Developing an agenda for teaching coaching psychology

Anthony M. Grant

The research and practice of coaching psychology has developed considerably over the past 10 years. However, if coaching psychology is to continue to grow and develop, an educational and teaching framework needs to be established. Very little attention has been paid in the published literature to the teaching of coaching psychology. The aim of this paper is to stimulate discussion about the teaching of coaching psychology and to start the process of developing a teaching agenda, including delineating some of the concepts, theories and skills that can be seen to lie at the core of coaching psychology. Drawing on the Australian Psychological Society and the British Psychological Society definitions of coaching psychology it is proposed that the following areas should form the core of an education in coaching psychology: an evidence-based approach to practice; ethical principles; professional models of practice; mental health issues in coaching; cognitive-behavioural theory as applied to coaching; goal theory; change theory; systemic theory as applied to coaching (including group process and organisational applications); core applied coaching skills and their application to skills, performance, developmental and remedial coaching; and applications of coaching psychology to specialised areas of practice such as executive coaching, workplace coaching, health coaching, life coaching, and peak performance coaching, in addition to non-core specialist areas of theory such as applied positive psychology, solution-focused approaches, cognitive-developmental, narrative, psychodynamic and Gestalt approaches. Coaching psychology as a psychological sub-discipline is well on the way to developing a coherent area of research and practice. It now needs to develop and formalise a body of teachable knowledge that can sustain and advance this new area of behavioural science.

Keywords: Coaching psychology; teaching coaching psychology; coach training; evidence-based coaching.
overlap between the coach education and training of a non-psychological nature and the teaching of coaching psychology, this article solely addresses education issues related to coaching psychology.

**Overview of the coaching psychology literature**

The research and practice of coaching psychology has developed considerably over the past 10 years. An overview of the literature cited in PsycINFO conducted in December 2010 using the keywords ‘coaching psychology’ found a total of 290 citations. Between 1927 and 1996 there were only eight citations listed. The first citation using the keywords ‘coaching psychology’ was Miller’s (1927) review of Coleman Griffith’s (1926) book on the psychology of athletic coaching. It is not until 1951 that the next citation is listed – another book on the psychology of athletic coaching (Lawther, 1951). No further citations are listed until Leonard’s (1995) editorial in *Consulting Psychology Journal* announcing the 1996 special edition on executive coaching, in which the term ‘coaching psychology’ is used as a keyword but not referred to in the text itself, as was also the case for other editorials (Kilburg, 1996a; Leonard, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c).

According to the citations in PsycINFO, the literature on coaching psychology comes to the fore in 2003 (Grant, 2003), and it is at this point in time that we can see articles whose primary focus is coaching psychology being published in increasing numbers. We can say that this period is the real start of psychological academic literature associated with the contemporary coaching psychology movement. Between 2003 and 2005 there are a total of 14 citations, with nine citations in 2006, 54 citations in 2007, 87 citations in 2008, 85 citations in 2009, and 34 citations in 2010. (Note: there is often a time delay between journal publication and the listing of citations on PsycINFO and this may well account for the lower number of citations for 2010; for example, articles in the December 2010 issue of the BPS SGCP publication *The Coaching Psychologist* are not listed; also note that this brief overview does not include the substantial amount of published literature on coaching that is not specifically psychology-related which could nevertheless contribute to the teaching of coaching psychology.)

Of course, quantity is not necessarily quality, and some of these citations refer to short articles, notices in relation to professional societies, social commentaries and the like, rather than academic research, theory papers or scholarly professional opinion or practice papers. Nevertheless, it is clear that a body of coaching psychology-specific literature is emerging. At the same time the numbers of coaching psychology practitioners in established national psychological societies has grown considerably. For example, the APS IGCP has 590 members, approximately 3.5 per cent of the total APS membership, and the BPS SGCP has 2332 members, approximately 5 per cent of the total BPS membership.

