INTERNATIONALISATION WITHIN HIGHER
EDUCATION IN AN EXPANDING EUROPE.
NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL
COUNSELLING

FEDORA PSYCHE Conference in Groningen, 2005

INTERNATIONALISATION WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AN EXPANDING EUROPE.
NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING

FEDORA PSYCHE Conference in Groningen, 2005

Contents

Internationalisation within Higher Education:
Challenges and Opportunities for Psychological Counselling

Dr. Gerhart Rott
President of FEDORA

Your Excellency Rector Magnificus Professor Zwarts, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues – welcome to our symposium on "Internationalisation within Higher Education in an Expanding Europe. New Developments in Psychological Counselling".

First of all I would like to thank you, Prof. Zwarts and the University of Groningen, for hosting us in such a wonderful environment. I would like to thank all who have participated in the preparation of this conference. My special thanks go to Ton Boekhorst who has done such a great job in the realization of this conference and in coping with all the obstacles which inevitably occurred in the preparation process. I am pleased to be able to meet so many participants from the new member states and I would like to especially welcome Mr. Piotr Pawlowsky from the University of Warsaw as one of our key lecturers.

We have before us a programme filled with interesting topics and important issues for guidance and counselling in general, and psychological counselling in particular, that will help us gain new insights and exchange ideas and experiences.

In a way, this conference is about bridging gaps. As psychological counsellors/psychotherapists our focus is – by the very nature of our work - on the individual student, but we are well aware that our students represent a larger personal, social and intellectual context, so their psychological needs are intertwined with complex social environments. At the same time, we – or rather our services – are part of larger entities and institutional settings as well, not only locally within our own universities but inasmuch as we are, together with them, influenced by regional, national and increasingly by European policy developments in Higher Education. And the way in which we cooperate on a European scale is defined again by far-reaching developments.

Internationalisation of the Universities

The ongoing globalization process leads to changes in society and the working world. For the student, this results in new demands such as an increased expectation of mobility, flexibility and adaptability. This is accompanied by an increased internationalisation of the universities. Internationalisation itself, however, is an ambiguous term.

On the one hand it refers to the ever-growing number of students who undertake part or all of their studies in a foreign country, bringing with them specific needs and challenges for the psychological counsellor. As the OECD says, there were more than 1.3 million foreign students in its member countries in 1998, and the number is steadily increasing (cf. UNESCO, 2002, p. 5). In 2002/2003, 123,957 students participated in the ERASMUS programme all over Europe, not to mention the

number of students that study abroad independent of such exchange programmes (cf. European Commission, 2003).

On the other hand internationalisation refers to the ongoing process of structural adaptation and change set into motion in the late 1990s. The internationalisation process reflects changes that are taking place outside the universities, such as the development of an increasingly European labour market as well as the demands of a knowledge-driven society. These developments in turn influence the structure of the European higher education institutions as seen in the Bologna Process. Of course there are different scopes and speeds of implementation in the various countries. Especially for the new member states like Hungary it is a tremendous challenge to adapt their systems again so soon after the changes of the early 90s. But despite all the barriers and differentiations, the process can be considered irreversible, since it has become such a broad flow of concerted actions. Just recently two important steps have been taken for the implementation of the European Higher Education Area: in April the clear commitment of the European Universities to the Bologna Process was expressed at the EUA conference in Glasgow, concluding with the EUA declaration on strong universities in a strong Europe; and just two weeks ago the Bergen conference of the European Ministers of Education (19-20 May) put a clear focus on quality assurance and qualification frameworks, and on degree systems based on learning outcomes and competences. Among the further challenges and priorities of its Communiqué, "The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals", it demanded "measures […] to provide [students] with guidance and counselling services" (European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, 2005, p. 4).

