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# UNIT 1 DEFINITIONS, IMPORTANCE AND CATEGORIES

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## **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- list the ways in which learners might be supported in distance education;
- define counselling and explain how it differs from tutoring;
- say why there is interest in counselling in distance education, what the attitudes to it are and why it is widely held to be important;
- suggest when counselling is likely to take place and for whom; and
- categorise counselling in distance education along two different lines—developmental/problem-solving and academic/non-academic.

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## **1.1 INTRODUCTION—SUPPORTING LEARNERS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

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In Unit 1 of Block 1 you have read about the need for learner support and also about the different types of support services that distance learners need at different stages of their endeavour. Let us list some of them.

## Kinds of learner support

## Possible examples

Tutoring  
Feedback  
Grading



Giving a lecture.  
Marking an essay.

Taking action  
Advocacy  
Assessment

Arranging transport for a disabled learner.  
Giving a reference.  
Testing if someone has the right qualifications  
for a course.

Informing  
Advising  
Counselling

Telling someone about a university regulation.  
Advising someone on the best way to study.  
Helping someone choose the right course for the  
future.

You may have thought of other activities as well. So it might help to fit the  
above activities (and the ones you have thought of) into three broad classes:

Tutoring  
Feedback  
Grading



Teaching

Action  
Advocacy  
Assessment

Administration

Informing  
Advising  
Counselling

Counselling

This is a rather arbitrary classification and you have probably thought of  
some activities that either do not fit into any of our classes, or fit into all  
three.

Nevertheless, we think you will find it helpful to keep these broad  
distinctions in mind during your study of this block and whilst you are at  
work, stop and ask yourself occasionally, 'At this moment am I a teacher, an  
administrator or a counsellor? And how should I be working in  
accordance?' This Block is to help you answer the second question — when  
counselling seems the most appropriate answer to the first.

You may also remember that it is the type of institution which greatly affects  
the organisation of support services. Distance education  
departments/directorates within conventional universities may have a  
different learner support structure as compared to a single mode open  
university. There are other factors affecting the provision of learner support  
services, namely: the learner needs; locational factors; media constraints; and  
cost factors.

## 1.2 WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

You will already have spotted one semantic problem. The term 'counselling' appears twice in the list; once to describe the group of activities and again as one of those activities.

This is historical misfortune arising from the way the subject has grown and developed. It would have been better if the description of the group had been a word like 'guidance' or 'consultancy', with 'counselling' as one of its elements. Things have now gone too far to change (it would mean altering the title of this Block for instance!).

In practice, such confusion does not often arise as the intended sense is usually clear from the context, in the same way as, till recently, the word 'Russia' was used to describe a Union of States, one of which was individually called 'Russia.' This will become clearer in the next section.

### 1.2.1 Defining counselling

Let us start by defining more closely the three activities that constitute counselling:

**Informing**—giving appropriate and correct information to learners—e.g. 'I'm sorry, the University's regulations don't allow you to submit that assignment late'.

**Advising**—suggesting appropriate course of action to learners, perhaps offering several options but recommending one especially for that particular learner—e.g. 'Well, we have two maths courses. You could take anyone but as you want to be an engineer, I suggest the Applied Maths course.'

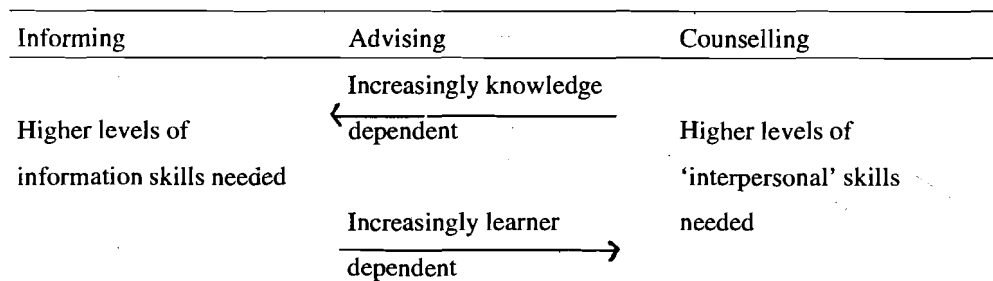
**Counselling**—helping learners clarify their needs, feelings or motivations so that they can make an appropriate decision for themselves—e.g. 'So you're not sure what you want to do with your life but you'd like to do something interesting. Describe to me what you mean by interesting'.

**Informing** is about knowledge which is largely independent of the learner—course requirements, regulations, statistics and so on. So you do not have to take the learner very much into account when offering such information. You do, however, have to have a high level of appropriate knowledge and the ability to communicate it clearly.

**Counselling** is about helping learners decide for themselves what is best for them as regards choice of course and career, overcoming of obstacles and so on. So, it is entirely learner-dependent rather than knowledge-dependent. As a counsellor you need clarifying skills rather than knowledge skills.

**Advising** is a mixture of knowledge and learner-dependence — something between informing and counselling.

You can think of these three activities as a 'continuous spectrum' of areas which merge into each other.



### Check Your Progress 1

Imagine you are a counsellor answering the following queries from the learners. What kind of response would you make in each case—informing, advising or counselling?

- 1 'Can I take these two courses at the same time?'
- 2 'What is the best way to study at IGNOU?'
- 3 'I'm interested in management—which course would be best for me?'
- 4 'I'm finding the course very hard—I shall have to withdraw'.
- 5 'Must I do all the assignments for the course?'
- 6 'I cannot sit for the exam—I am terrified of exams'.

**Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the ones given at the end of the unit.

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### 1.2.2 Transferring queries

Working through the above 'Check Your Progress' will have introduced you to the 'transferring query' syndrome. This occurs when:

- i) a query apparently aimed at one part of the 'spectrum' and really needs a response from another part. Usually this is in the form of an apparent *information request* that actually needs a *counselling response* to clarify what is needed e.g. 'Can you tell me of a good way to increase my powers of concentration?' It looks like a straight request for information. Yet it needs a little closer examination. Why is the

learner finding it hard to concentrate? Could it be (for instance) that he/she is in the wrong course? Some further clarification is needed—so you need to do a little counselling first.

- ii) a query moves naturally through several areas of the spectrum before it is resolved. You may start by giving a piece of information; the learners then need some counselling to clarify their response to this information and you finish by advising them on a particular course of action. e.g. 'Can I submit this assignment late?' initially needs an informing response, but then perhaps the learner needs some counselling—why is the assignment late, what problem has the learner been facing—before finishing with some advice to the learner on how best to catch up.

### 1.2.3 Counselling and tutoring

We hope by now you are beginning to have a clearer idea about what counselling is. The problem, however, that occurs to many people at this stage is, 'I can see the difference between administration and teaching. But I am not sure about the difference between teaching and counselling'.

And it is a very fair question because the two activities are so closely related as to be often indistinguishable. A good teacher is always a good counsellor because counselling is part of all successful teaching methods. But it is still helpful to compare the two activities:

**Teaching**—ultimately course-centred; communications are directed substantially from the teacher towards the learner; the teacher needs to be a good talker.

**Counselling**—ultimately learner-centred; communications take place the other way around, from the learner to the counsellor; the counsellor needs to be a good listener.

So the activities are essentially complementary—especially in distance education, for reasons that I hope will become clearer as we work through this unit and the next.

#### Check Your Progress 2

Which of the following activities could be classified under teaching, and which under 'counselling'? If they come under 'counselling', are they informing, advising, counselling or transferring queries?

- 1 A learner asks why  $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$ .
- 2 A learner fails to submit an assignment without contacting you.
- 3 A learner asks if you can explain why she got such a low grade on her assignment.
- 4 A learner tells you he has fallen off his bike and broken both arms.
- 5 A learner writes to say she has withdrawn from the course because it is too difficult for her.
- 6 A learner submits an assignment that you have to mark 'fail' because it does not answer the question.

**Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with that at the end of the unit.

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### **1.3 COUNSELLING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION**

So far everything we have said could apply to counselling in any educational setting. This section and section 1.4 ask why we should be interested in counselling in distance education and why it is considered so important.

#### **1.3.1 Interest in counselling in distance education**

That there is a deep and growing interest in this area now. It is undeniable. In 1984 the International Council for Distance Education and the British Open University held a joint conference on Counselling in Distance Education; a second conference was held in 1987. The British Open University has developed a range of correspondence, video and face-to-face staff development materials, including a section on counselling. The Association of European Correspondence Schools has instituted a Diploma in Correspondence Education which also contains a counselling module.

Principal journals of distance education such as 'Open Learning', 'Distance Education' and 'Indian Journal of Open Learning' now frequently carry articles on counselling.

#### **1.3.2 Attitudes to counselling**

This is not to say that counselling meets with unqualified approval from everyone in distance education. Counselling will always face competition from other areas for resources and there will always be opposition from

those who would prefer to see such resources going into extra tuition, three-colour print, TV programmes, or something else.

There is also a more complex opposition to counselling, that is particularly characteristic of university level education. University academics are accustomed to working on a purely intellectual and cognitive level. Counsellors sometimes find themselves dealing with learners' feelings and generally working on an affective level. Thus a cognitive/affective dichotomy can underlie many of the controversies between course writers and learner services or between central and regional academics.

The value of counselling is indeed hard to assess, in any rigorous way. You cannot for instance assume that a lower rate of dropout or withdrawal from a course indicates that counselling has had a positive effect. In some cases, a counsellor might actually advise learners to withdraw.

Nevertheless, the best corrective for anyone who is unconvinced of the value of counselling is to work with learners directly for a while, as we shall see in the next section.

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## **1.4 WHY IS COUNSELLING IMPORTANT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION?**

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Any one who does work directly with learners in distance education is likely to realise that it possesses three characteristics that make counselling important: the characteristics of the learners, of the institution and of the learning process.

### **1.4.1 The characteristics of distance learners**

It has already been mentioned for instance in Unit 1 of Block 1 of this course, that distance learners

- may be isolated, both from other learners and the institution;
- will certainly have had previous educational experience which may have been positive or negative;
- are very likely to have other substantial time commitments in terms of their home and work;
- will come from a wide variety of backgrounds, both educational and occupational;
- will be thoroughly committed, provided the courses they are taking are at a suitable level and are meeting their real needs.

Counselling is important because it is the only way of clarifying real needs, reconciling the conflicting demands of home and work, and coming to terms with isolation and with problems resulting from previous experience.

### **1.4.2 The characteristics of the institution**

It is clear that distance teaching institutions tend to develop certain common characteristics, particularly during the process of settling down. They are, or can become:

- **Remote:** Even an institution which develops a regional network of services is still likely to have its offices hundreds of miles away from its learners. But in countries where communications are difficult, that remoteness is compounded by delays and problems in the delivery of course materials.
- **Complex:** An institution that is trying to produce course materials of several different kinds, and deliver them to learners as well as provide support services is likely to develop a complex bureaucratic system of administration. Such systems can be very effective in dealing with large numbers of learners but may be inflexible and damaging when dealing with individuals.

Counselling is important in helping to individualise services to learners and in overcoming the problems of system malfunctions.

### **1.4.3 Learning characteristics**

Both learner and institutional characteristics suggest that the nature of the learning process is different in distance education. In particular, a learner must develop an effective set of appropriate learning strategies or study skills. Some learners may already possess these; some may need help. The process of acquiring such skills may be a cognitive one. However, for some learners, for example, those who have a previous history of educational failure, it may be an affective process, consisting in part of coming to terms with that previous failure.

Counselling is important in helping people to develop their own individual strategy for studying under a distance education system.

#### **Check Your Progress 3**

Here are some comments about counselling made by people working in distance education. How do you respond to what they are saying? How far do their comments reflect your own view at this stage? If you are working through the course with some colleagues or fellow learners, then also discuss your reactions with them, and compare them to the reactions of other people presented in the possible answers at the end of the unit.

**Teacher 1:** "When I started in distance education I really didn't know what counselling meant. But my supervisor thought I was already becoming an excellent counsellor!"

**Learner 1:** "I found the counsellor very helpful—I think it was just having someone to talk to, who seemed to care."

**Teacher 2:** "I'm always surprised how much learners appreciate someone just listening to them. Often I've been surprised how grateful they are for that and some simple advice."

**Learner 2:** "No I've never used the counselling service. But it's nice to know it's there."

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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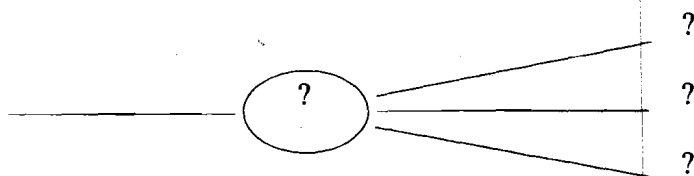
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## 1.5 WHEN DOES COUNSELLING TAKE PLACE AND FOR WHOM?

So who needs counselling and when do they need it? To take up the second question first, there appear to be two points in a learner's progress at which counselling may be appropriate—at a decision point or when some kind of barrier appears.

### 1.5.1 Decision points



Decision points (as depicted above) can occur at several stages of a learner's progress, such as:

- whether to apply for a course or not;
- which course(s) to take;
- what career possibilities to aim for;
- whether to withdraw or to keep going;
- how much time to devote to family/job/course.

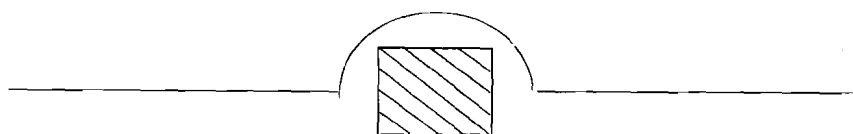
These are substantial decisions. But there can be less weighty decisions as well:

- whether or not to miss an assignment;
- which method of taking notes to follow;
- whether or not to ask questions in tutorials;
- the best way to approach the topic in an essay.

The amount of energy expended on a decision does not necessarily reflect its importance, as you probably know from your own life. Some people need no help in making such decisions. But some appreciate the chance that

counselling gives to reflect on the criteria involved in making the decision and clarify the possible consequences.

## 1.5.2 Barriers



Barriers (as depicted above) can occur at many stages of a learner's progress. They can be:

**Study-related:** to do with finding ways of studying effectively, and completing assignments and exams.

**Time-related:** finding or rationing time adequately.

**Personal:** domestic/career/financial/health barriers.

**Institutional:** barriers erected, probably unintentionally, by the institution—regulations, mailing delays and so on.

Again these can be substantial barriers. But small barriers at the wrong time can be equally difficult. Such barriers could be:

- a tutor returns work late;
- a badly timed holiday;
- extra pressure at work;

and so on. Again some people negotiate these barriers, both big and small, with ease; some need help which can range from intensive counselling to analysing the barrier and ways of surmounting it, to a sympathetic acknowledgement that the barrier exists and that lots of people share it with them.