The development of coaching psychology has been very much an international endeavour with global cross-fertilisation of ideas and actions. Without a doubt, one of the key practical drivers of the coaching psychology movement has been the development of coaching psychology interest groups in a number of established national psychological societies and the joint publication of peer-reviewed coaching psychology journals associated with such societies. The stewardship of dedicated individuals such as Prof. Michael Cavanagh and Prof. Stephen Palmer and the work of many different people has been vital here. Such pioneering work provides a solid foundation for the new discipline of coaching psychology. But to extend this work, to ensure that coaching psychology continues to grow we need to be providing training and education for those who come after us. We need to be able to teach coaching psychology in a rigorous, coherent and professional fashion.
Teaching coaching psychology: The next developmental step
Despite the aforementioned growth in both literature and practice, very little attention has been paid in the published literature to the teaching of coaching psychology. There are few published books explicitly focusing on coaching psychology (rather than coaching per se) that can be used as text books for teaching coaching psychology (e.g. Palmer & Whybrow, 2007; Peltier, 2010), and only a small number of articles have discussed issues related to the actual teaching of coaching psychology.

Palmer’s (2008) article argued for the inclusion of coaching psychology in undergraduate psychology degrees, and some universities are now indeed including short units on coaching psychology in their undergraduate curricula – a welcome development. Spaten and Hansen (2009) presented details of the benefits of embedding a coaching psychology programme into a postgraduate psychology programme in a Danish university. Passmore (2010) suggested that training in coaching and coaching psychology should focus on both behavioural (skills) development and the development of personal attributes and qualities, and his work with McGoldrick (i.e. Passmore & McGoldrick, 2009) has emphasised the need for models of supervision to be incorporated into coaching psychology education.

In relation to models of practice, which naturally inform the teaching and training of practitioners, Corrie and Lane (2009) discussed a range of interpretations of the scientist-practitioner model concluding that we need to harness the strengths of the scientist-practitioner model; rigorous thinking; the ability to weave data from different sources into a coherent case conceptualisation; the ability to devise and implement specific interventions strategies on a case by case basis; and the skills to evaluate and critique our work – whilst discarding its weakness. These include the over-reliance on previously conducted research and the rigid application of such, which may not be appropriate for the emergent, iterative nature of coaching, particularly at this point in time when there is still somewhat limited coaching-specific research.

Issues related to the education and training of coaching psychologists were also discussed in an excellent and comprehensive BPS Discussion Paper on Subject Benchmarks for Coaching Psychology (BPS, 2006a), a document which incorporated many of the points overviewed above. The BPS Discussion Paper focused specifically on the education and training of coaching psychologists and discussed possible educational benchmarks for the development of a designated specialised area of practice in the form of an advanced practice register or as an area of ‘Chartered’ practice.

Teaching coaching psychology to non-psychologists?
Although a detailed document, and one that may serve as a useful model for other psychological societies, the BPS Discussion Paper did not address a key thorny question: Should the study of postgraduate coaching psychology be restricted to those with a prior undergraduate degree in psychology or those who are registered psychologists? This is an important question that touches on matters of regulation and professional status and has clear implications for the development of an agenda for teaching coaching psychology.

I argue that the postgraduate study of coaching psychology should be open to all who have the ability, attributes and intellect to complete such studies successfully. This is not to diminish the value of registration or chartered status as a psychologist. Registration or chartered status as a psychologist in the UK and Australia entails an undergraduate degree in psychology, and then a postgraduate degree encompassing a lengthy and sophisticated training in the scientist-practitioner model, supervised internships and entry to a genuine profession with its attendant enforceable ethical codes and standards of practice, although it is inter-
esting to note that entry to many PsyD degrees and subsequent licensing as a psychologist in the US does not require an undergraduate degree in psychology. Indeed, I personally believe that we should be developing a recognised specialised area of practice, be it BPS Chartered status as a ‘Coaching Psychologist’ or an APS College of Coaching Psychology, entry to which would be restricted to those who are, or are becoming registered psychologists, as well as course accreditation processes from established national psychological societies such as the APS and BPS. This paper will not address issues related to accreditation of courses in coaching psychology – that is a complex topic worthy of a separate and focused discussion (see Carr, 2005; Grant & O’Hara, 2006).

However, it should be noted that the issues of designated professional practice as a ‘Coaching Psychologist’, accreditation, and the provision of an education in coaching psychology are logically independent issues: it is possible to learn coaching psychology without becoming a psychologist. Thus an agenda for the teaching of coaching psychology should deal with the process of teaching, accreditation and the process of professional status as a coaching psychologist as separate issues.

