UNIT 10  COUNSELLING AND TUTORING IN TEACHING AT A DISTANCE

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10.0 INTRODUCTION

Yourself being a distance learner you must have experienced the problems associated with absence of a classroom situation, the quasi-permanent separation from your institution, teachers and fellow learners. Also you are aware that, in order to minimise the negative impact of this physical separation on the one hand and to provide you an opportunity to come closer to your teacher / institution both psychologically and academically on the other, various support services have been devised and offered in the open and distance education system. The very purpose of these support services you have experienced till date is to make you feel that you are neither alone nor helpless during the period of your study. You are a member of a well-organised distance education institution which is ready to help you whenever you need help in order to complete your studies smoothly and successfully.

In this unit, you will therefore understand the essential learning support services provided to you in making your learning easy, effective and comfortable.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- justify the need for student support services in distance learning;
- explain the significance of personal contact programmes or face-to-face interaction for distance learners;
• describe the ways of organising counselling sessions for distance learners.
• appreciate the role of assignments in continuous assessment of learning in ODE;
• analyse the implications of tutor-comments for distance learning;
• describe the qualities and skills of academic counselor / tutor in ODE; and
• discuss the role of media in counselling and tutoring in ODE.

10.2 COUNSELLING IN ODE

The idea behind student support in ODE is that there must be a real dialogue between the teacher and the learner as it can enhance confidence and self-learning among the learners. Geographical distance should not matter much if the teacher/institution provides the mental, emotional and academic link between the learner and the institution/teacher through various means and sources. The learner, who is learning independently, may feel deprived of support from the teacher/institution and may feel isolated, helpless and even de-motivated sometimes, particularly when he/she faces a problem in learning. Therefore, there must be some arrangement to provide assistance to the learner who is geographically far from the institution/teacher to address his/her felt needs and enable him/her to overcome the problems.

You will agree that to be an active member of the society all of us need help and cooperation from each other to solve our problems. During your studies for so many years till date, you must have felt helpless many times when you had to take some important decisions regarding certain do’s and don’ts in various situations. And, you must have sought help from some persons who were more experienced and cooperative. These are not part of institutional support or services.

In ODE, student support services are provided through a large network of study centres which are linked with the headquarters/main institution through the regional centres. At the study centres counselling is organized for learners. Counselling is an important aspect of student support services. Let us understand what it is.

10.2.1 Concept of Counselling

In an academic set up also, whether conventional or distance education, a teacher helps students academically and non-academically by providing various bits of information about institutional rules, regulations, various administrative decisions, procedures and so on related to admissions, programmes, examinations, etc. The following are the major activities a teacher generally performs.

• Teaching : Lecturing, providing feedback, evaluation
• Administration : Action, advocacy, assessment
• Counselling : Informing, advising, counselling

From the above categorization, it is clear that counselling is an assistance given to the students to solve their problems, among other things. This assistance may be in the form of providing general information, giving advice on appropriate courses of action or helping the students to meet their needs, or solve their problems related to their study. In a broader sense, counselling constitutes all the three activities, i.e. informing, advising, and counselling altogether. The only difference between informing and counselling is that high level of information skills are needed in providing information to the students whereas in counselling high level of interpersonal skills are needed. Informing
is knowledge-dependent whereas counselling is student-dependent or student-specific. Advising is dependent on both knowledge and students. In other words, advising is somewhere between giving information and counselling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check Your Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> a) Write you answer in the space given below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Imagine that you are a teacher in a distance education institution answering questions from students. What kind of response would you make to each case mentioned below – whether informing, advising or counselling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Can you suggest me a good way to increase my power of concentration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Can I give the examination without submitting any assignments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) What are the rules of examination?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) I cannot sit for the exams — I am terrified of the exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.......................................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v) I do not find it easy studying independently. What is the appropriate way of reading through self-instructional materials?</td>
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<tr>
<td>.......................................................................................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi) Can I submit the assignments after the stipulated time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>.......................................................................................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher must be clear about the difference between teaching and counselling. Teaching is course-centred, and the communication starts from the teacher to the learner. A classroom teacher must be a good talker, effective presenter of the content, etc. Contrary to this, counselor must be able to give advice to the students. It is purely student-centred. Here, the communication starts from the learner and the counsellor responds. If you want to become a good counsellor, you should know very well that art of listening, as a counselor must be a very good listener too.

10.2.2 Genesis, Need and Significance of Counselling

Counselling was introduced formally in DE system in 1984. The International Council of Distance Education (ICDE) and British Open University held a joint Conference on counselling in 1984 followed by second conference in 1987. After that the British Open University (UKOU) developed a range of correspondence, video and face-to-face staff development materials including a section on counselling. Similarly, the Association of European Correspondence Schools has instituted a Diploma in Correspondence Education which also contains a counselling module.

