

READINGS IN COUNSELLING PRACTICUM



edited by
S. A. GEŞİNDE

VANTAGE
FOUNDATION BOOKS IN EDUCATION SERIES

CHAPTER 15

Individual (one-to-one) Counselling

A.A. ALAO

Introduction

Individual counselling is a 'one-to-one' counselling relationship. The 'one-to-one' relationship suggests that two individuals are involved. Hence, attention will be focused on these two individuals who are the counsellor and the client respectively. The two are coming together somewhere for a purpose, hence the need to discuss the setting, the relationship and the problem. There must be discussion if any change is to be felt, and so the need to discuss the interview itself. Thus, the discussion on the topic will be broken down into:

- (1) Nature of counselling;
- (2) The counsellor;
- (3) The client;
- (4) The physical setting;
- (5) The relationship;
- (6) The problem; and
- (7) The interview.

Nature of counselling

There are many definitions or explanations of what counselling is all about. For each counsellor, the purpose of counselling reflects the counsellor's training, value system, perception of role and the needs of the individuals being helped.

Ford and Urban (1963) enumerated four general characteristics of psychotherapy which also appropriately describe the nature of counselling. These characteristics indicate that:

1. Counselling involves two people in interaction, a generic term for the exchange of meanings between people which includes the direct communication of talking and listening as well as gestures,

glances, nods or shakes of head, frowns and other non-verbal features by which meaning is transmitted from one person to another. The interaction is highly confidential, since the client discusses himself in an intimate fashion.

2. The mode of interaction is usually limited to the verbal realm, that is the counsellor and the client talk with each other. The client talks about himself, his thoughts, feelings and actions. The counsellor listens and responds in some fashion to what the client says to provoke further responses. The two think, talk and share ideas.

3. The interaction is relatively prolonged since alteration of behaviour takes time.

4. The counsellor focuses the interaction on the client, and the client must be concerned with changing himself.

Counselling, is thus seen as a helping relationship between a counsellor and the client. In many different ways the counsellor's function is to provide conditions which facilitate change in client behaviour. The values and approach of the counsellor as well as the choices of the client serve to define the goals of relationship and impose limitations on it. Regardless of the theoretical bias of the counsellor, most counselling theories stress the importance of understanding and listening in relationship. The counselling relationship is always conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and discretion.

THE COUNSELLOR

How the counsellor reacts to the client and how he communicates these feelings are important in counselling. His attitude to the client could determine how the client will venture to cope with the problem. The counsellor must demonstrate a genuine acceptance of the client. The non-judgmental role of the counsellor encourages the client to be himself and reveal himself.

The counsellor is also expected to possess some characteristics which will make him effective in his relationship with the client.

Counsellor characteristics

The National Vocational Guidance Association (1949) gave the counsellor characteristics as interest in people, patience, sensitivity to other's attitudes, reactions and emotional stability, objectivity and personal maturity.

Hamrin and Paulson (1950) listed counsellor characteristics as including understanding, sympathetic attitude, friendliness, sincerity, tact, fairness, tolerance, neatness, calmness, broad mindedness, kindness, pleasantness, social intelligence and poise.

Rogers (1962) indicated counsellor characteristics as including:

- (a) congruence – being genuine and integrated;
- (b) empathy – a state of perceiving the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with emotional components and meanings which pertain there-to as if one was the other person.
- (c) unconditional positive regard – the perception of self-experiences of another without discrimination as to greater or lesser worthiness.

5. As regards the communication of these three attitudes to the client, Polmatier (1966) viewed the counsellor as follows:

- (a) The counsellor is an intelligent person who possesses verbal and quantitative abilities sufficient to think, reason and solve problems with logic and perception.
- (b) The counsellor's measured interests reveal a desire to work with people but are scientific enough to consider and utilise the science of individual and social behaviour.
- (c) The counsellor manifests an acceptance of self. He does not use clients to satisfy his personal needs beyond the limits imposed by his professional role.
- (d) The counsellor possesses value commitments which he understands and recognises since they influence his counselling behaviour and behaviour in general.
- (e) The counsellor exhibits a tolerance for ambiguity and has the ability to face ambiguity without letting it disorganise his work life.
- (f) The counsellor is flexible enough to understand and deal psychologically with all kinds of human behaviour without mustering authority or social pressures to force the client to conform.

Alao (1930) itemized characteristics perceived to be ideal in a counsellor, by counselling practicum students as friendliness, neatness, tolerance, patience, good interpersonal relationship, emotional maturity, ability to maintain confidentiality, interest,

kindness, pleasantness, objectivity, flexibility, cheerfulness, resourcefulness and sincerity.

These characteristics enumerated above suggest that the counsellor has a very significant role to play in the helping relationship. The counsellor must possess skills in:

- (a) attending behaviour; as well as
- (b) initiating behaviour and communicating behaviour.

Attending

The counsellor should be able to attend physically by holding in a difficult moment, through posturing, facing fully and moving forward. He must be able to attend psychologically by using his senses, eye contact and observing cues. He must be able to listen to important points expressed, suspend judgement and resist distractions.