## 1.5.3 Who seeks counselling?

There is no easy way of predicting who is likely to seek counselling. A self-sufficient learner can study for years, ignoring the counsellor, until suddenly one day he/she runs into an intractable problem and needs help.

Here are some very general patterns from the British Open University:

- i) (Very) approximately 60% of learners ask for some counselling support at some point in their careers.
- ii) Requests need responses ranging from the mainly informative (30%) to the mainly advisory (50%) to those which are mainly counselling (20%). Again, the percentages are very approximate.
- iii) The most common times for seeking help are at the pre-entry stage and during the first year of study—up to 60-70% of requests received are during this time.
- iv) The most common areas of request appear to be divided equally between decision points and barriers.

- v) The most common topics raised (more or less equally and on the whole about 50% of all topics) are:
  - a) institution-related problems;
  - b) course/career choice issues;
  - c) study issues—assessment, exams and so on;
  - d) withdrawal issues.

(We shall be dealing with the appropriate categories of response in the next section.)

- vi) There do not appear to be any consistent links between the probability of learners seeking help and their educational background. Well-qualified learners seem as likely to seek help—even with study problems—as those who are less qualified.
- vii) More women seek help than men and more arts/social science learners seek help than maths/science/technology learners. But since more women study arts/ social science than maths/science technology, this may be two ways of saying the same thing.

Let us emphasise that all these statements and statistics are very approximate indeed and that they might well be quite different in a different socio-economic and cultural climate.

### 1.5.4 Who does not seek counselling?

There is a reason for asking the complementary question to the previous one, as the answer affects the way in which counsellors go about their work.

Clearly there are many learners who do not need counselling and who do not seek it. But equally any experienced counsellor will have come across significant categories of learners who (and it is usually in retrospect) might well have benefited from help but who did not ask.

For instance, we have already noted that in the UKOU more women than men ask for help. And indeed women may be more likely to experience barriers to learning arising from, say, their domestic circumstances. At the same time it is noticeable that more men than women permanently withdraw from their courses. So it may be that women are simply better than men at identifying when they need help and better at asking for it.

There are a variety of reasons why people do not seek help. For example:

- i) The 'I didn't want to bother you' syndrome—learners who find it difficult to ask for another person's time and energy or who are afraid of what that person might think of them. This of course is a classical medical syndrome—the person who does not seek a doctor's aid, sometimes until it is too late.
- ii) The 'superman' or 'perfectionist' syndrome. The perfectionist believes that he/she ought to be able to manage without help.
- iii) The 'ashamed to admit to failure or inadequacy' syndrome. We doubt if there is anyone who does not feel this at times. It is hard to admit to someone that we cannot manage or have failed at something, especially

if we see that person as a kind of figure of authority, as learners often do perceive the staff of their institutions.

- iv) The 'there's no way anyone can help me' syndrome. This is the person who has come to believe that his/her problem is so deep-seated or intractable that no help is adequate. Such learners can be very frustrating to help because of their marked lack of self-confidence and esteem.

### **1.5.5 Counsellor-initiated counselling**

Clearly counselling can be initiated either by the learner (very largely the assumption we have made so far) or by the counsellor. Counsellor-initiated counselling must obviously be appropriate when trying to work with the kind of learner described in the previous section.

Some of those learners (especially perhaps the 'didn't want to bother you' and 'no way you can help me' groups) will actually welcome contact positively and with relief. Some however (the 'superman' and 'ashamed to admit failure' groups) may find such contact threatening; they may associate it, however gently it is made, with the 'call to the headmaster's office' they may have experienced during their school days. Perhaps you can remember that feeling yourself.

We mention this problem at the moment only to note it for later attention. Some of the counselling media we will be studying in Unit 2 are more suitable for this kind of contact than others, so it is a topic we shall return to.

### **1.5.6 Counselling colleagues**

Finally, it is worth mentioning in this section that you may sometimes be called upon to counsel your institutional colleagues. We have sometimes found ourselves counselling colleagues (who have been dealing with a particularly difficult or frustrating appeal case) or simply talking over their career prospects. If you develop counselling skills, you will inevitably find people drawn to use them.

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## **1.6 CATEGORIES OF COUNSELLING**

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In the last section we made an attempt to classify the points at which learners might seek counselling of some kind. In this section we shall try to classify the counselling responses appropriate to particular issues raised by learners.

We shall do this not because classification is useful in itself, but because counselling can be such an amorphous, diffuse, open-ended activity that it is often helpful for counsellors to stop and ask themselves 'What am I doing at the moment? Does this fit into any general pattern and, if so, are there helpful guidelines I might follow?'

There is certainly more than one way of classifying counselling and indeed we have already covered the informing-advising-counselling (IAC) spectrum which is not only a definition but an activity-based classification as well.

The IAC spectrum classification relates to two other possible classifications: developmental/problem-solving and academic/non-academic.

### 1.6.1 Developmental counselling and problem-solving counselling

This is both an activity and topic-based classification and relates closely to the two main points at which learners raise issues, the decision and barrier points respectively.

- **Developmental counselling** is often the most appropriate response to decision points. It is concerned with the development of learners so it covers issues such as:

|               |   |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| pre-entry     | : | for example, course information, alternative courses and institutions, preparatory advice, motive clarification, time allocations, institutional information, and entry requirements;      |
| entry         | : | for example, study skills, institutional requirements, orientation to study at a distance, and preparing assignments;                                                                      |
| course choice | : | for example, course information, recognition of courses, levels of difficulty, possible prerequisite courses and knowledge, relationship to other courses, and possible career directions; |
| career choice | : | for example, dealing with overall career directions, specific career wishes, qualifications, experience, possibilities of employment, and job-hunting skills;                              |
| withdrawal    | : | for example, clarifying reasons for, and helping to deal with the sense of frustration and disappointment, suggesting alternative courses, and encouraging return to study;                |
| motivational  | : | clarification of motives for study, remotivating, relating motives to appropriate courses, organising and structuring time and social demands.                                             |

To some extent developmental counselling is easier than problem-solving counselling. It is usually unstressed, the learners are not in a particular hurry to make a decision and so there is time to explore appropriate directions. Withdrawal counselling is of course the exception; this can be more difficult.

- **Problem-solving counselling** is often the most appropriate response to barriers in the learner's progress. Sub-categories of this might be:

|               |   |                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| institutional | : | for example, dealing with system breakdowns, discussing cases for exception and appeal against regulations, dealing with unsuccessful appeals, changing tutors and so on; |
| personal      | : | for example, illness, disability, marital breakdown, childcare, bereavement, ageing, unemployment,                                                                        |

re-employment, work pressures—all in so far as they affect a learner's progress;

- study : for example, developing appropriate study methods, helping to improve concentration and reading speeds, adapting to distance learning, overcoming negative study habits such as late assignments, and developing group study methods;
- assessment : for example, essay writing skills, providing assessment and dealing with exam anxiety;
- time : organising and structuring time, prioritising activities, clarifying motivation and so on.

One of the reasons why we find this classification helpful is that it suggests general approaches to specific issues, particularly in the last four areas. For instance, when dealing with these areas, we carry mental algorithms as follows:

- personal barriers : how far can we help;
- study and assessment barriers : check anxiety levels;
- time barriers : check motivation.

- a) **Personal barriers:** how far can we help? If we are trying to help someone deal with a personal problem affecting his/her studies, then we have to remember our limitations especially those of a lack of skill or time.

We cannot for instance help someone solve a difficult and long-standing marital problem. What we may be able to do is to help them:

- i) contain that problem so that they can continue studying if that is important to them;
- ii) refer that problem to someone better equipped to help such as a doctor, priest or psychotherapist;
- iii) to be enabled to temporarily withdraw (and help them feel alright about it) while the problem is being dealt with.

These processes are together known as 'holding'—helping someone at least to maintain their position in the face of unresolvable difficulties.

You may find it helpful to think of an extended IAC spectrum, as shown in Figure 1.1

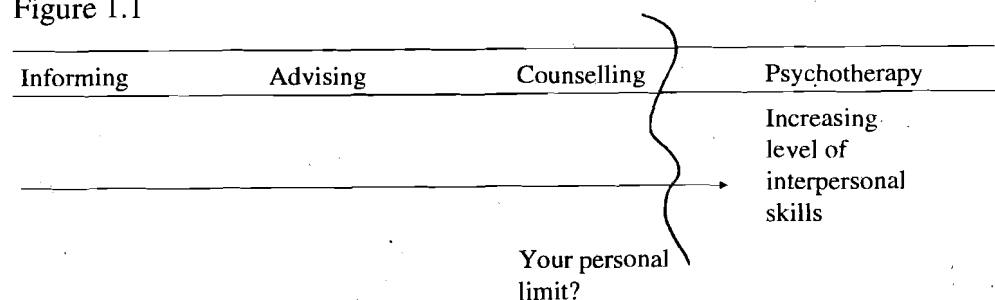


Fig. 1.1: IAC—Extended Continuum

Only you can decide how far you feel able (in the sense of being skilled and qualified) to go. Fortunately learners will always respect that limit and will very seldom ask you to offer skills that you feel are beyond you.

- b) **Study and assessment barriers:** check anxiety levels. Say someone approaches us with a study or assessment problem, typically, in this form (and you will note some of these are transferring queries):

'It just doesn't go in when I read something'.

'I'm finding it hard to concentrate—can you give me a few tips?'

'How do you get started on an essay?'

'I'm sorry, this assignment is late again'.

'I must learn to read faster'.

First we check that they are actually working in a sensible way. For instance, in the first query, we would get them to describe how they read. Do they survey and question the material to get an idea of what it is about or do they just read straight through? If they have an apparently reasonable approach to reading then we would begin to wonder if some basic anxiety about study is getting in the way.

- c) **Time barriers:** check motivation. Again someone raises a time problem such as:

'I just don't seem to be able to find the time to study'.

'Give me a few tips on organising my time'.

'I'm just getting further and further behind'.

'My tutor says I'm taking too much on'.

Again, we would first check the realities of the situation—what are the demands on their time? How do they organise and prioritise their time? If it begins to emerge that time is available to them, then we would begin to wonder if their motivation was beginning to fail them in some way. In Unit 2, we will come back to show as to how classification can be an aid to clarification.

#### Check Your Progress 4

Which category—developmental or problem-solving—might be appropriate to the following queries or issues? And what is the first thing you would say in response and why?

- 1 'I'm finding the course rather boring'.
- 2 'My tutor just seems to ignore my comments totally. Can I change tutors?'
- 3 'Is this qualification really recognised by employers?'
- 4 'I appealed against my exam failure but they wouldn't change it. I'm wondering whether to give up'.
- 5 'Do you have a course in journalism?'
- 6 'I've lost my job and don't really know what to do next. Can I get any financial help with the fees?'

**Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one at the end of the unit.

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### 1.6.2 Academic and non-academic counselling

This is a topic-based classification and is an alternative perspective that you may find useful. It is particularly helpful when considering the way in which counselling services are organised in an institution and the time of year at which they occur, that is, who does what and when. The informing-advising-counselling spectrum still applies.

- **Academic counselling:** covers all course and course-based topics. Examples of this might be preparation, specific course study difficulties and exam techniques. Academic counselling tends to relate to specific and cognitive issues.
- **Non-academic counselling:** covers all other areas of counselling. Examples here might be course choice, general study difficulties, and exam anxiety. Non-academic counselling tends to relate to general and affective issues.
- **Academic and non-academic counselling during the year:** as this classification is topic-based, examples can be illustrated in calendar form, as shown in Table 1.1 (you will see that we have also retained the IAC classification).

**Table 1.1: Academic and Non-academic Counselling**

| Stage     | Academic Counselling                                                                                                           | Non-academic Counselling                                                                                                    |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-entry | Information on courses, entry requirements, registration procedures etc. Preparatory course advice. Course choice counselling. | Information on alternative instructions. Advice to special cases e.g. disabled candidates. Return-to-study counselling.     |
| Entry     | Information on course use—tutorial times, assignment dates etc. Advice on studying the course. Course change counselling.      | Information on regulations and procedures. Advice on general orientation to studying at a distance. Withdrawal counselling. |

|                   |                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| During the course | Information about delivery problems. Advice on dealing with late delivery or incorrect material. Counselling on assignment difficulties. | Information about other (i.e., outside the course) aspects—e.g. summer schools. Advice about payment difficulties, counselling on personal difficulties, problems between tutors and learners. |
| Exam              | Information about time/place conduct of exam. Advice on exam techniques and revision.                                                    | Information about special support available—extra time for disabled learners etc., exam anxiety, counselling.                                                                                  |
| Post-study        | Information about further related courses. Advice on further course choice. Counselling for results.                                     | Information on possible career options. Career advice and counselling. Counselling failed learners.                                                                                            |

- **Academic and non-academic counselling—who does what:** depending on the way in which counselling is organised in an institution (see unit 3) the academic/non-academic split can be useful in deciding who does what.

For instance, academic counselling could be deemed to be the business of the tutors, and non-academic counselling the business of the central institution. Ofcourse, the learners would not draw this finer distinction, so both sides would need the necessary training.

### Check Your Progress 5

Look back at 'Check Your Progress 4' and decide into which category of counselling, academic or non-academic, each query might fall.

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Check your answer with the one at the end of the unit.

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### 1.6.3 The dangers of classifying

We have talked at some length about classifying counselling because it is helpful in making some pattern of the thousands of different queries/problems/issues that can arise for learners in distance education. Yet after

over ten years of working in distance education we still daily come across questions we have not met before.

So remember—people do not fit into neat classifications. Use these distinctions if you find them helpful but do not let them impose a pattern on your perceptions.