Need and significance of counselling

Counselling is needed when a person tries to arrive at a decision, but fails. In such a situation, he/she needs somebody’s assistance to do the same. In the DE system, the decision-making may range from choice of courses, time, budgeting, preparation of
Counselling and Tutoring in Teaching at a Distance

assignments, betterment of grades, learning style best suited for independent study, etc. (Please be clear that it is not necessary that each and every distance learner needs counselling while working through the course material or studying through this mode. There are many students who are confident enough to take decisions on their own). But, in general, distance learners need help in taking decisions at various stages of their study.

Counselling is also needed when a student feels any kind of difficulty in the process of learning. The barriers may be related to the following problems:

![Diagram of barriers to learning]

**Barriers**
- Study Related
- Time Related
- Personnel Related
- Institution Related

*Fig. 10.1: Counselling on barriers to learning*

What is the significance of counselling in ODE? From the Fig.10.1 you may understand that there are various types of barriers which may affect the learner’s study process. These barriers may be study-related (completion of assignment, preparation for examination, etc.); time-related (planning of time, etc.); personal (health, family problems/mishaps in family, career/financial problems); and institutional (dealing in mailing, ill-suited rule/regulations). Besides, there are some extraneous barriers such as extra pressure of work, meager educational opportunity at home, etc. which act as barriers in the way of smooth learning. To overcome these barriers counselling is essential. Personality traits of learners also play an important role in overcoming the barriers. For some people these barriers are not very powerful, instead they feel like getting energy from the difficulties and they accept challenges in a heroic manner whereas there are some other learners who become anxious and worried, and they need assistance and intensive counselling to overcome these barriers.

Timely counselling will help them overcome their problems and have smooth progress in their studies. Otherwise, it will lead to frustration, stagnation and finally their withdrawal from the course of study or programme. Thus, counselling in ODE place paramount role in addressing various problems of the diverse groups of learners. The counselling is generally organized as short-duration sessions of two-three hours, depending upon the type of counselling service required for learners. They are popularly called personal contact programmes, in common parlance, though they are intended to provide academic counselling and tutoring as may be required for the distance learners.

Many students have the ability to solve their problems on their own. A self-reliant, self-confident and self-sufficient student generally does not need counselling. But, there are some other types of students who feel shy to admit that they cannot solve their problems. Similarly, there are others who may feel that their problem is so intense, acute and deep-rooted that nobody is able to solve it for them. Counselling is usually sought to solve the problems such as withdrawal from a course, evaluation patterns, career choice, study related issues, etc. Whether the students are women or men of any course, be it
Learner Support Services in ODE

In arts, science, social science, commerce, medicine, engineering or computers, they need counselling whenever they face such problems. A learner seeks counselling to arrive at a decision or to overcome certain barriers in learning. Particularly, every crucial problem in their study through the programme requires timely counselling. If they are not provided timely counselling they may suffer from certain adverse consequences for they may take wrong decisions.

**Significance of Personal Contact Programmes:** Distance learners differ from the conventional learner as they study independently without having the opportunity to interact with their teachers and peer group regularly. The positive side of this self-study however, is that the learners can continue their study without any pressure or interference of time, pace, quality, and rules and can in turn become self-confident, self-reliant and more knowledgeable. The negative side of this freedom is that the learners have to do each and every thing to solve their problems on their own. This situation generates the feeling of loneliness, helplessness, de-motivation in the distance learner and in turn affects his/her learning pace and ability. To avoid these problems, it is important to have a place where the learners can enjoy the facility of interacting with the teacher as well as the peer group in face-to-face situation. This type of contact may help learners cognitively (solving the course content related problems) as well as effectively (solving their psychological problems to some extent). Thus, personal contact programmes provide opportunity to distance learners to feel at home academically as well as personally. During the contact programme, the distance learner may exploit the opportunity of viewing course related video cassettes, listening audio cassettes, interacting with the counsellor as well as peer group, going through the text as well as reference books to get in-depth knowledge of the subject and so on.

The significance of personal contact programme, particularly in teacher education, is very well recognised by many of the distance learning institutions all over the world. We cite some universities where personal contact programmes are being organised in a very effective manner at their study centres: The National Correspondence College of Zambia; The University Sains Malaysia (USM); UK Open University; Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand; and Indira Gandhi National Open University, Kota Open University, Yashvantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University in India. These examples of some of the universities in India and abroad, would have helped you in appreciating the significance of personal contact of distance learners with their tutor and counselor as well as their fellow students in ODE system.

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**Check Your Progress**

**Note:**

a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

2) i) What is counselling?

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10.2.3 Types and Stages of Counselling

When a distance teacher provides assistance in decision-making at various stages of learning the counselling is called developmental counselling. When the distance learner seeks counselling to overcome his barriers or problems, it is called problem-solving counselling. The types and stages of counselling are inter-connected. To understand this interconnection between the types and stages of counselling, let us discuss the problem-solving counselling first.

