

SPECIAL TIMES

Community Therapeutic Day School

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CREATING OUR CURRICULUM

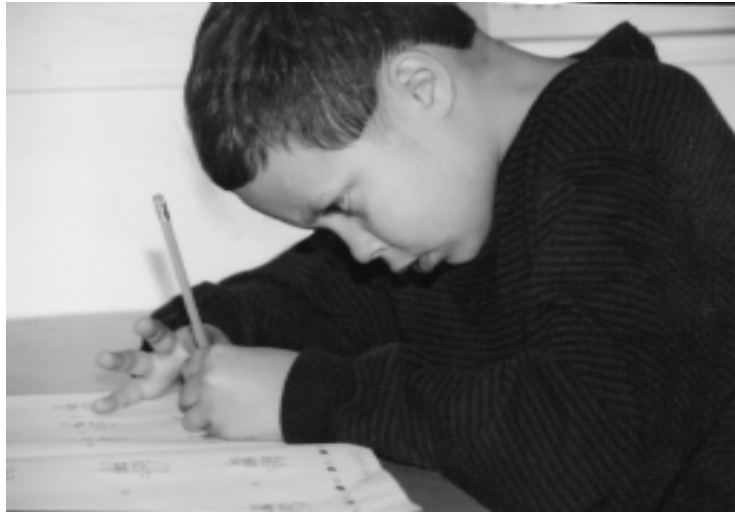
by Linda Bulter, Learning Specialist

The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and the mandated MCAS testing have presented an interesting challenge to teaching in a therapeutic setting. The Frameworks, a set curriculum developed by the Department of Education, requires that specific topics must be taught at specific grade levels. English Language Arts, Math, Science and Technology, History and Social Sciences, Foreign Language and Culture, Arts, and Health comprise the large Framework for grades K-12. Within that, Strands are defined. For example, within English Language Arts, the Strands are Language, Literature, Composition, and Media. Within the Strands are Standards which break down each Strand further. An example would be, for the Framework "English Language Arts", under the Strand "Language", "Students will understand and acquire new vocabulary and use it correctly in reading and writing".

The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) requires that all children in grades 3 through 10, including special needs students, be evaluated in specific subject areas yearly through rigorous, statewide standardized testing. Since Community Therapeutic Day School does not group students according to grade, and our philosophy includes belief in the merits of an ungraded school for our population, the requirements of the Frameworks and MCAS open the way to creativity and excitement in figuring out ways to make the curriculum accessible to all our students

Our classrooms are vibrant, busy learning environments, rich with subject matter and ideas. At the present moment in our classrooms, children in various classes are studying, among many other things, Ancient Greece, Spanish Culture and Language, China, the Solar System, Plant Life Cycles, Weather, Autumn, United States History, Geography, Civics and Government, Massachusetts, and Native Americans. They are also reading, writing, performing math operations and learning concepts, acquiring skills in grammar, spelling and decoding. They are exploring, opening their minds to new ideas, sharing, and producing work of all kinds.





Mastery of academic material is good for self esteem and can go a long way in healing emotional scars. At the same time, repeated failure adds to emotional scars. Our challenge is to make the curriculum accessible to all our students in a way that makes them feel successful. Children in the same classroom who are studying Ancient Greece may approach the topic from different angles. What is the key concept in studying an ancient civilization? Can all our children come to understand what “civilization” means and appreciate the concept of “ancient”? Yes, they can, and we as teachers are stimulated by the idea of coming up with lessons on levels from basic to advanced to reach each child. Some students may read books about Ancient Greece and write essays. Other students in the same class may learn about the type of ships that were used then and create them using art materials. Some students may write advanced book reports. Others may have books read to them and respond by filling in circles on a specialized book report form. Some children may enhance their learning by watching a video. Others may require repetition of the material presented in novel ways over several days in order to understand it.

Our challenges at CTDS, however, are not just learning challenges. The children who are here have great difficulties to overcome in order to help them to feel comfortable in the world and to approach successful relationships. It is through working, trusting relationships with teachers that results begin to take shape. We try to ascertain the child’s emotional, social, and behavioral ability to be part of a learning situation. We look at disruptive behaviors, intrusions of internal and external stimuli, ability to pay attention to what is being taught, what strengths and deficits the child might have, and the child’s self esteem or lack thereof around learning. We try to discover what motivates each child, and we develop and redevelop strategies for learning. Concurrently with the teaching of academics, we teach children how to sit still, how to listen, how to attend, how to focus on what is being taught, how to keep body and voice quiet, how to take turns and follow directions, and how to do all these things both individually and in a group setting. Most importantly, we foster a strong relationship between child and teacher on which the child can depend on both academic situations and in the milieu of the therapeutic day. We work to bolster each child so s/he will be more resilient and available for the joys and stresses of learning, both in academics and in life.



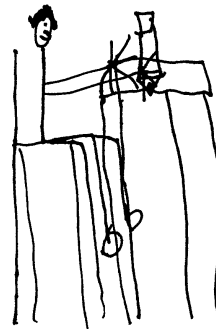
(1) $6 + 7 = ?$



6 + 7 = 13

Robbie

social studies
science
math
reading



Luke



Jackson

I bet you are wondering how day and night occur. I'll tell you. The sun stays in it's spot as the earth turns. When the earth turns, the spot that the sun is pointing right at, gets the most light. That's how day and night occur.... It's really cool how all this works. P.S. The word for going around is orbit.

Nicholas

"Math, Science, and Reading, Oh my!"

We asked the children to imagine themselves as a CTDS student in the year 3002 and write a biography of their favorite famous person. Emma wrote:

April 28, 3002



My name is Anna Smith.

My favorite famous person is Emma Bloom. She is a gifted writer and I have read all of her books, except for these two: Under the Willow Bridge and the one that I am reading, The Choice. But my favorite that I have read so far is probably The Lonely Island, although all of her stories are extraordinary and it is hard to decide.

Emma Bloom is a very talented artist as well. She illustrated many of her novels. She also painted many magnificent paintings, they must be the finest works of art ever made, including my favorite painting, The Moonlit Night.

She donated much of the money that she earned to charity. I hear that her birthday was this very day, April 28th. She loved art and writing and reading very early, as a young girl. I would recommend the works of this creative woman to all, and I wish that I could be like her.

Rafael

I am strong and athletic.
I wonder if I'll grow up to be a boxer.
I hear "Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. My name is Mohammed Ali."
I see the crowds screaming for me.
I want to be the best that I can be.
I am strong and athletic.

I pretend to be the strongest boxer.
I feel energetic and excited.
I touch every boxer, then knock them down.
I worry that I might lose.
I cry if I get hurt.
I am strong and athletic.

I understand that it's all pretend.
I say I will be very great whatever I become.
I dream of being a boxer or a basketball player.
I try my best.
I hope my dreams will come true.
I am strong and athletic.

by Rafael



Andrew

I am nice and helpful.
I wonder if I will be a psychiatrist when I grow up.
I hear people asking me for help with their feelings.
I see people thanking me.
I want to help people.
I am nice and helpful.

I pretend to be a psychiatrist.
I feel good because I help people.
I touch people to make them feel better.
I worry that I wouldn't help people the right way.
I cry when I can't help them.
I am nice and helpful.

I understand that people have problems.
I say that people can get better with help.
I dream that all the people I see will be happy.
I try to always do my best.
I hope people will come to me for help.
I am nice and helpful.

by Andrew

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