The individual student

So far as scope and timing are concerned, 2010 can be considered a realistic framework for establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Consequently, universities are currently adapting to a European perspective in order to make themselves more transparent for the students from their own, but also from neighbouring, countries. Results such as comparable study courses and degrees and the introduction of a European Credit Transfer System are helping students to increase their mobility throughout Europe and in turn to acquire the necessary flexibility and intercultural knowledge they need to be able to compete on a European and international labour market. In this context, developing inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge as well as generic skills becomes important with regard to coping with academic demands and enhancing graduate employability. University graduates not only need to excel in their specific field of study, they also have to learn how to transfer their knowledge to a other areas and disciplines. It should become the task of the higher education institutions "to link a student's academic work with perspectives on future employment, and in this way to improve both academic learning and professional competencies" (Rott et al., 2003). At the same time, a broad and flexible concept of the term "employability" should be introduced for a dynamic, knowledge-based society. Simultaneously, it becomes important to encourage the development of a genuine European citizenship and active participation in social life, not only at a local and national but also at a European level (cf. Bull, 2005).

Of course the structural changes acquired in a university setting do not happen without conflict. There are barriers inherent in this process that prevent higher education institutions from being as supportive of their students as they ideally should be. Institutional and curricular solutions need to be found to overcome these obstacles. The problems are closely connected with the general reframing of the universities, where the idea of the university, the values of academic teaching and research, and the wider contribution of the university to society are at stake. In more technical terms, quality assurance and accountability are important in this reframing process. In the broader sense, the question arises how the idea of the university and the concept of higher education can be updated into a modern context to make the universities an important player in a knowledge-based society, validating their traditions and centuries-long experience, and at the same time opening up to modern demands. If we focus on the education of the student, we have different kinds of traditions and philosophies of higher education in our various countries. An enhanced European dialogue can become a productive part of a European concept of higher education.

The ongoing internationalization process of the European universities, with its structural changes, implies an adaptation of the learning process. In countries such as Hungary, Germany, France and other European countries that have a tradition of different degrees, as opposed to the Bachelor-Master system, knowledge has to be developed and information given on how to adapt the university structures and curricula to achieve this two-tier structure. The new university structures put even more responsibility on the individual student. The modularisation of studies and differentiation of the courses, as well as questions of how many credits are awarded for which course or which kind of Master course should be chosen, are just a few examples of the uncertainties that the student now faces. In this context it becomes increasingly important that the student can fall back on an extensive support system. This is especially important for students from foreign countries who are not only faced with the results of the Bologna Process but at the same time have to cope with studying in a country with different traditions from their own.

Contribution of Psychological Counselling

How do the changes emerging within the context of higher education connect to our work as psychological counsellors and psychotherapists?

It is obvious that with the widening of the cultural and language background of our students, as well as the differentiation of their personal and educational experience, the complexity of separation and attachment demands, and their resolution, within the context of higher education is constantly increasing. The process of acculturation and adaptation opens up new opportunities, but also the necessity to cope with a lot of potentially risky and stressful situations and interactions. Students undertaking part or all of their studies abroad may experience a number of difficulties and disappointments once the initial excitement fades and the impact of cultural difficulties is felt. The need to adapt biographically learned "internal working models" (cf. Rott, 2002), in order to balance attachment and separation requirements in the new environment, increases for the individual student, and must be recognized by those who offer psychological and therapeutic support. What is required

on both sides is cross-cultural knowledge, specific skills, empathy, the ability to resolve inner conflicts with issues that are foreign to oneself and an enhanced awareness of one's own inner world. This, it seems to me, is an essential prerequisite for communication within this larger context.

Let me give you an example of counselling with an international student. Recently I was called on by a student from one of the far-eastern CIS[1] countries who was in her second year of studying in Germany and had already spent some time in Germany before beginning her studies. She came to me because she felt ashamed, thinking that her German was not good enough to participate in a conversation or a discussion during her courses, and thus thought that she would not be able to pass any exams. And at the same time the feeling of shame had prevented her from trying out communication. In the course of our session it became apparent that her difficulty in participating in dialogues in her studies was connected with unresolved conflicts with her mother. From early childhood her mother was always telling her that she needed to be more open with other people and ask for support more intensely, as well as to communicate with other people more actively. My client always had the notion that she couldn't and didn't want to do this, because she had a different character, and neither could nor wanted to do what her mother had told her, a feeling that was accompanied by negative emotions towards her mother. She adhered to this internal rejection even though her mother was now thousands of miles away, in fact the distance intensified the feeling. She kept to this concept in seminars and encounters with fellow students. In a way, she perpetuated the sentence "I can't do this though my mother wants me to, but I am not my mother and I do not want to be like my mother." This sentence became an inhibition which conflicted with her goal to be successful in her studies. It became very clear that this was her own goal. She really wanted to be a successful student and to finish the course. In fact, her mother insisted on her returning home, but she wanted to continue her studies and become fluent in German. She also mentioned that she had a proud character, which kept her from talking in a foreign language. At the beginning of our session it was difficult for her to understand that it was only natural that you are not as fluent in a second language as you are in your native tongue and that it took time and practice to overcome the humiliation of having difficulties in making yourself understood. In the end, starting to reframe the internal conflict with her mother in the direction of psychological separation, and discovering her own personal wish and way towards communication, it became easier for her to accept the limits of her language competence; she opened herself up to enhance her skills for communication and language acquisition and learning, and felt encouraged to actively use and participate in our university's language as well as skills provision.