Problem-solving counselling

Please go through the Table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Problem-solving Counselling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Example of Barrier</th>
<th>A Problem related with the Barrier</th>
<th>Probable response of the Counsellor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Illness, ageing, work pressure, emotional imbalance, etc.</td>
<td>I am finding it hard to complete the assignment due to ill health.</td>
<td>He may advise the learner to go to a better skilled person like doctor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Related</td>
<td>Developing appropriate study habits, assignment submission, visiting library, etc.</td>
<td>Whenever I study I feel that nothing retains in my mind.</td>
<td>He checks the anxiety level of the learner first and then advises him to acquire suitable study skills and habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution Related</td>
<td>Dealing with system breakdowns, unsuccessful appeals, dissatisfaction with evaluation, etc.</td>
<td>I am sorry to say that I could not get back the checked assignment yet.</td>
<td>Here first the anxiety level of the student should be checked and then he/she explains relevant rules and procedure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Related</td>
<td>Organising, structuring, and prioritizing time</td>
<td>I am not finding much time to complete the assignment</td>
<td>Here motivation of the learner should be checked first and then help in tailoring time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Related</td>
<td>Essay writing, skill of writing within the stipulated word limit, examination anxiety.</td>
<td>I am seriously thinking of not appearing in the examination.</td>
<td>Here check the anxiety level and then give tips on doing assignments on priority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learner Support Services in ODE

From Table 10.1, you might have understand various barriers that make the learner helpless and how a counsellor should be intelligent and mature enough to handle the student’s problems.

**Developmental counselling**

There are, however, various decision-points at different stages, which demand help in arriving at any conclusion. These decision-points may range across various stages from initiating the courses to withdrawal from the course(s). Some of the decision points, issues related to particular point, problems that the learners may raise can be understood by going through the table presented in Table 10.2.

**Table 10.2: Decision Points Requiring Problem-Solving Counselling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision point</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Example of problems/issues raised</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-entry</td>
<td>Preparatory advice, entry requirement, course information, time allocation, motive classification, etc.</td>
<td>Please send me the list of courses run by the institution. I wanted to look at them before joining the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>Orientation to study at a distance, study skill, institutional requirements, preparing assignments.</td>
<td>I feel difficulty in studying through self-instructional materials. I do not know whether I would be able to continue the studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Choice + Career Choice</td>
<td>Course information, recognition of courses, levels of difficulty, possibilities of employment, job hunting skill.</td>
<td>What are the prospects, if I join management courses run by the institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Clarifying reasons, helping to deal with the sense of frustration and disappointment, alternative courses.</td>
<td>I feel that I cannot proceed further with the studies as I am finding it extremely difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Classification of motives for study, re-motivating, relating motives to appropriate courses, organising and structuring time and social demand.</td>
<td>I become anxious sometimes thinking that this course will not help me in future to get a job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Tables 10.1 and 10.2 you must have developed clear understanding that counselling is devised to help the learner in overcoming his/her various barriers in taking decisions in the conflicting situations. As far as the stages of counselling is concerned, developmental counselling is done at each and every stage of learning.

We can also categorise counselling into two other types – academic and non-academic - depending upon its nature.

**Academic counselling:** It covers all courses and course-based topics. These topics may be related to selection of course at pre-entry stage, study habits, assignment preparation, learning styles and appearing in examinations, etc. The special feature of this type of counselling is that it always deals with specific pin-pointed problems, issues, etc. related to the programmes of study.
**Non-academic counselling:** The remaining assistance provided to the learner, which is not academic in nature, comes under the non-academic counselling. In other words, non-academic counselling deals with general, administrative and personal issues.

### Check Your Progress

**Note:**

a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

3) What category of counselling – academic or non-academic – might be appropriate in the following queries of issues?

i) Please inform me about the entry requirement for B.Ed course.

........................................................................................................

ii) I did not receive the checked assignment yet. Please inform me whether you received the assignment or not.

........................................................................................................

iii) Which type of course would be best suited for studying human resource development?

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iv) I am very much anxious about the forthcoming annual examination.

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v) Give me a few tips for organizing time for study.

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vi) I am finding it difficult to write assignment response.

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### 10.2.4 Organising Counselling

The organisation of counselling sessions is not an easy task. It needs a full-fledged and well-organised channel of communication, trained personnel and physical infrastructure. Counselling is the most lively aspect of student support services. It is done by a trained academic counsellor who is available at the study centre at specified timings to help/assist the learner if he/she is facing any personal, academic and non-academic problem or barrier in the process of learning. In order to offer effective counselling, a well-organized network of study centres, regional centres and the headquarters is necessary. Study centres are attached to the headquarters through regional centres. Study centres are the main work places of counsellors where they assist students through face-to-face interactions.

