

## Invited Presenter

CBM;

### **Skinner's Operationalism, Selectionism, Loving Infinitely, and Building the Deepest Connection With Others in ABA Practice and ACT**

Chair: Amy Murrell (University of North Texas)

THOMAS G. SZABO (Florida Institute of Technology)



Thomas G. Szabo, PhD., BCBA-D is a professor at Florida Institute of Technology. He graduated from the University of Nevada, Reno under the mentorship of W. Larry Williams and Steven C. Hayes. Over the last decade, Dr. Szabo has sought to develop iterations of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy suitable to the needs of ABA practitioners and within their specialized scope of practice. He has offered ACT training to parents, children, senior executives and frontline staff, and couples learning effective partner skills.

With his students, Dr. Szabo is currently investigating behavioral flexibility training and a variety of applied-RFT strategies to promote learning and improved performance. Dr. Szabo is also the second chair of an international non-governmental organization, Commit & Act, which teaches women, children, and couples in Sierra Leone behavior-based strategies for partnership and empowerment.

**Abstract:** In “The Operational Analysis of Psychological Terms” Skinner proposed that the science of behavior needs a contingency analysis of the contexts in which scientists use terms. A term is valid only when it increases the scientist’s capacity for prediction and influence, and not merely when it produces socially mediated reinforcers such as the approval and agreement of other scientists. Years later, Skinner continued to evolve contingency analysis in terms of Darwinian theory, which involves variation, selection, and retention. In this talk, I will argue that the pragmatic aims of ABA hinge upon these two conceptual advances and that Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT) offers practitioners a way to harness Skinner’s conceptual horsepower in service of helping others. In the ACT approach, ABA workers start where folks are at and talk with them about what they value most. About love. Family. Pain. Laughter. Building this kind of connection with stakeholders in ABA is neither unprofessional, nor is using common sense language an invitation to mentalism. It is the catwalk from unworkable essentialism to pragmatic contextualism. In this talk, I will bridge the conceptual with the pragmatic by sharing single case design data from our work with parents and children.