This example shows four aspects connected with studying in a foreign country that I would like to pinpoint here. One is the language-based difficulty of communication, which may be connected with very deep feelings and arouse psychological conflicts. The second would be the external separation from the family and the familiar environment which might be accompanied by a challenging mixture of psychological separation and homesickness. To redefine patterns of separation and attachment might be a problem for all students, but is more profoundly felt by foreign students. Third, besides the traditional psychological support, the training of intercultural competence can help the student to resolve problems connected with acculturation. Finally, it is important to be aware that studying in a

---

[1] CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States

foreign country presents an opportunity to learn about different cultures and holds a number of possibilities to acquire additional skills and competencies. These factors can support the resolution of conflicts emerging anyway in developing adulthood. With all the difficulties arising, it is essential not to lose awareness of these added opportunities. They can be used by the student to master inner conflicts and gain maturity, and they can certainly be used within the counselling setting.

Irrespective of whether we work with foreign students, or with students who are going abroad or returning from their studies at a foreign university, international students all experience personal growth within a challenging acculturation and adaptation process. These kinds of experiences and achievements can readily affiliate with the wider concepts of learner- and student-centred approaches in higher education. It is this view on higher education which provides strong links between psychological counselling and the Bologna Process.

A key objective of the Bologna Process is to reframe higher education by defining it in terms of qualification frameworks, descriptors and learning outcomes and competences. This connects closely with issues of comparable degrees and the modularisation of HE as means to enhance mobility and to facilitate graduates' transitions into the job market. The lifelong learning requirement also forms an interactive part of this cluster in the reframing of HE. To enhance flexible learning paths and to allow the recognition of non-formal, non-academic learning (cf. Reichert & Tauch, 2005) is part of the attempt to focus on students' learning needs. This shift from the teaching-centred paradigm to a learner-/student-centred paradigm strives to encourage creativity in individual learning. It includes the attempt to encourage interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary attitudes and knowledge, and supports the acquisition of generic and transferable skills to strengthen students' personalities. It is seen as an attempt which might help them to cope with uncertainties during their time in university, as well as in future life, in a constructive way and to apply their specialized knowledge and method-based expertise in a vast scope of contexts. The notion that the Bologna Process is not just a change in structures and curriculum development is accompanied by a reflection on ways of teaching and how the individual learning process can be strengthened e.g. in learning models like the problem-based learning in the Glasgow and Maastricht medical schools, or the individual study-plan which will be part of all Finnish HE institutions next year.

The focus on students' learning needs inevitably draws attention to the "Interplay between Cognition, Emotion and Motivation" (cf. Rott, in print), and to the interaction between acquired knowledge and personality development which was the topic of the FEDORA – PSYCHE Lisbon conference in 2002.

The theoretical and practical approaches of psychological student counselling and psychotherapy can substantiate this student-centred learning perspective and provide methodologies for integration into learning settings. At the same time counsellors can profit from a closer cooperation with more person-centred teaching arrangements. Participative, well structured, interactive learning environments, which actively introduce rules and regulations to encourage behavioural change, may for example reduce time-management or procrastination problems. They can also encourage the constructive integration of feedback to improve the expression of the results of learning processes and to reduce problems of test anxiety. Good learning structures can reduce uncertainty and the fear of failure and help to redefine attachment patterns within higher education. They also support competence awareness and

V

a realistic approach to the reflection of one's own weaknesses and strengths. The ability to enhance realistic strategies to increase self-efficacy reduces competitive pressure and other risk factors which are inevitably embedded in HE. The encouragement of a broader concept of learning integrates informal learning, e.g. voluntary work in the community, and validates personal experiences. It opens a holistic perspective on academic learning in which the knowledge acquired and the student as a person become an interactive flow creating meaning and self-efficacy. Both psychological counselling/psychotherapy as well as student-centred higher education support students in discovering personal insights and help them to acquire coping mechanisms and social skills that go beyond their studies and will be needed later on in their professional and personal life.