### 10.3 TUTORING IN ODE

You are aware that IGNOU uses print as main medium of instruction and the major part of teaching-learning takes place through SLPMs and assignments. This communication is all at a distance. Sometimes, it may take place even through writing of letters to the learners, talking on telephone, interaction through teleconferencing and radio, face-to-face counselling, computer-assisted teaching or through ‘guided didactic
10.3.1 Assignments Evaluation: Role of Tutor

One of the major differences between the conventional system and ODE system is that in the former the written work is primarily for correction, assessment and indicating progress of the learner and in the latter the most important function of the assignments is teaching and learning, rather than simply awarding grades/marks. In ODE assessment of assignments is simultaneously an act of teaching as well. The aim of the tutor should be to promote the learning by the learner. And the assessment through assignments is in the form of a dialogue between the tutor and the learner. It is the same academic counsellor who performs this role as a tutor. So, the most important task is to effectively teach through tutor comments. Therefore, the distance teacher should have a thorough understanding of how to write teaching-type comments on the assignment scripts to promote effective two-way communication between him/her and the learner.

A) Assignments evaluation: A two-way communication

The two-way communication through assignments evaluation in distance education generally serves the following purposes:

- Supports learner’s motivation and interest;
- Supports and facilitates student learning by enabling them to apply the knowledge and skills acquired from tutor’s comments, explanations and suggestions; and
- Assess students’ progress and provide them with an instrument by means of which the learners can judge their educational situation and needs.

Kulhavy (1977, p.229) states “there is little doubt that feedback works to increase what a person learns from an instructional unit”. To make teaching more effective through tutor comments, the right strategy should be to start with well written and positive points, then move on to indicate the weak points, omission, etc. in the answers. The comments should be concluded with an encouraging remark to keep the morale of the learners high. While writing the comments the tutor should be careful about such comments that may generate in the learners an adverse emotional reaction. The best quality of the tutor is to acknowledge the hard work, effort and considerable lengths of time the learner has invested in it.

To make teaching-learning interesting through the comments written on the assignment responses, the tutor will have to remind learners throughout the year to take time to learn from the comments and write back, in case something is not clear from the comments written by the tutor. It is important that the comments are written legibly to promote different levels of communication, so that the learners feels that their effort has been respected by the tutor.

B) Levels/Types of Communication

Teaching-learning depends on how better your communication is, particularly in the present age when there are different channels of communication. The levels of communication between the learner and the distance tutor are categorised mainly into the following three broad types:

- academic communication;
• personal (non-academic) communication; and
• supplemental communication.

i) Academic Communication

In academic communication, the tutor concentrates fully on writing the comments of only academic nature on assignment responses submitted by the learner. The tutor goes through the assignment and writes his/her comments on the assignment. These comments are based on the content given in a particular course. At the academic level, the distance tutor has to read the assignments with care and write comments on these assignments known as marginal comments and global comments, and award the grade for the assignments according to the information given in the assignment responses by the learner.

Whatever is being communicated between the distance tutor and the distance learner is at the academic level only. The comments written by the tutor communicate to the learner about the content, presentation, precision, expression and the planning of assignment response. The distance tutor, unlike a conventional teacher, has to address every student individually and the main means to do so is to write comments on the assignment responses. The task of writing academic comments on the assignments is much more difficult and challenging when compared with his/her counterpart in the face-to-face classroom teaching. Such task deserves great attention and patience. It should be the concern of the distance tutor to break isolation of the distance learners through his/her comments.

ii) Personal Communication

The personal communication is from the distance tutor to the distance learner in his/her personal capacity. With the help of personal comments a tutor can develop confidence in the learner. The distance tutor has to give a feeling that he/she is there to assist the learner in his/her studies in a personal manner. For this purpose, there has to be a non-academic level of tutor comments also, which will break the isolation of the learner and provide extra incentive/motivation and help. The personal comments which are different from academic communication should help the learner to continue with the course, and also to achieve the learning objectives. Personal comments will have to be well thought out, deliberate, precise and pedagogically purposeful.

iii) Supplemental Communication

This type of communication emerges out of academic and personal communication. This communication is possible from either side, i.e. from distance tutor or distance learner. The distance learner may like to ask the tutor about the comments written on the assignment responses or the grade/marks awarded to him/her on these assignment responses. Sometimes, the comments written on the assignments by the tutor may invite some questions. A tutor may also discover that some assignments are difficult and cannot be handled by the distance learners easily. Therefore, the tutor should prepare a supplemental communication in the form of model answers or notes to help the learners.

The distance learner may sometimes react strongly to the comments written by the tutor or even challenge the grade/marks awarded to him/her. The distance educator must explain his/her view point clarifying the issues to the learner. Therefore, the supplemental communication from the tutor should add to the credibility of the assessment scheme and also act as a teaching tool. This kind of interaction, rather
two-way communication, is bound to make learning more effective and motivate the learners to learn at a faster rate.

C) Functions of Tutor
A distance tutor performs the following three functions:

i) Reads the assignment-response of distance learner,
ii) Writes comments on the answers/assignment responses, and
iii) Evaluates the answers/responses by way of awarding a grade to it.

