

Fostering the development of transdisciplinary practice

The *National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care* (NQF) and the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (NDIS) highlight the importance of services from different disciplines working together to improve outcomes for children. For early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, this means supporting the inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disability and complex additional needs.

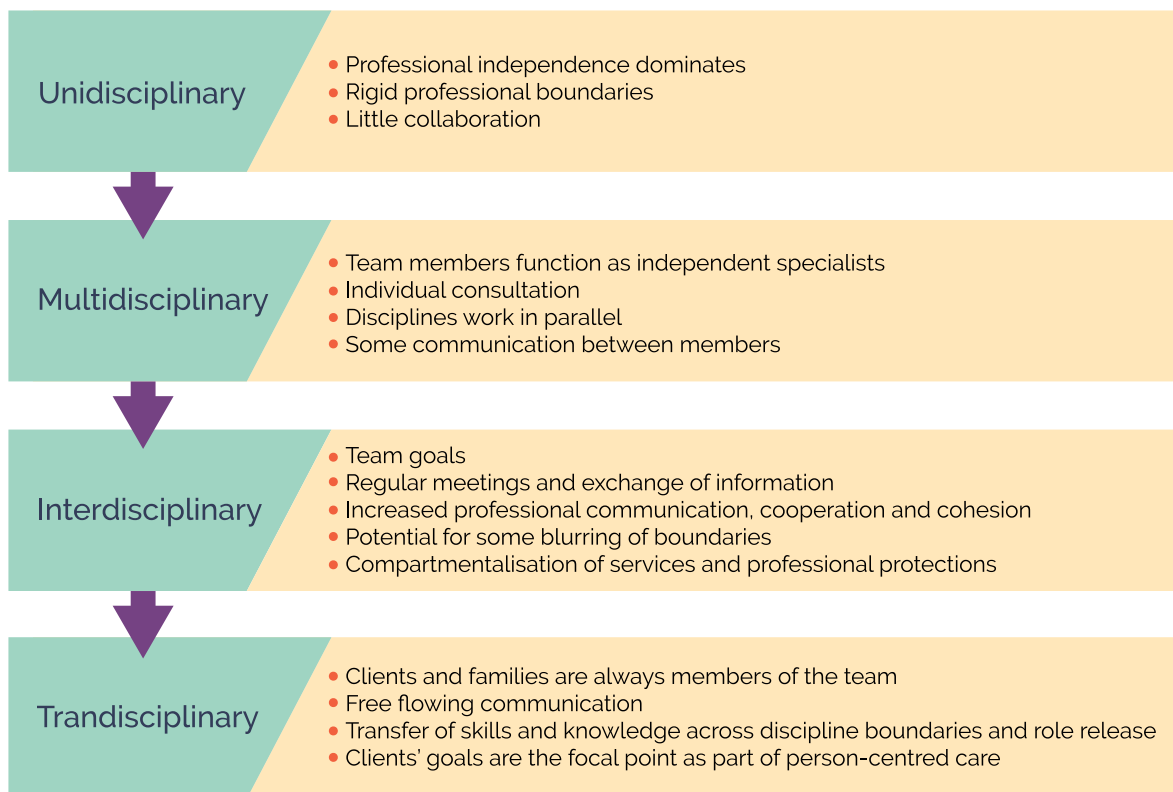
What is transdisciplinary practice?

The method to achieve better integration of services and collaboration between professionals is known as

transdisciplinary practice. Transdisciplinary practice is different from ‘multidisciplinary’ and ‘interdisciplinary’ practice, because it features a greater degree of collaboration. Transdisciplinary practice is also significant because it involves the ‘client’ (the child and their family) as a member of the transdisciplinary team, acting as a key contributor in developing goals and implementing plans.

The figure below summarises the different team approaches in transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary practice. Understanding the distinctions between these different forms of practice can help management and educators in ECEC services assess the effectiveness of their own working relationships with other professionals, and with families.