Furthermore, it must be recognised that coaching is a growing cross-disciplinary area of professional practice. Many excellent professional coaches do not have an undergraduate degree in psychology, and do not have the time or desire to sit through three or four years of full-time study of undergraduate psychology. They do not want to become psychologists. But they do want to learn about the psychology of coaching. There is a significant thirst amongst coaches for information about empirically validated ways to work with people and how to help them set and reach goals in their personal and business lives (for discussion, see Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). Academic psychology has for too long not engaged with non-psychologists’ thirst for such knowledge, leaving the door open for other, arguably less qualified people to meet the demands of this market. Finally, existing postgraduate courses in coaching psychology worldwide already admit non-psychologists. Thus, rather than attempt to lock the stable door, we should be thinking about how to design a better stable.

Definitions before teaching agendas

However, before we can begin to design and develop a meaningful agenda for the teaching of coaching psychology, we need a clear definition of what coaching psychology is and what it aims to do – it is difficult to teach what is not defined. This is particularly important given that non-psychologists study coaching psychology, and that many of those students will not have a background in mental health.

Various definitions of coaching psychology have emerged since the original delineations (Grant, 1999, 2000). Early work in establishing coaching psychology was aimed at helping develop coaching psychology as an applied psychology that was specifically distinguished from the foci of counselling and clinical psychologists (e.g. Grant, 2000). Whereas counselling, clinical and coaching psychology are all focused on helping people make purposeful change, they differ in that the primary focus of counselling and clinical psychology is defined by the APS as the amelioration of distress to ‘manage stress and conflict at home and work, deal with grief, loss and trauma, [and] overcome feelings of anxiety and fear’ (definition of the focus of counselling psychology; APS, 2007a), or the ‘assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychological problems and mental illness’ (definition of the focus on clinical psychology; APS, 2007b). Clearly, whilst both counselling and clinical psychology are important and valuable disciplines, their primary foci is on remediating dysfunction or distress.
APS definition of coaching psychology: Issues related to mental health

It was in recognition of the importance of distinguishing coaching psychology from counselling and clinical work, that initial APS definitions of coaching psychology included references to non-clinical populations. For example, the IGCP’s 2002 definition of coaching psychology emphasised that coaching psychology was focused on non-clinical populations and the ‘…enhancement of life experience, work performance and wellbeing for individuals, groups and organisations who do not have clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress’ (italics added; IGCP, 2002).

In contrast, the original BPS working definition of coaching psychology does not make explicit reference to issues related to mental illness and defines coaching psychology as follows: ‘Coaching psychology is for enhancing well-being and performance in personal life and work domains, underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established adult learning or psychological approaches’ (adapted from Grant & Palmer, 2005, and cited in Palmer & Whybrow, 2006). However, the non-clinical nature of coaching psychology is made explicit in the BPS SGCP Discussion Paper on Subject Benchmarks for Coaching Psychology (2006; note: see BPS Discussion Paper for further background on the BPS SGCP position on the treatment of mental illness and coaching psychology).

Nevertheless, there is now increasing evidence that many coaching clients do in fact have clinically-significant mental health issues and abnormal levels of distress. Early research into this issue found that between 25 and 50 per cent of individuals presenting for life coaching had clinical levels of psychopathology (Green, Oades & Grant, 2006; Spence & Grant, 2005), and higher-than-normal levels of mental illness including personality disorders have recently been reported in executive coaching populations (Kemp & Green, 2010). Yet the coaching literature repeatedly states that coaching does not aim to treat psychological problems (e.g. Whitmore, 2009; Williams & Thomas, 2004). There is an important gap here between the reality of practice and the rhetoric of theory, and we need to address this tension if we are to develop a teaching agenda for coaching psychology that clearly differentiates it from the counselling or clinical psychologies whose foci is primarily on the treatment of distress.

One way to do this is to use definitions of coaching psychology that recognise both: (a) the primary focus of coaching psychology (as being about the facilitation of goal attainment, personal or professional development and the enhancement of wellbeing, rather than the treatment of mental illness); and (b) the notion that, although some coaching clients may indeed have mental health problems (and in this regard many not be from a ‘non-clinical’ population), it is not the aim of coaching psychology to directly treat such problems. Of course, such problems may become alleviated as a result of coaching; the pursuit and attainment of personally-valued goals is frequently associated with increased well-being (Sheldon et al., 2004). Further, many coaching psychologists who are also appropriately qualified to deal with mental illness may conduct psychotherapeutic interventions with their coaching clients and explicitly treat issues such as depression, anxiety disorders and the like. But such interventions are not coaching interventions – they are more accurately delineated as counselling or clinical work and should not be presented as ‘coaching’. Indeed both the BPS (2006b) and APS Codes of Practice (APS, 2007) explicitly warn against the misrepresentation of psychological services.