When the tutor reads the assignment-response of a learner, his/her likely comments are born of his/her attempt at correlating and comparing his/her own interpretation of a particular course-unit with the corresponding learner response in terms of both content and presentation. The content of the course-unit, the tutor’s own expertise in the field, the corresponding expertise of his/her colleagues, and his/her own idea of the ideal response (for a particular assignment) form the bases of his/her comments and the grades he/she awards. It should also be mentioned here that the tutor’s idea of the ideal response is a variable that is affected as much by his/her own views as by the range and variety of the assignment-responses he/she receives from different students.

Further, to distance teach effectively he/she must understand each and every student. Unlike a classroom teacher who addresses a collective mass of students, the distance teacher/tutor has to address every student individually. And a major means of addressing his/her students is to write comments on the assignment-responses.

The distance teacher/tutor must:

i) correct his/her student and guide him/her where he/she may have gone wrong,
ii) elaborate on what he/she may have attempted summarily,
iii) point out and confirm the acceptable aspects of his/her responses, and
iv) assess the level of his/her achievement and explain the basis of that assessment so as to ensure better student performance in future.

It is the duty of the tutor to repeat all the above mentioned tasks over and over again with every student. This certainly is a task that demands great attention, besides patience in writing a variety of comments appropriate to each of the assignment responses.

10.3.2 Types of Tutor Comments
The teaching comments and the supplemental communication from the Academic Counsellor / Tutor would help the learner understand two important points:

i) What is expected of the learners when they write their assignment responses?
ii) Whether the grades/marks given by the assessor are justified by the tutor comments?

The tutor comments are broadly categorised under two groups — namely teaching, and non-teaching comments. The Figure 10.2 presents, schematically, the classification of these comments.
Since the comments given in Figure 10.2 are not exhaustive one may think of some more types of comments. But these are globally accepted comments. However, there is no hard and fast rule of expressing these comments. One comment can be expressed in many ways. The tutor has to be very careful in writing comments so that a teaching comment does not change into a non-teaching comment.

When the learner goes through these comments carefully then the real communication takes place between the tutor and the learner. Let us now discuss these comments one by one and see what exactly they mean.

I) Non-teaching Comments

Non-teaching type comments are of the following types.

a) **Harmful (HL) Comments**

This type of comment hurts the learner and de-motivates him/her and may even lead to the withdrawal of the learner from the course. Instead of helping the learner the comment discourages him/her. Such comments are rude and fail to build a purposeful rapport between the distance learner and the distance tutor. Some learners may object to these type of comments and develop hatred towards the tutor. With this type of comments all possibilities of communication get blocked. For example: ‘Horrible language’, ‘this is foolish’, ‘you do not know anything’, ‘do you think you have written everything about the unit?’ etc.

b) **Hollow (HW) comments**

These comments do not carry any thing for the learner. They do not suggest anything to the learner, neither do they guide nor do they help the learner in any way. The learner...
does not get any benefit out of this type of comments. The comments do not serve any purpose. For example: ‘Your answer in not to the point’, ‘Go through the lesson once again’, ‘Try to write a good answer’, ‘Your assignment contains many unnecessary materials’.

c) Misleading (MG) comments

At times the tutor writes such comments which mislead the learner and put him on the wrong track — the learner is asked to do something that does not serve any purpose for him. This type of misleading comments, often, will have an adverse effect on teaching-learning process. There are instances when the distance tutor contradicted with correct answers/responses of learner as the tutor himself/herself was not clear about a concept. Sometimes, he/she may express his/her view point differently which misleads the distance learner. For example: your understanding is not clear, please read the unit again and re-do the assignment.

d) Null (NL) Comments

These comments do not convey any meaning to the learners nor do they help him in any way. These comments neither confirm nor question nor explain nor approve anything. The distance teachers tend to put signs and symbols while going through the assignment responses. For example, the non-verbal marks like (?), (-), (=), (II), (??) (/) do confuse the learner. It is therefore, important for the distance tutor to avoid writing meaningless symbols as comments and express his/her views in words and sentences so that the learner understands these comments and improves his/her other assignment responses.

e) Negative (NE) Comments

Through these comments the distance tutor wants to point out the weaknesses and strengths in the assignment responses. Such comments usually carry a negative element in them. The words like ‘no’, ‘none’, ‘not’, etc. are mostly used for this type of comments.

Let us see the following examples:

i) The answer to this question is not up to the mark.

ii) The answer is not sufficient.

iii) The explanation given is not clear.

iv) Coverage of facts is not adequate, etc.

These comments do not convey complete message for the learner. Therefore, the distance tutor has to categorically indicate and explain as to “what” can be added or changed to make the answer complete and correct.

