

The logo for CTL (Center for Teaching and Learning) is displayed in a large, bold, serif font. The letters are white and set against a black background. The logo is tilted slightly to the right.The text "ON THE CUTTING EDGE" is written in a white, serif font on a black rectangular background. The text is centered and occupies the upper right portion of the header area.

## *The Bridge Project:*

*Addressing needs through interdisciplinary collaboration*

by Zhen Chai, Ph. D., Tara Fahmie, Ph. D., Michele Haney, Ph. D., and Stephanie Hood Ph. D.  
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The Office of Special Education Programs (U.S. Department of Education) recently awarded a \$907,584 grant to CSUN for a groundbreaking new collaborative project between the **Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)** program in the Department of Special Education of the Michael D. Eisner College of Education and the **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)** program housed within the Department of Psychology in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

**The Bridge Project** will focus on addressing the critical shortage of highly qualified professionals prepared to collaboratively serve infant, toddlers, and young children with high intensity needs and their families through interdisciplinary collaborative Master's level training of early childhood special educators and applied behavior analysts.

In early childhood educational settings, professionals from a variety of disciplines (i.e., early interventionists/early childhood special educators, behavioral interventionists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists, etc.) must be able to work collaboratively with each other as young children with complex disabilities usually require services from more than one discipline. Early childhood special educators and behavior analysts are key members of the service delivery team in identifying the child and family needs, developing goals, implementing interventions, and monitoring progress for children with disabilities who need support in both educational and behavioral issues. However, they are not usually supported to collaborate. They may also view the needs through very different perspectives. Behavior analysts are often employed through contract by private agencies, while educators are employed directly by schools or early intervention programs. Time and support for collaboration is often not part of their responsibilities.

The two professions are also trained according to different standards and may not understand each other's roles. To efficiently meet their differing standards and competencies, most ABA training programs are designed to 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 (Campbell, Chiarello, Wilcox, & Milbourne, 2009; Kelly & Tincani, 2013), sometime resulting in behavioral interventions that may not be developmentally appropriate. 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 field placements (Hemmeter, Santos, Ostrosky, 2008). Early childhood teachers commonly report that they do not feel equipped to manage problem behavior (Melnick & Meister, 2008; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012).

Thus, it is vital to increase understanding between the two groups of professionals to promote successful coordination and collaboration. For young children with complex needs and their families to receive highly effective services, an interdisciplinary approach to personnel preparation is needed.

Professors Chai and Haney work in the Department of Special Education and Professors Fahmie and Hood work in the Department of Psychology at CSUN. All are passionate advocates for high-quality early childhood inclusion. The Bridge project is supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.

# Want to Learn More About the Bridge Project?

## The Bridge Project

Aligned with core ECSE and ABA program philosophies, the Bridge Project will focus on a) meeting the dual needs of infant, toddlers, and young children with complex behavioral and educational issues and their families, b) interdisciplinary collaboration between behavioral interventionists and early childhood special educators to meet child and family needs, c) supporting the participation of young children with complex needs in early childhood inclusion settings and natural environments, d) training in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to implement behavioral and educational interventions, e) family-centered practices to collaborate with caregivers to identify and implement behavioral and educational interventions, and f) evidence-based practices consistent with ABA and ECSE program standards. Graduates of the project will be well prepared and fully certified for positions that serve young children with disabilities eligible for Part C or Part B preschool services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As a result of this project, ECSE scholars can receive additional certification as a Registered Behavioral Technician (RBT), while ABA scholars will be endorsed by a university certificate as an ECSE/EI Specialist layered upon their Master's degree.

The Bridge project will fund 30 scholars over the next five years. Funding will be provided for scholars as stipends, travel, and technology support. The first 10-student cohort of Bridge scholars will begin Summer 2020. Contact us if you are interested in the program.

## Want to learn more about the Bridge Project or training in ECSE or ABA?

### ECSE MA Program Contact

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### ABA MS Program Contact

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