



SPECIAL TIMES

Community Therapeutic Day School

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REFLECTIONS

The Experience of Learning and Understanding

CTDS, a model of the 'holding environment' where, through other people, we become aware of ourselves.

"When I look I am seen so I exist. I can now afford to look and see.

I now look creatively and what I apperceive

I also perceive." D.W. Winnicott, MD

Each of the following are sharing their reflections and describing their experiences of seeing and developing an awareness of seeing at CTDS.



This poem for me was a great experience. Since I came to this school I have matured and changed. This poem represents how much I have learned and understanding that my past can't represent my future but still walks in my shadow.

REFLECTION

As I stare into a mirror

I see

I see a girl who wants to be free
courage and hope fills her eyes
questions float through her mind
wisdom and beauty is what she sees

Power and determination

is what she needs

strength she knows she has

determination gets her far

a change in time

changes everything

a girl she couldn't see

before the change in time

used to see her reflection

as a girl with no dignity

shyness and fear was what she saw

now she can see her for her

her past brought her down

her future shines with in the stars

her reflection shows it all

her dreams and imagination

are a creation

a girl who says hello to freedom

a clearer reflection

I now see

I see my power and determination

I see me for who I am

a reflection of a girl

who can accomplish anything

that reflection is me.

*by Jesse Riley
CTDS student*



From Interview to Adieu - Reflections on an Intern's Journey

Amy B. Corral, LMHC - Therapeutic Teacher and former Intern

On a recent interview of a prospective intern, I was struck by how many times I heard the word "safe". The graduate student reflected to us how CTDS seemed like a "safe" place to try new skills, a "safe" place to explore the integration of education, creativity and therapy and a "safe" place to learn. While our prospective interns come from diverse backgrounds, different universities and represent a range of clinical and educational interests, the impression of being welcomed into a "safe" learning relationship seems to be a common experience.

As an intern goes on a journey from initial impression to an integral part of the classroom team, the sense of safety transforms from an invested hope to a functional vehicle of therapeutic relationship. The position of not knowing exactly what to expect from a new school year, but trusting in the guidance and safety that the classroom teachers and therapist offer, posits interns in a parallel process with the students. The feeling of, "We are here. We are safe. We can

learn together," can be an immediate common experience between students and interns from the first day of class - an unspoken camaraderie that forges a pathway to relationships.

From the relationships that interns develop with the students, ideas are inspired, curiosity is ignited, and understanding is cultivated. At the point in an intern's training when he or she begins to initiate individual and group therapy sessions, the felt sense of safety transforms once again. The intern is called upon to internalize and represent the feeling of safety to the student as they move together into another unknown - what will special time be like together?

It is interesting to reflect that the origin of the word "safe" comes from the root word "sol" which means "integrate" or "whole". As classroom teachers and supervisors, we strive to nourish this journey that interns entrust to us. We facilitate the "integration" of an intern's experience in the community or "whole". From initial impressions of safety, to the experience of establishing a safe therapeutic relationship themselves, interns gain the confidence and ultimately, the competence to be talented innovators and clinicians.

This year, we have had the privilege of welcoming and guiding another group of exceptionally gifted, dedicated and creative interns. As the year ends, we wish them well and hope that we have given them, not only a safe place to learn, but a safe place from which to launch.



In reflecting on my experience here at CTDS, I have realized how large an impact the extent of support I've received here has had on my professional development. Throughout the year I have been continuously impressed by how invested everyone here at CTDS has been in my personal experience. The "holding environment" does not stop with the children that we work with; a similar container is created among the staff that supports each of its members, interns included. From the celebration of the individual through acknowledgements of birthdays to the team approach to supervision, I have felt empowered to take important risks to further my learning.



