

ABSTRACT & OBJECTIVES

Abstract

Project HOPE is a mixed methods research project consisting of a literature review and a survey gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. HOPE is an acronym that stands for hope, optimism and potential through education and coaching. My aim is to explore the theoretical frameworks and practice elements in the field of personal or life coaching specific to coaching people who may experience barriers or marginalization with respect to full social and economic participation in society. The major themes explored in this context are the scope of practice for personal or life coaching, transformative learning, positive psychology and universal design for learning. For the survey element of this research, I am limiting the inquiry to coaches and coaching leaders who have varied levels of experience coaching these populations. My stance as a researcher is constructivist and is influenced by critical disability, feminist and emancipatory theories. This is a project that aims to improve practice from my vantage point as both a researcher and a practitioner. It is anticipated that Project HOPE will act as a scoping project for future more in-depth research.

Keywords: life coaching, transformative learning, positive psychology, character strengths, diversity and inclusion, disability

Objectives

My aim with this research is to investigate to what extent other coaches are experiencing the need for frameworks that specifically support coaching people who may experience barriers or marginalization with respect to full social and economic participation in society and to ascertain the voice from the field as to what theoretical frameworks and practice elements may be useful. Therefore, the primary research question asks:

What theoretical frameworks exist for coaches to coach people who experience barriers or marginalization with respect to full social and economic participation in society? A sub-question asks what recommendations coaches have for such theoretical frameworks.

Additional questions include:

- a) What practice elements exist for coaches to coach people who experience barriers or marginalization with respect to full social and economic participation in society? A sub-question asks what recommendations do coaches have for potential such practice elements?
- b) What mechanisms exist to pay for client coaching services where the client may be economically disadvantaged? A sub-question asks what recommendations do coaches have for such mechanisms?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scope of Practice for Personal or Life Coaching

Pendle, Rowe and Britten (2017) as part of their research concerning coaching people who access mental health services state that there is an undercurrent in the coaching literature that cautions against coaching clients who experience mental health issues and that such literature suggests that those who experience such issues should only be served by therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists. This effectively creates a divide in the availability and breadth of helping professionals where those who can afford therapy or manage to navigate complex social systems to access therapy receive help. This divide may exclude people with sub-clinical mental health issues and may also remove the element of choice for clients who wish to pursue goal oriented, hope centered recovery options. There are cautions to explore in this realm, including the risk that to open coaching to such clients has the potential to create false hopes of mental wellness.

Transformative Learning

Mezirow (2000) puts forward transformative learning as a process that people embark on through an impetus, whether it is a life event or a general desire for change. The process is both reflective and reflexive in that it involves rethinking core assumptions as well as making underlying thought processes visible for discernment and then transforming these thought processes into ones that will serve a future desire state. Cranton (2006) asserts that ultimately the exclusive nature Mezirow suggests regarding a certain level of critical cognitive ability as the bar for participating in transformative learning goes against the emancipatory prime directive of adult education and certainly the role of educators in upholding this creed. Cranton's view with respect to an emancipatory prime directive aligns with the undercurrent of exclusion in terms of scope of practice for personal or life coaches.

Positive Psychology

Tomasulo (2014) reviews modification to a group psychotherapy model that incorporates interventions from the fields of positive psychology and positive psychotherapy for the benefit of treating people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The article highlights a missing link to a holistic view of improving the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by not addressing mental health needs. This further exposes a void in providing supports that recognize needs arising for complex intersectional identities. Tomasulo (2014) cites the roots of positive psychology as a sort of antidote to psychology's pre-occupation with treating what is wrong with a client by recognizing and building on what is right. With further research, it may be possible to posit that similar interventions could be applied to the fields personal or life coaching.