*'For the pattern is new in every moment  
And every moment is a new and shocking  
Valuation of all we have been'*

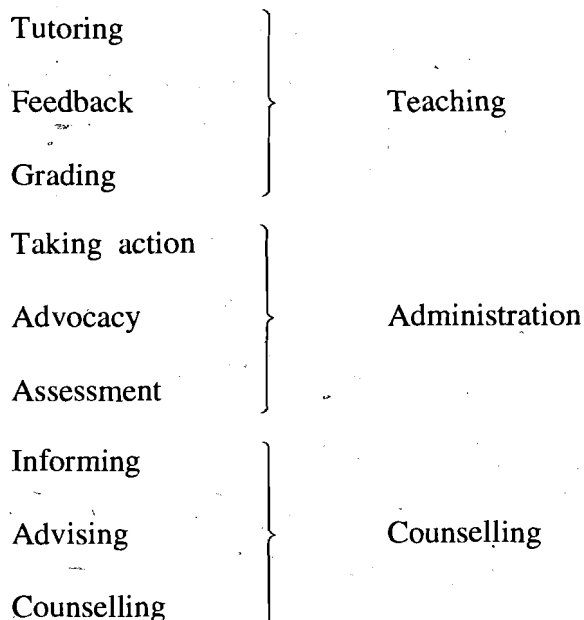
—T.S. Eliot

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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There are at least nine ways of supporting learners in distance education



**Counselling covers a spectrum of activities** — those of informing, advising, counselling. A query can be answered from the most obvious place on the spectrum or from elsewhere. — it could be a transferred query.

**Counselling is important in distance education** because of the particular characteristics of the learner, of the institution and of distance learning itself.

**Counselling takes place** at decision points and barriers and can be initiated by the counsellor as well as the learner

Counselling can be categorised in two ways:

- developmental and problem-solving, or
- academic and non-academic.

### Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

- 1 This probably starts as a straight informing response depending on your institution's regulations. But perhaps some advice is needed too—is it desirable for the learner to take two courses?—can they manage the work load?

- 2 An advisory response that perhaps takes into account the learner's previous study experience.
- 3 An informing response. But you also need to know more about what your enquirer really wants, so perhaps some counselling is needed along the way.
- 4 A counselling response is needed to find out what the learner means by 'hard work'. Have they for instance, found it too hard because it is the wrong course? Getting the answer right could mean the difference between just dropping out of a course and withdrawing from the institution altogether.
- 5 An informing response initially, but some counselling also needed for the same reasons as in 4.
- 6 A counselling response initially, perhaps followed by advice when the problem has been clarified.

2

- 1 A fairly straightforward teaching activity, unless the answer uncovers other problems.
- 2 A counsellor-initiated contact which may result in a tutorial or counselling response from the learner (if any response at all).
- 3 If the learner has received apparently adequate feedback from her/his tutor, then this might well be a counselling request rather than a tutorial one—a transferring query in fact.
- 4 A counselling activity—probably an advising query.
- 5 This sounds like a counselling activity that might lead to a teaching activity once the learner's problem is clear.
- 6 This might well depend on the learners' previous record. If they have received adequate teaching and feedback previously but are still failing to answer the question, then perhaps there is some other problem affecting them, such as assessment anxiety.

3

Here are some reactions to the comments from distance education staff.

**Teacher 1:** 'I think this feeling is very common. It's sometimes hard to know whether one is counselling well because the end-product is often unclear. In the end, it's learner feedback that tells you'.

'So many people think counselling is a difficult and highly technical job when often all it means is warm friendly listening. In some ways I think it would be best to use the word 'befriender' instead'.

**Learner 1:** 'I'll bet the counsellor was using a lot more skill than the learner noticed! But if the learner found her helpful it doesn't matter'.

'So many learners have said this kind of thing to me that it must be true. It's because distance education is potentially so isolating'

**Teacher 2:** 'It's interesting how difficult some teachers find it to just listen—as teachers they're used to talking I guess! But if you can

stop talking and listen sometimes it makes a world of difference to your success

'The point of course is that it's no use giving advice **before** you've listened'!

**Learner 2:** 'Yes of course there are many learners who never need counselling of any kind. But it's essential to be seen to be easily approachable, friendly and informal so that they know you're there if needed'.

4

- 1 This sounds like a barrier with some development to come. My first response might be 'I'm sorry to hear that—what is it about the course that you're finding tedious?' I would want to find out if it was the whole course or just a part that was a problem.
- 2 Another barrier. My response would be 'Well, yes you can. But can you tell me first what exactly it is that you're finding frustrating about the tutor?' My intention would be to find out if this was a case of individual antipathy or whether there was more to it than that.
- 3 Possibly a barrier, possibly developmental. Sometimes a query about course recognition is a way of saying 'Is it worth it? I've run out of motivation'. So my first response might be 'Yes it is recognised. Were you beginning to wonder if it wasn't?'
- 4 This sounds like a developmental problem disguised as a barrier. Assuming the failure is final, some developmental counselling is needed. I would say, 'I'm sorry about the exam result. But why are you wondering about going on?'
- 5 At last, a straightforward developmental counselling query! I would say 'Yes we do. What was it about journalism that interested you, though?' My intention would be to ensure that a journalism course was what was wanted.
- 6 A confused query mixing developmental and barrier queries. Deal with them separately and say 'Yes we can get you help with the fees. What is it you're wanting to do now?'

You might like to look back at these answers and ask yourself whether they are informing, advising and counselling or transferring responses.

5

- 1 This could be either academic or non-academic, depending on whether it is the course content or general demoralisation of the learner that is the problem.
- 2 Relationships with tutors are often non-academic and could be based on all kinds of previous experience.
- 3 An academic counselling query.
- 4 A non-academic query.
- 5 An academic query since it is about a specific course.
- 6 A mixed query but mainly non-academic.

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## UNIT 2 THEORY, PRACTICE AND MEDIA OF COUNSELLING

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### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Theories of Counselling
- 2.3 The Qualities of a Counsellor
  - 2.3.1 Warmth
  - 2.3.2 Acceptance
  - 2.3.3 Genuineness
  - 2.3.4 Empathy
- 2.4 The Skills of a Counsellor
  - 2.4.1 Selecting
  - 2.4.2 Listening
  - 2.4.3 Structuring
  - 2.4.4 Epilogue
- 2.5 The Media of Counselling
  - 2.5.1 Face-to-face counselling
  - 2.5.2 Group counselling
  - 2.5.3 Telephone counselling
  - 2.5.4 Counselling by letter
  - 2.5.5 Counselling by handbook
  - 2.5.6 Counselling by audio and video cassettes
  - 2.5.7 Counselling by broadcasting
  - 2.5.8 Counselling by computer or interactive video-disc
  - 2.5.9 Counselling by internet
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- describe non-directive Rogerian counselling and say why it is suitable for distance education;
- list and describe the qualities of a counsellor and give examples of their use;
- list and describe the skills of a counsellor and give examples of their use; and
- describe the media used in counselling in distance education, give examples of how they may be used, and recognise the limitations of each.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 1 of this block we dealt with the why, when and what of counselling in distance education. In this unit we shall be looking at the 'how' aspect—how you counsel, and what skills, qualities and media you use in doing so.

## 2.2 THEORIES OF COUNSELLING

Counselling in its general sense can be seen as a branch of psychotherapy bearing the same relationship to psychotherapy as a local doctor might to the nearest hospital. Such doctors can deal perfectly adequately with the most common ailments; occasionally they may have to refer patients to the hospital for much more drastic treatment. However, the medical theories underlying both the doctor's and hospital's work are the same.

Psychotherapy was originally associated with the work on psychoanalysis of Freud, Jung and others—the process of probing the sub-conscious in order to lay bare inner motivations.

Recently however there has been a reaction against psychoanalysis in the form of the 'humanistic psychology' movement. In this movement the role of the psychotherapist is as an enabler rather than a prober; the humanistic psychologist helps his or her clients explore their situation for themselves so that they can move towards understanding and dealing with their problems on their own.

There are various humanistic psychotherapies—gestalt, transactional analysis, psychodrama, bio-energetics and so on, some with a degree of rationality and success, some less well founded. One in particular has been found by many people to be relevant in educational settings and is known as 'Rogarian' therapy after its founder Carl Rogers(1902-1987).

The underlying theory of Rogarian therapy is essentially simple. It is 'non-directive'—i.e. clients are helped to talk over and clarify their problems for themselves, taking charge of their own therapy. The therapist (and therefore to a lesser extent the counsellor) brings certain qualities and skills to the relationship that enables clients to do this in their own way and in their own time.

We have over-simplified the theory, but in a sense it may not be unfamiliar to you. Rogers has re-invented the concept of meditation and prayer, where troubled persons commune with God and themselves and try and move towards finding solutions to their troubles. Roger's contribution is to suggest that a second person with particular qualities and skills can help this process.

So what are these qualities and skills? We shall see in the next section.

### Check Your Progress 1

'Rogarian' counselling is non-directive. That does not mean counsellors cannot make suggestions to their clients. But it does mean that those suggestions must arise naturally out of the counsellor-client dialogue.

- i) What do you think are the difficulties of being non-directive?
- ii) What might happen if counsellors give advice and suggestions at too early a stage in the dialogue?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answers with the one given at the end of this unit.

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## 2.3 THE QUALITIES OF A COUNSELLOR

Rogers identified **four** particular personal qualities that appeared to be essential to working as an effective counsellor. They are warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy.

### 2.3.1 Warmth

The ability to communicate personal warmth and to make learners feel welcome and valued as individuals.

Rogers called this 'non-possessive warmth' which means that it should be appropriate and genuine but not overdone; it should not make the recipient feel taken over or manipulated in the way that, say, they might feel by the behaviour of some kinds of salesmen.

Warmth means saying 'Hello, can I help you?' not 'I'm sorry, I'm rather busy, please keep it short'.

People are sometimes not warm for various reasons: tiredness, overwork, consciousness of status, and may be unfavourable attitude. That apart, without an initial welcoming start, a counsellor is unlikely to have a chance to practise the other qualities and skills.

### 2.3.2 Acceptance

The quality of being able to accept other people and their feelings for what they are without criticising or judging them personally (which of course is different from judging their behaviour).

Criticism, whether in the form of moral injunctions or negative statements, has little role to play in counselling, as it tends to shut down communication.

But let me try to illustrate this: a learner says to you 'I think these regulations are very stupid!'. Which of the two following responses would you make?

- a) 'The regulations all have a purpose, you know'.
- b) 'It sounds as though you're pretty angry about this business'.

I hope that you chose response (b), since response (a) is defensive and somewhat critical and is not likely to encourage the learner to think sensibly about how he/she feels.

People are sometimes not accepting because of authoritarian personalities, prejudices of various kinds about class, race, age and sex, and because of fixed, often wrong ideas about their roles ('I'm a teacher—a teacher's job is to criticise').

### **2.3.3 Genuineness**

The ability to be naturally yourself, open, friendly and undefensive.

It means not adopting a superior role as in the 'white-coat syndrome' of the person who has the answers and must be respected. It also means being honest with yourself and your learner about your own feelings and activities.

Which would be the 'genuine' response to the following comment from a learner: 'I'm just finding this part of the course so boring'?

- a) 'But you chose the course—you'll just have to work at it'.
- b) 'To be honest I've found parts of my job boring sometimes! Do you think you'll be able to carry on through to a more interesting part?'

Again we hope you would choose (b). Response (a) is not likely to help the learner very much; response (b) at least admits that you have the same experience from time to time and will encourage the learner to think about ways he/she can keep going. People are sometimes not genuine because of status-consciousness or feelings of their own inadequacy which are hard to admit.

### **2.3.4 Empathy**

The ability to sense the feeling and experience of another person, and so to fully appreciate them as if you were that person.

This is not quite 'sympathy' in which you take over the feelings for yourself. It is being able to say, 'I think I can see you feel that', not 'I felt exactly the same when that happened to me'. The latter statement takes over the learners' feeling and in a sense takes it away from them.

Which is the most empathetic response to the following statement 'If I don't pass this exam, I shall have failed completely'?

- a) 'Oh you mustn't feel that. I mean, it's not a difficult exam'.
- b) 'You feel that if you fail this exam all your work will have been wasted'.

You may find (b) as the empathetic response that will ensure that the learners feel you understand and appreciate their feeling.

Empathy can be a difficult quality to acquire, sometimes because of the difficulty of understanding that every person's experience is unique and that our own experience can only be a fallible guide to how other people might feel about an ostensibly similar experience. But it is important to try to feel empathy in all circumstances.

These, then, are the qualities of a counsellor. How can a person develop them? If that question is considered objectively as a teaching exercise it sounds faintly absurd. Can you really teach someone to be warm and genuine?

In fact that is not necessary. Most people—certainly most people who are attracted to distance education—already possess these qualities to a high degree and are already well on the way to being effective counsellors on that count alone. The challenge is to recognise that these interpersonal qualities are essential and to give yourself permission to express them professionally.

In order to remember the individual qualities, it might help you to think of the word WAGE (warmth, acceptance, genuineness, empathy).

### Check Your Progress 2

Imagine that you are writing a handbook for new learners just about to start their course. How do you think they are feeling and how might you take those feelings into account in your writing?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer against the one given at the end of this unit.

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## 2.4 THE SKILLS OF A COUNSELLOR

There are three essential skills of a counsellor: selecting, structuring and listening. There are a host of other subsidiary skills, but these are the core ones.

### 2.4.1 Selecting

We have already mentioned selecting: It is the process of deciding what kind of response from the informing-advising-counselling spectrum is appropriate at any particular stage in an interview.

An inappropriate response can halt progress in its tracks. Giving information to someone who really needs advice or counselling may satisfy him/her temporarily but will not answer his/her real or long-term needs; giving counselling to someone who would like a piece of straight information is likely to be very frustrating for him/her.

We will not give any more examples at this stage. Turn back to Unit 1, and take another look at sections 1.2.1 to 1.2.3.

## 2.4.2 Listening

The skill of *active intelligent* listening is central to counselling of any type, whether informatory, advisory or counselling. As Rogers himself wrote '...I discovered that simply listening to my client was an important way of being helpful. So when I was in doubt as to what I should do in some active way, I listened. It seemed surprising to me that such a passive kind of interaction could be so useful'.

So is that all then a counsellor simply listens? Of course, it is not as simple as that; the key lies in the words 'active' and 'intelligent'. The counsellor listens actively by encouraging learners to think through their query or problem for themselves; the counsellor listens intelligently by clarifying what is being said and looking (sometimes) for what is not being said—the implications of omitted or unclear statements.

There are some useful but simple techniques to help you listen better. They are open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflections, and silences.

- i) Open-ended questions: Use questions that encourage a learner to think and to develop rather than giving straight mono syllable answers.

For example, a counsellor asks the same question in two different ways; which do you prefer?

- a) 'So you think you want to be a maths teacher?'
- b) 'How do you feel about maths teaching as a career?'