Figure 1. Professional relationships across different disciplines



In ECEC services, transdisciplinary practice involves professionals from different disciplines or areas of expertise coming together to develop integrated ways to support early intervention therapies and inclusion of children with disability, developmental delay and complex social, emotional and behavioural needs in mainstream services. To support young children with disability and complex additional needs, the professional fields involved in transdisciplinary practice commonly include (but are not limited to):

- early childhood education and care (ECEC)
- early childhood development (such as maternal and child health)
- specialist early intervention
- psychology
- occupational therapy
- speech therapy
- child protection.



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How can transdisciplinary practice improve ECEC services?

Transdisciplinary practice can change the way that ECEC services work with children, families and other local agencies to support the inclusion of children with disability and complex additional needs. The goal is to create a team of professionals who work in an integrated and collaborative way to deliver tailored supports for the child and their family.

When working in a transdisciplinary way, ECEC services will seek out opportunities to work with other support agencies to enable timely referrals of children with disability and complex additional needs to early childhood intervention services.

Effective integration means that ECEC services work with other support agencies—such as early childhood intervention providers, child and family support agencies, maternal and child health nurses and schools—to promote the healthy growth and development of all children, including children with disability. Transdisciplinary practice supports the inclusion of children with disability in mainstream ECEC services, which provides particular benefits that cannot be replicated in other settings.

Importantly, families are ‘valued members’ of transdisciplinary teams—they have a unique understanding of their child (NDIA, 2014). Collaborative practices strengthen child-centred strategies and may better support children and their families. For example, in transdisciplinary practice, families have a single point of contact within the transdisciplinary team, which simplifies the development of their child’s care, therapy and inclusion.

Building transdisciplinary practice in your service

The NQF gives all approved providers, service supervisors and management a clear direction and obligation to work with other support agencies in their local community. This means considering how greater collaboration and integration with other support agencies can be achieved, to improve outcomes for children with disability and complex additional needs and their families.

To assess your level of collaboration with other professionals, consider these questions:

1. What is being asked of your ECEC service under the NQF in relation to collaborative service delivery for inclusion?
2. How would you characterise the relationships your service has with families of children with disability and complex additional needs? What elements of the relationships have worked well? Why?
3. What relationships does your service currently have with other support agencies? How are these relationships focused on increasing inclusion within your service? How can these relationships increase inclusion within your community, beyond your service?
4. What resources (human, financial and professional development) does your ECEC service need to develop and maintain collaborative working relationships with other local support agencies for children?

Practical steps to build transdisciplinary practice

All approved providers, service supervisors and management in ECEC services are encouraged to plan for how their service supports staff to participate in transdisciplinary practice for the inclusion of children with disability and complex additional needs. The development of transdisciplinary practice may be included in the service's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) or Disability Action Plan.

In fostering transdisciplinary practice, approved providers, service supervisors and management are encouraged to:

- create time for staff to build relationships with families, key workers supporting children with disability and other members of transdisciplinary teams
- enable staff to have time for joint planning and knowledge transfer, both within the service and through transdisciplinary meetings
- support professional development of staff to build their confidence and skills in working with other support agencies and professional staff from other child and family-focused disciplines.

Where to find more information

Early Childhood Intervention Australia (ECIA) has produced the [National Guidelines for Best Practice in Early Childhood Intervention](#) to enable ECEC educators to access research and advice on disability support for young children, including collaborative teamwork practice.

The [Practice principle guide: Partnerships with professionals](#), developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), explains the benefits of professional collaboration and provides case studies and a template for a professional partnerships action plan.



Photo: Lime

References

National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). (2014). [Early childhood intervention—transdisciplinary approach to service provision](#). Canberra, ACT: NDIA.

Speech Pathology Australia. (2009). [Position statement: Transdisciplinary practice](#). Melbourne, VIC: Speech Pathology Australia.

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