

Children's Therapy Centre

External Examiner Report 2016-2017

1 The Evidence Considered

This was my third year as External Examiner at CTC. I was given an effective orientation and access to all relevant written and practical examples of student materials by the provider. Any information I required throughout my visit was also made available. This included Student Assignments and Handbooks, Assessment Criteria, Marking Schemes, Programme Evaluation Reports, End of Year Student Evaluations and Play Therapy Bazaar materials. The context of CTC is conducive to creating the conditions needed to fulfill the purpose and ethos of the programme.

2. Minimum Intended Programme Learning Outcomes

The Centre's responsibilities to facilitate successful learning are clearly and thoroughly outlined with educational objectives are explicit, appropriate and consistent at every level. The range of programmes provided by CTC meets 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 and psychotherapy practice. This observation is grounded in 27 years of experience teaching and assessing learning. This has included Bachelors, Masters and Ph'D levels at Queens University, Belfast; the Open University, UK; Dublin Business School; Metanoia Training Institute, London; and adult and community education providers. It is also grounded in knowledge of European standards of training for psychotherapy, knowledge of the Irish Association for Humanistic and Integrative Psychotherapy standards and informed by the 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 perception of the actual attainment of learners at CTC indicate that the Centre provides learners with the the necessary knowledge, skills and competences of child psychotherapy at the range of levels provided. In order to come to this conclusion, I spent over 8 hours across two days reading selected samples of student work from each year at a range of low 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 trauma, big feelings, messy, mixed up and confused feelings, overwhelming loss, anxiety, obsessional feelings and anger/rage. It is clear that the learners at all levels of achievement and grading are attaining a very

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:

'The learning and practice are all rich experiences. It is I'm sure unlike any other training in the world.' 3rd Year student

'Excellent learning experience and content. Personally and professionally challenging.' 2nd Year student

'I think the setting of Ballymore is very fitting. It is such a peaceful and calm place, even when we are actively listening and learning in class.' 1st Year student

In reading a sample of the Masters dissertations, I noticed that the work was of widespread professional and public interest as well as internationally applicable, addressing themes of significance for the well being of current and future generations (i.e. School Refusal Behaviours, Developing a Systematic Framework for Supporting Parents and Self Care).

This year I also focussed on examining the Ethics section of the Dissertations and found a consistently high adherence to the ethics of clear consent in relation to research. Finally, an example of the quality of teaching and marking structure was the use of mapping themes and relational patterns in the Dissertations.

4. The Programme

The signature strength of the programme is in its clear national and international leadership, with coherence and fitness for purpose in evolving high quality play therapy and psychotherapy practice. The belief that clients have their own answers, given appropriate creative and play based therapeutic support shines through and is evidenced in the student work. CTC is also in continuous evolution under the guidance of the Director who has written a further publication in the last year.

I witnessed a very high standard of programme integrity in the materials prepared by staff and the student work. There were examples of outstanding work by some students. Evidence of the purpose, principles and therapeutic presence relevant to providing nationally and internationally acclaimed play therapy and psychotherapy training were demonstrated to the highest standards.

Areas for improvement are very minor and directed at students - dissertation page numbers were knocked off at the printer for one student.

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 and psychotherapy 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. The marking sheets are an example of good practice that others can learn from.

6. Trends

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

- i. That the 2nd year Exam is rescheduled following students feedback. This year students wished to retain the original time and this was upheld.
- ii. To have a locally available Dissertation trainer and advisor in Ireland for ease of access. This has been implemented and is working well.

In addition, The Centre has decided to change the Dissertation starting date to May rather than September in order to give students more settling in time and this has been well received by students and staff.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The evidence I witnessed and engaged with strongly validates the view that CTC provides an excellent standard of Play Therapy and Psychotherapy Training from Foundation, Diploma to Masters levels, as well as a range of other workshops, and writing for publication in local and international publications. The Centre has now extended its provision in Limerick to avail of the high quality resources and further enhance the learning opportunities for students. These resources include video equipped play therapy rooms with facilities for students to view live practice sessions via a direct link to the training room. CTC has taken the initiative in providing access to a European Certification to students that progressively extends the possibilities for work and integration in Europe at a time of wider social uncertainty.

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. There was an interesting discussion on how to widen access to the wonderful creativity and practicalities of the Play Therapy Bazaar for parents and other frontline professionals in order to improve quality of life and well being of children and caregivers.

Recommendations for next year are:

- i. To expand the staff team in accordance with need.
- ii. To explore the possibility of widening access to the Play Therapy Bazaar through video or other media.

To conclude with the words of one staff member seems the best way to conclude this report and what CTC is offering children and play therapists in their training:

'We need to give children the space and time to discover their innate patterns and pacing. This is the most precious gift.' M. Fearn

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosie Rogers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

21st July 2017

External examiners' signature, date