

Putting the ACT in Activism

Ms Reyelle McKeever
Dr Sacha Rombouts

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the Whadjuk people.

We recognise them as the custodians and caretakers of the land – land of which was never ceded.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We extend this respect to all First Nations and Indigenous peoples in attendance today. We acknowledge these cultures of wisdom and the collective power of First Nations.

Workshop Overview

- What matters to you
- What stuff comes up for you
- Getting perspective
- Taking Action

Exercise: Concerns

- Why did you decide to attend this workshop?
- When I think about the condition of our world I would say...
- Some concerns I have include...
- One of my worst fears about the future is...
- Some feelings that come up when I think about these are...
- Ways that I avoid these feelings are...
- Some ways I can use these feelings are...

Brainstorming:
stuff that came up

Beware of fusion

- I don't believe it's that dangerous
- It isn't my responsibility
- I don't want to look differently from others
- There is no point in doing anything because it won't make a difference

Avoidance

- Accepting this information threatens my lifestyle, political interests etc.
- It is too upsetting to think about
- Anger about what is happening
- Feeling overwhelmed and/or paralysed
- Despair

Mindfulness – our relationship to time

- Short-term benefits outweigh long-term costs
- We don't see disasters approaching
- Narrow timescapes are self-reinforcing
- Narrow timescapes reduce our sense of meaning & purpose in life
- We export problems to the future

The Problematic Hexaflex

- Fusion – ‘They’ are constantly trying to force you to fuse with their version of reality
- Avoidance – ‘They’ push fear and offer avoidance options
- Rigid perspective
- Taken away from present moment
- Loss of contact with values
- Unworkable actions

Barriers to Action

The story of the Hummingbird and the Forest Fire:

A raging fire is burning in the jungle. It's such an overwhelming disaster that all of the animals are watching the conflagration in shock. A hummingbird says, "I'm going to do something about the fire." It flies to the nearest stream and takes a drop of water. It races back to the fire, where it drops the water onto the flames. Back and forth it goes, over and over, while the larger animals – like the elephant whose trunk could deliver so much more water – stand watching. Eventually they ask the hummingbird, "What do you think you can do? You're too little!" Without pausing, the hummingbird answers: "I'm doing the best I can."

- Wangari Maathai

Exercise

- Imagine you are the forest being burned. Your life force being decimated and turning to ash. How do you feel? What do you sensations and urges do you feel? What do you say to yourself as you watch the animals standing by?
- Imagine you are the fire, burning hot and without control. Is it in your nature to destroy? Are you responsible for your actions?

Exercise

- Imagine you are the elephant standing on the edge of the forest, watching your home being burned, your safety threatened, your way of life completely reduced to ashes. How do you feel? What sensations and urges do you have? How present are you in that moment? What actions can you take? What do you notice when watching the hummingbird?
- Imagine you are the hummingbird. What relationship have you forged with the elephant and other animals? Are you willing to accept your shared experience of distress? What are your motivations for action? Are you acting to shame others with moral superiority and self-sacrifice? Are you avoiding the emotional experience of pain and suffering with hyper-altruism? Imagine seeing the suffering of your fellow creatures and being filled with love and compassion, noticing their experience without judgment.

Changing the Story – From ‘I’ to ‘We’

- We can get hooked on the story of not being powerful enough, strong enough, resourced enough
- Empowering collective action to make a change requires a change in the narrative
- Governments and big business rely on our individualistic focus and lack of homogeneity of purpose to push policies and economies that negatively impact on the community wellbeing.
 - Without a shared narrative as a group, we use finite energy and resources lobbying / fighting against each other to get our needs met
 - With a shared narrative, we are a stronger voice that is empowered to support each other by sharing resources, advocating and agitating for meaningful change
 - We need to extend our sense of cooperation that is inclusive of the whole of humanity (acknowledging we are most effective in applying that cooperation in small groups)

4 Levels of Community

1. Groups we feel comfortable in.
2. Wider community around us.
3. Global community of humanity.
4. Earth community of life.

The Earth's Perspective

- A letter from the Earth
- If the Earth could speak to us, what would it say?

Never doubt that a few caring people
can't change the world.
For, indeed, that's all who ever have.