New tools in psychological counselling like web-based counselling provisions with e-mail counselling and interactive exercises emphasise this interplay between learner-centred academic teaching and counselling. Advantages of these kinds of supplemental delivery methods include the fact that students who are not comfortable seeking help in a face-to-face situation nevertheless have access to the advice they need. Moreover, IT-counselling provisions ensure the accessibility of counselling services in one's native language to students studying abroad. The provision of modules to support the acquisition of skills like time management amplify the possibilities of the counselling setting. At the same time they prevent study problems, and contribute to the establishment of learner-centred approaches in HE. As in e-teaching, where blended learning is now the most validated approach, one might in future develop further concepts of 'blended guidance', in which face-to-face counselling and IT-based tools are intertwined.

The interplay between the student and learner-centred approaches with psychological counselling/psychotherapy opens up two other promising perspectives.

Firstly at a conceptual level the student-centred approach puts the relation between knowledge-and-methods acquisition and the student with his/her learning process and personal development at the centre of consideration. Reflection on these processes can enrich concepts of student counselling/psychotherapy and vice versa. The reframing of psychotherapeutic concepts in neuropsychological findings such as Grawe's (2004) neuro-psychotherapy may provide additional frameworks to enhance and facilitate this understanding (Huether et al., 1999; Lux, 2004).

Secondly, at an institutional level this interplay encourages work together within the university and in the wider community. Within frameworks and networks of provision of comprehensive student support, psychological counselling can play a well-defined role.

But with all this encouraging focus on the student as a person it remains important to underpin the specific contribution of psychological counselling to student health and well-being. Besides the doubts which arise whether the Bologna process will be able to expand "the space for creativity and individual learning" or whether it will "reduce" it (EUA, 2005, p. 10), all these structural reforms cannot ignore that being a student and studying itself is still an extremely individual process, which implicates psychological risks for a relevant part of the student population. Psychological counselling/psychotherapy fulfils a preventive function for student health. Social cohesion and inclusion are seen as "underlying elements for competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher

education" (ibid.) and psychological counselling is a necessary part of required guidance and counselling provisions.

In addition to helping students directly to cope with problems related to their personal health and well-being, it is also the task of counselling professionals to help them indirectly by raising the higher education institutions' awareness of the risk factors that go hand in hand with studying. It is the responsibility of counselling personnel to give feedback to their own university. Given the Bologna Process and its internationalisation, it is still a challenge for us to communicate this feedback within a wider context. In doing so, psychological counsellors contributing to this European dialogue on student support and teaching also contribute not only to the internationalisation and the successful implementation of the Bologna Process, but also to the development of a larger body of knowledge on guidance and counselling within FEDORA.

FEDORA

With our conference here in Groningen we will take one significant, highly specialized step forward in the context of FEDORA's work, followed by the Summer University in Cyprus next month and the Congress in Vilnius in October 2006.

Since its foundation in 1988, FEDORA has been concerned with bringing together colleagues from all over Europe to exchange ideas and experiences in order to further our knowledge about guidance and counselling from a European perspective. PSYCHE members and other colleagues working in the field of psychological counselling have made their own valuable contribution to the content of FEDORA, starting with the conferences on psychological counselling in higher education in Naples in 1992, and followed more recently by the conferences on separation and attachment in Copenhagen in 1999 and on cognition, motivation and emotion in Lisbon in 2002. Beyond that, colleagues have also regularly participated in FEDORA's Summer Universities and Congresses and have thus helped further their own and their colleagues' understanding of their work in a national and international context. One of the results of this exchange of information is the "New Skills for New Futures" reports that were produced for every EU member state in 1998 and which give an overview of the guidance and counselling provisions in each country.

