Chapter 7

Social Justice and Advocacy in University-Based Play Therapy Training Clinics

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how university training programs and clinics can help play therapists develop social justice advocacy competency. Developing social justice advocacy can help play therapists understand social inequalities and oppressive systems, experience empathy with clients, and integrate advocacy action into their work. Training programs can help facilitate social justice advocacy for students through curriculum focus, service learning, and continuing education opportunities that promote awareness and empathy. Play therapy services offered in university clinics also offer opportunities for interns to increase understanding of social justice advocacy through client interactions and clinical supervision. Clinic directors promote social justice advocacy through managing just organization procedures and coordinating advocacy and outreach initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the *Play Therapy Best Practices: Clinical, Professional, & Ethical Issues* published by the Association for Play Therapy (APT, 2016), training programs should include a focus on diversity issues. This is imperative as play therapists are serving increasingly diverse clients. Currently, almost half of children in the United States are racial and ethnic minorities, and it is estimated that more than 64% of children will be from racial and ethnic minorities by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Mental health practitioners need cultural competence to respond to the needs of children and families in an increasingly diverse society, and the need for multicultural play therapy has been addressed in the play therapy literature (e.g., Davis & Pereira, 2014; O’Connor, 2005).

In addition to developing multicultural competence, mental health practitioners provide social justice advocacy to better serve clients. This is an intentional practice of seeking to meet the needs of disenfranchised clients based on an awareness of privilege, social inequality, and oppressive systems. Social justice advocacy can help clinicians understand and address the effects of social equalities and oppression on well-being. One framework for the integration of multiculturalism and social justice is provided in the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies endorsed by the American Counseling Association (ACA; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015, 2016). To facilitate the development of these competencies, mental health training programs are tasked with providing education and supervision for mental health practitioners (Ratts et al., 2016). Play therapy training programs also need to provide multicultural training and awareness for play therapists on issues of diversity and social justice (Parikhah, Ceballos & Post, 2013). Specifically, Parikhah and colleagues (2013) recommended play therapists engage in “empathy training, activities that increase dialogue and immersion, the use of case studies, and role play . . . to increase their empathy and challenge their [belief in a just world], which may lead to an increase in their [social justice advocacy]” (p. 250). Parikh and colleagues (2013) suggested social justice advocacy attitudes could help play therapists enhance empathy in relationships with children and integrate advocacy into their work.

Despite recognition of the need for social justice advocacy training for play therapists, APT’s (2016) guidelines have little to no information on advocacy, outreach, or social justice work. Therefore, this chapter provides university based play therapy training clinics with information on furthering social justice advocacy competencies in training programs with recommendations for training, clinical services, advocacy, and outreach efforts.
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