Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapy [RCCPT]: Challenge & Possibility

Carol Korn-Bursztyn, Psy.D.
Licensed Psychologist &
Professor, Brooklyn College &
Ph.D. Program in Urban Education, Graduate Center, CUNY
Director, Play Therapy Project, Brooklyn College

How does (*RCCPT*) address children with challenging life experiences?

- **Concept 1:** Relational & cultural competence builds capacity for **empathy**
- **Concept 2:** Promotes development and change; coherent with pedagogic principles of **Developmentally Appropriate Practice** *(DAP)*
- **Concept 3**: Creates **holding environment of structure and care**
- **Concept 4**: **Relationally** oriented & **attachment** based
- **Concept 5**: Promotes **creative** thinking
- **Concept 6**: Encourages **inquiry**

Concept 1: Relational & cultural competence builds capacity for empathy

- Practitioners work to develop an insider's view of the child and the family through honing empathic resonance & furthering attachment systems.
  - **HOW? Focus on technique:**
  - **Mirroring** techniques associated with developing attachment systems and establishing milieu of interpersonal responsiveness and safety
    - **Reflection-in-action: Physical/gestural register**
    - **Reflection-in-words: Language/ Symbolic register**

Technique: How do we build relational capacity and empathy in children?
Focus on Physical/gestural Register

- Reflection-in-Action: *Mirroring Gesture*
- Reflection-in-Action: *Mirroring Affect*
- Reflection-in-Action: *Vitality Affects*
- Reflection-in-Action: *Communicating Enjoyment*

Reflection-in-Action: Mirroring Gesture

- Attending to the physical:
  - Subtly mirror the child's posture, movement & gesture
  - Monitor physical distance from child according to the child's signals
    - Too close?
    - Too far away?
      - Let's try this! (Dyads: child/play therapy practitioner. Switch.)

Reflection in Action: Mirroring Affect

- Observe, and match child's affective state
  - Matching communicates your willingness to be with the child in affective experiences – including expression of adverse experience
  - Creates a safe environment for expression
    - *How do I match affective state?*
      - If the child is low-key, initially match low-keyed presentation of self
      - Maintain a steady, stable emotional presence
        - Let's try this! (Dyads: child/play therapy practitioner. Switch.)

Mirroring Vitality:
Reflection-in-Action: Vitality Affects

- Communicate interest, surprise, and pleasure in being with the child through:
  - Warm, welcoming, and lively facial expression, gesture & tone

    BUT,
  - In introducing warm emotional presentation, aim for **slight elevation** in lively, positive affect from what the child is presenting child's presentation
  - Avoid sudden changes in emotional tone in room.
  - Maintain lively, vital, but calm & consistent manner
    - Let's try this! (Dyads: child/play therapy practitioner. Switch)

Reflection-in-Action:
Nonverbal Communication of Practitioner Enjoyment in Interaction

- Attend to practitioner non-verbal communications associated with development of secure multiple attachments in childhood
  - **Facial expression** – happy to see the child?
  - **Proximity**: how near, how far?
    - Communicate **emotional responsiveness** without reliance of physical contact associated with primary caregiver behavior
  - Communicate **enjoyment** of interaction through **vitality affects**
  - Communicate **interest** through visual, gestural and verbal tracking behaviors

Reflection-in-Action: Nonverbal Communication of Practitioner Interest: Tracking

- Tracking actions with objects/materials/toys communicate that you are emotionally present with the child
  - Observe
  - Mirror actions – especially where the child's developmental need calls for development of joint interest, e.g. young children; children with ASD
    - Let's try this! [In small groups: 1 child/1 play therapy practitioner/coaches. Switch.]