A working definition of coaching psychology that draws on past APS and BPS definitions and makes such distinctions clear is as follows:

Coaching psychology is a branch of psychology that is concerned with the systematic application of the behavioural science of psychology to the enhance-
Coaching psychology focuses on facilitating goal attainment, and on enhancing the personal and professional growth and development of clients in personal life and in work domains. It is not aimed at directly treating clinically significant mental illness issues or abnormal levels of distress.

The inclusion of a short statement in the above working definition that explicitly excludes the direct treatment of mental illness or abnormal levels of distress clearly distinguishes the primary role of coaching psychology from that of counselling and clinical psychology and thus provides a useful platform from which to explore an agenda for teaching coaching psychology. It is to this issue we now turn.

An agenda for teaching coaching psychology

As the BPS Discussion Paper (2006a) details, coaching psychology emphasises a commitment to goal setting and the pursuit of specifically defined outcomes as agreed with clients. It is also concerned with the exploration of the meaning of events and experiences, the mental representations of events, the identification of both internal and external factors of influence and the particular significance of these for relationships with coaching clients themselves and with others. Such an understanding of coaching psychology is compatible with a wide range of philosophical, psychological and theoretical traditions including cognitive-behavioural, humanistic, adult learning and systemic perspectives, amongst others (BPS, 2006a).

However, whilst a broad church of theoretical underpinnings to coaching psychology can serve to enrich the field, it is essential that an education in coaching psychology fosters the critical thinking skills necessary for graduates to critically evaluate various philosophical, psychological and theoretical traditions and to construct conceptually coherent models of theory and practice. Thus an education in coaching psychology should be far more than a ‘how-to-coach training’ programme based on a specific coaching methodology – we must aim to produce informed practitioners who are able to enact the key aims of coaching psychology.

Drawing on the above discussion the aims of coaching psychology include: providing one-to-one or group-based support to facilitate people in achieving their life and/or work goals; facilitating the achievement of group goals; recognising and appropriately responding to client’s mental health problems including making referrals for treatment; supporting the development of effective coaching programmes in organisations; accessing and utilising current best knowledge in the design, enactment and evaluation of coaching interventions; undertaking research into the effectiveness of coaching; being able to use a psychological framework for the theory, practice and research of professional coaching in an ethical and professional fashion, whilst drawing on and developing existing psychological theory and knowledge for use in coaching contexts (for discussions on these points see, for example, Palmer & Whybrow, 2006; Stober & Grant, 2006). It is these issues that an agenda for teaching coaching psychology needs to address.

Core areas of study

Given the above points, I suggest that the teaching of coaching psychology should include the following core areas of study. (In addition to these proposed core areas of study listed below, the teaching of coaching psychology should also include a range of other non-core areas which may vary depending on the interests of students or speciality of the teaching institution; see Table 1.)

1. Foundations for an evidence-based approach to practice.
2. Ethical principles.
3. Professional models of practice.
4. Mental health issues in coaching.
5. Cognitive-behavioural theory as applied to coaching.
6. Goal theory.
7. Change theory.
8. Systemic theory as applied to coaching (including group process and organisational applications).
9. Core applied coaching skills and their application to skills, performance, developmental and remedial coaching.
10. Applications of coaching psychology to specialised areas of practice including (but not limited to): executive coaching, workplace coaching, health coaching, life coaching, and peak performance coaching.

It should be noted that the exact composition of any whole graduate programme in coaching psychology will be, of course, determined by the theoretical preferences and values of the course director, teaching faculty and the institution at which the course is offered. The above listings are in line with what I would consider to be the core areas for a graduate programme in coaching psychology that reflects the key bodies of psychological knowledge as related to coaching as previously defined in this paper.

There are a wide range of other areas of study that could also be included (see Table 1). The above areas of study fall into three broad categories. Areas one to four encompass core professional and ethical issues; areas five to eight encompass core psychological knowledge as applied to coaching; and areas nine and 10 relate to applied skills and coaching practice. Each of these areas could be taught either as a stand-alone subject, or combined with other areas to make a coherent unit of study (or module). For example, areas one to three combined would make a coherent unit of study, as would areas five, six and seven.