As usual we hope you have chosen (b), the open-ended question. Question (a) encourages the answer 'yes' or 'no' and no further; question (b) encourages the learners to think more about the implications of what they are saying.

- ii) Acknowledgements: This simply means that counsellors do not sit listening in inscrutable silence. They are always indicating that they are listening—nodding, saying 'Ah-ah' (or 'Umm' if you prefer), and using positive 'body language' (maintaining reasonable eye-contact, sitting alertly on the same side of the desk as the learner and so on). It also means not interrupting the learner unnecessarily.
- iii) Reflecting: The most useful listening skill is 'reflecting', sometimes called 'mirroring'. It simply means saying back to the learner something that they have just said but in such a way as to clarify it, reassure the learner that they are being heard correctly and encourage them to go on. It is best illustrated by a simple example:

**Learner:** 'So you see I just don't think I can keep up'.

**Counsellor 1:** 'Oh well, I'm sure it's not really that bad. With a bit of effort...' etc.

**Counsellor 2:** 'You're worried that you'll fall so far behind that you'll have to withdraw?'

Counsellor 1 is certainly trying to encourage the learner, but fails to accept the learner's real fears. The learner is likely to feel that the problem expressed simply has not been heard or has been denied.

Counsellor 2 on the other hand has reassured the learner that the problem has been heard and also gives the learner the opportunity to clarify what is worrying him/her.

Note that 'reflection' does not simply consist of repeating the learner's words but rephrasing them and clarifying them before reflecting them back.

- iv) **Silence:** This is at once a simple and most difficult skill. It means not feeling compelled to fill every gap in the conversation but being able to give the learners space to think through what they are trying to say. It means being able to distinguish between the negative silence of someone who is stuck and the positive silence of someone who is just trying to work out how to phrase his/her next statement.

For Example:

**Learner:** 'I'm not sure what kind of course I want...' (silence).

**Counsellor:** Mm?

**Learner:** 'I suppose I really want to feel I'm helping others'.

This example was taken from a real experience and although it sounds almost trivial it was the start of a useful session on choice of course.

These then are the practical skills of listening. It may help you to remember them as OARS (open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflections, silences).

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Here is a learner statement with two counsellor responses. In which response do you think the counsellor is best using relevant qualities and listening skills?

**Learner:** 'You see I haven't studied since leaving school nearly 20 years ago. So I'm rather worried about starting again'.

- a) **Counsellor 1:** 'Oh studying's just like riding a bicycle you never forget'.

**Learner:** 'Yes, well, thank you for the reassurance'.

**Counsellor 1:** 'You'll be fine'. (And so on.)

- b) **Counsellor 2:** 'You're worried about being able to cope after so long?'

**Learner:** 'Yes, that's right'.

**Counsellor 2:** 'I think a lot of people feel like that. I'm sure we'll be able to help you overcome any problem. But tell me how did you get on at school?'

(And so on.)

- ii) Here's another learner statement. How would you respond?

**Learner:** 'It's my parents. They are pushing me so hard and I just want to do something for myself'.

**Notes:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.

- ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

i) .....

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|     | ..... |
|     | ..... |
|     | ..... |
| ii) | ..... |
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### 2.4.3 Structuring

By now you may be asking how, after listening to the learner, do we actually move towards solving their problem, answering their query, choosing the right course etc.

This is the heart of counselling. It is knowing when, for example, is the right moment to stop counselling and give advice, when a learner has solved a problem for himself/herself or at least come to terms with it, when you have done as much as you can. This is the process of structuring your counselling and the interviews in order to move towards the best solution.

Structuring consists of three stages: clarification, checking and consequences.

- i) Clarification—the basic counselling process of clarifying the issue or problem by dialogue with the learner.
- ii) Checking—going back to the learner to ensure that the problem or issue is now completely clear or at least that it is as clear as it is possible to be at this stage.
- iii) Consequences—settling with the learners what will be done by them and by the counsellor (action or advice) as a result of the interview.

These stages can be short or long but they are almost always present even in the simplest 'informing' interview.

For example:

**Learner:** 'I'm interested in a career in nursing'.

**Counsellor:** 'Is that mental nursing, district nursing or hospital nursing?'

CLARIFYING

**Learner:** 'Oh, I meant in hospitals'.

**Counsellor:** 'Hospital nursing—right. I have a leaflet about that; I could send it to you if you'd like'.

CHECKING

**Learner:** 'Oh yes, please'.

**Counsellor:** 'Fine—I'll put that in the post to you today. And then if you have any questions after reading it you're welcome to contact me again'.

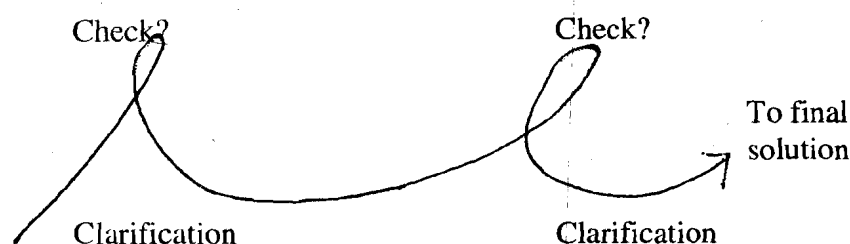
## CONSEQUENCES

**Learner:** 'Thank you very much'.

Clarification is important because it is essential to find out what the learner's needs are. This is often a short process but can be much longer when, for instance, learners are not fully aware of what they need.

Checking is important before deciding on any action, to be sure that it is appropriate. Consequences agreed upon mutually are important because any action or advice not mutually agreed upon is almost certain to fail. Think how often you have been given advice which you failed to take because you found it unconvincing or inappropriate.

In a complex problem the stages may well be repeated for different states of the same problem. Think of it as a cycle.



### 2.4.4 Epilogue

This has been a long and complex section and you should not worry if it feels rather like learning to drive a car. Remembering how to steer and change gear simultaneously is not unlike remembering to listen, select and structure all at the same time.

If it helps, remember the various mnemonics:

Qualities—WAGE (warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy)

Skills—SLS (selecting, listening, structuring)

Selecting—IAC (informing, advising, counselling)

Listening—OARS (open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflecting, silences)

Structuring—3C's (clarification, checking, consequences)

Much of your counselling will be very straightforward, needing more information than skill. Indeed it is probably true that 80% of your counselling will only need 20% of your skill. But there will certainly be 20% of the counselling needing 80% of your skill and it is often very difficult to tell at the outset of what sort of query you will get.

So we hope you will have found the emphasis on skills in these last sections helpful, even if you only exercise the whole battery of skills on the rarest minority of occasions.

### Check Your Progress 4

Here is a dialogue between a counsellor and a learner. Read through it and ask yourself how the counsellor is using her qualities and skills to clarify the query and how well she is structuring the interview.

- 1 **Learner:** 'I'm worried about my studies. They don't seem to be going very well'.
- 2 **Counsellor:** 'Mmm. What's the problem?'.
- 3 **Learner:** 'Well, I spend a lot of time reading but nothing seems to go in'.
- 4 **Counsellor:** 'So you read a lot but you don't feel you're remembering what you've read?'.
- 5 **Learner:** 'Yes that's right'.
- 6 **Counsellor:** 'Tell me exactly how you set about studying'.
- 7 **Learner:** 'Well I simply read through the text, sometimes three or more times but I can't get a feel for what it all means'.
- 8 **Counsellor:** 'Do you try to ask yourself specific questions about the meaning?'.
- 9 **Learner:** 'Well no not really. Should I?'.
- 10 **Counsellor:** 'It might help. You see I get the feeling that perhaps you expect that the text will sink into your mind just by reading a lot. But in distance education you have to work with the text as well. Look, here's a different method of reading. It's called SQ 3R—survey, question, read, recall and review. (The counsellor goes on to explain the method.)  
So will you give that method a try for the next unit?'.
- 11 **Learner:** 'Yes I will'.
- 12 **Counsellor:** 'Good. Come back to me next week and let's see how you got on'.
- 13 **Learner:** 'Right. Thank you'.

**Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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## 2.5 THE MEDIA OF COUNSELLING

We have now dealt as comprehensively as we can in a short space with the skills of counselling. If this were a course on counselling in conventional educational settings, then the unit could have almost ended here.

But, as you are now well aware, in distance education the varied media, such as face-to-face, correspondence and telephone make a critical difference to everything we do.

For instance so far we have made at least three implicit assumptions about how counselling is conducted. However, these assumptions may not be true of all media. What are those assumptions?

- i) That counselling is a two-way process between a counsellor and a learner.
- ii) That counselling is directed at individuals.
- iii) That it can be initiated by either the counsellor or the learner.

You may be able to spot other such assumptions. But let us look at the different media and ask how far counselling (informing, advising, counselling) is possible in each medium, and what are the relative advantages and disadvantages.

We have summarised this below (Table 2.1) and we will go over each medium in detail subsequently.

**Table 2.1: Media and Counselling**

| Media                                                | 1<br>Is two-way<br>communication<br>possible? | 2<br>If not, is<br>'interactive'<br>communication<br>possible? | 3<br>Can it be<br>initiated by the<br>counsellor? | 4<br>So is it suitable for<br>informing, advising<br>and counselling? |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Face-to-face</b>                                  | Yes                                           | —                                                              | Yes—but can be<br>threatening                     | All                                                                   |
| <b>Group<br/>face-to-face</b>                        | Yes                                           | —                                                              | Yes—much less<br>threatening                      | All                                                                   |
| <b>Phone</b>                                         |                                               |                                                                |                                                   |                                                                       |
| -one-to-one                                          | Yes                                           | —                                                              | Yes, but can be<br>threatening                    | All                                                                   |
| -teleconferencing                                    | Yes                                           | —                                                              | threatening                                       | Informing only                                                        |
| -answerphone                                         | No                                            | No                                                             | No                                                |                                                                       |
| <b>Writing</b>                                       |                                               |                                                                |                                                   |                                                                       |
| -letters                                             | Limited-slow                                  |                                                                | Yes—Less<br>threatening                           | Informing/advising                                                    |
| -handbook                                            | No                                            | Yes                                                            | Yes—<br>unthreatening                             | Informing/advising                                                    |
| <b>Audio or video<br/>cassette</b>                   | No                                            | Yes                                                            | Yes                                               | Informing/advising                                                    |
| <b>Broadcast</b>                                     |                                               |                                                                |                                                   |                                                                       |
| -Radio & TV                                          | No                                            | No                                                             | Yes                                               | Informing                                                             |
| <b>Computer &amp;<br/>interactive<br/>video-disc</b> | Yes                                           | —                                                              | No                                                | Informing/advising<br>and limited<br>counselling                      |
| <b>Internet</b>                                      | Yes                                           | Yes                                                            | Yes                                               |                                                                       |
| <b>On-line<br/>discussion</b>                        |                                               |                                                                |                                                   | Informing                                                             |
| <b>E-mail</b>                                        |                                               |                                                                |                                                   | All Informing                                                         |
| <b>WWW</b>                                           |                                               |                                                                |                                                   | Informing/advising                                                    |
| <b>computer<br/>conferencing</b>                     |                                               |                                                                |                                                   |                                                                       |

|                                              | 5                                           | 6                   | 7                                                                                                  | 8                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Media                                        | Suitable for development or problem solving | Individual or group | Any particular advantages or disadvantages?                                                        | Examples                                                                                                      |
| <b>Face-to-face</b>                          | Both                                        | Individual          | Best—but expensive                                                                                 |                                                                                                               |
| <b>Group face-to-face</b>                    | Usually developmental                       | Group               | Much less expensive—uses other learners' experience                                                |                                                                                                               |
| <b>Phone</b>                                 |                                             |                     |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                               |
| —one-to-one                                  | Both                                        | Individual          | Relatively cheap and quick                                                                         |                                                                                                               |
| —tele-conferencing                           | Developmental                               | Group               | Available 24 hrs                                                                                   |                                                                                                               |
| —answerphone                                 | Problem-solving                             | Individual          | 'Adviceline' UKOU                                                                                  |                                                                                                               |
| <b>Writing</b>                               |                                             |                     |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                               |
| —letters                                     | Usually problem-solving                     | Individual          | Permanent record, unthreatening                                                                    |                                                                                                               |
| —handbook                                    | Usually developmental                       | Both                | Permanent record, unthreatening                                                                    | 'Taking off' UKOU, 'a package of shoelaces'—Athabasca Univ., 'Counselling Package'—Deakin Univ.; many others. |
| <b>Audio or video cassette</b>               | Both                                        | Both                | Can be replayed—audio cheap                                                                        | 'Telling it like it is', Athabasca; 'Relaxation for exams'; UKOU                                              |
| <b>Broadcast</b>                             |                                             |                     |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                               |
| —Radio & TV                                  | Usually developmental                       | Both                | Can be very fast and sophisticated—reaches many people                                             | TV & Radio 'Open forum'; UKOU                                                                                 |
| <b>Computer &amp; interactive video-disc</b> | Developmental                               | Individual          | Relatively cheap after capital outlay                                                              | CASCAID—Careers Advisory, Programme—UKOU<br><br>Entry Programme —<br>Fernsehen Universitat (Germany)          |
| <b>Internet</b>                              | Developmental Problem Solving               | Both                | Permanent record<br>Immediate communication<br>Reaches many people independently of time and space | Open University of Hong Kong                                                                                  |

### 2.5.1 Face-to-face counselling

Everything that we have said so far applies to face-to-face counselling and in many ways this remains the most important medium for counselling of all

kinds. However, it can be extremely expensive in terms of staff, time and travel and could also be inaccessible to distant learners. One way of at least reducing the first problem is through group counselling.

## **2.5.2 Group counselling**

Counselling is possible in a group situation. Normally a group might consist of any number from three upwards, commonly a dozen but it is perfectly possible for it to go up to thirty or more. We have seen counselling attempted in groups of 200, but this really then becomes another activity.

Although a group loses the one-to-one relationship of counsellor and learner, it gains something almost as valuable, the opportunity for learners to share their concerns with each other. Inevitably, in doing so they discover that their concerns are common and find this immensely reassuring.

The skills in group counselling are just the same as one-to-one counselling, except that the counsellor is using them primarily to encourage learners to talk about their concerns (and solutions) with each other, and not with him/her. In addition the group counsellor must develop some sensitivity to the dynamics of the group.