Responding

The counsellor must be able to respond to the client's behaviour feelings and meaning. He should be able to develop appropriate feeling words. Meaning puts the feeling in context. (Feeling – I am angry; context – with my father for not paying my fees).

Initiating

The counsellor must be able to lay a base for initiating, he must initiate additive understanding and he must be able to initiate confrontation.

Communication

To facilitate counselling relationship, the counsellor must develop communication skills. He does not only have to understand what the client is expressing but also to communicate this understanding to the individual through reflection of feelings, silence, leads and reassurance.

THE CLIENT

The client is the individual seeking growth in the relationship. The client should not just bring himself physically to the counsellor's office for relief to occur, he has responsibilities in the counselling relationship. Effective counselling does not encourage the client's dependence on the counsellor to solve his problems and make decisions for him. His co-operation and effective participation, and involvement in the relationship is important. His respon-

sibilities in the relationship may be communicated to him by the counsellor.

THE PHYSICAL SETTING

The counselling interview has to take place where the client and the counsellor are both free of distractions. The environment must make the client reasonably comfortable to be himself and express himself. It could be the counsellor's office or any other place designated as counselling room.

THE RELATIONSHIP

Rogers (1957) postulated six conditions that are necessary and sufficient to establish and maintain an effective counselling relationship:

- (a) Two persons are in psychological contact;
- (b) The first (the client) is in a state of incongruence, being vulnerable or anxious;
- (c) The second (the therapist) is congruent or integrated in the relationship;
- (d) The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard for the client;
- (e) The therapist experiences an empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference and endeavours to communicate his experience to the client; and
- (f) The communication of the therapist's empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard to the client is achieved to a minimal degree.

These conditions enumerated by Rogers emphasise the importance of sensitive and accurate understanding of the counsellee.

Concreteness or specificity is also stated by Truax and Carkhuff (1964) as an essential condition in counselling. Both argue that concreteness ensures that the counsellor does not become abstract and intellectual, and thus more emotionally removed from the counsellee's feelings and experiences. The counsellor is forced to be more precise and accurate in his understanding of the client, while the client is influenced to attend, with specificity, to problem areas and emotional conflicts.

Furthermore, a counselling relationship requires privacy — both

auditory and visual. It also requires confidentiality because of the self-revealing and intimate experiences as narrated by the client to the counsellor. If the client does not trust the counsellor in the relationship, the client will only present superficial problems to the counsellor.

There are codes of ethics which govern the ethical responsibilities of counsellors. The Counselling Association of Nigeria, resolved at one of its annual conferences, to come up with codes of ethics within which Nigerian counsellors would operate. One would presume during the tenth year anniversary celebration that the codes of ethics would be formerly presented. These codes suggest that the personal information supplied in counselling is an entrusted communication and that the nature of counselling relationship imposes an obligation of confidentiality. However, there are some limits to the confidentiality of the relationship since the counsellor owes allegiance to the institution that employs him as well as the society at large.

Schneiders (1963) enumerated seven principles which apply to the limits of confidentiality:

- (a) The obligation of confidentiality is relative rather than absolute since there are conditions which can alter it;
- (b) Confidentiality depends on the nature of the material so that the material which is already made public can easily become so, is not bound by confidentiality in the same way as the entrusted secret;
- (c) Material that is harmless does not bind the counsellor to confidentiality;
- (d) The material that is necessary for a counsellor or an agency to function effectively is often released from the bounds of confidentiality.
- (e) Confidentiality is often conditioned by the intrinsic rights of the counsellee to his integrity and reputation, to the secret, and to resist unjust aggression. Such rights can be protected by the counsellor even against the law;
- (f) Confidentiality is limited also by the rights of the counsellor to preserve his own reputation and integri-

ty., to resist harm or aggression and to preserve privileged communication; and that

- (g) Confidentiality is determined and limited by the rights of an innocent third party and by the rights of the community.

Matters of confidentiality and of counsellor ethics are sometimes complex and may be resolved in reference to the unique circumstances of the specific situation.

THE PROBLEM

One-to-one counselling involves attending to the problem of the client and assisting him to grow with a better awareness of himself. During counsellor preparation, the counsellor is exposed to the techniques of problem-solving. The counsellor needs to know how to relate to the client in addition to his awareness of how to resolve problems.

Carkhuff (1973) suggested that the counsellor should be able to:

- (i) develop the problem of the client;
- (ii) break down the problem;
- (iii) consider courses of action; as well as
- (iv) develop courses of action.

Developing the problem

This involves exploring and understanding the problem.

In exploring the problem, the counsellor needs to respond to the client's behaviour. The response may be physical or verbal. He also needs to respond to both the feeling and the meaning. The counsellor has to understand the problem as to how it is relevant to the client's functioning as well as what is there about the client that has precipitated the problem, etc.