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<th>Table 1: Examples of areas of study that could also be included in teaching of coaching psychology.</th>
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<td>1. Positive psychology approaches to coaching</td>
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<td>2. Adult cognitive-developmental approaches to coaching</td>
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<td>3. Psychodynamic approaches to coaching</td>
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<td>4. Narrative approaches to coaching</td>
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<td>5. Gestalt approaches to coaching</td>
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<td>6. Solution-focused approaches to coaching</td>
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<td>7. Socio-cognitive constructs such as emotional intelligence and mindfulness</td>
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<td>8. Motivation including self-regulation theory</td>
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<td>9. Measurement in coaching including issues related to multi-rater feedback</td>
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<td>10. Applications of adult learning models to coaching</td>
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<td>11. Leadership and management topics</td>
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<td>12. Issues related to health and wellbeing</td>
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<td>13. Research methods in coaching</td>
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1. Foundations for an evidence-based approach to practice

This area of study should aim to impart the knowledge and skills necessary for an evidence-based approach to coaching practice that is grounded in the behavioural science of psychology. In this context the term ‘evidence-based’ means much more than simply producing evidence that a specific coaching intervention is effective, or discounting any data that is not drawn from double-blind, randomised controlled trials. Because coaching engagements are not medical interventions that follow prescribed treatment regimes, much coaching does not lend itself to evaluation within a medical model. Indeed, given the non-clinical, non-medical context of coaching, the medical model may be an entirely inappropriate framework from which to understand, teach, and evaluate coaching (Stober & Grant, 2006).

Thus this area of study should promote a broader view of evidence-based coaching, a view that values qualitative as well as quantitative data, is comfortable with both case study and randomised controlled trials, and recognises that manualised assessment-led coaching can be as valuable as an emergent action research methodology. The key point here is that the graduate should be able to determine which methodology is the most appropriate for the specific situation in hand, and know where to go to (e.g. electronic databases, published coaching-specific and related literature) in order to find the knowledge and evidence they need to conduct coaching in an ethical and professional fashion.

2. Ethical principles

Ethical principles are the foundation of professional practice. The teaching of ethical principles and their application in a discipline-specific fashion is central to all areas of professional practice from law, medicine to psychology. There are a number of challenges in teaching ethics in coaching psychology courses. Firstly, because coaching per se is a cross-disciplinary endeavour, students will come from a wide range of prior backgrounds and many will not have been have been schooled in the basic ethical principles that permeate undergraduate psychology courses. Because such ethical frameworks are central to a psychologist’s professional sense of self, it may be more difficult for mature-age students who have not had such prior long-standing exposure to a psychology-specific ethical framework to suddenly adopt and embody a new ethical framework. Secondly, the ethical codes appropriate for a psychologist who coaches may well differ from the codes that are appropriate for a non-psychologist coach, and this could require the teaching of two or more specific ethical codes within one course. Key issues that come to mind include ethical issues rated to the use of psychometric data and psychological tests, issues related to mandatory supervision and continuing professional development (CPD), and responsibilities regarding mental health issues. Thirdly, the myriad of professional coaching associations each with their own ethical framework, makes it difficult to determine which association code to include. Of course, none of these problems are insurmountable. Nevertheless, they need to be addressed as an agenda for teaching coaching psychology develops.

3. Professional models of practice

As regards models of professional practice, the Australian and British Psychological Societies are committed to the scientist-practitioner model (Kennedy & Llewelyn, 2001; Provost et al., 2010). Although the notion of becoming a scientist-practitioner may be intimidating to those who have not been previously schooled in a scientific discipline (Cruz & Hervey, 2001), the basic principals underlying the scientist-practitioner model are quite straightforward. In short, there are three key characteristics of the scientist-practitioner model: Firstly, the scientist-practitioner holds a commitment to further their professional understanding through
research, either through a traditional academic context, or through the examination and reporting of data obtained in one’s professional practice; secondly, the scientist-practitioner is a active consumer of research and uses such research to improve their practice; and thirdly, the scientist-practitioner is an active evaluator of their practices, programmes and interventions (Jones & Mehr, 2007).

The scientist-practitioner model has attracted a wide range of criticisms since its formulation in 1949, including difficulties in training professionals to be scientists (O’Gorman, 2001), the fact that many practitioners do not have the time or the inclination to conduct rigorous scientific research (Martin, 1989) and distaste in some quarters for the medical model assumed by some to underpin the scientist-practitioner approach in psychology (for an informed discussion of these and other issues related to the scientist-practitioner model, see Lane & Corrie, 2006). Nevertheless, the three central tenants of the scientist-practitioner model can provide an important foundation for professional coaching psychology practice although some adaptation for use in teaching coaching psychology is required.