II) Teaching Comments

Teaching type comments are of the following types.

a) Positive (PE) Comments

Positive comments always help the learner at a distance. These comments motivate and encourage the learner to improve his/her future performance. Such comments are to the point and clearly written. The distance tutor should have lot of clarity and patience to write these comments.
Positive comments are presented in a straight forward, clear, and complete manner in favour of the argument put forward by the learner. For example, “your answer is to the point. Illustrations have made the answer clear and stronger.”

b) *Constructive (CE) Comments*

These comments offer constructive suggestions to improve upon the response. For example: “You could have made your arguments stronger by giving two or three specific examples.”

c) *Global (GL) Comments*

Global comments are written separately on the assessment sheet supplied with the assignment to give comprehensive response on the assignment. The important function of these comments is to justify why a particular grade/mark is given to the particular assignment. These comments cover the entire assignment-response in terms of the accuracy, information, comprehensiveness, logic, planning, expressions, size, etc., of the assignment response. These comments do not necessarily repeat the details of the marginal comments. Global comments categorically spell out the reasons why has he/she awarded a particular grade, be it A, B, C, D or E to the assignment. The explanation given in the global comments helps the learner to know his/her weaknesses and improve his/her performance in the subsequent assignment responses.

d) *Personal (PL) Comments*

As discussed in sub-section 10.3.1 above, the main function of the personal comment/personal communication is to break the isolation of the distance learner. Writing a comprehensive personal comment and breaking the isolation of the distance learner is much more difficult than writing any other teaching type of comments.

Personal comments are very useful to the learners, for these involve the affective domain of the learner. Personal communication brings the distance tutor and the distance learner closer to each other, and thus help them in promoting their mutual understanding. These comments give a sense of feeling to the distant learner that there is someone to help him/her. He/she gains confidence by writing to the distance tutor and by getting clarifications from time to time at personal level.

An example of a good personal comment is given below:

“Your performance proves that you can manage very well as a distance learner. Should you have any problem of writing out the descriptive portion with hand, it can be typewritten and sent. If you still prefer writing to typing, you can wait till your fractured arm is alright”

The distance tutors should, therefore, be thoroughly oriented on writing tutor comments. They should never write non-teaching comments. It is essential that there should be a logical link between the tutor comments and the grading in the assessment scheme for distance open learning. You need to keep these things in mind, if you become a distance tutor.

**Check Your Progress**

**Note:**

a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.
10.4 QUALITIES OF AN ACADEMIC COUNSELLOR / TUTOR

The term academic counselor/tutor is used for him/her who teaches as well as advises through correspondence or who conducts face-to-face tutorial / counselling sessions at the study centre. The counsellors are advisors, tutors and teachers in open and distance education. The qualities they are expected to possess must correspond to the duties/responsibilities they perform in distance education. Let us first know about their duties/responsibilities.

**Duties/responsibilities**

The duties/responsibilities of an academic counselor/tutor are:

- To foster further academic discussion in the face-to-face sessions at the study centres;
- To respond to student queries, problems, doubts, etc. about the course material;
- To assist students to become independent learners by helping them to develop sound skills appropriate to distance education;
- To evaluate assignment responses, grade them and give feedback to students;
- To encourage and support students to overcome the barriers to learning or to take academic decisions. These barriers and decision points may be related to their study; examinations, assignments, language as instructional medium and so on.

In order to perform these duties/responsibilities mentioned above, the academic counsellor is expected to possess certain qualities. What are those qualities?

**Qualities**

Rogers (1984) (who introduced non-directive, client-centred counselling) has identified four qualities of an effective counsellor. They are: warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy — simply called WAGE, to remember easily, as each letter in it stand for each quality mentioned above. Given below are some illustrations. These illustrations may help you understand the importance of these four qualities in a counsellor.

Suppose you, as a counsellor, are sitting in your room. A student who is worried and a bit nervous approaches you. He tells you: “I am fed up with the strict regulations regarding submitting assignment responses within the stipulated time. I feel like leaving..."
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You may respond to that learner in the following manner, reflecting the four qualities or attributes of a good counsellor.

- It’s true. But can I help you? (Warmth).
- “It sounds that you are bit anxious about this business.” (Acceptance).
- “Do not be very much anxious about it. Honestly speaking, this is not only you who are facing this problem. Sometimes, I also feel it difficult to finish the assignment within the stipulated time. However, proper planning and budgeting of time can definitely solve your problems.” (Genuiness).
- “I can understand how anxious you are about the completion of the task”. (Empathy).

Now, having so responded, you can be placed in the category of a good counsellor.

Contrary to the above, if you react in the following manner, what happens, then?

- “I am busy, be brief, in your Statement.”
- “We cannot change our regulations for you. If you are finding it difficult, better leave it.”
- “You have chosen the course to study. Now, you have to get on with it.”
- “You must not feel that completing assignments within a stipulated time is a difficult task at all”.

As discussed in sub-section 10.3.3 above, with the help of personal comments a good tutor can develop confidence in the learner. If the distance tutor has to be able to do this, he/she needs to possess the following extra qualities:

a) Very high degree of patience,

b) Linguistic sophistication, and.

c) Feel for appropriate placement of the personal comments.

