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Robert J. Cross  
*Grand Valley State University*

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# Parental Involvement

## Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model Increases Parental Involvement With Special Education Students

By Dr. Robert J. Cross, GVSU Faculty

Researchers have proven the importance of parental involvement in a child's education. In fact, James Griffith (1996) found that schools having higher levels of parental involvement and empowerment also had higher student criterion-referenced test scores. Although much attention has been focused on ways of involving the parent in school activities, little has been written on how to better involve parents of special education students. The U.S. Office of Education 1998 revisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (I.D.E.A.) contained major changes specifically designed to increase the parent's involvement in the educational process. These revisions required school districts to invite the parent to be involved in the diagnosis of the disability, determination of need for special education programs and services and the extent to which the child would receive these services. In addition, parents were to be invited to participate in any planning meeting held by educators regarding their child.

The implementation of these revisions is called the Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model. Transdisciplinary service delivery is based on two fundamental beliefs: 1) children's development must be viewed as integrated and interactive, and 2) children must be served within the context of the natural environment (regular classroom setting and home). Transdisciplinary education focuses on identifying those instructional techniques that can be taught to others (teachers, parents, aides, other staff) and utilizes these individuals to facilitate the instructional process, thus, increasing the amount of instructional input given the student.

Transdisciplinary also recognizes the parent as an important member of the team and relies heavily on a combination of consultation, monitoring and direct service delivery from the related service specialist as ways of supporting the parent (Woodruff & Sterzin, 1988). Within Transdisciplinary service, staff retains the responsibility for assessment and planning, but assumes new roles as teacher, consultant and monitor. In these new roles, staff identifies what they do that they can "give-up" to others and then teaches other persons in the students' life how to provide these services supported by the related service staff.

### Research Study of Transdisciplinary Model

In the Fall of 2003, I began a study project with special education staff at Gratiot Isabella Regional Educational Service District (RESA), located in Mount Pleasant, Michigan. The Gratiot Isabella RESA serves several local school districts including rural, suburban and one urban district that includes a large public university. After a year of studying various models of delivery the staff and administration chose to adopt the Transdisciplinary service delivery model. The Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech, Social Work and Teacher Consultant Staff implemented this model beginning in 2004.

This study began with an assessment of how related staff members were spending their professional time within the pull-out program they currently employed. A Task Analysis Survey was administered to four physical therapists, seven occupational therapists and thirteen speech pathologists. The resulting data showed that the staff spent:

- 30% of their time was spent on direct service delivery of one hour or more on a one-to-one with a one student.
- 12% of the time was spent on consultative service delivery
- 10% of the time was spent on attending Individual Education Planning meetings
- 9% of the time was spent on direct service delivery of thirty minutes or less
- 8% of the time was spent on assessment
- 8% of the time was spent on documentation
- 23% of the time was spent on other, which included travel, staff-meetings, workshops, planning, phone conferences.

The baseline data showed that staff was spending only 39% of their time on direct service. The problem is that direct service requires the staff person to travel to the student and the student is pulled out of the classroom for service. This delivery system is not supported by the recent emphasis from the U.S. Office of Education toward keeping all special education students in a regular education environment discourages the pull-out model nor by research studies that suggest pull-out types of delivery are no more effective than classroom-integrated therapy (Case-Smith & Cable, 1996)

## Choosing A Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model

The next step was to ask the related service staff to document which of their current services could not be transferred to someone else; which could, and for those that could be transferred, who they could be transferred to and what training was required for this to work. Most duties not considered for transfer had issues of danger and/or certification, for example, in-depth oral or motor assessment that requires intensive training. Specific data from the research regarding the identified issues may be requested directly from the author (crossr@gvsu.edu). Staff also determined instructional tasks that could be transferred to and taught by parents. The following table shows those tasks identified as parent transferable.

## Implementation Follow-up

In the winter of 2005, I conducted a follow-up study of the special education teachers who were using the Transdisciplinary approach. A total of 12 special education classrooms (six resource rooms and six self-contained classrooms) were selected to examine potential variables that interact with parent involvement in their child's education. The classrooms were equally represented as rural, suburban and urban school districts and included six at the elementary level and six at the secondary level.

### Extrapolated List of Tasks That Can Be Transferred to Parents

<i>Taken From</i>		<i>Given To Parent</i>	
<b>Occupational Therapist</b>	Hand writing	Tool Use	Visual Perception
	Fine Motor Activities	Dressing	Sensory Diet
	Hygiene	Eating	
<b>Physical Therapist</b>	Gentle Passive Range of Motion	Motor Planning (selective)	
	Aerobic Endurance		
	Donning, Daffing, Orthotics		
<b>Speech &amp; Language Therapist</b>	Basic Oral	Daily Training of PECS	
	Motor Tasks	Eliciting Various Language Structures	
	Transfer of learned sounds into various settings		

Robert Cross holds a BA, MA and Ph.D. from Michigan State University. He has served as a Full Professor of Graduate Special Education, Director of Special Education, Chair of Educational Leadership, Chair of Graduate Studies and Professor of Education Foundations at Grand Valley State University for the past twenty-five years. His prior experience includes service as an Executive Director of Special Education for a consortium of seven large school districts in Michigan. Dr. Cross has authored numerous articles and most recently has spent his time studying Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Systems as a means of improving services to special education students.

