RFT of Meditation

This session is intended to provide a stage for thinking together about these questions …

- **What is going on in meditation from a contextual-behavioural perspective?**
- **How might contextual-behavioural science language be helpful in teaching and researching meditation?**

- E.g.
  - Rule-governed behaviour and responding to instructions
  - RFT of Self-compassion
  - Talking about self

Meditation is just another behaviour...

- Well actually a collection of behaviours
  - Responding to instructions
  - Initiating "Attending", sustaining attending
  - Getting distracted
  - "Accepting"
  - Being self-compassionate
  - Constructing and reconstructing sense of self

- All involve behaviour under the control of antecedents and consequences.

Why bother answering this question?

- Teaching
  - "mindfulness", "awareness", "self", "distraction" → confusing and evaluative
  - **E.g. How would you know you were listening mindfully?**
  - **Behavioural language is more compassionate**
- Research
  - Sedlmeir et al. (2012) "there is a substantial need for a psychological theory of meditation."
    - E.g. the distinctions between TM and all forms of mindfulness.
  - **Behavioural language is more precise**

Example 1: A grand purpose - Meditation is about training flexibility in moving between the verbal and nonverbal worlds

- *"the purpose of philosophy is to free the mind from the bewitchment of language."* *(Wittgenstein)*

- Verbal behaviour is the source of meaning, love and suffering
- Perhaps meditation is simply multiple-exemplar training in defusion, allowing and choosing.
- "Flexibility", "bigger repertoire"

Example 1b: The language of not-language, "dropping beneath the words"

- **STUDENT: "What can I DO to be more accepting?"**

- E.g. Body scan
  - Initial sensing one's own body is nonverbal
  - But it rapidly becomes a verbal and social process
  - Noticing the body may not be reinforced, and may even be punishing.
  - Bodily sensing is thoroughly saturated with verbal processes

Example 2: "I am a hopeless meditator, I get so easily distracted, I cant focus."

- E.g. Why is it so hard to stay focused during meditation. Why do we drift off so frequently? Does this mean "I am a bad meditator"
  - Thinking is just another behaviour, generally very beneficial and therefore reinforced in many contexts.
  - If I am continuously distracted, it is because of a history of preferential reinforcement for making sense/being coherent etc over noticing bodily sensations.
- Perhaps most of the time it is *more* reinforcing to be enjoying ride down the river than sitting on the bank.

Example 3: My instructions are "rules"

- In behavioural terms, a rule is simply a "contingency specifying stimulus"
- i.e. under these circumstances, if you do X, Y will happen"
- Verbal statements help us orient and respond to stimuli we have never encountered before.
- But they can also create inflexibility.
- What rules are being expressed or heard?
- The more vague we are about this, the most likely we are creating rigid or unintended rules.

Example 4: The language of the "self"

- E.g. Tara Brach – RAIN
  - *Recognize what is happening*
  - *Allow life to be just as it is;*
  - *Investigate inner experience with kindness*
  - *Non-identification???*
- Understanding self → process not a thing

Example 5: If my purpose is XYZ, how specifically should I meditate?

- How long should I meditate?
- Should I take breaks if I am highly distracted?
- Should I always sit in the same place or multiple places?

- Can behaviour-analytic data be brought to these questions?

Some questions

- What is going on in meditation from a contextual-behavioural perspective?
- How might contextual-behavioural science language be helpful in teaching and researching meditation?

- AGENCY: Does CBS language strengthen or reduce a sense of agency?
- Does self-compassion require agency?