With the successful reorganisation of our working-group structure earlier this year, we were able to further strengthen coherence within FEDORA. This will facilitate the production of content and knowledge in the different areas of higher education within our network, as well as communication to the outside. It will also facilitate the updating of the "New Skills for New Futures" report. Moreover, it will make the generational change, which is a constant challenge for FEDORA, more manageable. I am confident that in future FEDORA will continue to play its part in the creation of a European space for guidance and counselling within the European Higher Education Area.

This perspective will be strengthened by the FEDORA Congress next year with the topic of "Guidance and Counselling within the European Higher Education Area". At this event we will focus on strategies

and policy development for guidelines in guidance and counselling. The Congress will be preceded by a symposium in Krakow next spring, where we will try to update the "New Skills for New Futures" reports to some extent and get a more thorough insight into the guidance and counselling provisions in the new member states. At the congress itself we will attempt to produce a charter on guidance and counselling in higher education, which will address the wider public. To produce a substantial text, intensive work on exchanging ideas and concepts is necessary. I think the substantial consultation here in Groningen is an important step in that direction.

The announcements of the workshops and key lectures of this conference provide ideas and concepts on how all those tasks connected to the ongoing internationalisation of higher education can be tackled, how bridges can be built. I wish us all an exciting exchange of experiences, and the emergence of new insights which will help us at home in our challenging daily work with students. At the same time I hope – and in fact I'm quite sure – that this conference will play an important role in furthering the professional body of knowledge on psychological counselling in Europe, especially in the field of "Internationalisation within Higher Education". This enhanced knowledge will support the wider ambition of FEDORA to become not only a stakeholder but a key contributor to the development of a conceptual framework for guidance and counselling within the European Higher Education Area. With all those tasks and challenges ahead, I wish us all productive and enjoyable debates and encounters during the next few days.

References:

Bull, T. (2005). *Theme 3: How to implement sustainable Bologna reforms in higher education institutions? Results and Recommendations from the 4 Working Groups.* Presentation given at the 3rd EUA Convention of European Higher Education Institutions, Glasgow 31 March – 2 April 2005. Downloaded from http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Theme3_Tove_Bull.1112692700026.pdf on 19 May 2005.

EUA (2005). *Glasgow 2005: Strong Universities for Europe. 3rd EUA Convention of European Higher Education Institutions. Reader*. Brussels: EUA.

European Commission (2003). *Erasmus student and teacher mobility 2002-2003*. Downloaded from http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/erasmus/statisti/stat14.pdf on 19 May 2005.

European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education (2005). *The European Higher Education Area - Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005.* Downloaded from http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf on 23 May 2005.

Grawe, K. (2004). *Neuropsychotherapie*. Göttingen: Hogrefe.

Huether, G., Doering, S., Rüger, U., Rüther, E. & Schüssler, G. (1999). The Stress-Reaction Process and the Adaptive Modification and Reorganization of Neuronal Networks. *Psychiatry Res. 87*, pp. 83-95.

Lux, M. (2004). Neurowissenschaftliche Perspektiven für den Personenzentrierten Ansatz. *Gesprächspsychotherapie und personenzentrierte Beratung 4/2004, S. 246-252.*

Reichert, S. & Tauch, C. (2005). *Trends IV. Main Findings and Conclusions.* Presentation given at the 3rd EUA Convention of European Higher Education Institutions, Glasgow 31 March – 2 April 2005. Downloaded from http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/Theme3_Tove_Bull.1112692700026.pdf on 19 May 2005.

Rott, G. (2002). Attachment & Separation Theory in Higher Education and Student Counselling. In D. Aherne, P. Figge, G. Rott, (Ed.), *Fedora Psyche Conference in Copenhagen, Separation and Attachment in Higher Education (pp.17-30).* Louvain-la-Neuve. FEDORA.

Rott, G. (in print). The Interplay between Cognition, Emotion and Motivation: a Qualitative Parameter for Higher Education in Europe – a contribution by the FEDORA Working Group PSYCHE. In G. Rott, G. Figueiredo Dias & J.-P. Broonen (Ed.). *Cognition, Motivation and Emotion: Dynamics in the Academic Environment. Fedora Psyche Conference in Lisbon, 2002.* Louvain-la-Neuve: FEDORA.