The student would have left the room, before you complete your response. Therefore, if a counsellor wants to solve the problems of students, he/she has to communicate with personal warmth and empathy to make students feel at ease. Similarly, you must possess the quality to accept other people and their feelings without criticising or judging them personally (acceptance). You have to be genuine with the students by showing the ability to be naturally open, friendly and un-defensive. Lastly, you should sense the feelings and experiences of others and fully appreciate them. These qualities, along with some other traits such as patience, courtesy, affection, tolerance, etc help you become an effective counsellor/tutor.

10.5 SKILLS OF AN ACADEMIC COUNSELLOR / TUTOR

To be a successful academic counselor/tutor, besides the above qualities, you need to possess certain skills as well. What are these skills you need to master?

You should master the following three essential skills
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- Selecting,
- Listening, and
- Structuring.

i) **Selecting:** It is nothing but the skill of categorising student’s/learner’s response into informing, advising and counselling. Suppose a learner wants some information about the admission process he/she should be provided with that information which he/she requires specifically. We have already discussed it in detail in sub-section 10.2.1, as to what type of enquiries come under which specific category.

ii) **Listening:** The second important skill a counsellor should possess is listening. Keeping ‘mum’ or intelligent listening is the best way of understanding the problem of any individual learner. While doing effective listening the counsellor may ask open-ended questions, acknowledge what the learner is saying, reflect/repeat what the learner has said, and, if needed keep active silence when the learner is trying to express his strong feelings. The counsellor should be able to do all these in such a manner that the student may not feel disturbed or interrupted while saying something.

iii) **Structuring:** The third skill required is structuring. It consists of three stages - clarification, checking and consequences. Look at the Table 10.3 to know more about these stages mentioned under this skill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Activity / Work done</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarification</td>
<td>Clarifying the issues or problems through dialogue with the students.</td>
<td>S: I am interested in a career in teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C: Teaching at which level – primary, secondary, or higher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Oh! I meant in secondary level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C: Secondary level, O.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking</td>
<td>Going back to the students to ensure that the problem or issue is completely clear.</td>
<td>C: I have a leaflet about that. I could send it to you if you like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Oh, yes please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>What will the counsellor try to do (action or advise) as a result of the interview with the student.</td>
<td>C: Fine, I will put that in the post to you today and then if you have any question after reading it you are welcome to contact me again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Thank you very much.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** C = Counsellor; S = Student

From the above discussion it should be clear now that if you want to become a good counsellor; you must have qualities like warmth, acceptance, genuineness and empathy along with skills of selecting, listening and structuring.

Now, let us discuss organising counselling sessions for the distance learners. Examine the following illustration in the box below.
Box 10.1: How I act as an academic counsellor

If I have to perform the role of a counsellor who is to counsel the beginners of the course, who assembled before the submission of first assignment of the B.Ed. course, I will conduct the counselling in the following manner:

_Counsellor:_ Hello! How are you? Feel free and make yourself conformable here. This is your institution and we are all members of one family. I am physically present here to make you feel at home and help you”.

_Student:_ ...........................................................

_Counsellor:_ What are your reactions to the course material specially designed for you? I agree with you that studying through the course material independently is a bit difficult task, but do not worry. It happens when we have to de-condition ourselves from something and try to condition to something new. You have to face a similar situation here in this system too. However, studying independently is not very difficult if you use certain skills while studying the course material. Similarly, doing an assignment is not at all a difficult task, if you do it properly. For example, to write an assignment response, first prepare the framework of the assignment response keeping in mind the following.

i) The meaning of the question,

ii) Word limit specified for the response,

iii) Points of emphasis, and

iv) Illustrations, if needed.

When you frame the answer keeping in mind the above four points you will be definitely able to overcome the difficulty in writing the assignment response. If the assignment questions are not very clear to you, you may get it clarified here itself. I am here to solve your problems. Feel free to ask about anything that makes you anxious.

The above illustration shows how counselling can be organised for the beginners of any course. Thus, in order to conduct effective counselling sessions, counsellors will have to perform the following activities in a phased manner or in proper order:

Phases of activities:
— opening the session
— establishing rapport
— exploration of the problem of the student
— exploration of the causes of the problem
— discovering alternative solutions
— termination of the session
— follow-up.

In other words, counselling involves the following phases:

i) The counsellor may start the session with a few preliminary introductory remarks about the learners. This is intended to set the counselling going in smooth manner and provide a setting for counsellor-learner interactions.

ii) The second phase is the establishment of rapport by the counsellor with the learner. This activity is the most important one as the whole process of counselling depends
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on the rapport the counsellor establishes with the distance learner. To establish this rapport the counsellor must use all his abilities and skills very effectively so that the learner may feel free to initiate a dialogue with the counsellor.

iii) It also helps the counsellor to identify the actual problems of the learner. Unless the counsellor understands the problem correctly be cannot help the learner properly.

iv) The counsellor, after understanding the learner’s problem, assists him/her (learner) in working out solutions in the form of readjustment plans. Here, the counsellor’s duty is to ensure that the learner accepts the best strategy that suits him.

v) When the counsellor is satisfied with the outcome of the discussion, termination of the session takes place. In this phase, the counsellor asks the student to review the causes of the problem and the readjustment strategies he/she has planned. Along with this, the counsellor reassures and gives encouragement to the student to use the re-adjustment strategy effectively.

vi) They plan together to evaluate the readjustment strategies evolved from the discussion are effective.