An ‘informed-practitioner’ approach may be a more appropriate stance for the teaching of coaching psychology. As discussed by Stober and Grant (2006) the informed-practitioner approach to professional coaching draws on, and further develops, the reflective-practitioner and the scientist-practitioner models. An informed-practitioner is trained in both the self-reflective processes central to the reflective-practitioner model and also in the understandings of evidence-gathering and evaluation central to the scientist-practitioner model. However, informed-practitioners are not expected to be significant producers of research (Parker & Detterman, 1988). Rather they are positioned as educated consumers of research who can utilise related research and critical thinking skills to improve their practices and intellectual understanding of coaching – a more realistic approach than attempting to make fully-fledged research scientists from students of coaching psychology. It is interesting to note that similar models of professional practice are being proposed for use in marriage and family therapy training programs (Karam & Sprenkle, 2010), and that a number of commentators have called for greater flexibility in understandings of the scientist-practitioner model as applied to coaching psychology (Corrie & Lane, 2009). Thus a scientist-practitioner model that draws on an informed-practitioner approach may be a useful framework for a model of professional practice that can address the needs and attributes of a diverse range of coaching psychology students.

4. Mental health issues in coaching

Given that some coaching clients will have clinically-significant levels of psychopathology, and that such issues have the very real potential to derail the coaching process (Berglas, 2002) it is important that mental health and mental illness issues in coaching be a core area of the study of coaching psychology. Of course, many coaching students who are already psychologists may have had prior training in recognising and dealing with mental health problems. But many students of coaching psychology will not have had exposure to issues related to mental health.

I argue it is important to include information on mental health problems in a coaching psychology programme even for those students who have prior mental health training because the presentation of mental health problems in coaching relationships is often quite different to presentations in clinical or counselling settings. In a clinical or counselling setting, the mental health problem is frequently overt, and is the very reason the client is there – diagnosis and identification of the problem may only occur during or after the consultation session, but typically the client contacts the clinician or counsellor because he/she is distressed and he/she know that something is not right.
In coaching contexts mental health problems are often more difficult to identify. The presenting issue could be a need to have more engagement in the workplace, or leadership development involving a shift from a command and control style to a more humanistic, encouraging style, or a need to increase sales performance, rather than an overt distress or mental health problem. Indeed, it may be that coaches need better diagnostic skills than clinicians or counsellors.

For some clients mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or personality disorders will be significant barriers to change. Some of the core skills that a coach needs here include the ability to recognize common mental health problems in coaching clients, the ability to discuss these issues empathetically with the client, the ability to make a referral to a qualified mental health professional – it is not the coach’s role to diagnose or provide treatment.

This area raises a number of difficult and complex questions which need to be addressed in coaching psychology programme. This include whether or not the coach should continue coaching if the client elects to have treatment with a mental health professional; whether or not a coach who is a psychologist should treat mental illness whilst concurrently providing coaching services; how to best work or liaise with a mental health professional; whether or not the coach should terminate the coaching relationship if the client does not seek help; and how to deal with issues of confidentiality and duty of care – particularly in organizational settings where the organisation is paying for the coaching services, and such issues need to be addressed in a graduate education in coaching psychology. These are challenging issues that should be addressed in a graduate programme.

5. Cognitive Behavioural Theory as applied to coaching

Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) is the most common theoretical perspective underpinning coaching practice in general, and also the most empirically validated (Grant et al., 2010). Thus CBT should form a core area of study in a graduate programme in coaching psychology.

CBT is grounded in the notion that emotions and behaviours result (primarily, though not entirely) from cognitive processes and that it is possible for human beings to purposefully modify such processes in order to achieve different ways of feeling and behaving. CBT does not exclusively focus on cognitions, it is a comprehensive theory of human behaviour that proposes a ‘biopsychosocial’ explanation as to how human beings come to feel and act as they do, that is a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors are involved (for discussion on these points, see Froggatt, 2006). In this sense CBT is a generic term that encompasses a great number of approaches and applications including psychotherapeutic applications such as Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) and Cognitive Therapy (CT).

