



Child Development and Family Studies

December 2007/January 2008

Getting to Know You: Dr. Volker Thomas **Filial Therapy: Teaching Parents How to Play**

Dr. Volker Thomas, Associate Professor of Marriage and Family Therapy in [Purdue University's Department of Child Development and Family Studies](#), conducts ongoing research using filial (fi-lee-yel) therapy with young children and their families.

Filial therapy is a non-directive play therapy developed to use with children having behavioral and emotional problems. The main objective of the intervention is to train parents in various play techniques which they can apply at home. In this way, parents learn how to work with their own children rather than with therapists.

Past research has shown the effectiveness of this approach with families of elementary-aged children and adolescents. Dr. Thomas believes the play therapy approach can also be used early as a preventative tool with young children and their families to help avoid future behavioral and emotional problems.



Parents of young children usually tend to play with their children in more directive ways (i.e., giving suggestions, asking questions). In his current intervention research, Dr. Thomas teaches parents how to play in non-directive ways with their preschool children. He suggests that the "special play time" in filial therapy gives children the opportunity to direct their play and parents to follow their child's lead within a clear set of rules. In this way, the intervention has a more positive affect on the child's behavior, as well as on the child-parent relationship overall.

Community Engagement

In October, Dr. Thomas conducted a two-day training on campus, *Teaching Parents to Use Non-Directive Play Techniques with their Children*, based on the filial therapy model. Seven (7) Purdue Extension educators were trained in this technique as part of their local parent education outreach programming.

Recent Grant Funds Received

In partnership with the Martin Luther King Center in Indianapolis, Dr. Thomas received a grant this month through the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust to provide filial therapy training to the staff working with grandparents in the Center's *Second Time Around* program beginning in January 2008. Extension educators trained in this approach will have the opportunity to be members of Dr. Thomas' team providing non-directive play technique training at the Center to a new research audience of grandparents raising their grandchildren.

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Results of their work will be evaluated and documented as part of Dr. Thomas' overall research on the filial therapy intervention model.

For more information about filial therapy and/or other areas of research being conducted by Dr. Volker Thomas, visit his web pages at www.cfs.purdue.edu/cdfs/pages/fac_staff/thomas.html or www.cfs.purdue.edu/mft/thomas.html.

Research and Program Resources

Family Involvement Makes a Difference



The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) project at Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) provides a series of research briefs on family involvement and student outcomes to make the case that family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age.

[Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education](#)

Number 1, Spring 2006. Heather Weiss, Margaret Caspe, and M. Elena Lopez.

How family involvement contributes to young children's learning and development (downlink 8 pages)

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/earlychildhood.html

[Family Involvement in Elementary School Children's Education](#)

Number 2, Winter 2006/2007. Margaret Caspe, M. Elena Lopez, and Cassandra Wolos.

How family involvement contributes to elementary-school-age children's learning and development (downlink 12 pages)

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/elementary.html

[Family Involvement in Middle and High School Students' Education](#)

Number 3, Spring 2007. Holly Kreider, Margaret Caspe, Susan Kennedy, and Heather Weiss.

How family involvement contributes to adolescents' learning and development. The brief summarizes the latest evidence base on effective involvement (downlink 12 pages)

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/adolescent.html

Upcoming Calendar of Events*

February 2008

Black History Month: National African American Read-in

February 3-4, 2008

<http://www.ncte.org/prog/readin/107901.htm>

Take Your Family to School Week

February 10-16, 2008

http://www.pta.org/dadsandschools_landing.html



March 2008

Women's History Month

<http://www.nwhp.org/whm/index.php>

National Nutrition Month

http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/nutrition_4920_ENU_HTML.htm

Read Across America

March 3, 2008

<http://www.nea.org/readacross/10ways.html>

<http://www.nea.org/readacross/toolkit.html>

<http://www.nea.org/readacross/index.html>

*(*Note: References to websites cited are for informational purposes only and do not imply endorsement by Purdue Extension or Purdue University).*