For example, let us assume that you are a counsellor who has gathered together a group of dozen or so learners about to start their distance education course at a local centre. How would you help them talk about the issues, concerns, anxieties and hopes that will certainly be present in that group? Here is a possibility:

- 1 You introduce yourself within 2-3 minutes.
- 2 You say 'Now I want you to get together with any other learner in pairs. Introduce yourselves and say briefly why you are taking the course and how you feel about it. Take 5 minutes'.
- 3 After five minutes you say 'Now I want each pair to get together with another pair and share your introductions and see what motives and feelings you all have in common. Take 10 minutes'.
- 4 After 10 minutes you say 'Now let's all come together and share our introductions and what we've been discussing'.
- 5 At this point the learners will have discussed their feelings in pairs and in groups of four. They will have discovered that many of their concerns are mutual and will now have no difficulty in talking about their feelings in the larger group. (Indeed you may have difficulty in getting them to stop talking!) As they talk, you will be able to listen, clarify, reflect and decide upon general consequent action (such as preparation) with the whole group.

This particular group process of discussion in pairs, threes, fours and so on is known as 'pyramiding' or 'snowballing'. It can be used in many different situations.

In the next unit (Unit 3) of this block we shall be discussing face-to-face contact in distance education in greater detail as it is an important medium of counselling.

### Check Your Progress 5

Imagine you have groups of learners at the following stages of their studies. Devise a suitable group counselling activity for each.

- i) About to tackle the first assignment.
- ii) Choosing future courses.
- iii) Coming up to the exam.

**Notes:** i) Write your answers in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- i) .....  
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- ii) .....  
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- iii) .....  
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### 2.5.3 Telephone counselling

#### i) One-to-one

There is a curious myth attached to telephone counselling that it is somehow very different from face-to-face counselling. The experience of organisations like the UK suicide-counselling service, the Samaritans\*, suggests that this is not so and that the similarities are far greater than differences.

There is one very obvious difference—the absence of visual clues. This is not an entire disadvantage, as such clues can mislead as well as help. Possibly a more serious problem is that the absence of visual clues makes it harder to find ways of disengaging the process of learning from the c

\* Samaritans is a voluntary organisation which gives advice by telephone (only by telephone so as to preserve anonymity) to individuals suffering personal distress or contemplating suicide.

But undoubtedly the biggest problem of telephone counselling is the feeling that it is different from face-to-face counselling and that the skills are different. They are not. Apply your WAGE, SLS, OARS, and 3C's, with an additional emphasis on verbal acknowledgements and you will be as successful a telephone counsellor as a face-to-face one.

## *ii) Teleconferencing*

It is now possible to link a number of people at different locations to the same telephone line; for technical reasons the maximum number is about six. So in theory it should be possible to run group counselling sessions over the telephone.

However we are not aware of any significant reports on group telephone counselling sessions as distinct from group telephone tutorials. One related development was the 'Dial'n Learn' project run in the London Centre of the British Open University. In this project learners could dial a given number between certain hours and be automatically connected to other people who had also dialled the same number. The hope was that learners would use this facility to engage in counselling—less group counselling.

In actuality the project was let down by technical difficulties including the quality of the telephone lines (this is a constant problem with group telephone tutorials). However, with better equipment and improved technology (such as the use of satellite communication for the purpose) teleconferencing is now being used successfully in some advanced countries. Besides, two-way-audio and one-way-video teleconferencing is also being used successfully these days. (More of this in the course ES-318.)

## *iii) Answerphones*

Telephone answering machines which give an automatic taped message when dialled are now in relatively common use in many parts of the world. Since most offices have more than one telephone line, it is relatively simple to use one of those lines out of office hours to provide an appropriate counselling message.

There is a report on such a system in the journal 'Open Learning', February 1987, called 'Adviceline'. 'Adviceline' provided a taped message which could be dialled at any time outside office hours. The message depended on the time of year: 'Choiceline' for course choice time, 'Examline' about exam time, and so on.

Clearly 'Adviceline' could provide only a very elementary counselling service. Yet it did have two very special advantages: it was available at times such as 2 o'clock in the morning to any learner with access to a telephone when no other form of help was available, and it was completely anonymous and non-threatening.

In over two years of operation, about 400 learners found 'Adviceline' sufficiently valuable to be worth dialling.

## 2.5.4 Counselling by letter

There is probably still more counselling carried out by letter than in any other way, especially in distance education in the developing world, where other forms of communication can be tenuous. Such correspondence counselling has obvious limitations: it is slow, two-way dialogue is difficult, it is hard to convey feelings accurately, and so on. Yet there are advantages: the counsellor has time to think carefully over both the originating letter and the reply, there may be helpful clues in the writing, and a counsellor-initiated letter is generally less threatening than a face-to-face interview or telephone call. Above all, the learner has a permanent record to pursue at leisure and think over.

The process of writing such a counselling letter, whether as a counsellor initiative or a response to a letter received, is still informed by basic counselling principles. Active intelligent listening is replaced by careful reading to try to clarify the feelings and issues in the learner's letter. It should then be possible to respond with warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy, structuring the letter to ensure its meaning is clear.

For example consider the following letter received from a would be learner and two possible replies:

Dear Sir

Do you have any course in journalism at IGNOU? Now that my family is all grown up. I find time hangs heavy on my hands and I would like to develop a new interest.

Yours faithfully,

(Mr.) P

a) Dear Mr. P,

Thank you for your letter. I regret that we do not run courses in journalism.

Yours sincerely,

Learner Adviser No. 1

b) Dear Mr. P,

Thank you for your letter. I can understand your desire to use your new-found leisure constructively.

Unfortunately we do not have any course in journalism yet. You could try my colleagues at Veracity College, (address...).

However, I did wonder if you have considered alternatives to journalism. If you are interested in improving your writing skills and perhaps making some money we have an interesting course called 'Creative Writing' of which I enclose details.

I do hope you find what you are looking for. Please contact me again if I can help you further.

Yours sincerely,

Learner Adviser No. 2

Which reply do you prefer? Adviser No. 1 has been business-like but no more. Adviser No. 2 has read the letter carefully noting that journalism might not be what Mr. P is looking for. She has then responded with warmth and empathy to the enquirer's feelings and tried to clarify what he wants. Which letter would you have preferred to receive?

### Check Your Progress 6

Imagine you have received the following letter from a learner. Write a 'counselling' reply.

Dear Adviser,

I am writing to tell you that I have withdrawn from IGNOU. I am very sorry to have let you down but our new baby is taking up much more time than I thought and I cannot keep it up.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. P

**Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.

ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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### 2.5.5 Counselling by handbook

Many institutions have developed counselling materials in handbook form. We gave some examples in the summary chart. These handbooks are usually aimed at learners at particular points in their careers. For instance, the text from UKOU 'Taking Off' is designed for pre-entry learners and there is a similar text called 'Bailing Out' for learners who are withdrawing from the course.

Clearly such handbooks are an economical way of providing some kind of counselling to a large number of learners. They are also about as unthreatening as it is possible to be. They are always written with the usual counselling qualities but obviously unless a learner responds in some way there cannot be any two-way communication.

So these handbooks are often written in an 'interactive' style. They contain text which encourages learners to ask themselves questions about, for

example, their motivation, needs, and so on. The hope is that such reflection will enable learners to clarify such issues on their own or at least encourage them to raise appropriate questions with a counsellor.

For example a section in a handbook for pre-study learners might read:

“Why have you applied to IGNOU?”. Listed below are some of the reasons people have given in the past. Tick the ones that apply to you and add at the end any other reasons you might have.

- 1 to improve my qualifications to get a better job;
  - 2 to prove I can get a degree;
- and so on, for about a dozen different reasons.

The text then ends:

“Does that help you clarify why you have applied? It is useful to be clear about your reasons as they may affect your wish to study, and your choice of course.”

There might be other pages dealing with feelings about **study, preparedness for study** and so on.

Another form of interactive text **uses quotations from existing learners** for new learners to react to. Such handbooks can be used with groups of learners in reactive discussions. An example of this approach is ‘How to Tutor in an Open Learning System’ (Lewis, 1984), which consists almost entirely of a series of quotes and responses from Open Learning tutors. We have occasionally used this approach in these units, as you will have noticed.

### **2.5.6 Counselling by audio and video cassettes**

For obvious economic reasons, the use of audio-cassettes is much wider in distance education than that of video cassettes and some attempts have been made to use them for counselling.

Often this use is similar to that of a counselling handbook and tapes can be made interactive in a very similar way. For instance the tape ‘Telling it like it is’ from Athabasca University consists of a series of learners talking about their experiences of distance education. The tape is designed to be stopped at particular points for listeners to think about their reactions.

A different and unique use for audio-tapes is in anxiety counselling. There could be different tapes for different types of anxiety. For example, you could have an exam counselling tape of ‘relaxation exercises’ designed to help anxious learners to reduce their levels of tension before the exam. The advantage of such tapes is that they can be heard whilst the learner is actually undertaking the exercises, for example whilst lying on the floor.

### **2.5.7 Counselling by broadcasting**

Very little counselling use appears to have been made of broadcasting in distance education except for relatively ordinary informing purposes. Perhaps this is not altogether surprising since broadcasting offers very little

possibility of either two-way or interactive working. Although for instance it would be easy to make a programme about learners talking about their feelings and experiences, it would be difficult to make that interactive as it cannot be stopped and started, and proceeds at its own pace.

Nevertheless broadcasting can uniquely enthuse, enrich, motivate and excite, and it is surprising that no one has given attention to it. Perhaps one way would be to run a problem question and answer session or a phone-in. There is much work to be done in this area.

### **2.5.8 Counselling by computer or interactive video-disc**

We shall deal with these together as they are very similar. (Video-discs offer a superior quality but at considerably greater expense.) The advent of relatively cheap micro-computers has made them accessible at Study Centre and Regional Centre Levels if not at home in the developing world. Computer programmes can be made interactive relatively easily; for example, they can respond to different choices made by learners.

So it is not surprising that there has been some interest in the use of micro-computers, particularly in developmental counselling.

The most obvious example is in career counselling. A typical example of this is the programme called CASCAID.

CASCAID—the 'Careers Advisory Service Computer Aid' is a programme in which learners are asked to respond to a series of preferences: 'How would you like a job in which you would (e.g.) 'gather information', 'cope with members of the public', and so on.

The programme then analyses those preferences and produces a list of career suggestions for the learner together with a note of the preferences most relevant to each career.

An example of such a list is:

- 1 Teacher in higher education
- 2 Social Worker
- 3 Priest
- 4 Lawyer.

The relatively cheap interactive and non-threatening nature of computer-counselling means that many learners appear to enjoy it and find it useful. It cannot stand on its own. It is essential when using CASCAID, for instance, that learners are 'talked through' the results with an experienced CASCAID counsellor.

Nevertheless computer counselling is here to stay and is likely to become more useful in other areas as well, specially since the Introduction of programmes on-line.

## 2.5.9 Counselling by internet

The internet as a counselling medium for distance education programmes remains a largely untapped resource. The use of the internet demands access to both computers and telecommunication equipment. The lowest level of connection to the internet requires dial-up telephone access, which remains problematic for many distance learners in developing countries. Even those located close enough to highly developed telephone infrastructure may find that long distance tolls or hourly connection charges restrict access to those with limited disposable income.

Let us look at the methods and devices that internet based distance education can use for counselling distance learners:

Online discussion, which is also conducted in computer networks. The counsellor interacts with one or more learners simultaneously at different terminals. The counsellor announces his/her "contact time" in cyberspace, and distance learners log-in to discuss questions in that period. The counsellor acts as the chairperson of the discussion. It is known in bulletin board systems as the 'chat room' or 'talk room' which holds one-to-one or to many conversations respectively.

E-mail is another commonly used example of correspondence or an asynchronous interaction between counsellors and distance learners. Instead of writing letters and waiting for several days to get the reply by post, counsellors can post assignments, announcements, supplemental materials, as well as give feedback or responses to distance learners individually or in a group. Distance learners who are "quiet" and "shy" are able to respond in a comfortable and private atmosphere.

Another way used by the counsellor of reaching out in a 'one-to-many' way is by the use of the World Wide Web (WWW). WWW can be used to put out articles, study guide and whole textbooks and slide shows. In the context of counselling it could be used for posting information, messages, assignments etc.

The most interesting part for distance education is group communication, (many-to-many communication), for which we could use the device of computer conferencing. Computer conferencing connects the counsellor and distance learners present at different locations, through computer networks. If a camera is attached to the computer, the computer conferencing gets converted into video conferencing. All the participants can be seen on the monitor whenever they log-in. In this way the counsellor can see the distance learner and the learners can see the counsellor.

Basically videoconferencing is similar to regular face-to-face interaction except that the learners and the counsellor are located at several different locations, thus providing an opportunity for group discussion and team learning, independent of space and time.

It is interesting to note that this medium has the potential to offer opportunities for collaborations between institutions across the globe.

### Check Your Progress 7

Imagine you are setting up a counselling system for the new Veracity College from scratch. Which media would you adopt and what would be your priorities?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit covers the following topics:

**Theories of counselling:** 'Rogerian' or non-directive counselling.

**Qualities of a counsellor:** warmth, acceptance, genuineness, empathy (≡ WAGE).

**Skills of a counsellor:** selecting, listening and structuring (≡ SLS).  
Selecting skills—informing, advising, counselling (≡ IAC). Listening skills—open-ended questions, acknowledgements, reflecting, silence (≡ OARS). Structuring skills—clarification, checking, consequences (≡ 3C's).

**Media of counselling:** face-to-face; group; telephone (including teleconferencing and answering machines); letter; handbook; audio/video cassette; broadcasting; computer and internet.

### Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1

- i) One of the principal difficulties you may have thought about is that as teachers we are often expected to be directive, writing and running syllabuses, testing learners and so on, and it is very difficult to step out of that role.

Another difficulty is the feeling (well-expressed in the quote from Rogers) that being non-directive is 'doing nothing'. That of course is not so: in some ways your undivided attention and time are the most important things you can give anyone.

- ii) If advice is given too early, before someone is in the right frame of mind to accept it, then it is simply unlikely to be acted on. Advice must be seen to be appropriate both in quality and timing.

## 2

Think back to your own experience of starting something new. A new learner may be excited, hopeful, looking forward to new career or leisure prospects. At the same time they may be anxious, wondering if they can cope, wondering if they will be shown up in front of teachers and fellow learners. After all there can be an element of exposure in becoming a learner. You are saying in effect 'I am ignorant and need to be taught; I am likely to get things wrong and need correcting'.

