Teaching mindfulness amidst chaos

A Dialectical Behaviour Therapy Approach

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Conflict of Interest Statement

- Dr. Swales is married to principal shareholder of Integral Business Support Ltd that runs British Isles DBT Training
- Dr. Swales receives payment for consultation in DBT
- Dr. Swales receives royalties from books on DBT
What is Dialectical Behaviour Therapy?

- Psychological treatment
- Developed for adults with a diagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder presenting with suicidal and self-harming behaviours
- Adapted for other client groups
  - Substance Dependence
  - Eating Disorders
  - Adolescents
What is Borderline Personality Disorder?

- Affective lability
- Problems with anger
- Chaotic relationships
- Fears of abandonment
- Identity disturbance
- Sense of emptiness
- Suicidal and self-injurious behaviours
- Impulsive behaviour
- Transient stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms
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Conceptualizing the Chaos

- Capability deficits
- Motivational deficits
- Particular difficulties in the management and experience of affect
- Leads to regulation difficulties in:
  - Interpersonal relationships
  - Sense of self
  - Behavioural control
  - Cognition
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- Providing a comprehensive programme of care
Comprehensive Treatment

- Enhance capabilities
  - E.g. skills training groups
- Enhance motivation
  - DBT individual psychotherapy
- Assure generalisation of capabilities
  - E.g. between-session skills coaching
- Structure the environment
  - Programme management
- Enhance therapist capabilities and motivation
  - Consultation Team
A principle-based treatment
Behaviourism

- Developer of DBT, Marsha Linehan, trained as a behaviour therapist
- Developed a behavioural intervention for suicidal behaviour
- Several problems became apparent in testing the treatment on individuals with a BPD diagnosis
  - Treatment focus changed rapidly
  - Therapy interfering behaviours were numerous e.g. attendance problems, non-completion of homework
  - Individuals in the treatment experienced the constant focus on change as invalidating
A technology of acceptance?

- Acceptance-based therapies can also be invalidating
- To counterbalance the focus on change
- Linehan, a student of Zen, turned to mindfulness and Zen-based principles of acceptance to incorporate into DBT
- Zen is highly compatible with Behaviour Therapy
- Like Kabat-Zinn, she ‘psychologized & Westernized’ the principles before incorporating them into the treatment
Dialectical Synthesis:

- Using behavioural principles to promote acceptance
- Becoming mindful is a new behaviour
- Teach mindfulness as we would any new behaviour
Skills training

- Skills Acquisition
- Skills Strengthening
- Skills Generalization
Skills Acquisition
Mindfulness in DBT

- Taught in skills class 4 times in a 6-month cycle with a practice every week
- Wise Mind: a synthesis of emotional and reasonable mind
Mindfulness ‘what’ skills

- Observe
- Describe
- Participate
Mindfulness ‘how’ skills

- Non-judgementally
- One-mindfully
- Effectively
Skills Strengthening
Skills Generalization
Becoming mindful

- Applying the skills in everyday life
- Using the skills to participate in and not to distract from everyday life
- Not mistaking the practice for mindfulness itself
Useful references

**DBT SKILLS IN SCHOOLS**
Skills Training for Emotional Problem Solving for Adolescents (DBT STEPS-A)

*James J. Mazza, Elizabeth T. Dexter-Mazza, Alec L. Miller, Jill H. Rathus, and Heather E. Murphy*

*Foreword by Marsha M. Linehan*

**DBT Skills Manual for Adolescents**

*Jill H. Rathus and Alec L. Miller*

*Foreword by Marsha M. Linehan*
With thanks

- Marsha Linehan
  - Behavior Research & Therapy Clinics University of Washington, Seattle
  - Behavioural Tech LLC
- Joaquim Soler