Rott, G., Diefenbach, B., Vogel-Heuser, B. & Neuland, E. (2003). *The challenge of transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge: Some Results of the WISA-Project. European Conference on Educational Research (ECER; Europäische Konferenz für erziehungswissenschaftliche Forschung) des Jahres 2003, 17.-20.September 2003, Hamburg*. http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00003520.htm

UNESCO (2002). Higher education for sale. *Education Today No. 3, October-December 2002.* pp. 4-7.

Student counselling in a cross-cultural perspective: theoretical framework and practical guidelines

Key lecture

Eric Depreeuw, PhD

Centre for Study and Student Counselling
Catholic University of Brussels, Belgium

eric.depreeuw@kubrussel.ac.be

Higher education in Europe, also outside the traditional attractive institutions, is increasingly confronted with students who do not belong to the local culture of the country or region. These students do not only share most study and personal problems with the native students but have additional difficulties related to culture-specific factors or to homesickness. This evolution presents a challenge for higher education in general and for student counsellors in particular.

Cross-cultural psychology is a recent branch of scientific psychology that can offer a framework to address this phenomenon. Studying in a foreign context is not only a question of language or even culture, it implies often other differences, such as religion, political system, climate, dietary habits etc.

Our lecture will outline several difficulties students with the above mentioned backgrounds are facing and the way they appeal to student counsellors, or refrain from seeking professional advice. Further we will briefly describe a theoretical framework and its application, illustrated with case examples. An attempt will be made to deduce some useful guidelines for counselling practice.

1.   Introduction

In 2000 around the world about 1.8 million international students were enrolled in educational institutions (Arthur, 2004). Projections indicate a long-term trend of growth to 7,2 million international students in 2025 (Bohm, Davis, Meares & Pearce, 2002). In Europe, also outside the E.U., the internationalisation expands in the landscape of higher education. The advantages are numerous: a better understanding of increasing interdependence of social and economic systems, exchange of knowledge between students of different nations, promotion of cooperation, enhanced opportunities for the improvement of global quality of life, preparation of individuals, institutions and nations for competition on the world marketplace (humanitarian, business, commercial, scientific …). Because of the numerous advantages many countries have established it as a goal to increase the number of their own post-secondary and post-graduate students studying in another country to 10%. The same percentage is put forward concerning the enrolled students coming from abroad.

However this introduction reflects only one side of the picture. International students decide to study abroad driven by extremely divergent motives. In our research (Depreeuw, 1973) 54% of the sample

(N = 299) declared to study at the Catholic University of Leuven because of the scientific reputation, 36% because of limited opportunities in the home country, 44% chose the alternative '*Other reasons*'. The list can be complemented by other motives such as superior academic qualifications and related ambitions, personal desire, family influence in the local government or sponsoring agencies, traumatic or threatening local political conditions etc. Although the focus of this lecture will not be on them, we have to mention (potential) students, belonging to minority groups, living permanently in our countries. In the United States of America this relates to main groups as black-, Asian- and Latino-American students. In Europe we have considerable migration cohorts from North Africa, Turkey and Eastern Europe, but also growing numbers refugees from Central Asia. The integration process of transitional international students is partly the same, partly different from the one of the migrant-student (Wartenberg, E., 2004).

Arthur (2004) is concerned that international students will be treated as '*commodities*' without respecting their roles in the cultural exchange and without sufficient supporting their human and learning experiences. This concern can be expressed more specifically in relation to counselling psychology. In a world involved in a permanent process of globalisation, we have to critically analyse our own ethnocentricity (Leong & Ponterotto, 2003). The social psychology in general and *similarity-attraction-hypothesis* in particular posit that people by preference seek out, enjoy, and interact harmoniously with people of 'like' values, interest, language, and racial appearance. McDevitt (1996) warns against two extreme positions: the illusion that we understand each other's cultures and that we all are similar at one side, and, at the other, often as an undesired consequence of the former, anxiety and rejection as our own cultural identity is impinged upon.

Finally, counsellors as well can be victim of myths and misconceptions (Arthur, 2004), such as: an international student belongs to 'the cream of the crop' from their country, comes from a wealthy family, and does not want counselling, or previous experience prevents culture distress. Are international students difficult clients (Wartenberg, 2004)?

