Exam Magic®

The Exam Magic course was developed in response to the needs of students preparing to take GCSE and A level exams. It combines practical tools for raising attainment in public examinations with simple, easy to understand explanations of the emotional and intellectual processes involved in improving academic results. Exam Magic provides a simple easy to follow system that anyone can use to improve both exam results and feelings of personal well being and increased self esteem.

Course Overview for Teaching Professionals

Exam Magic is.....

1. Setting Goals
2. Exam Magic role play
3. T-Far model and motivation - Emotions
4. Conscious & Unconscious mind
5. Comfort zones/ fear/ belief structures
6. List method
7. Visualisation theory and practice; 2 step Visualisation process
8. Audio patch (audio recording)

Plus...
8 ROADS TO NOWHERE

1.Goal Setting (Session 1)

Goal Setting is a powerful tool in the Exam Magic course, the primary intent of which is to facilitate aspirational change and increasing the student's motivation to learn. With this transformational aim in mind the students are guided towards and supported in the setting of attainable educational goals. Goal setting is presented as a creative process. Students are encouraged in the first instance to imagine what grades they think they could achieve if they applied every successful learning strategy within their current body of knowledge. They are subsequently invited to set goals beyond those they "think" they can achieve (one grade point higher is usually suggested) . Goals are about moving beyond present experience. It is made explicit to students that in order to reach their goals they must stretch and enter into growth experiences. THIS IS THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE GOAL. It facilitates growth and learning. Students learn how to recognise a genuine goal by it's emotional imprint. When one sets a realistic attainable goal one feels a mix of excitement and fear. Excited because it is something new and desirable, fearful because there is no certain known plan to achieve it.

The students write down their grade goals. This is an important step because it is a written commitment to achieve a specified aim. It is also the first stage in the goal's transformation from the intangible realm of thought (setting the goal) into the physical dimension of things (achieving the goal). The students' completed grade goals in the first session are used to prepare for session two, the role play.

2. Role Play (Session 2)

The role play simulates exam results day. During the role play students experience emotional and sensory stimuli which form memories of how success in their examinations will look and feel. These memories are later used as the basis of the student's visualisation practice. A student attempting to visualise themselves as being successful in examinations needs only to remember what happened during the role play. Visualisation is explained in detail during the course as part of goal setting theory and practice. Students are provided with simple visualisation techniques and tools to support their practice.

Role Play Method

The student's grade goals are made into results statements that closely resemble the one's they will receive when they complete their studies. The school or college sets up a simulated exam results day where the students receive the results they set as their desired goals. For the very best results every effort is made to ensure the role play is a faithful simulation of the actual results day typical for their particular learning environment. Where possible the results are given out adhering to the same conventions and in the same part of the school as would be the case on the real results day. Teaching staff play an important role congratulating and engaging with the students as emotionally charged sights, sounds and images associated with success are formed in the student's mind.

3.The T-Far model (Thoughts- Feelings- Actions-Results) (Session 2)

The students have increased their awareness of goals and have acquired a clear sensory experience of how it looks and feels to achieve or reach a goal. They are then exposed to the T-Far model which relates motivational and cognitive theory to their specific educational needs.

They learn that actions cause results and that human beings are motivated to act according to our perception of any action's potential rewards. If we feel an action will cause pleasure then we approach it, if we feel the opposite then we seek to avoid it. Actions in the T-Far model are emotionally motivated and emotions and feelings are caused by patterns of thought.

Students experience the relationship between thoughts, emotions and feelings through short guided visualisation exercises. Once this relationship is understood students may trace the causal chain backwards from results through actions through feelings to thought. In doing so they become aware that the quality of their own thinking is the ultimate source of all results within their potential control.

At this stage students' existing thought systems will naturally protest that the results they experienced in the role play are purely fictitious. They are ready for the next stage in understanding which is an awareness of the relationship between, and specific properties of, their conscious and unconscious mind.

4. Conscious and Unconscious Mind (Session 3)

A simple model is used to make the contrasting properties of the conscious and unconscious mind explicit. This is necessary in order to encourage the student to look beyond their current thought system. They are introduced to the timeless nature of their subconscious which has no concept of past or future. They learn of the unconscious mind's inability to discern imagined reality from sensory data and it's inability to reject ideas that reach it. Students are guided towards an understanding of their unconscious' role in regulating body metabolism and muscle control. In this sense the body is seen as an instrument of the mind. Actions are taken through the body. Results are the consequences of actions. Students are once again lead to the primary importance of conscious thought in the creative process.

In this model the conscious mind is seen as the control centre where thoughts are perceived and formed, accepted and rejected. Students experience the image based nature of conscious thought through a simple visualisation exercise. They are explicitly given encouragement and permission to think freely and to think of their exam results as the would have them be. The passing of such images from the conscious to the unconscious mind is the process of visualisation.

Students are being guided towards establishing new patterns of habitual thought that support successful educational outcomes.