- Margaret Mead

Exercise: Open Sentences of Gratitude

- Some things I love about being alive on Earth are...
- A place that was magical to me as a child was...
- My favourite activities include...
- Someone who made a difference in my world was...

Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.

- Marjorie Moore

What we know

- We share a heightened awareness of the suffering and threats besetting our world
- Distress tolerance, mindfulness and self-compassion enable us to turn towards these issues without dodging, denying or numbing out
- We can widen our behaviour repertoires and experience an upsurge in energy as we unblock feedback loops by accepting our pain for the world – reframing it as compassion
- We can build a new narrative of our group – to build our capacity to care for the world with a wider sense of identity that is integral to the living body of Earth and its beings

Anything you can do needs to be done, so pick up the tool of your choice and get started.

- Ben Linder

Co-Design as a Model for CBS Action

- Co-design (aka participatory design) is well known in business / commerce but has new applicability to activism and innovative, community-led solutions
- Co-design shifting from person-centred practices (e.g. independent living movement in disability sector; patient-centred medical treatment) to citizen-lead initiatives (e.g. self-determination movements)
- Co-designing for social good – the role of citizens in designing and delivering social and environmental services
- Can be minor change to radical adaptation / revisioning that challenges traditional roles and relationships

Committed Action Primers

Work outside of psychological circles to co-partner and co-create innovative, values-directed actions

- Engage with economists, engineers, film makers, environmentalists, product designers, law makers / enforcers

Take up opportunities to advocate and agitate for change

- Write submissions to government about policy issues outside of mental health sector; apply CBS concepts of behaviour change to eco-economical models and projects

Share resources with different groups and communities

- Provide resources and teach CBS concepts to support those 'on the front line' to retain motivation and reduce burnout

Committed Action Primers

- Building ideas for applying CBS processes in environments / contexts that extend out from the therapy room, e.g. sitting on working groups / boards / committees for NFP organisations, charities, lobby groups, etc., engaging with industry groups (e.g. agriculture, natural resources)
- Sharing our CBS resources to front line organisations, e.g. Greenpeace, Indigenous Nations, Lock the Gate Alliance

Committed Action Primers

- Assisting with environmental / social marketing campaigns that focus on changing the ‘story’ for the intended audience
- Build opportunities through therapy (e.g. reduce activism burnout through CBS-based therapy groups; create youth-led groups in schools that teach CBS processes)
- Work across academic departments (e.g. curriculum content, research centres) and with industry (e.g. bridging grants)

Case Study: GetUp

- A one-stop shop for social action
- Vision – based on values
- Strategies – meetings, conversations, group-building, strategic tactics
- Action Groups
- The 1st PowerUp conference

GetUp: Making Connections

- Making connections with others who care is an important socio-political action.
- Imagine being able to tap into the skill sets of various community members.
- “You are doers” → moving out of your comfort zone to take action and this is easier when you do it with friends.

How do we move forward? It's not rocket science... The truth is that we can't know which act in the present will make the most difference in the future, but we can behave as if everything we do matters...

- Gloria Steinem

Your Committed Action

- If there was a camera watching you care for this earth, what is one action it would see you do?
- What will it feel like to do this?
- When will you do this?
- What do you need to make this happen?
- Are you willing to share this commitment and be accountable?

Circle of Blessings

This is a chance for you to look one at a time at each person in our group and experience the full intensity of your appreciation and regard. Take a moment to relish the uniqueness of each person and marvel at their readiness to be of service to life on Earth. Know that you are connected more than through race, ethnicity, gender, or profession. You are connected through a shared commitment to the healing of our world and welfare of all beings. That you can support others in their work for the world and can ask for help with your work. The world is a living being to which we all belong. It is part of our own self and we are part of its suffering – and we are all part of its healing. With Love.

Recommended reading

- Bond, B., & Exley, Z. (2016). *Rules for Revolutionaries: How big organizing can change the world*. Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Gallagher, N., & Myers, L. (2016). *Tools for Grassroots Activists*. Patagonia: Ventura, CA.
- Klein, N. (2014). *This Changes Everything. Capitalism vs. The Climate*. Simon & Schuster: New York City, NY.
- Maathai, W. (2010). *Replenishing the Earth. Spiritual values for healing ourselves and the world*. Doubleday Religion: New York City, NY.
- Macy, J., & Brown, M. (2014). *Coming Back to Life*. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, B.C.