Concept 1b:
Mirroring techniques
Reflection-in-words

- Follow the child's lead by **adding language**
- Mirror word choices
- Maintain a low-key, verbal / murmuring presence
- Tracking comments – **observational** in nature
- Genuine interest and curiosity
- Tactful, tentative, & provisional "I'm wondering…" comments for clarification & amplification - no interpretation
- Maintain reflection-in-gesture while adding language
  - Let's try this! [Dyads: child/play therapy practitioner. Switch]

Concept 2:
Promotes development & change; consistent with Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

- All therapeutic work with children is aimed at promoting development

- Developmental parameters are individual and social/relational

- Change is associated with learning and with developmental achievement

- Practitioners tailor mirroring techniques of reflection-in-action and reflection-in-words to the developmental level and needs of individual children

  - Let's try this! [Dyads: Child (with developmental needs) / Play therapy practitioner. Switch]

Concept 3:
RCCPT Creates a Holding Environment of Structure and Care

- **Structure** is an inherent part of an organized, responsive and caring environment

- Clear limits, expectations & boundaries in accordance with DAP create a sense of **safety**, and provide scaffolding for growth enhancing exploration and discovery

- Clear **limits, expectations & boundaries** in accordance with children's developmental needs should be set at the **start of the play therapy relationship**.

  - Let's try this! [In groups: What are the limits, expectations and boundaries that you need to set in your practice?]

Holding environment:
Limit-setting for safety and for healthy growth

- Setting limits & consequences
  - Time
  - Space
  - Materials use
  - Destruction
  - Interpersonal aggression – physical, verbal

Holding environment: Establishing boundaries for safety and growth

- Physical boundaries; time boundaries
- Psychological boundaries: recognizing and resisting practitioner rescue fantasies
- Identification with children; vicarious traumatization
- Transference, countertransference and self-disclosure
- Peer supervision for play therapy practitioners

Concept 4: Relationally oriented & attachment based

- *Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapy* practitioners develop capacity for **therapeutic attachment relationships** with children
  - **Attachment** systems are **co-constructed** by practitioner and child
  - Development of attachment system facilitated **by mirroring, tracking & practitioner vitality affects**
  - Practitioners understand t**ransference & countertransference** reactions and draw on their understanding to advance **children's healthy development**
    - **Let's try this! [Journaling: a) Provide an example of a transference reaction you have experienced in your work? b) What was your own countertransference reaction?]**

Concept 5: Promotes Creative Thinking

- Learning and therapeutic relationships are co-constructed and are structured around mutual learning

- All learning involves capacity to imagine possibility and to risk creating new structures

- RCCPT draws on children's capacity to reflect-in-action, express & **transform their experiences** – including **adverse childhood experiences** - through creative and expressive arts (visual and performing arts)

    - Art materials

    - Toys as tools for symbolic expression

    - Natural environment

    - Maker lab activities

  - **Let's try this! [Paper and pencil activity]**

Technique: Concept 5: Promotes Creative Thinking: Arts materials

- Concept: Choices between structured v. unstructured materials
  - Unstructured materials draw on inner life – this can be experienced as liberating or risky
  - Offer choices
- What are the properties of specific art materials and how can we select these?
  - Pencils, markers wax crayons, oil pastels, tempra paints, watercolors, clay, play dough (younger children), paper
  - Found objects, collage

Technique: Concept 5: Promotes Creative Thinking: Play materials

- Concept: Structured v. unstructured materials
- Concept: Unstructured materials draw on inner life
- Concept: Offer choices in accordance with child's developmental level and needs
- Play materials/toys:
  - Variety of structured & unstructured materials
  - Family figures
  - Vehicles
  - Sand tray
    - Let's try this! [In groups: child/play therapy practitioner enact moment in play therapy session with child who has experienced adverse life experience. Switch]

Concept 6: *RCCPT* Encourages inquiry

- Experiential and furthers active learning
- Active listening encourages children's curiosity & interest
- Encourages children – not practitioners - to ask questions
- Challenges practitioners to carefully consider the meaning of children's questions
- Encourages child initiative to further sense of (socially acceptable) mastery
- Further socially appropriate expression and communication
- Creates structure to promote safety

Practice: Case 1

- A 10-year-old boy, with typical development, has recently become uncharacteristically withdrawn in school. Little current information is available about his home life, but you do know that his father has recently returned home from a period of incarceration.

- You have begun to meet with him in play therapy sessions at his school, and have noticed that prior to leaving at the end of the session, he surreptitiously pockets a few small toys.

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Practice: Case 2

- You've noticed that an 8-year-old girl, Renny, with whom you've recently met for play therapy sessions, has what appear to be the marks of old bruises and scratches on her arms and legs. She is currently in foster care.