*Darci Nelsen,
Lesley University*



*Pauline Smith,
Lesley University*

One of the greatest benefits I have received at CTDS has been learning about how well a therapeutic organization runs when it is grounded in a carefully and consciously chosen philosophy. Since day one of my internship I have seen how the holding environment supports everyone related to this school: the children, their families, and the staff who work here. It is this feeling of being held and supported as an intern that has allowed me to grow and learn so much through this clinical experience. Truly, CTDS is a school with its own culture of caring, which I believe, is one of the reasons children

feel safe and taken care of in this place, and why they are able to learn here and take in the help that is offered.

My learning in the Transitional Classroom has certainly been unique. With all seven students preparing to graduate, I have come to understand how important it is for children to be therapeutically supported in saying goodbye and preparing for big transitions. Perhaps, most importantly I have learned what a wonderful gift it can be to give children an opportunity to say goodbye in a way that feels good. Through this process the students learn about themselves, and about their needs and habits around times of transition and goodbye.



*Julia Vishnepolsky,
Lesley University*

Through my internship and training at CTDS I have gained professional skills in clinical work with children, family systems and being a member of an interdisciplinary team. However, the greatest gain I see is to have come to understand the holding environment on a very personal level, through my own experience of it. Coming in to the internship during a tremendous family crisis, the support, empathy, and understanding I experienced from my supervisors and administration was an unexpected surprise. I was reminded that just because I am in the role of a therapist, I am still human, and can have human reactions to traumatic events. It was because of the sincere

support and connection on a very human level that I felt from my supervisors that I was able to show up every day. I thank CTDS for instilling in me the power of simply showing up and the importance of self care, consistency, boundaries and authenticity.



*Rebecca Connors,
Lesley University*

This year has been about standing in front of a mirror, at times of my best and at times of my worst. The people next to me in my reflection, however, distinguish this experience. Gently, my mentors ask complicated questions regarding authenticity, risk-taking, and my ability to walk in the shoes of others. Their faith compels me to relive frozen moments of self-doubt, reset limits, and restructure ideas, so that I can sense my intuition and feel my voice all the way to the heels of my feet. I am urged to express my needs as a learner because my readiness to witness others must be matched by my willingness to be seen.

In the little classroom upstairs, I am taught deeper and deeper what brought me to this work: that Art heals. As artists we are facilitators, collaborators, and communicators. I am learning to be a doer-to feed and nurture my curiosities in the loudest and most confident of ways. We turn gourds into musical instruments, boxes into automobiles and unwanted poles into time machines. In this environment, presence is alignment with the client – trusting - and letting the next motion come through me, just as the mover spirals her spine or the poet implements his dash.

My ultimate goal as a counselor is to be able to work with children and families to create a positive and nurturing environment promoting growth and development, and to foster individual differences and uniqueness among children. For the past five months I have been a practicum student at CTDS, and will continue through the following year as an intern. Here at CTDS, I am offered a rich experience to work with a multidisciplinary team of highly-trained individuals, where I can learn to support “the whole child” from each approach. At CTDS, I will gain deeper insight into how every facet of a child’s world is important to the child’s overall wellbeing, as well as explore the many individualities among children, and how to encourage healthy and successful development in a safe and therapeutic environment.



*Amy O'Boyle,
Northeastern University*

I have learned a vast amount at CTDS about me, the field of counseling, and the students whom we serve. I was familiar with the holding environment before this placement, but have embraced this concept so much more in my time as an intern. Not only have I learned what it is like to hold these fragile children, but I, too, feel held by my fellow counselors. The amount we work as a team is crucial to the learning I have done, as well as something I will search in future occupations.



*Olivia Jennings,
Lesley University*

The supervision, guidance and support found at CTDS is beyond what I had imagined was possible in our field. The teachers with whom I work in the classroom are ever ready to offer support, suggestion, and teaching in my journey, making me comfortable handling feedback, acceptance and praise. The employees at CTDS continue to be approachable and open in my journey to become a counselor, and their passions radiate throughout the school. Most of all, the energy exuded by staff, students and fellow interns is rich in learning, love and passion for helping and self-reflection.