5. Belief Systems, Paradigms, Comfort Zones and Fear (Session 3)

Students learn a simple model for understanding the effects of belief systems or paradigms on self esteem and results. Paradigms and Belief Systems are synonyms. They are taught as collections of habitual thoughts established within the unconscious mind which shape perception and therefor control behaviour. Students are introduced to the metaphor of paradigms as sunglasses which colour how a person sees the world and its possibilities They learn that comfort zones are the product of paradigms and that fear is the agent that seeks to limit growth.

Students learn to recognise their own limiting paradigms and to change them for growth orientated ones. Teaching stories are used to emphasise the importance and power of persistence when working towards any given goal. Procrastination is explained in the context of fear avoidance and pleasure seeking. The desire for instant gratification is gradually replaced within the individual as the emotional value of longer term goals is established and supported.

6. Activity Management - The List Method (Session 3)

There are twenty four hours in everyone's day. The world does not divide up between people who have more time and those with less. The difference is then in the way the time is spent. Time is an abstract concept, activity which takes place in time, is concrete. Students are taught to manage through managing the activities which use time. This is achieved through the List Method.

The List Method provides students with a structured approach to activity management. It has built into it it's own rewards system that increases student's feelings of self worth. It is a deceptively simple technique that harnesses the organising power of the students' unconscious mind.

7. Visualisation Techniques (Session 2)

Students are taught simple visualisation techniques which use the memories generated by the role play as the basis for their practice. The students are provided with a guided visualisation audio

recording (audio Patch) to support their practice. They also learn the 2 step process a quick visualisation which can be practiced often in a variety of daily situations.

The value of such a practice is re-enforced throughout the course.

8.Audio Patch

The audio Patch is a free audio recording which supports the students in changing the way they think about themselves in relation to their educational goals and forthcoming examinations.
It aids their progress towards their specified goals in three ways:

a. The first section consists of a guided relaxation session.
b. The second section consists of positive self talk focusing on successful exam preparation and completion
c. The third section is a guided visualisation referring to the role play.

The recording is available as a free download from www.exammagic.co.uk

Plus...

The 8 Roads to Nowhere

The 8 roads provide a light hearted look at the behaviours and ways of thinking that ultimately lead away from the successful completion of intended goals. They comprise a self check list of "what not to do" when preparing for exam success.

Experimental and Clinical Evidence

The sessions included in Exam Magic though not tied to specific theoretical approaches, are all supported by a wide range of cognitive, motivational and social psychological theories..

Here, some of the major theories or approaches used by psychologists (and for which there is extensive experimental and clinical evidence supporting them) are presented, along with a brief summary of the kinds of processes that are addressed by the sessions described in Exam Magic. Although this list is not exhaustive of those that are relevant, they are at least representative. The main sessions that relate to a particular theory or approach are specified in brackets in the headings for each theory or approach. However, they are not mutually exclusive and many sessions touch on many of the theories described.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

[1 Setting Goals; 2 Exam Magic Role Play; 5 Visualisation; 7 List Method]

The Theory of Planned Behaviour is a widely supported and very influential theory within social psychology. It states that the likelihood of engaging in a particular behaviour is a result of people's intentions and their perceptions of control over the behaviour (perceived behavioural control), whereby they are confident in their ability to elicit a particular behaviour but also that the environment provides them with an opportunity to elicit that behaviour. Intentions themselves are derived from people's perceptions of control (see above), their attitudes (i.e. that the outcome is desirable and that a particular behaviour will lead to that outcome) and subjective norms, the attitudes of those around them towards the behaviour and the outcome. Recent developments of the TPB include the addition of "anticipated affect" as a construct in the formation of intentions. This refers to the anticipation of the feeling of having completed (or not completed) the target behaviour. The TPB suggests that any intervention that addresses anticipated affect, attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control will therefore increase intention to engage in a behaviour and, consequently, the likelihood of engaging in that behaviour.

> Anticipated affect - simulation of outcomes [2 Exam Magic Role Play; 5 Visualisation]
> Perceived behavioural control - simulation of processes [7 List Method]
> Subjective norms - inclusion of important others (e.g. friends) [2 Exam Magic Role Play]
> Attitudes – education, cognitive effort [1 Setting Goals; 7 List Method]

Self-Affirmation Theory

[2 Exam Magic Role Play; 8 Audio Patch (positive self-talk)]

Self-affirmation theory concerns the adoption of behaviours from messages that are perceived as threatening. Even messages that are intended as helpful can be perceived as threatening (e.g. the message to improve exam grades can be perceived as critical of past exam performance or implies the risk of future failure). When messages are perceived as threatening, they reduce self-esteem and decrease the likelihood of taking up the relevant behaviour change. Simple techniques that maintain self-esteem also make reception of such messages more likely to lead to behaviour change.