Applications of CBT have changed over time. Originally used almost exclusively to treat mental health problems (Rachman, 1997), CBT has now been adapted and empirically validated for use in a range of areas including sports and performance psychology, organisational psychology, health psychology and latterly coaching psychology. Each of these different applications requires a specialised adaptation of CBT for optimal use in different populations who have different linguistic nuances, frames of reference and different goals. Just as the language of a cognitive-behavioural organisational psychologist may not resonate for the socially phobic client, the language of cognitive-behavioural clinical or counselling work may not resonate for the coaching client and may well alienate them.

Although there is a wealth of literature associated with cognitive-behavioural therapy in the treatment of anxiety, stress or depression, more work needs to be done in developing positively-languaged coaching-specific adaptations of CBT. Some of the
literature on cognitive-behavioural coaching (CBC) draws heavily on cognitive-behavioural approaches to counselling for stress or perfectionism and defeating dysfunctional thinking patterns and uses language more akin to counselling than coaching (e.g. Neenan & Dryden, 2002) – rather than using the non-pathological orientation and language of goal attainment and coaching. (For more recent work that incorporates a more positively-language approach to the use of CBC, see Neenan, 2006; for an interesting example of the application of REBT to executive coaching, see Grieger & Fralick, 2007; and for a useful general overview of CBC, see Williams, Edgerton & Palmer, 2010.) Whilst the CBC literature to date has been an important start in this domain, we will need a greater depth and breadth in this literature as an agenda for teaching coaching psychology develops.

6. Goal theory
A commitment to goal setting and the pursuit of specifically defined outcomes as agreed with clients is the core of coaching psychology (BPS, 2006). Thus the study of goal theory should be a central part of the teaching of coaching psychology. Goal theory is represented in a large and diverse body of literature (Locke & Latham, 2002) much of which has direct relevance for the teaching of coaching psychology.

Most commercial coach training organisations teach little in the way of goal theory, often simply focusing on the need to set so-called SMART goals. Yet there are well over 20 different categories of goals that can be used in coaching including learning goals, performance goals, distal goals and self-concordant goals, with indications and contraindications well documented in the goal literature (for discussion of goal theory and applications in executive coaching, see Grant, 2006). In addition, the psychological goal literature includes in-depth discussions about a range of controversies in goal setting (e.g. Locke & Latham, 2009; Ordóñez et al., 2009), knowledge of which should be an essential part of a graduate coaching psychology programme.

7. Change theory
Coaching is about creating purposeful, positive change and so change theory has a vital place in the teaching of coaching psychology. There is a substantial change theory literature ranging from models that focus almost exclusively on the individual (intrapersonal), to relational (interpersonal) and systemic theories of change, and there are a wide range of validated techniques drawn from such models (Abraham & Michie, 2008). Most theories of change were not developed for coaching purposes, rather they were developed in relation to the adoption of health behaviours, organisational change or psychotherapy, and to date there has been little work done adapting models of change for use in the coaching context (Grant 2010).

Some of the models of change that may usefully inform the teaching of coaching psychology include the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982), Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2006), Transition Models of change (e.g. Bridges, 1986; Williams, 1999), Social Learning/Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977), Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour (e.g. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and a range of organisational change approaches including Kotter (1996) and Lewin (1947), in addition to acceptance-based or paradoxical models of change (e.g. Quinn, Spreitzer & Brown, 2000).

8. Systemic theory as applied to coaching
Although much coaching takes place on an individualistic basis (Ward, 2008), systemic theory has long been influential in coaching practice (e.g. Kilburg, 1996b; O’Neil, 2000). Indeed, whether it be a work situation, organisational context or family structure, coaching clients are always part of a system. The systems in which coaching clients live and work have a significant impact on their ability to achieve their goals. To ignore
systemic issues in coaching is to ignore factors that significantly effect the clients chances of success (for a comprehensive view on systems theory in coaching, see Cavanagh, 2006).

In addition, there is a growing interest in using group-based coaching in organisational settings to help increase the flow of information needed to solve complex problems and complete complex tasks in the situations of ambiguity and uncertainty that characterise much contemporary organisational life (e.g. Anderson, Anderson & Mayo, 2008; Arrow & Henry, 2010; Clutterbuck, 2007), and systemic theory can usefully inform group coaching processes. Thus a theoretical understanding of the major systemic theories is a vital component of a rounded coaching psychology programme.

