

Abstract Title:-

Neurodiversity-Affirming and Assent-Based Behavior Analysis: Advancing Humane, Collaborative, and Effective Practice

Keynote Speaker – Dr. Laura Barcelos Nomicos – Director, Global Institute for Behavior Analysis



Abstract:

Neurodiversity recognizes differences in neurological development and functioning as a natural and valuable aspect of human variation rather than a deviation from a presumed norm. As research, advocacy, and lived experience continue to broaden the understanding of neurodiversity, there is increasing urgency for behavior analytic practice to evolve accordingly. Neurodiversity-affirming and assent-based approaches are not only ethical imperatives, but also enhance learning outcomes by ensuring individuals experience choice, predictability, and meaningful control over participation. When autonomy is supported, engagement increases, distress decreases, and instruction becomes more efficient, durable, and socially meaningful.

This presentation highlights humane, autonomy-supportive practices that reduce coercion, strengthen instructional relationships, and promote learning across culturally and contextually diverse settings. It explores how Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) can collaborate effectively with professionals across disciplines—including education, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, and developmental services—using the scientist–practitioner model as a shared foundation for best practice. This model emphasizes integration of empirical evidence, clinical expertise, and stakeholder values to guide intervention. Data-informed hypothesis testing, ongoing evaluation, and responsive adjustment of supports are presented as mechanisms for aligning interdisciplinary goals while prioritizing learner assent, dignity, and well-being.

Within early intervention and inclusive education, these principles support flexible, individualized approaches that are both humane and effective. The presentation also addresses preparation of the next generation of behavior analysts to work within interdisciplinary, neurodiversity-affirming systems. Training models that emphasize reflective supervision, ethical decision-making, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed care, and collaborative problem-solving are discussed, with particular attention to how coursework, supervision, and applied experiences can intentionally teach assent-based practice and meaningful evaluation of learning progress in ways that honor autonomy and participation.

Keywords:

Neurodiversity • Assent • Training • Inclusive practice • Collaboration

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- **Describe** neurodiversity as a framework for understanding neurological differences and explain how evolving perspectives on neurodevelopment inform contemporary ABA practice.
- **Identify** key components of neurodiversity-affirming and assent-based approaches and explain how they support engagement, reduce distress, and promote meaningful learning outcomes.
- **Explain** how the scientist-practitioner model strengthens interdisciplinary collaboration by integrating evidence, clinical expertise, and stakeholder values in early intervention and inclusive education settings.

Short Professional Biography:

Dr. Laura Barcelos Nomicos (BCBA-D) is a licensed behavior analyst in Nevada and Director of the Global Institute for Behavior Analysis, where she leads international training in humane, neurodiversity-affirming, and evidence-based practice. Her work emphasizes assent-based approaches, inclusive service delivery, and workforce preparation for culturally responsive support of diverse communities. With a strong clinical foundation and expertise in the experimental analysis of behavior and instructional systems design, she brings a multifaceted perspective to practitioner training and ethical intervention development. Dr. Barcelos earned her master's degree from California State University, Fresno, and her doctorate from the University of Nevada, Reno, where she advanced online and hybrid instruction in behavior analysis. In 2022, she co-founded the Global Institute for Behavior Analysis with Dr. Linda Hayes to expand accessible, high-quality training worldwide.