

November 30, 2005

The Winslow Therapeutic Riding program is of great benefit to the students in my class. This program has provided students with learning growth in a multitude of areas including language specifically in reading, writing, listening and communicating, physical development, social skills including turn taking, appropriate greeting and interaction with adults, and comradery.

Language skills are an area that has developed the most in the students. All of my students have a language or communication need. The experiences they have had through the Winslow program have opened the doors of communication to these students. Students, using a word bank, can create multiple sentences about their experiences riding horses. They can sequence events that have happened there in ways they previously couldn't. These students can express themselves and their feelings using descriptive words and expanded vocabulary like never before. Listening skills are increased because the students are very focused on their participation and want to learn the proper way to ride and care for the horses. They are following directions better in order to practice and increase their knowledge of riding. They are gradually following and completing multi-step directions. Since the Winslow program looks to incorporate the classroom curriculum, many lessons using life skills, such as maps and directions, have been incorporated into the program. The real life experiences at Winslow have provided the students with reinforcement and understanding in how the content they have learned relates and is useful in their lives.

There has been steady growth physically from the sessions at Winslow also. Students who present with severe physical malformations of the skeletal and muscular systems have shown remarkable improvements in their posture after a session at Winslow. Students have increased their postural strength overall through riding and the accompanying activities. Changes have been seen in the basic activity of swinging a leg over to get onto the horse, as well as using the upper body to right oneself after laying on the horses neck and mane. One student who has greatly diminished coordination on one side has been able to successfully maintain his balance without his feet in the stir-ups. As the students have progressed they are becoming more independent on the horse and have learned control, of the horses, but more importantly of themselves. They are beginning to understand that horses, as well as other people, react based on their movement and behavior.

These children have made remarkable advances in their social skills as a result of the Winslow program. They must take turns when it is time to ride and some have even offered their time in the first group in order for a classmate to be

able to ride first. Because the students have become more verbal, they are interacting much more with each other. They are also interacting with adults in a setting outside the school and home. They can now make their desires known to these adults with confidence. They are learning that they cannot always have what they want, like riding the horse they want, or choosing when they will ride. The students have become closer friends because of the experiences they have had together. When a child accomplishes something for the first time, the classmates are all right there cheering them on and congratulating them for their efforts. This behavior is spreading into the school experiences also. The transference of their positive experiences to everyday life is very important for the advancement of their life skill abilities.

The students from my class who are involved in the Winslow experience have shown dramatic advancements in many areas. A continuation of this program throughout the winter and spring sessions would be of great value to their overall educational experience and success. Maintaining the program without interruption would ensure minimum regression of skills and assist in the continued educational development and advancement of these students.