

Jesús Rosales-Ruiz and Mary Hunter
Invited Workshop

Building Reinforcement Systems for Accelerated Learning

Recommendations for the application of positive reinforcement have often been based on characteristics of the reinforcer, such as size, immediacy, level of deprivation, and the schedule used. However, in some situations, teachers have slow rates of progress and low levels of learner engagement, even when they have what should be an effective reinforcer.

What is often missing is a reinforcement system. While it is often convenient to think of reinforcers as “things,” reinforcement involves the interaction between two individuals. These interactions create a “reinforcement system,” which is the interconnected chain of behaviors between a teacher and a learner. In order for a reinforcement system to work effectively, the learner must learn when reinforcement is available, where to go or what to do to access the reinforcer, how to consume the reinforcer, and how to go back to the task after consuming the reinforcer.

In this workshop, you will learn how to build effective reinforcement systems when working with children. Lectures, videos, and hands-on activities will illustrate what a reinforcement system is and how to analyze and teach reinforcement systems. You will leave with a new understanding of reinforcement, as well as practical ideas for how to accelerate learner progress and increase learner engagement.

Workshop Presenter Bio:



Dr. Jesús Rosales-Ruiz is an associate professor in the Behavior Analysis Department at the University of North Texas. In 1995, he received his Ph.D. in Experimental Child Psychology from the University of Kansas, where he studied under Dr. Donald M. Baer and Dr. Ogden R. Lindsley. Since 2020, he has served as the director of the Beatrice H. Barrett Behavior Analytic Neuroscience Initiative at the University of North Texas. Among his many significant contributions to behavior analysis is the behavioral cusp, introduced in 1996 together with Dr. Baer.

This groundbreaking work provides a behavior analytic account of the rapid changes that are often considered developmental and offers practitioners guidance when selecting target behaviors.

Additionally, Dr. Rosales-Ruiz has been at the forefront of bringing the science of behavior to the growing field of human-animal interactions. His work on functional analysis and shaping has helped bridge the gap between academia and applied animal training. He is also the co-creator of PORTL, the Portable Operant Research and Teaching Lab, a tabletop game which allows students and practitioners to experience behavioral principles and practice their teaching skills.

Workshop Presenter Bio:

Mary Hunter earned an undergraduate degree in biology from the University of Chicago and a master's degree in behavior analysis from the University of North Texas. Mary's business, Behavior Explorer, offers educational courses and programs for individuals interested in the science of behavior. In addition, she teaches as an adjunct instructor in the behavior analysis department at the University of North Texas. In 2019, Mary and Dr. Jesús Rosales-Ruiz published their first book, PORTL: The Portable Operant Research and Teaching Lab.

Mary's research interests include studying the process of shaping and finding better ways to teach people to train animals. Her master's thesis, which examined the effects of a single reinforcer during shaping, was published in 2019 in the Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior. She is a full member of the Association for Behavior Analysis International and has presented her research at the organization's annual convention.