These are some of the activities which a counsellor has to perform when he/she organizes counselling sessions for the learners. Here, there are no hard and fast rules to be followed. The counsellor’s concern should be to solve the problem, and not to stick to the rules he/she has to follow. Similarly, counselling may be provided in the form of informal interactions, formal, well planned interviews, lecturing (on a difficult content-related problem-solving) advising (assignment writing or language related problem); improving (about examination, admission, etc.) and so on.

Check Your Progress

Note:  a) Write you answer in the space given below.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

5) Mention the activities generally performed by the counsellor in conducting a counselling session.

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10.6 USE OF MEDIA IN ACADEMIC COUNSELLING AND TUTORING

Various media are useful in academic counselling and tutoring. All those media which have relevance for distance education are equally applicable for academic counselling and tutoring. Here, it is good if you revisit Unit 6 of Block 2 of this course. From this unit, you will understand that all the media, viz. visual, audio, video, television, computing
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and communication media will be useful in varied contexts of counselling and tutoring. So you can use the following media depending upon the need, convenience, availability, and suitability, among others.

- Text / Visual media, including graphics — Course units, supplementary print materials; correspondence tutoring
- Computer media — Databases, electronic publishing, Computer-aided learning, conferences; audio graphics, multimedia, e-mail.
- Audio media — Cassettes, Radio Programmes, telephone tutoring, audio conference.
- Television — Broadcasting (Programmes), Video Cassettes/Discs, lectures; video conferences, etc.

While choosing the relevant media for counselling and tutoring, its appropriateness to the context, purpose and the background of learners must be duly considered by the counselor/tutor.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the genesis, need, significance, types, stages and organization of counselling. We have also discussed the role/place of assignments and the tutors and tutor comments in assessment, didactic communication and evaluation in open and distance education system. We have highlighted the duties/responsibilities, qualities and skills to be possessed by the counselor/tutor in organising counselling for distance learners. You will agree that we cannot ignore/avoid counselling sessions and tutoring in distance learning, as it is the only way to avoid loneliness, helplessness and danger of de-motivation among distance learners.

10.8 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’ QUESTIONS

1) i) Counselling
   ii) Informing
   iii) Informing
   iv) Counselling
   v) Advising
   vi) Informing

2) i) Counselling is a face-to-face interaction between a counsellor and a learner in which former attempts to help/assist the latter in solving his problems of different nature and kind.

   ii) Counselling is needed when the learner has to make decisions as well as to overcome the barriers, problems, difficulties, etc., in the course of his study.

3) i) non-academic  ii) non academic  iii) non academic
   iv) academic   v) academic   vi) academic

4) The tutor comments are of two types — non-teaching and teaching. Non-teaching comments include: Harmful, Hollow, Misleading, Null and Negative comments.
Teaching comments include: Positive, Constructive, Global and Personal comments.

5) Activities generally performed by the counsellor while conducting a counselling session are:
   - establishing rapport
   - exploration of the problem
   - exploration of the causes of problem
   - discovering alternative solutions
   - termination of the session
   - follow-up

10.9 REFERENCES


10.10 UNIT END EXERCISES

You may write brief notes or full-length answers to the questions given here in your own interest. Such notes or answers might help you during your preparation for examination.

Unit End Questions

1) Define counselling. Explain with the help of example(s) how it differs from tutoring/teaching. (250 words).

2) Explain with illustrations the need and significance of counselling in distance education system. (250 words).

3) Explain with suitable examples the interrelationship between the types and stages of counselling. (500 words).

4) What are the qualities of an academic counselor? Substantiate your answer with the help of examples. (250 words).

5) What are the skills to be possessed by an academic counselor? (250 words).

6) What are the functions of a tutor in distance education? (250 words).

7) What are the different levels of communication that take place between distance learner and tutor?

8) Discuss different types of tutor comments with suitable examples. (1000 words).
Questions for Critical Reflection

1) Do you think there is a perfect match between the comments made by the tutor on your assignments and the grade awarded to the respective assignments of your BEd courses? Justify your answer with your individual critical observations on the comments of the tutor.

Activity

Suppose you and your colleague of the BEd programme have completed all courses of first year. You exchange a photocopy of an evaluated assignment of yours’ of a course with that of your friend of the same course, and of the same batch/year. You compare the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation done of your assignment and of your friend with due consideration of the comments written and the grade awarded by the tutor(s). Note down the points of discrepancy on a separate sheet of paper in the light of what you learnt under section 10.3 above. Both, you and your colleague, can discuss these discrepancies, if any you noticed in the tutors’ evaluation vis-à-vis the comments offered thereof, to mutually validate or otherwise of your views of discrepancy.