



ON THE CUTTING EDGE

The Bridge Project: Transdisciplinary Preparation to Serve Young Children with Disabilities

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The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs recently awarded a \$1.25 million grant to CSUN for a groundbreaking collaboration among three Master's programs: the MA in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) in the Department of Special Education of the Michael D. Eisner College of Education, the MS in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) in the Department of Psychology in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and the MS in Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) in the Department of Communication Disorders and Sciences in the College of Health and Human Development. The Transdisciplinary Bridge Project represents a new program in which three disciplines (ECSE, ABA, & SLP) focus on collaboration and teaming in ECSE and Early Intervention (EI) settings. It addresses the critical shortage of highly effective, culturally responsive professionals in ECSE/EI to meet the needs of young children with disabilities and their families from diverse backgrounds.

As the demand for including students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment continues to grow, there is a great need for professionals who are trained to support students within these settings. Professionals from a variety of disciplines must be able to work collaboratively with each other as young children with disabilities usually require services from more than one discipline. While special education teachers/early interventionists, behavioral analysts, and SLPs often work with the same child, they usually do not receive any time or support to collaborate, despite the fact that behavior interventions and supports and speech and language therapy are commonly listed on Individualized Family Support Plans (IFSPs) or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs.) There are distinct differences in their training and practice. First, the three professions are trained according to different standards. To meet these professional standards and competencies, most ABA and SLP training programs produce generalists who work across disabilities, ages, and settings, and have no room to provide content related to young children with special needs and their families (Kelly & Tincani, 2013). At the same time, ECSE teacher preparation programs often have difficulties embedding opportunities to address topics promoting social emotional development and challenging behaviors in their curriculum and fieldwork (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012). Second, there are differences in the teaching procedures, structure, data collection, and formality or

specificity of interventions that might impact collaboration (Lane & Brown, 2023). Lastly, these professionals may view the needs of young children through different perspectives and may not understand each other's roles. Thus, it is vital to increase understanding among the three groups of professionals to promote successful coordination and collaboration.

The Transdisciplinary Bridge Project is a three-semester program. Through providing co-taught interdisciplinary collaborative coursework, specially designed seminars, and joint fieldwork experiences, the Transdisciplinary Bridge Project will prepare 36 highly qualified professionals from diverse backgrounds to work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families from 2024 to 2028. As a result of the Transdisciplinary Bridge Project, students will be eligible to earn a CSUN University Certificate in Transdisciplinary Teaming in ECSE/EI layered upon their Master's degree. Individualized funding will be provided for scholars as stipends, conference travel, and technology support.

Want to learn more about the Transdisciplinary Bridge Project?

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