The first variable assessed was the amount of training the teacher had received in parental involvement. Research has shown that teachers who are prepared and taught how to involve parents into their classroom have better communication with parents (Quigley, 2000). All of the respondents in my sample had taught less than 10 years. Eighty-four percent indicated they had taken courses or workshops that dealt with involving parents in their child's education. None indicated they had taken more than six total hours of courses or workshops dealing with parent involvement. When asked "What do you do when a parent won't participate in Transdisciplinary? The majority of teachers participating in the survey (74%) indicated that they pushed the parent by sending suggested things home for them to do with the student. The second question asked participating teachers "Have you noticed any difference in standardized assessment scores with those students who are receiving Transdisciplinary education?" Responses varied with 33% saying "There is no change" and the remainder was equally spread between "The students are doing significantly better"; "The students are doing somewhat better"; "The students are doing worse"; and "There are mixed results"

### Five-Year Follow-up

A five year follow-up study of the original phase 1 study of related service staff in the Gratiot Isabella RESD was conducted in Fall of 2009. The intent was to measure any difference in service delivery time as compared to the measure taken in 2003 given five years of implementing the Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model. Staff reported that approximately 84% of their time was spent providing Transdisciplinary Service Delivery to students, teachers and parents. When asked their opinion of the

Transdisciplinary Service Delivery Model staff gave the following responses:

1. "Very good opportunity for collaboration."
2. "I believe in the Transdisciplinary model. I believe it works well if the teacher buys into it. It is a little difficult to use regular education where there isn't any para-professional staff to implement plans."
3. "Great idea when you are in a room with consistent trained staff working closely together. In the gen. ed. setting, I provide suggestions to teachers or give some practice folders, but I don't set up classroom lessons... not time effective to regularly meet to plan with ALL teachers."
4. "Have a whole team at a table is one of the most effective tools we have. We can bounce ideas of each other faster and get more things done."
5. "This model is very effective. I try to be in the classroom as much as possible at the pre-school level in order to provide input & suggest ways that students' speech and language needs can be met during classroom routines. I provide therapy on a weekly basis to many of my older students, so consulting with the classroom teacher and staff allows them to carry out my intervention techniques throughout the rest of the week. Meeting with other therapists also allows for a more comprehensive approach to meeting the students' goals & objectives."
6. "It works well if you have cooperation and the appropriate atmosphere."
7. "I think it can be a very effective model of service. Unfortunately, we have not been given time in our schedules to implement this better way of service delivery."

The last two comments (numbers 6 and 7) point out two of the common problems in delivering the Transdisciplinary model. Having an “appropriate atmosphere” includes such things as administrative support, and classroom teacher and parent willingness to assume instructional responsibility.

## Lessons Learned

Although there is overwhelming evidence that parental involvement can significantly improve students’ success in school, the evidence that a Transdisciplinary service delivery approach will significantly impact the progress

of special education students is not substantiated in this study. There is a definite need for a large-scale study to measure the effectiveness of the Transdisciplinary method on student standardized test scores. Issues related to teacher education and teacher training regarding communication and involvement of parents must be considered to ensure model success. Administrative support and encouragement of parents are also necessary for the successful implementation.

This is a shortened version of the full article which is available at [www.ColleaguesPlus.com](http://www.ColleaguesPlus.com).

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

# Colleagues Redesign

It has been a very busy period since the last issue on bullying. We have been meeting and planning the redesign of the magazine from top-to-bottom. From a stack of ideas and proposals we narrowed it down to the design you are now reading. I hope you enjoy the new format and the added pages.

This process could not have happened without the help of the Colleagues Committee. We also had assistance from Dr. Ed Wong-Ligda of the GVSU Department of Art and Design (whose students are featured as illustrators), Dr. Claudia Sowa Wojciakowski, Forrest Clift, and Jaymes Pyne. Finally the dedication and expertise of Lisa Tennant,

our designer, has led us successfully through this difficult but rewarding effort.

I am also happy to announce *Colleagues* won a third consecutive APEX Award for Excellence and a second Graphic Design USA award. Thank you to everyone who made these accomplishments possible!

Our next issue will be focused on education reform. Things are moving fast nationally and we will endeavor to bring you a thoughtful and challenging issue.

Clayton Pelon  
Editor-in-Chief