Universal Design for Learning

Hamrie (2013) discusses Universal Design (UD) which is the architectural idea that environments should be built in such a way that the broadest elements of human access are served. Hamrie (2013) theorizes that there is always an ideological foundation to design and that this ideological foundation can prophesy social exclusion and could further create barriers to entry for education and training in the very professions that seek to eliminate barriers. This is a salient idea in terms of barriers to entry for education in the helping professions. Universal Design is at the origin of several other specific applications including Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Rogers-Shaw, Carr-Chellman and Choi (2018) define UDL as a "epistemological shift" that provides a framework for education through three guiding principles "multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, multiple means of engagement" (p. 22). They cite this framework as an entry point to a more socially just practice in education.

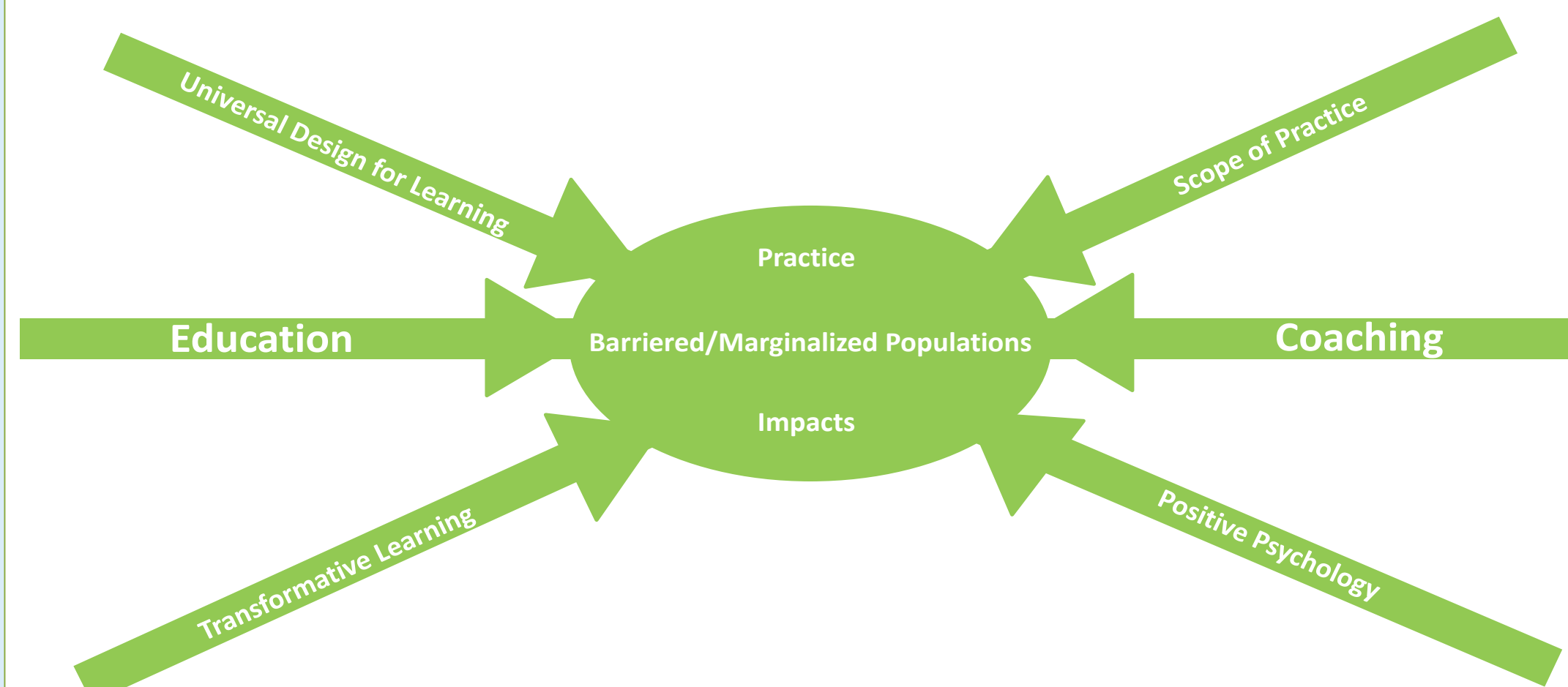
TOWARD AN ANTICIPATED CONCLUSION

Project HOPE is a current Capstone Project with an estimated completion date of April, 2019.