The inclusion of approaches such as general systems theory (e.g. Von Bertalanffy, 1968) and complexity theory (Waldrop, 1992) will help students of coaching psychology develop their understanding of groups and complex human systems, particularly in relation to group and team dynamics (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Also of particular relevance for coaching are systemic issues related to learning organisations (Senge, 1990), self-organisation, leadership and control (Wheatley, 1999), and engaging with change in complex adaptive systems (Stacey, 2000).

9. Core applied coaching skills
Although ‘there is nothing as practical as a good theory’ (Lewin, 1952, p.169), coaching psychology is essentially an applied discipline, and thus applied coaching skills should be a core part of a coaching psychology programme. Issues of relevance here include active listening and attending skills; questioning and communicating effectively; facilitating learning through helping clients design actions that help them attain agreed-upon coaching goals; contracting; managing process and accountability; and appropriately challenging clients to keep them on track. In addition it will be important to include instruction in the use of coaching skills in relation to skills, performance and developmental coaching as well as remedial coaching.

Applied skills are important, but practice should not be isolated from theory. An important part of a coaching psychology education is the explicit linking of coaching practice to theoretical frameworks through a case conceptualisation or case formulation process – and case conceptualisation should lie at the heart of applied coaching skills within a coaching psychology programme (for discussion, see Lane & Corrie, 2009). In addition, as part of their education in coaching psychology students should learn a variety of methodologies for structuring coaching sessions and have opportunities to develop their applied skills through supervised role plays and case studies. Ideally, students would learn through supervised role that a good supervisor can bring foster both personal and professional insight, and the importance of engaging in a supervision process should be should be emphasised throughout the programme.

10. Applications of coaching psychology to specialised areas of practice
Coaching is essentially a methodology for facilitating positive change. Such change has a specific focus including (but not limited to): executive coaching, workplace coaching, health coaching, sales coaching, life coaching, and peak performance coaching, and many of these applications of coaching require some specialised knowledge. Further, coaching is utilised as a change methodology in a wide range of commercial, professional and organisational contexts. Many of these will have specific associated knowledge domains with attendant jargon, assumptions and practices which the coach needs to be aware of – for example, coaching in the legal profession without being aware of the terminology used to describe the different roles lawyers adopt may significantly undermine the credibility of one’s coaching services. Therefore, a
graduate programme in coaching psychology should ideally prepare students by delivering any specialised knowledge required to work in specific areas of practice.

A research agenda for scholarship into the teaching of coaching psychology
Thus far this paper has discussed broad issues related to the development of an agenda for teaching coaching psychology. But self-reflection should also be part of the agenda for teaching coaching psychology – scholarship into the teaching of coaching psychology must also be an important part of the agenda. As yet there has been very little work in this area.

Research questions that could inform such scholarship could include: What are the most effective methods for teaching coaching psychology? Are there differences between those students who come to their studies of coaching psychology with a background in psychology compared to those without prior psychology in terms of academic performance and performance as a coach? How does learning coaching psychology change or develop students? Given that coaching can be an effective methodology for personal change, and studying psychology can facilitate personal insight, does studying coaching psychology enhance or accelerate students’ own personal development? If so in what way? The limited research in this area suggests that studying coaching psychology can indeed have a positive impact on students’ academic performance and personal insight (Grant, 2008). Further research and scholarship in these areas will be benefit both the teaching and professional practice of coaching psychology.

Summary
Whilst the research and practice of coaching psychology has developed considerably over the past 10 years, a formal framework for the teaching of coaching psychology has not as yet been widely discussed in the literature. Some of the core areas in the teaching of coaching psychology that are in clear alignment with existing APS and BPS definitions of coaching psychology and should form the core of an education in coaching psychology include; an evidence-based approach to practice; ethical principles; professional models of practice; mental health issues in coaching; cognitive-behavioural theory as applied to coaching; goal theory; change theory; systemic theory; core applied coaching skills and their application to skills, performance, developmental and remedial coaching; and applications of coaching psychology to specialised areas of practice. These are in addition to specialist areas of theory such as applied positive psychology, solution-focused approaches, cognitive-developmental, narrative, psychodynamic and Gestalt approaches. Coaching psychology as a psychological sub-discipline is well on the way to developing a coherent area of research and practice. It now needs to develop and formalise a body of teachable knowledge that can sustain and advance this new and vibrant area of behavioural science.

Correspondence
Anthony M. Grant
Coaching Psychology Unit,
School of Psychology,
University of Sydney,
NSW 2006,
Australia.
Email: anthony.grant@sydney.edu.au
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Anthony M. Grant


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