

Teaching Philosophy Statement

My teaching philosophy is rooted in the belief that fostering engagement and lifelong learning among adult learners requires a reflective, student-centered, and evidence-based approach. Early in my development as an educator, an interview experience prompted me to think more deeply about what makes teaching meaningful. I began asking questions that extended beyond course content: What do students remember about their most influential educators? How does a classroom shape a learner's confidence and professional identity? What do students carry with them after a course has ended? These questions continue to shape my approach to teaching and mentorship.

As an educator and Board Certified Behavior Analyst-Doctoral (BCBA-D), I view teaching as more than the transmission of technical knowledge. Particularly in behavior analysis, effective teaching requires helping students connect scientific principles to ethical, culturally responsive, and socially meaningful practice. My goal is to prepare students not only to demonstrate competency in behavior analysis, but also to become thoughtful clinicians, critical consumers of research, effective collaborators, and lifelong learners.

Goals for Student Learning

I prioritize deep, meaningful learning, particularly for adult learners preparing for or advancing within clinical practice. I advocate for a culture that values growth and mastery rather than speed or perfection. Inspired by Black Box Thinking (Syed, 2017), I emphasize the importance of learning from errors. Similarly, Dweck's (2013) work on growth mindset informs my belief that students benefit when they understand that professional competence develops through practice, feedback, reflection, and continued learning.

This perspective is especially relevant to the preparation of behavior analysts. Students must learn complex conceptual and technical skills while developing the professional judgment necessary to apply those skills across diverse clients, families, organizations, and communities. I therefore encourage students to move beyond memorization and ask why an intervention is appropriate, what evidence supports it, how contextual variables may affect its implementation, and whether the resulting outcomes are meaningful to the individuals receiving services.

I also recognize that student success is shaped by cultural, educational, professional, and life experiences. Gladwell (2008) emphasizes the importance of context in shaping opportunities and achievement. Adult learners, in particular, enter higher education with different professional experiences, responsibilities, strengths, and learning histories. I strive to create learning environments that acknowledge those differences while maintaining high academic and professional expectations.

- Structure instruction to balance direct teaching, application, discussion, reflection, and opportunities for active responding.
- Use clinical scenarios and case-based learning to connect behavioral principles with real-world decision-making.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to participate and demonstrate understanding.
- Incorporate opportunities for students to connect assignments and projects to their professional interests and goals.

- Encourage students to evaluate research critically and translate evidence into ethical and socially significant practice.
- Treat students as individual learners and professionals whose experiences can contribute meaningfully to the learning environment.

Enactment of Teaching Goals

My approach to instruction is strongly influenced by the principles of applied behavior analysis. I view effective teaching as an iterative process in which instructors establish clear expectations, provide opportunities to respond, assess performance, deliver meaningful feedback, and adjust instruction based on learner outcomes.

I incorporate the concept of a Culture of Error (Green, 2014) to encourage academic risk-taking and identify misunderstandings before they become barriers to learning. This philosophy complements behavior-analytic approaches to skill development, including shaping and differential reinforcement (Cooper et al., 2020). Students should have opportunities to approximate increasingly sophisticated levels of performance rather than being expected to demonstrate mastery immediately.

This approach is particularly important in online and remote learning environments, where intentional instructional design is necessary to maintain engagement and connection. I strive to make expectations explicit, provide predictable course structures, and create meaningful opportunities for interaction among students and faculty. Technology should not simply replicate an in-person classroom; it should be used intentionally to increase accessibility, engagement, feedback, and opportunities to apply knowledge.

In my courses, I foster a supportive learning environment by using growth-oriented language and encouraging students to ask questions without fear of judgment. I integrate diverse perspectives and clinical examples, select readings that expose students to different populations and viewpoints, and create opportunities for students to analyze how behavioral principles operate across settings and communities. I also engage in ongoing reflection about my own teaching practices and use student feedback to identify areas in which instruction can be strengthened.

Assessment of Student Learning

My background in special education and behavior analysis has reinforced my belief that assessment should inform instruction rather than simply document performance. Just as behavior analysts use data to make clinical decisions, I use student performance data and feedback to determine whether instructional strategies are producing meaningful learning.

At the same time, I recognize that engagement, professional development, and lifelong learning are not always fully captured through traditional examinations. Assessment should therefore provide multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate competency and apply their knowledge.

- Clearly communicate learning objectives, grading criteria, and assignment expectations.
- Use low-stakes opportunities for practice before higher-stakes assessments.

- Provide timely, specific, and actionable feedback.
- Incorporate case-based assignments that require students to apply behavioral concepts to realistic clinical and professional situations.
- Create checkpoints that promote individual accountability, reflection, and revision.
- Use student performance to evaluate the effectiveness of my own instruction and modify teaching strategies when necessary.

This approach models an important professional expectation within behavior analysis: decisions should be informed by data, and practitioners should be willing to modify their own behavior when outcomes indicate that change is necessary.

Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

Education can provide opportunities for both professional and personal transformation. Hooks (1994) describes teaching as an engaged practice that recognizes students as whole individuals. I strive to create learning environments in which students can connect academic knowledge with their professional experiences while recognizing that no single perspective represents all learners, clients, families, or communities.

Self-awareness is central to this process. When discussing topics such as autism, disability, culture, ethics, or service delivery, I encourage students to consider how their own experiences and assumptions influence their interpretation of behavior and professional decision-making. I model this reflection by acknowledging the boundaries of my own experiences and emphasizing the importance of listening to perspectives that differ from one's own.

To cultivate an inclusive learning environment, I avoid assuming shared experiences among students, incorporate scholarship and perspectives from individuals with varied backgrounds, and use case studies that require students to consider cultural and contextual variables. I encourage respectful disagreement and teach students to distinguish between professional assumptions and conclusions supported by evidence. Within behavior analysis, this also means emphasizing social validity and recognizing that technically effective interventions must also be meaningful and acceptable to the individuals and communities we serve.

Preparing the Next Generation of Behavior Analysts

Ultimately, my goal is to prepare behavior analysts who understand both the science and the responsibility associated with its application. Technical competence is essential, but effective practitioners must also communicate clearly, evaluate evidence critically, collaborate with others, respond to feedback, and recognize when their own practices need to change.

I view teaching and mentorship as extensions of the same process. Whether working with a student learning a behavioral principle for the first time or mentoring an emerging clinician as they develop professional judgment, my role is to establish conditions in which learners can practice, receive meaningful feedback, reflect, and progressively develop independence.

Through reflective teaching, evidence-based instructional practices, meaningful assessment, and an inclusive learning environment, I aim to develop students who leave my courses with more than knowledge of behavior analysis. I want them to leave with the confidence to ask difficult questions, the skills to seek evidence-based answers, and the

professional responsibility to continue learning throughout their careers. In this way, my teaching philosophy aligns with the preparation of behavior analysts who can advance the science of behavior while improving meaningful outcomes for the individuals, families, and communities they serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ramella". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Ramella Lee, PhD, BCBA-D