Project HOPE aims to consider new paradigms for education and coaching that could potentially contribute to a greater possibility for barriered/marginalized people to live a flourishing life.

So far, the literature reveals some evidence to challenge traditional boundaries where it comes to scope of practice and potential for new frameworks that will broaden the scope of coaching methods and coaching clients served. I am deeply invested in developing innovative practice that helps all people recognize and enact strengths and create hope, optimism and flourishing in the world of work, in family life, in physical health, socially and in community.

The following diagram is a conceptual model of the current investigation.



Project HOPE Conceptual Model

METHODOLOGY & METHODS

Methodology

Project HOPE is a mixed methods research project consisting of a literature review and a survey gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. Arthur, Waring, Coe and Hedges (2012) suggests that mixed methods research is a practical approach where the researcher's aims and intended contribution to practice drive the decisions for which elements are utilized in the research design (p. 148)

Methods

The literature review will include peer reviewed journal articles from academic databases and from research portals related to coaching and positive psychology. The major themes explored in this context are the scope of personal or life coaching, transformative learning, positive psychology and universal design for learning as they currently relate to personal or life coaching. The literature review will look for research that connects these theories to elements of practice related to barriered or marginalized populations.

The survey of the state of the field will be implemented through a web-link to the online research tool Survey Monkey. The web-link will be included in an explanatory email to The EDGE coaches and to coaches and coaching leaders in my network. The survey will consist of both qualitative and quantitative questions and seek to discover the voice of those in the field who coach in this specific arena of practice. The literature review combined with the data from the survey of the field will comprise the findings of this project regarding the state of theoretical knowledge and practice elements in the field for coaching people who experience barriers or marginalization.

Targeted participants in the state of the field study

In my consulting practice, I am engaged by a government funded community agency to act as a learning and coaching practice leader for a program that provides pre-employment training for people with disabilities. An element of this program that is holistic in nature is that participants are offered ten personal or life coaching sessions. The coaches for this program are recruited primarily from Adler Graduate Professional School Coach Training. The coaches are mostly in the early stage of post-training practice and are paid a nominal, below market fee by the community agency for their coaching services. This group of coaches is effectively a bound community of practice of approximately twenty coaches. Additionally, the focus of my consulting practice has enabled me to connect with other coaches and coaching leaders who are interested in coaching for greater social impact. The group of coaches and coaching leaders in my network are more advanced in their post-training practices than program coaches. This tertiary group of networked coaches and coaching leaders comprises approximately ten coaches. The total reach for the survey will be approximately thirty coaches and coaching leaders.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS & SIGNIFICANCE

Ethical Considerations

Project HOPE aims to act as a scoping project for future more in-depth research. As such, the research design is uncomplicated and poses minimal potential for ethical compromise. The survey questionnaire will be conducted anonymously and confidentially through an online platform Survey Monkey.

I am engaged as a consultant to the community agency that runs the pre-employment program. I have obtained preliminary permission from the community agency to conduct the survey of the state of the field with The EDGE coaches pending the outcome of Yorkville University's Research Ethics Board.

On balance, Project HOPE represents minimal ethical risk which is foreseen in consideration of ethical practice in research with human subjects.

Significance

Emerging practices in this arena have the potential to be socially significant. Mikkonen and Raphael (2010) reported on a model of social determinants of health developed in 2002 in Canada. The report details fourteen social determinants of health of which eight could potentially be impacted by the practices arising from Project HOPE: "disability; education; health services; income and income distribution; race; social exclusion; social safety net; and unemployment." (p. 9). The report suggests that the effects of these social determinants of health are even stronger than the effects of harmful behaviours (i.e., smoking). The report highlights that socially excluded people are more vulnerable in the labour market, have less access to health and human services and less access to higher education. The report also points to a downward spiral created by social exclusion through a lack of self-determined behaviour and the potential for addictions and mental health issues.

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