

NZAPP Newsletter 1

September 2008

- **Welcome.**

- Welcome, founding members, to the first newsletter for the New Zealand Association of Positive Psychology (NZAPP). The purpose of an occasional and brief newsletter such as this is to keep members informed about new developments in positive psychology both generally and around New Zealand. Similar to the associations' website, we also aim to point members in the right direction should they wish to pursue an aspect of positive psychology further.

- **NZ Research.**

- Can happiness be taught? This is the question Alison Ogier-Price addresses in her research poster which can now be downloaded from the NZAPP website (research tab at top, then R1 from left tab). Alison's conclusion is very much that it can through learning and practicing positive psychology!

- **Areas of Positive Psychology.**

- What is flow? Flow is defined as a state of optimal experience in which activities are done for their own sake and not for extrinsic rewards. When in flow, people describe being so deeply absorbed in an activity that they lose self-consciousness and fear of failure, feel action and awareness merge, lose track of time, and attention is freely invested and centred on achieving goals. The psychologist most associated with flow is Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced cheek-sent-me-hi-lee). His research indicates that frequent experiences of flow at work lead to higher productivity, innovation, and employee development (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, 2004). These results are also the case with schools, families, and other social groups. Unfortunately flow does not come 'on demand', however there are situations that make it more or less probable. In general, some of the conditions that make flow more likely (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991, p. 74) include activities that require ongoing learning of skills, activities where skills are adequate to the task, where task goals are clear, where frequent feedback is provided in order to drive behaviour adjustment, where there are chances to concentrate on tasks, where there is a sense of personal control, and a sense that the activity is intrinsically rewarding. Again, these conditions suggest ways to make flow more likely. The first two of these conditions imply a dynamic balance between skill and challenge. As skills grow, challenge may lag, leading to boredom. Alternatively new challenges may seem to exceed skill, leading to anxiety. Csikszentmihalyi calls the balance the "flow channel" and argues that boredom and anxiety both tend to lead to disengagement from an activity that was previously rewarding, whereas get the right balance, and flow is more likely.
- The decisive text on Flow is:
 - Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Other easy to read articles and book chapters include:
 - Wesson, K. & Boniwell, I. (2007). Flow theory - its applications to coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(1), 33-43. Retrieved May 26, 2008 from http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/ICPR_2_1_March07.pdf
 - Nakamura, J. & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2005). The concept of flow. In C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology*, pp. 89-105. New York: Oxford University Press.

- **Book Review.**

- Positive Psychology in a Nutshell: A Balanced Introduction to the Science of Optimal Functioning, Ilona Boniwell (reviewed by Aaron Jarden).
- This very cheap (seven pounds from amazon.co.uk) and introductory book provides a breadth of information about positive psychology in just over 100 short pages. Published in May 2006, and written in an accessible, friendly, conversational, and engaging style with light-hearted illustrations, it also provides a smidgen of critical commentary. Topics covered include research findings and thinking on areas such as happiness, flow, optimism, motivation, character strengths, wisdom, positive aging, love and more. No other slim volume covers so much in so little, which makes it an ideal starting point to learn more about positive psychology. The extensive reference section at the end is also a great pointer to further reading.

- **Article Review.**

- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L. A., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131, 803-855 (reviewed by Rebecca Scrimgeour). Available at: <http://www.apa.org/journals/releases/bul1316803.pdf>
- This seminal article in the happiness literature aims to make the case that it's not just success that makes people happy, but that by being happy in itself leads to success. In essence they argue that positive affect (happiness) engenders success. In making this argument the authors consider and review cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies to date on this topic. Again, their firm conclusion is that happiness is associated with and precedes success and behaviours that parallel success. Although this article is lengthy (52 pages), and psychologically technical (for lack of a better phrase) in that it discusses things such as meta-analysis and effect sizes, it is indeed a treasure chest of valuable information on happiness and its relationships.

- **Events.**

- Aaron Jarden, lecturer in psychology from The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, recently attended the 4th European Conference on Positive Psychology in Croatia in July, where he presented some of his research on personal values. Aaron highlighted the links between values and low mood, psychopathology, well-being and character strengths. He also met leading researchers and theorists in the field, such as Ed Diener and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.
- Alison Ogier-Price presented a workshop at the New Zealand Psychological Society annual conference in Christchurch in August titled: 'The science of happiness and well-being: Positive psychology'. This workshop was very well received and focused on applying the principles of positive psychology.

- **NZAPP Website.**

- The website has been updated with new sections. For example, you can watch a short video on positive psychology by Martin Seligman (see 'learn more' tab on left of home page), or have your name and e-mail address displayed on the website in order to network with others in your area (see 'nz people' tab at top).

- **Members Questions.**

- Q: Can any member use the acronym MNZAPP to indicate their affiliation?
- A: Yes.
- Q: Is there going to be a positive psychology conference in NZ at some stage?
- A: Yes, however we are not sure when. We are also looking at the possibility of having a joint conference with the Australian association.

- **NZAPP Membership Total.**

- 87.

- **Support.**

- You can support your association by:
 - Informing your networks, friends, and colleagues about the NZAPP.
 - Contributing to the next newsletter (i.e., book review, article review, general comment/question, write about an area of positive psychology?).
 - Making a suggestion for the association?