- Occasionally, Renny makes reference to her bruises and scars; her narrative is confused, and you are unsure what is biographical and what might be fantastical. She finally settles on a version in which she communicates that the injuries were inflicted by a younger brother.

- Renny expresses a great deal of mixed, even labile affect ranging from very upbeat to withdrawn, accompanied by thumb-sucking. In non-directive play, Renny's response to your reflective comments is often, "I don't why I did that".

Practice: Case 3

- Sam is an 11 year old child. You have learned that Simon has a history of abuse; he was in a series of foster homes, and is currently in the process of adoption by his foster family.
  - Develop Sam as a character. Give Sam a personality - strengths, vulnerabilities, likes, dislikes – and background.
  - Develop an inner life for Sam: Wishes, fantasies? How does the theme of rescue emerge?
    - Play: one child, one therapist, other group members coaches. Switch
    - Unpacking the experience:
      - What were the transferences?
      - Countertransference reactions?
      - Enactments?

Relational Culturally Competent Play Therapy

Made in Brooklyn

Brooklyn College
Play Therapy Project

- **Professional Development through graduate level Advanced Certificate in Play Therapy**
- **Career-ladder professional development workshops and seminars tailored for agencies and community-based organizations**
- **Options for on-campus courses and seminars, or on-site programs**

Brooklyn College Advanced Certificate in Play Therapy

- Education; special education
- Social work
- Psychology
- Mental health counseling
- School psychology
- School counseling
- Creative arts therapy
- Speech-language pathology
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Nursing
- Other relevant profession

Course of Study:
Advanced Certificate in Play Therapy

- **A coherent set of four courses (16 credits)**
- **Structured sequentially to develop professional**
- **Expertise in culturally competent play therapy with diverse populations**
- **Proficiency in the supervision of culturally competent dynamic play therapy with diverse populations**
- **Case-based, experiential seminar meetings**
- **Mentoring and consultation**

Course Sequence

- SPCL 7946 Historical, Theoretical and Social Foundations of Play Therapy
- SPCL 7947 Play Therapy Methods and Approaches
- SPCL 7948 Play Therapy Applications for Special Populations
- SPCL 7949: Advanced Seminar in Play Therapy Practice and Supervision

SPCL 7946 Historical, Theoretical and Social Foundations of Play Therapy

- **Critically analyze** the history and development of play therapy
- Engage in **case-based study**
- Explore the **social and cultural contexts** of play therapy
- Develop a **culturally competent** approach to play therapy
- Learn the **role of the play therapist**
- Study the **therapeutic relationship**
- Develop **applied approaches** to working with diverse children and families.

SPCL 7947 Play Therapy Methods & Approaches

- Learn multiple, culturally competent **play therapy interventions** with common presenting problems
  - anxiety
  - aggression
  - oppositional behavior
- Learn to **evaluate** play therapy interventions with
  - Children with typical development
  - children with autism spectrum disorders
- Develop **proficiency** in working with **diverse families**

SPCL 7948 Play Therapy Applications for Special Populations

Play therapy interventions with children & families who have experienced

- *Separation and Loss*
- *Trauma*
- *Abuse*
- *Neglect*
- *Divorce*
- *Migration*

SPCL 7948 Play Therapy Applications for Special Populations *Continued*

- Develop applied skills for conducting and evaluating play therapy interventions with special populations in community and school settings
- Develop clinical sensitivity to working with diverse children who present with a wide variety of psychological needs, and their families

SPCL 7949: Advanced Seminar in Play Therapy Practice and Supervision

- **Take part in an advanced seminar in play therapy practice with diverse populations**
- **Study advanced play therapy skills**
- **Draw on play-based experience in the field**
- **Participate in group supervision of play therapy practice**

SPCL 7949: *Advanced Seminar in Play Therapy Practice and Supervision* Continued

- **Learn principles of diagnostic play assessment**
- **Learn about child forensic interviewing**
- **Learn principles of clinical supervision of play therapy**
  - **role of the play therapy supervisor**
  - **impact of vicarious trauma on play therapist and supervisor**

Contact

Carol Korn-Bursztyn, Psy.D.

Professor, Brooklyn College &

Ph.D. Program in Urban Education, Graduate Center, CUNY

Director, Play Therapy Project, Brooklyn College

carolkb@brooklyn.cuny.edu