When writing a handbook for such learners it will be important to acknowledge that some of them may share some of these feelings. Your 'cognitively-based' colleagues will argue against this, saying that to talk about such fears is to aggravate them: survey work carried out at UKOU shows that this is not true. Learners are grateful and relieved to know that others feel the same way as they do.

So include some 'interactive' material (see Section 2.5.5) in your handbook. Perhaps quotes from learners about how they felt when starting. But finish on a positive note touching upon their hopes and expectations of the future.

## 3

- i) Counsellor 1 is trying to be encouraging but is trying too hard. He does not really listen to what the learner is saying at all, and the learner, although polite, can sense that and draws the interview to a close.

Counsellor 2 reflects the learners statement. He then empathises ('I'm sure a lot of people feel like that') and offers some appropriately timed reassurance, before exploring the issue further.

- ii) It can be particularly difficult on the (relatively rare) occasions that a learner introduces personal issues into the conversation. But remember you have a resource that is always available to you at difficult moments—your own humanity. Respond as one human being to another and you will not go far wrong.

In this case I would say something like 'you are under a lot of pressure from your parents and you would like to escape?' and see where we went from there.

## 4

**In exchange** (1) to (6) the counsellor is clarifying what the learner means by his studies 'not going very well'. She is drawing on her previous experience and recognises a pattern—the learner who

(perhaps because of study anxiety) simply reads and re-reads his units without assimilating them or interacting with them at all.

By (8) the counsellor has a clear enough idea not to need to check the query any further and feels that some advice might be appropriate – (10).

(11), (12) and (13) are the consequences. The learner has 'contracted' to try a new method of reading and the counsellor has 'contracted' in turn to give further help.

## 5

- i) About to tackle the first assignment. Learners will be wanting some practical help with this, but there will be some for who it is the first thing they have done since leaving school which will be assessed in this way. So it will be helpful to demystify the assessment process.

Find an old assignment answer (or part) and give copies of it to the learner. Tell them 'pretend you are the teacher and mark this assignment on your own' (5 minutes). 'Now get together with another person and compare your results. What things did you find yourselves looking for? Where was the assignment good and why, where bad and why?' (10 minutes).

In the ensuing group discussion it should be possible to bring out the importance of answering the question, planning the essay and so on.

- ii) Choosing future courses. For some learners the leap to the next course can seem intimidating. So invite some experienced learners to your group to talk about how they choose their future courses and to lead a discussion of course choice.

- iii) Coming up to the exam. There is always a lot of anxiety focusing on exams and group sessions can be very helpful in sharing and ameliorating this anxiety.

Suggest to the learners that they are examiners reporting on this year's paper. What sort of things will they have identified as losing learners' marks? This can be run as a simple 'brainstorming exercise', with learners calling out items for you to list on the board for subsequent discussion.

The list might end up including:

- a) not following the paper's instructions about how many, and which questions to answer.
- b) misreading the questions.
- c) spending too much time on some questions and not enough on others.

## 6

Here is my answer; yours may be different but I hope you have responded not too dissimilarly.

Dear Mrs. P

I am sorry to hear that you have withdrawn from IGNOU.

- 1 Although as a father myself I know how demanding a new baby can be sometimes.
- 2 Please do not feel you have let anyone down; these things can happen and we are prepared for them.
- 3 When life is a little calmer please write to me again and we will work out a way of getting you back on the course.

My warmest wishes for happiness with your 'new arrival'.

Yours sincerely

Learner Adviser

- 1 The counsellor empathises with the learner's concerns by drawing on his own experience in this case.
- 2 He deals with the learner's feeling of having let someone down by meeting it head on: such feelings of embarrassment are not uncommon and can be a barrier to further study.
- 3 He deals with the consequences, trying to encourage the learner to return when she feels ready.

7

The media you would adopt would depend on Veracity College's situation. In a technically advanced society with a reliable and accessible telephone system you might place most emphasis on telephone counselling, and usage of the internet, which has several devices for counselling distance learners.

In a developing country the most important counselling medium would be correspondence both by letter and handbook and perhaps your most important initial task would be to write such handbooks.

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## UNIT 3 FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Need for Face-to-Face Sessions
  - 3.2.1 The human factor
- 3.3 The Organisation of Face-to-Face Sessions
  - 3.3.1 Personal contact programmes: A case study of correspondence institutes (CCIs) of India
  - 3.3.2 Learner Opinion of Counselling Sessions: A case study of IGNOU
- 3.4 The Role of Support Services Staff
  - 3.4.1 Role and functions of tutors and tutor counsellors at the UKOU
  - 3.4.2 Role of academic counsellors at the IGNOU
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After working through this unit, you should be able to:

- state and describe the need for face-to-face sessions;
- study the aims of face-to-face sessions and the purposes they serve;
- be familiar with a case study of personal contact programmes;
- describe the organisation of face-to-face sessions;
- be familiar with the role of support services staff with the help of a case study of the UKOU.

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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Units 1 and 2 of this block introduced the concept of counselling, considered different categories of counselling and looked at counselling theories in relation to opportunities in different media. This unit is devoted to face-to-face sessions in distance education, which is an important medium of counselling.

As we all know that in distance learning, learning takes place through both individual interaction with the self learning materials and social interaction with peers/tutors. Face-to-face meeting, therefore, is an occasion for this social interaction. Although communication between the learner and the counsellor/institute takes place through various media as discussed in the previous unit (section 2.5), the loneliness of the distance learners cannot be effectively compensated for unless there are some opportunities for them to meet their counsellors in person and discuss their problems and exchange their views with them. Face-to-face sessions also give the learners opportunities to discuss their problems — academic and personal — with their counsellor and also their peer groups.

Most of the institutes of distance education and open universities all over the world organise face-to-face contact sessions for their distance learners. Of course, these are limited as compared with the face-to-face lecture sessions organised by conventional universities.

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## **3.2 NEED FOR FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS**

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Many distance learners may find it difficult to handle the self-learning materials with their various access devices, activities and assignments. These would require knowledge of study skills which can be provided through human support. You may also bear in mind the characteristics of distance learners which have been discussed in course ES-313, Block 1, Unit 1, which will further make you understand the need for face-to-face contact counselling sessions.

As we discussed in Unit 1 of Block 1 and also in Unit 4 of Block 1 that distance learners are independent, and also lonely. They are independent to the extent that they need not attend the classes at regular timings and do not depend on the oral instruction of a teacher. They can study at their own homes and choose their peer groups as well. They cannot get immediate clarification for the doubts that come up during their studies. They may not be in a position to discuss their academic problems with their fellow learners. Similarly, they may not possess the study skills necessary to cope with the requirements of courses offered by a distance teaching institution. If the distance learners happen to live in economically and technologically backward societies, they may not be able to make use of the audio-video programmes, nor the educational broadcast, since the majority of them will not have access to the media in their homes. Apart from these, the learners may like to know many things regarding the scope of their courses, their performance in assignment responses, examination pattern, the modes of assessment and evaluation, the attitude of their peer group, etc. Precisely to meet such needs of the distance learners, study centres are established and face-to-face contact sessions are arranged at these study centres. Thus, contact-cum-counselling sessions give the distance learners the opportunities to discuss their problems (academic and personal) with their teachers and also their peer groups.

Thus, whatever the merits of the self-learning materials to the extent they try to build the teacher in the text, try to simulate a classroom situation, they remain finite in their character. They cannot go beyond a point. On the other hand, the needs of the learner are infinite in their variety, as all human beings are. So, distance education has to cater to these infinite variations, which the self-learning materials however good, may not completely succeed in doing. To satisfy these variations, it thus becomes necessary to offer some face-to-face support.

We have said so far that face-to-face sessions are very useful. However, there could always be some distance learners who could probably do equally well even without attending these programmes. If open learning materials are perfect, and if learners' learning skills are highly developed, there might be no need for the learner to attend face-to-face sessions. On the other hand, even with imperfect learning materials, many learners shoulder responsibility and succeed without the help of a counsellor.

There are two schools of thought whether face-to-face sessions are necessary or are unnecessary. One school of thinking finds face-to-face sessions essential, but another finds them unnecessary and even, in some cases harmful as they are felt to represent interference, disturbing the individual study. No conclusive proof has been established either to prove the necessity of face-to-face elements or to reject them as conventional embellishments. However, philosophically the organisation of face-to-face sessions is a dilution of the very concept of distance education. But this should not be taken to mean that face-to-face sessions have no place in distance education. Holmberg (1986) and Keegan (1989) suggest a variety of aims and purposes that face-to-face sessions serve in distance education. According to Keegan, "Occasional face-to-face sessions are organised for both didactic and socialisation purposes unlike the conventional system, where it is a major teaching medium" (Keegan, 1989).

Holmberg (1986) also endorses the same view. He feels they are useful as opportunities to consult subject specialists and to exchange views with tutors and fellow learners as well as to benefit from tutors' expositions and criticism of work done. Face-to-face interaction seems mainly suitable for:

- practising psychomotor skills in laboratories and under similar conditions, also verbal skills through personal communication;
- facilitating the understanding of the communication process and human behaviour;
- encouraging attitudes and habits of relevance for the study;
- mutual inspiration and stimulation of fellow learners;
- training in co-operation.

Discussions in groups appear the most valuable supporting functions of face-to-face sessions apart from those that require special equipment (labs, machinery, computers etc.)

Another form of integrating distance study with face-to-face sessions that has been found profitable is running intensive residential courses. As they take place during concentrated periods (pre-scheduled) they do not interfere or disturb the learner's routine/regular study.

Another form of face-to-face instruction according to Holmberg is supervised correspondence study. The learners work in libraries or classrooms and have a teacher available there as a resource (individual helper and adviser) rather than as an instructor; this teacher answers questions, explains when asked to, motivates, organises group activities and administers.

In spite of this there remains a basic controversy between those who are in favour of as much face-to-face contact as possible and those who mainly rely on non-contiguous communication. To the former distance education is merely a substitute for interaction when this is not available and learning is seen as something of a social activity. To the latter learning is basically individual and distance education has considerable potentials of its own, different from but not inferior to traditional types of education. Both approaches, as we can see, represent individualisation. Even the former viewholders stress that self-learning materials are provided for hundreds or

thousands of learners in general, but the counsellors (tutors) counsel or tutor the distance learners as individuals.

There is a continuum between the two. At one end there are programmes that employ primarily face-to-face learning supplemented with texts and audio-visual aids. At the other end lie the programmes being offered online without any face-to-face component. In between the two there are many programmes that strive to combine (limited) face-to-face communication, either between teachers and learners or among learners themselves and also interactive media based dialogue with carefully structured printed, audio-video materials which make central inputs to the teaching-learning processes.

### Check Your Progress 1

Why do you think face-to-face sessions are an essential component of the distance education system?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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### The human factor

In the foregoing section we have highlighted the controversy regarding the need for face to face contact in the distance education system. It has also been pointed out that whatever the merits of the self-learning materials, they remain finite in character, therefore the human factor is very important to take the distance out of distance education and resolve the infinite problems of the learners.

As we all know distance education revolves around a learner centered system with teaching activity focussed on facilitating learning. The institutional function, and the task of its instructional personnel, is to facilitate and enhance that process — despite the distance to achieve optimum learning outcomes. The faculty engaged in distance education must be adept at facilitating learners' learning through particular attention to process, unlike, classroom based teachers whose traditional role is largely confined to selecting and sharing content. Also the faculty must recognize the role of instructional technology as a learning resource. Thus, the human factor in distance education has a very crucial role to play in the teaching-learning process. The task of the distance instructor is more than merely grading learners submitted material (assignments, projects, examination papers etc.) Ideally the instructor's role involves:

- diagnosing the learner's readiness to learn;

- monitoring learner progress towards objectives sought;
- recognizing and discovering a learner's learning difficulties;
- stimulating and challenging learners to further efforts;
- evaluating the quality a learner's learning and assigning a grade to estimate learning outcome; and
- maintaining an effective two-way communication between the institution, the teacher and the taught and also among the peer groups.

Hence, distance education is a highly specialized branch of education requiring a special set of skills and attitude on the part of teachers (instructors) who take to distance teaching and function at any of the different levels in the system, such as: course designing, course developing, course production, tutoring, counselling, evaluation, etc.

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### 3.3 ORGANISATION OF FACE-TO-FACE SESSIONS

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Local support centres or study centres are the best places to provide face-to-face sessions, which you had read about in Block 1, Unit 4. The distance learners are informed well in advance about the specific period and place where the face-to-face sessions are to be held. The distance education institutes/open universities differ widely with respect to the number of face-to-face sessions organised by them for each course during the academic session.

Also as regards the frequency of face-to-face sessions in the time and interval with which they are organised, the institutions again adopt different policies.

Open universities mostly organise limited face-to-face sessions throughout the academic session on weekends or holidays in the evening hours whereas personal contact programmes are mostly organised by correspondence course institutes during the end of the academic session, in order to prepare the learners with the end of the course examination.

To give you some insights with regard to the organisation of face-to-face sessions in distance education, we think it appropriate to take you through a case study of personal contact programmes being organised at correspondence course institutes (CCIs) attached to conventional Indian Universities. It is a well known fact that these CCIs rely heavily on face-to-face sessions for tutoring distance learners. We have also included a study on the learners' opinion on counselling sessions. These learners are enrolled at one of the Regional Centres of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), India.

### 3.3.1 Personal contact programmes: A case study of correspondence course institutes (CCIs) of India

The study conducted by H.C.S. Rathore has made an attempt to look at the adequacy and the relevance of the face-to-face sessions popularly known as personal contact programmes (PCPs) organised at 14 CCIs. He also surveyed the perceptions of the learners and staff of these institutes. Two hundred learners were selected from 14 CCIs.

Now let us look into the findings of the study under various headings.

#### *Organisation of PCPs*

In principle as per the UGC guidelines a PCP is required to be held at places wherever there is a concentration of more than 200 learners. It may be noted that most of the institutions were not able to abide by it for reasons like unavailability of an institution willing to host the programme; lack of funds; lack of expertise in the city in question; lack of accommodation for learners etc. The CCIs also differed widely with respect to the number of PCPs organised by them for each course during the academic session; the frequency of PCPs, the venue of PCPs and nature of participation at PCPs. Mostly the CCIs did not have sufficient staff to conduct PCPs. Thus they had to hire experts from local colleges or universities. 71.42% of the institutions hired experts to conduct PCPs.