Breaking down the problem

This involves defining the problem and defining the goal. The problem could be defined in units of human behaviour both in quantity and quality. Mathematical relations could be used to show deficits in behaviour, if any. Defining the goal, which is the other side of the problem, is an attempt to break down the problem. The goal defined must be specific and achievable.

Considering courses of action

This involves developing alternate courses of action and developing value hierarchy for the client.

Both the counsellor and the client should develop the courses of action and the courses of action so developed must be relevant to the goal, and must be workable. These courses of action must be evaluated. The values of the client that could assist in achieving the goal should be considered. The counsellor should construct a hierarchy of value by ordering the values of the client according to priority.

Developing courses of action

This involves choosing courses of action and implementing such courses of action.

In choosing courses of action, one needs to determine whether each course of action helps or hinders each value item. The course of action with the highest positive total should be the preferred course of action. In implementing the course of action, one should select a programme, alternate ways to implement the chosen course of action so considered, making the individual to act on the programme.

THE INTERVIEW

Initial contact

The initial interview is usually a sensitive inquiry directed towards learning more about the pupils. It is to discover what the client wants, what he thinks, what he considers to be his problems. Essentially, the initial interview with the client is to get a sound counselling relationship started. The counsellor also opens up the psychological realms of feeling and attitude within the person, while the structure of the counselling process is also clarified.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

While conducting counselling interviews, these guidelines could be followed:

- (a) Establishment of rapport;
- (b) Provision of structure;
- (c) Helping the client to talk;
- (d) Alertness to client's feelings and needs; as well as
- (e) Termination of the interview.

Establishment of rapport

The counsellor must make conscious efforts to make the client feel comfortable. The atmosphere must lead to a feeling of ease,

confidence and freedom. The counsellor has to be responsive to the client. This is essential to the success of counselling initially and subsequently. When some reluctance to begin counselling is observed in the client, general initial discussion on a different topic from the problem on hand may reduce restraint and establish rapport.

Provision of structure

The counsellor may need to explain to the client, the nature of the relationship, the role he will play in the relationship, and the responsibilities of the client during counselling. Discussing structure could be very beneficial to clients entering into counselling relationship for the first time. Some explanations of expectations could be made to the client, in broad terms.

Helping the client to talk

In some cases, the client may need assurance and encouragement from the counsellor before the client can discuss his problems freely.

The client can be encouraged to state his perception of the problem through the counsellor's reflection of his feelings, as well as his reflection of the client being content. He should also watch his silence, acceptance and encouragement.

Alertness to client's feelings and needs

Since the counselling experience should lead to development of the client, the counsellor needs to be alert to the client's feelings and emotions. He also has to be sensitive to the needs of the client which could range from informational needs to making choices and decisions. The client may also need to be referred to other counsellors or specialists.

Termination of interview

The counsellor should bring the interview to a close smoothly and skillfully. This could be done by the counsellor verbally summarising the interview that has taken place, or asking the client what has been accomplished in the interview. The termination should leave the client aware of what next to do. Some counsellors prefer to rise with the client and walk out with him at the end of the interview.

Subsequent interviews

The number and frequency of subsequent interviews will depend

on the nature of the problem which the client presents and the structure adopted by the counsellor. After the initial establishment of rapport with the client by the counsellor, and after the knowledge of what to expect in the relationship, subsequent interviews will focus largely on the problem itself. It may still be necessary to assist the client to talk while the counsellor must, all the time, show alertness to client's feelings and needs.

In one-to-one counselling, the counsellor and the client need to co-operate to make the relationship a growing experience. The counsellor, for instance, need to possess the necessary skills and competence to deal with the client's problem, while the client needs to assume some responsibility in the relationship in order to make the interaction meaningful.

References

- Alao, A.A. (1980), 'A Comparative Perception of Counsellor Characteristics by Practicum Students in a University Setting,' *The Counsellor*, Volume 3, Nos 1 and 2 pp. 16 - 26.
- Carkhuff, R.R. (1973), *The Art of Problem-solving*. Amherst, Massachusetts. Human Resource Development Press.
- Ford, D.H. and Urban, H.B. (1963), *Systems of Psychotherapy*. New York: John Wiley and Sons Inc.
- Hamrin, S.A. and Paulson, B.P. *Counselling Adolescence*. Chicago Science Research Associates, Inc. 1950.
- National Vocational Guidance Association, (1949), *Counsellor Preparation*, Washington, The Association Press.
- Polmantier, P.C. (1966), 'The Personality of the Counsellor,' *Vocational Guidance Quarterly*, Volume 15, December, pp. 95 - 100.
- Rogers, C.R. (1957), 'The Necessary and Sufficient Conditions of Therapeutic Personality Change,' *Journal of Consulting Psychology* Vol. 21, April, pp. 95 - 103.
- Rogers, C. R. (1962), 'The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance,' *Harvard Educational Review*. Volume 32, February, p. 428.
- Truax, C. B. and Carkhuff, R.R. (1964), 'The Old and the New: Theory and Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy,' *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, Volume 42, May, pp. 860 - 66.