

Children's Therapy Centre

External Examiner Report 2015-2016

1 The Evidence Considered

This was my second year as External Examiner at CTC. I was given an effective orientation and access to all relevant written as well as practical examples of student materials, as well as any other information I required throughout my visit. This included Student Assignments and Handbooks, Assessment Criteria, Marking Schemes, and Programme Evaluation Reports. I found the environment of CTC to be highly congruent to the purpose and ethos of the programme, and that the high standard of materials prepared by staff and the student work evidence the purpose, principles and presence relevant to providing national and internationally acclaimed play therapy training.

2 Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes

The range of programmes provided by CTC meet national and international standards relevant to the level, learning objectives and outcomes set across the range of relevant categories from personal development, academic theory, to play therapy practice. This observation is grounded in 26 years of experience teaching and assessing learning at Bachelors, Masters and Ph'D levels at Queens University, Belfast; the Open University, UK; Dublin Business School; and adult and community education providers. It is also grounded in knowledge of European standards of training for psychotherapy and informed by the new Ethical Framework of the BACP, as an accrediting body for Counselling and Psychotherapy in the UK and N.Ireland.

3 Actual Attainment of Learners

My informed perception of the actual attainment of learners at CTC indicate that the Centre provides the clarity, focus and structure that enables learners to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and competences of play therapy at the range of levels provided. In order to come to this conclusion, I spent many hours reading selected samples of student work from each year at low, average and high marks across each course, as well as in depth reading of each years work. This included examining all relevant evidence, assessment criteria, theoretical models, placements, reports, and practical materials created by the learners in the creative peer development of the 'market' bazaar that supported practical engagement and learning across a range of themes such as low self esteem, loss, fear, and anger/rage. It is clear that the learners at all levels of achievement and grading are attaining a high level of knowledge, skill and competence that is more than comparable with other national and international trainings. The evaluation from students demonstrates this with feedback such as:

'this course has been life changing for me'

'excellent facilitators, offers an intimate learning environment that other universities do not offer'

I 'can not overstate the incredible learning process that I have been through' and 'I felt I received an exceptional level of training over the past four years.'

For example, in reading some of the Masters dissertations, I noticed that the work was of widespread interest and internationally applicable, addressing themes of significance

for the well being of current and future generations (i.e. working with shame, working with parents, and working with those on the autism spectrum).

4 The Programme

The notable strength of this programme is in its coherence and fitness for purpose in evolving high quality play therapy practice where practitioners are equipped to be both confident and competent in whatever setting they choose to work. There had been some loose ends in the first year of the training, and these have been addressed this year through the Placement Report which pulls together student learning throughout the year. Feedback from staff and from students indicates that this has been beneficial, has simplified and increased the integration of complex learning from year one. Further evidence of fitness for purpose was provided by students who commented on how the programme has facilitated different learning styles, including visual learners. In terms of meeting the needs of equality, children's / human development and rights, as well as diversity issues, this is another robust finding for CTC on the overall strength of the programme.

5 Assessment Procedures

My overall sense from the External Examiners visit is that CTC demonstrates transparent, fair, consistent and reliable assessment procedures, and that the organisation is highly responsive to feedback from learners, staff, and others, including the External Examiner. I was totally immersed in the experience of assessing the quality of practice and the overall environment at CTC, and my own experience and the evidence from participants demonstrate that CTC is highly conducive to building purposeful relationships, processes and tasks through its design and application of assessment procedures.

Assessment criteria are robust and thorough, and provide students and staff with a clarity of purpose. For example, the use of solid observation criteria using a wide range of relevant child development theorists. The holistic approach to assessment that ensures a whole child in context approach, and that includes sensory, sensory motor, intellectual, emotional, social, structured and sequential assessment and response, and that integrate the latest neurobiological developmental theories (i.e. Perry). The structured and sequential nature of the assessment, supports the very essence of the practice of play therapy itself in supporting the development of the child and the practitioner. In sum, I find the work of CTC in regard to assessment procedures to be outstanding, and congratulate the Centre and staff.

6 Trends

The recommendations in the previous reports have been acted on and integrated into the programme. They were:

- i. That the first year criteria is simplified for first year students. This recommendation emerges from the data offered from noticing the extensive criteria, from written or verbal feedback from Students and

- Programme Staff. CTC has pulled this together in one document, the Practicum Report that integrates learning from placement.
- ii. That those Students interested in publication (online or in other forms) could use their final year Dissertations to make the learning from the high standard of practice of Play Therapy more available within Ireland and internationally. CTC has been involved in a number of student and staff publications, including a new publication to come out autumn 2016.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence I witnessed and engaged with strongly validates the view that CTC provides an excellent standard of Play Therapy Training from Foundation, Diploma to Masters levels, as well as a range of other workshops, and writing for publication in local and international publications.

There is a sense of clear building blocks to the progression of learning, and a coherence throughout the programme that is recognised by students as 100% of students participating on the programmes would recommend CTC to others.

Recommendations for next year are:

- i. To re-schedule the 2nd years Model of Psychotherapy exam to take place in the morning rather than late afternoon as a number of students mentioned this in their feedback.
- ii. To have a dissertation trainer and advisor in Ireland as well as Wales so that the 4th years have easier access to them between modules if needed.

To conclude with the words of one participant seems the best way to conclude this report:

'to not recommend this course to people working with children is like knowing the magic spell to cure a dreadful disease and keeping it to myself' (3rd Year Student).



23rd July 2016

External examiners' signature, date