Social Mentalities Theory

[2 Exam Magic Role Play; 4 Conscious & Unconscious Mind; 5 Visualisation]

Social mentalities is an evolutionary theory that considers that our behaviour is based on the perceptions that we have about how we exist in the minds of others. It also considers how external events can become internalised and lead to the same physical and emotional responses. For example, when hungry, thinking about eating food stimulates gustatory and salivary responses in the same way as being presented with a meal; thinking about sex stimulates the same gonadal responses as seeing sexually arousing stimuli; thinking self-compassionate thoughts stimulates the

same safe/calm positive affect as being soothed by carers. In the present context, thinking about achieving desired grades, once internalised following role play, stimulates the same affective response as actually achieving the desired grades.

Cognitive Theories of Emotion

[3 T-FAR Model and Motivation; 6 Comfort Zones/Fear/Belief Structures; 8 Audio Patch]

Since the 1950s, cognitive theories of emotion have dominated. Although there are many theories they all share the premise (and are supported by evidence showing) that appraisals cause emotions, e.g. appraisal of threat triggers anxiety, appraisal of loss of status triggers shame. More recent theories also propose that the experience of emotion motivates behaviour, either to change a currently felt emotional experience or to avoid experiencing a particular emotion in the first place. In general we are motivated to experience positive emotions because these signify that we are progressing towards our desired goals. Negative emotions signify that our goals are threatened or blocked. The demonstration of the link between thoughts and emotions and the effect that emotion has on our actions is the application of 60 years of experimental and clinical research.

Cognitive Behavioural Interventions

[3 T-FAR Model and Motivation; 4 Conscious & Unconscious Mind; 7 List Method; 8 Audio Patch]

Although not a specific theory, most evidence-based psychological interventions are derived from cognitive-behavioural approaches. In these approaches the links between thoughts and behaviours are demonstrated by personal experiments (e.g. identifying and challenging negative automatic assumptions). The effect of changing behaviour on changing thoughts is also highlighted (e.g. acting against personal beliefs). One consequence of this is that people learn to move away from engaging in habitual behaviours and to develop new repertoires. In addition to theory-based interventions, cognitive behavioural approaches also state that individual must be taught the model on which the intervention is based (in order that client and therapist share the same model of pathology/intervention and that it provides a rationale for each of the interventions introduced by the therapist). It is vital therefore that a plausible model from which the intervention is derived is described to individuals in order to increase their engagement with the intervention. Simple behavioural techniques (such as the list method) and support (e.g. positive reinforcement and relaxation) are introduced and the power of these demonstrated.

Transtheoretical Model of Change

The Transtheoretical Model of Change was an attempt to identify all the processes addressed by all the major therapeutic approaches and has enjoyed 40 years of evidence to support it as an explanatory model of behaviour change. While all 8 sessions described in Exam Magic are relevant to the TTM, of most importance is the order in which these elements are presented. The TTM describes people moving from a state of individuals being unaware of a particular behaviour (or else either unaware or indifferent that a behaviour is a problem), through thinking about change, preparing to change, engaging in actions designed to change a behaviour and finally through to strategies that help maintain the change. The model proposes that the processes that facilitate moving through these early stages are cognitive and emotional (e.g. dramatic relief, raising awareness) while those processes that facilitate moving through and maintaining the later stages are behavioural (e.g. helping relationships, stimulus control). The order in which Exam Magic sessions are presented parallel the sequence of processes that are effective at different stages of the cycle of behaviour change.

Bibliography/Suggested reading

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Armitage, C. J., & Conner, M. (2001). Efficacy of the theory of planned behaviour: A meta-analytic review. British Journal of Social Psychology, 40: 471-499.

Rivis, A., SHEERAN, P., & ARMITAGE, C. J. (2009). Expanding the affective and normative components of the theory of planned behavior: A meta-analysis of anticipated affect and moral norms. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 39, 2985-3019.

Self-affirmation theory

Sherman, D.K. & Cohen, G.L. (2006). The Psychology of Self-defense: Self-Affirmation Theory. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 38, 183-242.

Social mentalities theory

Gilbert, P. (2005). Social mentalities: A biopsychosocial and evolutionary approach to social relationships. In P. Gilbert & M. Baldwin (Eds) Interpersonal cognition (pp. 299-333). New York, U.S.: Guilford Press.

Cognitive theories of emotion

Scherer, K. R., Shorr, A. & Johnstone, T. (Ed.). (2001). Appraisal processes in emotion: theory, methods, research . Canary, NC: Oxford University Press.

Cognitive behavioural interventions

Hawton, K., Salkovskis, P.M., Kirk, J., & Clark, D.M. (1989). Cognitive behaviour therapy for psychiatric problems: A practical guide. Oxford medical publications. New York, U.S.: Oxford University Press.

Transtheoretical Model of Change

DiClemenete. C.C. & Prochaska, J.O. (1998). Toward a comprehensive transtheoretical model of change. In W.R. Miller & N. Heather (Eds) Treating addictive behaviors (2nd edition) (pp.1-24). New York, U.S.: Plenum Press.

If you would like to know more about Exam Magic you can visit
www.exammagic.co.uk

To make an enquiry about introducing Exam Magic to your school or college email Mike Warwick on mike@exammagic.co.uk