#### *Aims of PCPs*

All the correspondence institutes organised the PCPs mainly for formally teaching the course contents to their learners — this is the main aim behind organizing the PCPs. The second priority was given to the aim of preparing learners for the coming final examination by 10 out of 14 institutions. Similar number of institutions used PCPs as platforms for removing learners' isolation and this was the third priority aim. It may be quite disheartening to a number of learners that the PCP sessions to remove their learning difficulties were held only by 9 institutions and they too gave only a fourth priority to the issue. Again, a very important aim behind organizing PCPs was to provide individualized tutoring and counselling to the learners; but surprisingly it came as a fifth priority aim and that too only in the case of 5 (i.e. 35.71%) institutions. The other aims too such as, to use PCPs as a platform for seminars and group discussions, to orient learners with distance teaching and learning methods etc., which are important to be achieved through PCPs. But this study reveals that they were almost neglected in the system of correspondence education in India.

#### *Suitability of the PCPs*

The study revealed that the venue of the PCPs suited 65.51% of the learners. Similarly in the case of 59.21%, the PCPs were organized during the time when they really needed them, but this was not the case for 40.78% of the learners. As regards the suitability of the activities during the PCPs, 65.68% of the learners were satisfied with the quality of the organized activities and only 34.31% were not satisfied with them.

#### *Academic value of PCPs*

82.74% of the learners reported that they benefitted in their studies from the teaching given during the PCPs, and barely 17.25% reported that they did not benefit from the formal teaching during the PCPs. 33.9% of the learners wanted participation in the PCPs to be made voluntary. Although the PCPs were considered worth the time and money spent to attend them by 61.77% of the learners, almost an equal number of learners felt that sufficient time during PCPs was not given to enable them to individually consult the teachers to discuss their academic problems. Perhaps this is the reason why every second learner felt that PCPs did not serve the purpose of removing their academic problems. However, on the basis of these findings it was clear that on the whole PCPs are beneficial to the learners.

(Extract from an article by H.C.S. Rathore (1995), *Personal Contact Programmes of Correspondence Course Institutes in India, An Evaluation*, published in *IJOL*, Vol. No. 1, p. 15-21. Reproduced with the permission of the editor of *IJOL* and the author.)

## Check Your Progress 2

How have you benefitted from the face-to-face sessions organised by your institution?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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### Some Observations

- From Rathore's study (1995) of PCPs organized at CCIs attached to conventional Indian universities, it is clear that: PCPs are a compulsory component of the teaching learning process. The learning materials supplied to learners are supplemented by teaching through PCPs. The stress is more on spoon feeding i.e., teaching the course content (through lectures) rather than using PCPs for interaction and solving problems of distance learners.
- Majority of the learners have viewed them positively. Hence the general notion that distance learners being adults and generally employed, are independent and do not prefer any kind of compulsion to participate in PCPs. But from this study it is obvious that the same cannot be said of the Indian learners. Rathore (1995) has also pointed out in his study that the probable reason for this is that most of the learners studying at these CCIs were dropouts from conventional system who failed to get admission in the conventional system. Their traditional habits of being taught by a teacher in a classroom situation dominated their thinking and hence their preference for more compulsory face-to-face sessions. Also the unemployed learners would view their study as full time work. Barely 33% of the learners expressed that PCPs should be made optional as they were probably the employed or adult learners. They could also include those persons who are residing in rural and remote areas, who found it cumbersome and expensive to attend PCPs organized continuously over a period of 7-14 days at a few places. Above all, it should not be forgotten that PCPs are utilized for imparting instruction (course content). Hence the learners have no other alternative but to view them positively.
- Every second learner felt that PCPs did not serve the purpose of removing their doubts and clarifying their problems. Therefore, in their suggestions the learners have expressed their need for individualized tutoring. Since PCPs are utilised mainly for imparting instruction, there is no provision of tutoring and counselling as in the case of counselling

sessions organised by open universities. In fact, counselling sessions are utilised mainly for providing problem solving and developmental counselling to distance learners and not for imparting instruction.

- The learners had also suggested that PCPs should have been conducted at least 3 to 4 times in a year and should be completed at least 2 months before the examinations were held. This reflects on the need and importance of spreading out the support provided through PCPs throughout the academic year instead of providing it only at one time of the year and at a few places as is being done in the case of counselling sessions organised by open universities.
- The learners' suggestion that necessary accommodation for outstation learners need to be arranged by the institution at subsidized rates, indicated that the venue of the PCPs was not suitable for many learners. The places where PCPs are conducted are limited, there is a need to increase the access points for the learners by the institution when PCPs are conducted.

### Check Your Progress 3

In your opinion should participation in face-to-face sessions be made compulsory?

- Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
ii) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

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### 3.3.2 Learner opinion of counselling sessions: a case study of IGNOU

A study was undertaken by Srivastava, Reddy and Fulzele (1996), on counselling organised by IGNOU. The major objectives of the study were to examine the:

- pattern of attendance at counselling sessions;
- usefulness of counselling sessions;
- reasons for not attending counselling sessions;
- activities undertaken at counselling sessions;
- preparations made by students before attending counselling sessions.

Although the study was conducted in 1995, the universe of the study included the 2036 learners enrolled at IGNOU Regional Centre for the post-graduate and undergraduate level programmes in the year 1992. Deliberately 1992 batch learners had been selected

as they had been in the system for over 2 years and therefore their opinion would be more valuable than the freshly enrolled learners. Using the random sampling method 25% of the learners were selected for the study giving due representation to women, rural residents. Let us now look at the findings of this study.

#### *Pattern of attendance at counselling sessions*

62.5% of the respondents had attended counselling sessions. Age-wise analysis showed that the participation in counselling sessions was cent percent in the case of learners who were in the age group of above 60 years, 80% in the 46-60 years, 66.7% in the below 25 years age group and 54.5% in the 26-45 years age group. The percentage of women and men who had attended counselling sessions was identical i.e., 62.5%. However, only 50% of the rural residents attended counselling sessions.

#### *Usefulness of counselling sessions*

39.7% of the respondents found the sessions useful, 39.0% to some extent useful and 21.3% not at all. The respondents had given highest rating to the point relating to meeting with fellow learners at sessions which created more enthusiasm to complete the course on time viz., 45.3%. The next point i.e., counselling sessions encouraged further readings and increased the interest in the course (32.8%) as an important reason, for attending sessions. 29.7% found the sessions useful because of the fruitful discussions at counselling sessions on assignments, 28% of the respondents found it useful because of the audio-visual aids used by the Counsellors, 23.4% said that their doubts were clarified; 29.1% found the discussions comprehensive; 20.3% felt the sessions covered more content than was given in the lesson, scripts/units and 26.6% were happy at the convenient time chosen for the sessions.

Interestingly, all the respondents of the above 45 years age groups have found the sessions useful whereas 75% of the below 25 years and 57.6% of the 26-45 years age groups have found them useful. The responses of the rural and urban group was almost identical viz., 67.2% urban and 66.7% rural respondents had found counselling sessions useful. More men (70%) as compared to women (62.5%) had found the sessions useful.

#### *Reasons for not attending counselling sessions*

The respondents who had not attended counselling sessions had also given their reasons for not attending the sessions. 45.3% had expressed that they could not attend sessions as the study centre was too far away for them to attend sessions; 29.7% could not attend due to demands of full employment; 21.9% found that the sessions were not upto the mark, 21.9% had no difficulty with the SIMs, 17.2% could not attend due to family duties; 14.1% felt that the counsellors were not well-versed with the SIMs; 10.9% due to inconvenience of tutorial time and 7.8% due to financial difficulties could not attend the sessions.

The major reasons given by the urban respondents (44.8%) for not attending sessions was that the study centre was located too far away though the centre was located within the city itself. The rural respondents (50%) had also given the same reason. In addition, to that 50% of them also felt that they had no difficulty with regard to the SIMs. 37.5% women felt that the study center was too far away, 32.5% said that they could not attend sessions due to demands of full employment and 25% of the women respondents could not attend due to family duties.

#### *Activities during contact/counselling sessions*

It is interesting to note that 50% of the respondents had mentioned in the questionnaire that they listened to lecture/discussion and even took notes whereas 15.6% only listened to the lecture/discussion, 46.9% participated in the sessions by asking questions, 45.3% by participating in the group discussions, 40.6% by talking to their peer group, 35.9% by watching video cassettes and 15.6% by listening to audio cassettes. 50% of rural and urban respondents had taken notes during the discussions but in all other aspects the urban respondents had been more participative than their rural counterparts. Sexwise analysis shows that men had been more participative than women, except for one activity of taking notes in the sessions where the ratio is fifty-fifty.

### *Preparations of distance learners for attending counselling sessions*

The active participation of the distance learners at counselling sessions is directly linked to the preparations they made before coming to the sessions. 54.7% of the respondents read the relevant course materials before coming to a session; 48.4% attempted the self-check exercises before coming to the session; and 39.1% brought the list of questions they wanted to ask.

All the learners in the age group 46-60 years had gone through the relevant course materials, attempted all the self-check exercises but only 40% had listed the questions to be clarified. The oldest age group i.e., above 60 years, only 50% had read the SIMs, had done the self-check exercises and listed out their doubts before coming to the session. The response of the below 25 years age group is also quite similar. There is no noticeable difference in the response of the rural and urban respondents. Sexwise analysis shows more than men (60%) had read the SIMs than the women (45.8%) before attending the session. But interestingly more women had attempted the self-check exercises than the men in terms of percentage. But it is the reverse in relation to listing of questions before coming to the sessions.

*(Extract from excerpts of the study published as an article by Manjulika, S., Reddy, Venugopal, V. and Fulzele (1996). Student Opinion of Counselling: The Experience of Indira Gandhi National Open University, IJOL, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 19-29. Reproduced with the permission of the editor of IJOL.)*

### **Some Observations**

- The study conducted on counselling sessions at IGNOU (1996) (an open university), has brought out the fact that all learners had not attended counselling sessions. In the previous case study of CCIs this point of attendance was not raised as PCPs are a compulsory component. Whereas at IGNOU or, for that matter, at any other open university, it is not compulsory for learners to attend counselling sessions. Hence 37.5% of the learners did not attend counselling sessions.
- Since counselling sessions are conducted at study centers, which are located in urban areas, barely 50% of the rural residents attend counselling sessions. 45% of the learners who did not attend counselling sessions said that they could not do so because of the distance of the study center. The university therefore needs to set up more centers in rural areas to facilitate the learners living in rural areas. It could also provide/make alternative arrangements for providing counselling support by making use of the new telecommunication technologies available for reaching out to all parts of the country.
- Nearly 80% of the respondents found the counselling sessions useful. The major reason mentioned by them is the opportunity it gave them to meet and discuss with their peer group which not only motivated them but also increased their interest in their course. Also through individualized tutoring and counselling many of their doubts were clarified.
- The active participation of over 50% learners in the counselling sessions reveals the preparations that they must have made before attending the counselling sessions. Since counselling sessions are not lecture sessions like PCPs, the learners are expected to have read the self-learning materials provided to them before coming to the counselling session. The counselling session is to be utilized for clarifying doubts, reinforcing learning, improving study skills and finding solutions to the problems/hindrances coming in the way of successfully completing the course.

- On the other hand more than 40% of the learners had not read the relevant study materials before attending counselling sessions. It is therefore necessary to make induction programs compulsory for new entrants. Distance learners need to be familiarized with the *modus operandi* of the distance education system, particularly the integrated role of counselling sessions in the teaching-learning process.
- Identification and appointment of the right academic counsellors is equally important as it has a long term impact on the system. In order to make the counselling sessions more interactive and beneficial to the learners, counsellors/tutors should be trained. Since most of the counsellors/tutors are teachers in the conventional system, they are not familiar with their tasks and responsibilities about which you have read in Unit 1 of this Block.
- In the next section you will be reading more about the role of counsellors/tutors who are responsible for handling face-to-face counselling sessions. Before you go to section 3.4, you may do the check your progress exercise that is given below.

#### Check Your Progress 4

Do you attend counselling sessions regularly? If yes, what are the reasons that make you to attend counselling sessions. If no, what are the reasons. Explain.

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### 3.4 THE ROLE OF SUPPORT SERVICES STAFF

*Conscientious counsellors/tutors plan things to do at a face-to-face session. Ideally, in a face-to-face session all the learners should be involved. There are all sorts of ways of doing this, all of which depends on breaking down the initial formality of the atmosphere and allowing even the shyest in the group not to feel threatened or pressurized. It helps a lot to seat the learners in a circle rather than in rows. That stops people at the back being excluded*

or cut off. If everyone in the group can see each other's facial expression, the group soon becomes more relaxed.

It is important to always regard the processes as much more important than the context. Processes such as questioning, sharing ideas, discussing, and solving problems contribute to the learning process. If the counsellor/tutor were merely to provide a long lecture, there is no guarantee that effective learning would occur.

Some learners may be quite shy in face-to-face sessions. If the whole group is asked a question, the same one or two voices would reply. It would be uncomfortable for the shyest learners if they were forced to give their views. An easy way out is the use of brainstorming sessions in the group.

Everyone may be given a question to answer on a slip of paper or a post-it. Learners after writing their answers may stick or post it on the wall and all of them can then look at each others responses. This method of 'joining in' is much kinder to shy learners and allows them to participate equally. In fact their contributions are often better than those from the one or two learners who would have answered all the questions orally (Race, 1994).

There are several other group learning techniques that can be used such as buzz sessions, debates, seminars, brainstorming, panel discussion, etc.

It is more helpful to highlight the responsibilities of staff who will normally be locally-based Academic Counsellors as:

- to respond on the assignments to the dialogue initiated by the learner in their written work and to assess that work;
- to foster further discussion in face-to-face sessions at the Study Centres;
- to respond to learners' queries and/or confusions about the course material;
- to assist learners to become independent learners by helping them to develop sound study skills appropriate to distance education;
- to encourage and support learners' when they reach barriers to learning or points of decision, e.g. at the start of the course, the first assignment and the examination;
- to maintain adequate records, interpret the institution's regulations and to liaise with supervisory staff.

This is a different role from that of conventional face-to-face educators and it can be highlighted further by stressing the differences. Some of these are:

- teaching a course designed and written by other people;
- making greater use of a multi-media system;
- much greater concern with study skills in a novel way of studying;
- possibly dealing with older learners who have a wider range of experience and higher motivation;
- possible tensions between the roles of counsellor and assessor.