CTDS is a strong nest of vibrantly colored straw made up of each teacher and staff member. Interwoven together, it supports and holds the vulnerable baby birds, which are the students here, so that they may one day fly. As an intern, I am part of that nest. Through the developmental struggles that I have witnessed the students here face, sometimes I felt that I, too, was only a young and vulnerable bird incapable of flight. I was uncertain how strong my straw was or its ability to hold the precious cargo within the safety of the nest. However, the arms of straw that interweaved and connected with mine reminded me of both my ability to hold another as well as my willingness to show up for them. I have learned what it means to be present with another person through his or her experience and hold and support them with loving-kindness. Outside the CTDS walls, I may not have been able to do that. The difference is in the community that holds its members through the language and philosophy, as well as through the belief in the human potential. This year has taught me about trust. I have learned how to trust others in their process of learning by learning to trust myself in my process. One of the first weeks at CTDS I was advised to explore my own feelings, learn about them and hone in on them. I realized that no one was going to teach me about me, except me. This was liberating and daunting. Throughout this valuable process, I realized CTDS had instilled huge amounts of trust in me and in their students unlike anything I had ever experienced. They provided the framework inside which I could dance, explore and create. I realized my unique and colorful strand of straw was an integral part of the work here. I felt I had meaning and value to contribute. All this learning was transferable to the health and wellness of the students. While I was learning about my abilities as a teacher, therapist, creator, and student, my students could feel empowered to learn about themselves in a deep and rich way that will serve them for the rest of their lives.



*Jessica Knochel,
Lesley University*



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I returned to CTDS in January because it has had such a lasting impact on the way I think about complex children and their families since I first visited in October 2009. I was in my second year of general psychiatry training and visited for one month in a purely observational role. I was impressed then by the depth of compassion and dedication of every individual at CTDS to the common goal of supporting and understanding and reaching each child. Now that I am nearing the end of my second and final year of child and adolescent psychiatry training, I return to CTDS as a clinician, therapist, psychopharmacologist, bringing with me more clinical experience.

Since the New Year, I have been a fixture in the Transitional Classroom where I have been privileged to get to know seven students and the adults who work with them at CTDS. As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, I rarely get to see my patients in their daily lives, but at CTDS, I see students during snack, in class, at the park, in Big Music, and in my group. Each student in the class is a complex individual with unique talents and vulnerabilities, and each is navigating the uncharted territory of leaving CTDS at the end of the year for a new school. On Fridays, starting in March, I lead “Jen’s Senses Group,” a mindfulness group which starts and ends with a sensory experience of eating “something very small and, I hope, very delicious, or at least not yucky.” In the group each of us focuses in on the present moment and on different senses (smell, sound, time, movement, sight) for ourselves, and then we reflect collectively on what we each noticed. Each week, the group settles more easily into a quieter pace, and each week I am surprised again by the children’s responses. As I myself contemplate next steps after training, I am grounded by texture of the daily lives of the children and staff at CTDS.



Kalli Kronmiller,
Lesley University

Prior to beginning my internship at CTDS, I had experience both as an elementary classroom teacher and as a therapist working with homeless children. Based on my experiences, I perceived the two worlds as distinct and separate. Education was one thing. Therapy was another. The stark contrast between my experiences in both fields left me feeling divided both personally and professionally. It was not until I stepped into the world of CTDS that I began to feel a congealing of that fragmentation. My time at CTDS has brought me great relief in many ways. Whereas my previous experience as a classroom teacher left me feeling isolated in my efforts to effect change, the sense of unity within the team of CTDS has offered me a tremendous amount of support and sense of community within which I can contribute, and feel successful in assisting in the process of children’s growth. At CTDS no one is alone with his/her efforts. Children are supported, as well as teachers, staff, interns and families. The process of change works effectively because of the many hands working together. It has been a very magical process watching the integration of academics with a social and emotionally supportive structure. Whereas my previous experiences divided education and therapy, at CTDS I witness and participate in a unique mix of academics and social-emotional work that fosters success in students’ academic pursuits and personal well-being.

My vision has been expanded, my skills have been honed, and my desire to engage in the work has increased. With gratitude I press forward in my personal and professional journey.