*This is a novel role offering new challenges and making different demands on academic staff and to take it on with a positive approach can be exciting. The institution itself needs to be clear in its expectations of its staff. It needs to:*

- *provide a clear description of duties and procedures;*
- *establish a clear contractual position;*
- *provide well thought out and comprehensive briefing and training.*

*Very often staff providing academic and counselling support in areas remote from the centre will be recruited from the staff of other institutions on a part-time basis. This can be beneficial to the distance education institution as it can involve experienced educationists who will, hopefully, find that their fresh experience with distance education provides new insights in their full-time jobs. It is also our experience that graduates not currently working in education have a lot to offer, particularly if the work becomes their major professional outlet. We shall not look at a few examples of the role and functions of tutor counsellors at UKOU and IGNOU.*

### **3.4.1 Role of Tutors and Tutor Counsellors at the UKOU**

*A brief check list of the tasks performed by the learner support staff at the UKOU includes (Kaye & Rumble 1981):*

*a) commenting on written work sent in*

- grading written work submitted;*
- assisting learners to understand course materials through discussion;*
- conducting discussions face-to-face or occasionally by telephone;*
- organising self help groups of learners;*
- providing feedback on course materials and learner problems to full-time staff;*

*b) answering learner queries about the system*

- helping learners plan their work;*
- negotiating with the institution on behalf of learners when problems occur;*
- advising applicants if required;*
- inducting new learners into the course;*
- advising learners on course choice;*
- giving guidance on problems of an administrative nature such as fee payment, late submission of work;*
- helping learners develop study skills.*

*This is a fairly comprehensive list of requirements for any distance education support service. In the UKOU, two categories of staff are recruited to carry out these functions and in UK terminology they are*

entitled *Tutor and Tutor Counsellor*. Their relationship with the learner is shown in the diagram below:

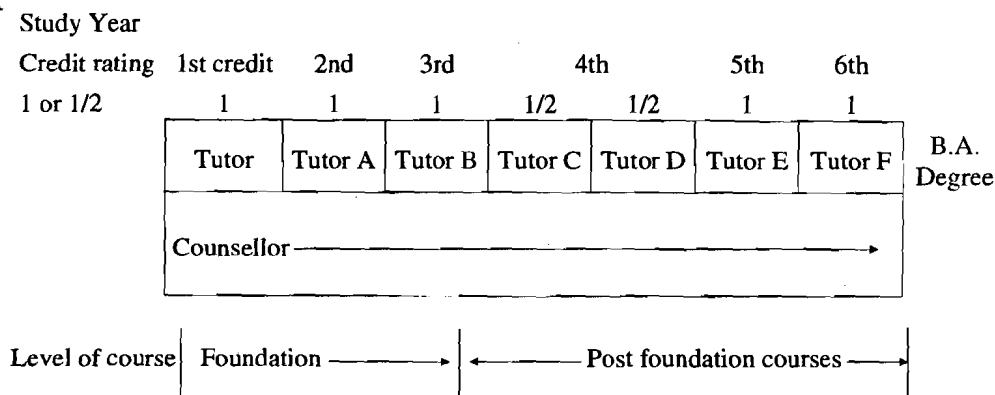


**Fig. 3.1: Responsibilities of Tutor Counsellors and Tutors**

The tutors carry out all the tasks listed above the gap in the checklist [see part (a) of the check list above] and are specialists in the subject taught by the course. The tutor counsellors teach one of the five foundation courses all learners start with and they also concern themselves with the educational support matters listed below the gap [see part (b) of the checklist above]. The university allocates greater resources to foundation course support as it recognises that learners need most help in the first year of distance education. As the diagram shows, the tutor counsellor continues to act as educational advisor [the duties listed under (b) above] throughout a learner's study life, providing continuity of contact.

There has been some debate in recent years about the continuing role of the Tutor Counsellor, and some staff advocate moving to a model similar to that of IGNOU, whereby all duties are carried out by one member of staff namely the academic counsellor.

A diagram showing the complexity of the Learner Support System is given below (Fig. 3.2).

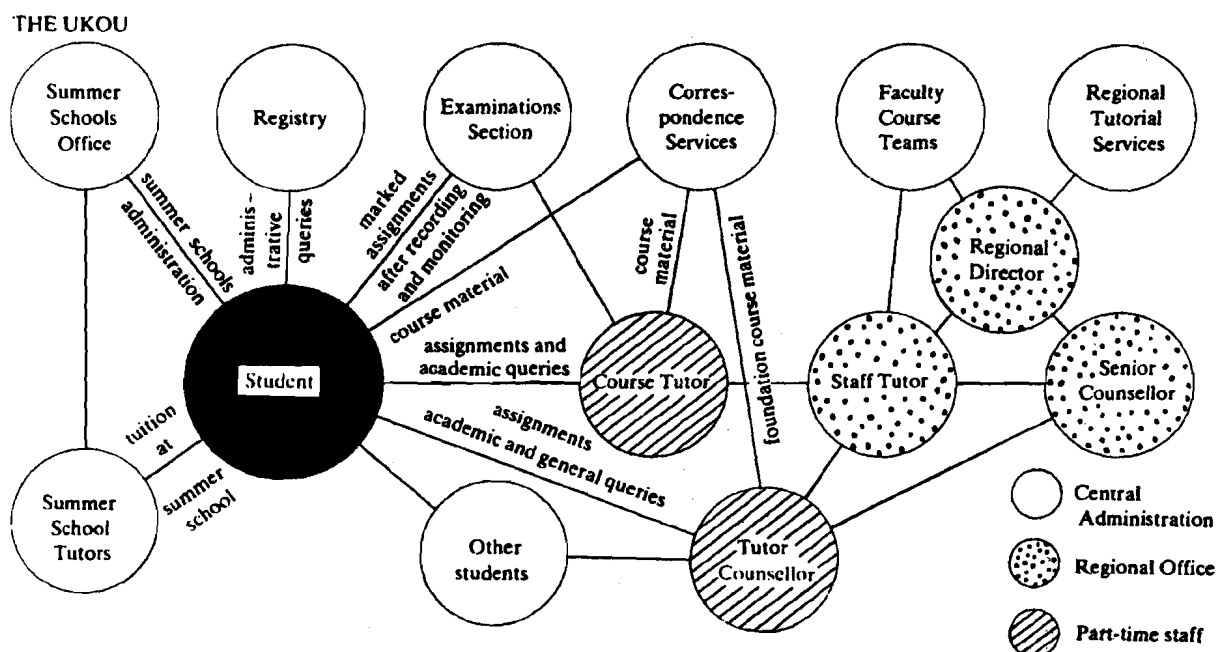


**Fig. 3.2: Communication within the University**

*This concludes the description of a large relatively well resourced system in a densely populated country. In the next section we will study the rôle and functions of an Academic Counsellor at the IGNOU.*

### **Check Your Progress 5**

- a) Which of the following functions are likely to be performed at the Institution's Headquarters and which at the Study Centre:
- 1 run a computer terminal induction session for learners.
  - 2 organise a staff briefing and training session.
  - 3 arrange an end of term learner party.
  - 4 publish and distribute the Study Centre handbook.
  - 5 appoint a new part-time Academic-counsellor.
  - 6 revise the Study Centre financial payments.
- b) Which of the following do you think are not the Academic Counsellor's responsibility:
- 1 replacing a missing page from a course book.
  - 2 agreeing a timetable for assignments to be submitted late by a sick learner.
  - 3 guaranteeing a loan for a learner.
  - 4 devoting some time to questions and answers about examination problems.
  - 5 helping a learner who wants you to witness his signature on a paper.

**Notes:** i) Write your answer in the space provided.

ii) -Check your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- a)
1. ....
  2. ....
  3. ....
  4. ....
  5. ....
- b)
- 1 Yes/No
  - 2 Yes/No
  - 3 Yes/No
  - 4 Yes/No
  - 5 Yes/No

*[Sections 3.4 and 3.4.1 were contributed by Derek Spencer, Senior Counsellor, Southern Region, UKOU and are taken from the unrevised version of Unit 3 of Block 2 of Course ES-313.]*

### 3.4.2 Role and functions of academic counsellors at the IGNOU

As you already know, most of the learners who freshly enter the open system require general counselling to a large extent along with a small component of tutoring. This combination of general counselling and tutoring is known as academic counselling at the IGNOU and the person who offers academic counselling is called an academic counsellor.

As a general counsellor he/she is supposed to orient learners to learn at a distance, familiarise them with the system, and try to help them overcome their non-academic problems that are hindering their process of learning. As a tutor he/she assumes a role of a subject specialist where the emphasis is on dealing with problems related to the subject.

An academic counsellor is supposed to understand his/her partnership role allied with technology and has to make use of appropriate interventions of non-print media in order to facilitate the teaching learning process. Such as use of audio cassette recorders, video cassette recorders (both are available at the IGNOU study centres) during face-to-face counselling sessions; telephones; teleconferencing (available at limited study centres but at all Regional Centres); and more recently computers.

The role of an academic counsellor depends on the programme for which he/she is allotted. For instance, in the Bachelor's Preparatory Programme counsellor's responsibilities involve dealing with learners who have to be acquainted with study and mathematical skills likewise, the main role of a counsellor dealing with the Bachelor's Degree Programme (Foundation Course) is to foster confidence in the learner and to advise him/her to improvise on the aspects he/she is already familiar with. The change in approach of the counsellor between these two categories is primarily because of the difference in the nature of the learner needs; the former category consists of those who had no formal education, whereas those entering the Foundation Course stream are those who have had either a formal higher secondary school exposure or should have presumably prior acquaintance with the IGNOU's learning scheme in their BPP. On the other hand, a counsellor of the Management programme would be facing student participants who have had a good deal of work experience. However the basic responsibilities of the counsellor are the same to guide, to inform, to help and in short, to help the students to help themselves to make satisfactory progress in the system. Both the academic and personal needs of the learners have to be taken care of by the counsellor. The functions of an academic counsellor are as follows:

- Encourage the learner to keep contact through phone or correspondence and also have willingness to take the initiative to contact a learner.
- To guide learners how to make the best use of the library provided by the University at the Study Centre.
- To find during the contact programmes whether the learner has completed the self assessment tests given to him/her in the print media and provide feedback to enable the learner to know in which aspects of learning he/she is weak.
- To familiarise the learners with general study skills & even listening to their personal problems.

- Initiate discussion with a view to helping the learner consider all the relevant factors and reach a decision.
- The counsellor should be a friend rather than a teacher. Inherent in this new role is an element of advising which the counsellor would perform.

#### Major Functions of Academic Counsellors of the IGNOU

| <i>Counselling</i>                       | <i>Tutoring</i>                                      | <i>Use of Multimedia</i>                              | <i>Assessment &amp; Evaluation</i>                   |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| (helping overcome learning difficulties) | (helping to achieve satisfactory academic standards) | (making appropriate interventions of non-print media) | (give feedback and establishing interpersonal links) |

Another very important responsibility entrusted to an academic counsellors is that of grading a learner's assignment response and writing tutor comments on the assignment response. These tutor comments should be positive and constructive. The comments should keep up the morale of the learner. At the same time these comments should also provide distance tuition (teaching) to the distance learner.

#### Check Your Progress 6

Can you list out the specific tasks of an academic counsellor of the IGNOU?

- Notes:** (i) Write your answer in the space given below.  
(ii) Compare your answer with the one at the end of the unit.

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Thus the basic requirements of an effective academic counsellor are:

- Good knowledge of the course he/she is taking up for counselling.
- He/she should have a genuine and sustained interest in the learner as a learner and also as a person.
- An ability to observe accurately and empathize: i.e. looking and listening carefully to what a learner says, and putting himself/herself in the learner's place so as to understand his/her problems sincerely.

- A thorough knowledge about the University which enables him/her to help the learners achieve their goals without much disruption.

At IGNOU the concerned school, that designs the programme of study, decides on the academic qualifications and experience required of a suitable academic counsellor for its programme. Thus for each programme there is an eligibility criterion with regard to the selection of academic counsellors.

A two day orientation programme is normally arranged for the newly appointed academic counsellors at the regional centre utilising the services of resource persons from concerned schools at headquarters, academic staff from the regional centre and distance education experts drawn locally or from other regional centres/headquarters. These trained academic counsellors have these basic responsibilities to perform at the study centre as (a) informer (b) counsellor, and (c) evaluator.

In order to maintain standards, the university monitors the performance of academic counsellors through various mechanisms: namely monthly reports of study centres, visits of IGNOU centre staff to study centres, and monitoring 2% of the evaluated assignments by the faculty members of the concerned school.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have sought to draw your attention to the factors responsible for the provision of face-to-face sessions in distance education and the aims and purposes they serve. We have also given you a glimpse of the organisation of face-to-face sessions and the role of support services staff involved in providing this type of support.

#### **Check Your Progress: Possible Answers**

**1**

In your answer to this question you will have considered the factors responsible for the provision of face-to-face sessions in distance education. We are sure you would have considered all the key factors listed below:

- human factor in distance education
- need to break the isolation of the distance learner
- need to cater to the learners' needs which are infinite
- need to impart instruction and provide individualised tutoring and counselling.

**2**

Your own experiences are to be stated in order to answer this question. We list here some key points, but we hope you have thought of some more:

- your isolation was removed

- your academic and non-academic problems were removed/partially resolved
- you were encouraged to discuss your problems
- you benefitted from interaction with the counsellor and your peers (fellow learners)
- you were encouraged to make better and effective use of the facilities provided at your study centre
- you felt motivated to complete the course on time.

3

Your own ideas are required to answer this question. You would have felt that face-to-face sessions should either be made compulsory or they should be voluntary. Depending upon your choice you would have also given reasons for the same.

4

Your own opinion and experiences are required to answer this question. If you are attending counselling sessions, you would have spelt out the benefits that you have derived from counselling sessions. In case you are not attending counselling sessions, you would have given your reasons for the same.

5

- a) At the headquarters 2, 4, 5, 6 (all administrative functions). At the study centre 1, 3 (learner involved activities)
- b) Ideally the central despatch department should see to this; 2 and 4 are clear responsibilities; 3 is a personal matter and not for you; 5 is a difficult one as you might help as an individual, but you have no duty to do so.

6

Specific tasks of an academic counsellor of IGNOU:

- initiating learners into distance learning
- guiding the self learning in a desirable direction
- identifying mislearning and undoing the same
- providing non-print instructional interventions
- promoting and sustaining learner motivation
- identifying person specific problems and helping to overcome learning handicaps
- providing distance tuition (teaching) through tutor comments on assignment responses
- grading learners' assignments.

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