## 2.	Some cases

Phalet (2003) describes the testimony of a 20 year old Korean female student. After a stay of two years at the university of Utrecht, she says she doesn't feel at home in the Netherlands. Before she left Korea, she should describe herself as the oldest daughter in her family, the best pupil of the class and liked by her teachers. In town everyone knew her. She was proud of herself. All this disappeared in Utrecht, not only because of her Asian look but most of all because of *the totally different way of thinking and behaving*. She lost herself because some ideas in her head totally changed: she had to be independent, strong, courageous, responsible as an individual person. Going back to Korea, she doesn't feel at home either because some of the new ideas in her head are good but do not exist in Korea. She feels depressed and enjoying life became exceptional.

A White Russian female student of 25 years old was sent to me by her GP because of extreme fear of failure and related distress. In her country she obtained a certificate but could not find a corresponding job and worked as a waitress. She met a sailor and after the quick marriage the couple left her

country. She enrolled at the university, preparing herself for the entrance exams to the medical courses the year after. Meanwhile she studied the Dutch language. During the preparatory year she studied extremely intensively. Finally, for the scientific part of the entrance exam she scored 17 out of 20, but failed on the linguistic part. She lodged an appeal with the minister of education against what she experienced as a huge unfairness but without success. She was frustrated, angry and disoriented and left Belgium without further news.

An Chinese-Indonesian girl of twenty was sent by her father to the university of Leuven. She was a successful medicine student in her country but the father judged the political situation not safe enough and studying in Belgium was rather cheap, compared to the UK and the USA. She left soon after the decision, by consequence with very limited preparation and without mastery of the Dutch language. She was delighted by the Western infrastructure and safe way of living, she got a host family. However, after a couple of weeks she was roughly confronted with changed relational and sexual morals of her fellow-countrymen and –women, staying in Belgium already some time. Her roommate committed a suicide attempt and she had much difficulties in finding another room. Because of the miserable mastery of the Dutch language but also because of the cultural gap especially the non-medical courses were hard to study. How to understand philosophy and metaphysics when in your mother tongue the word 'to be' and its derivates are missing…

A Chinese female student is sent to Europe and both parents work unimaginably hard in order to send her enough money. After three years she reaches a sufficient adaptation to the Western environment but gets pregnant by her friend, a black South American.

As a last example, I mention a conflict between post-academic students. A big poster was put on the wall of the toilets with the following text: '*Forbidden to wash yourself in this space*'. As a matter of fact, this (rude) message was intended for Muslim colleagues.

3.   Research data

During the academic year 1970 – 1971 a multidisciplinary team of the Catholic University of Leuven collected research data by questioning the total population of international students. Although these data are far from recent, we will give a limited survey because they fit in with the context of this lecture but above all because, after 35 years, the results seem to have preserved a considerable relevance. An extensive questionnaire (11 A4-pages) was sent by public mail to the 670 international students enrolled for that academic year. On the recto side of the pages the text was written in Dutch, on the verso side the text was in English. Because of the considerable cohort of Indonesian students at the time, the instructions were also translated in the Indonesian language. 45 envelopes came back because students didn't live anymore at that address. 303 out of the remaining 625 questionnaires were sent back, 299 properly filled in (48%), 58% in Dutch, 42% in English. The respondents belonged to 38 different nationalities but students from the Netherlands, the USA and Indonesia formed the largest section (each about 25%). 78% belonged to the age group 21 – 30 years, 52% to the age group 21 – 25 years. The division of the sample over the gender was as follows: 8O% males, 20%

females. 70% of the respondents were enrolled at the bachelor and (under) graduate level (master), 26% at the post academic level. 40% of these students had no family members in Belgium or in Western Europe.

Table 1 shows percentages of students experiencing 'difficulties' at different moments of their stay at the foreign university, combined with the availability of help. During the first 24 hours after their arrival, 45% of the international students had some difficulties, two thirds of them got help. Difficulties experienced most frequently were loneliness (20%) and linguistic complications (26%). During the first weeks 65% of the students had some

	No difficulties		Difficulties	
	No help	*Help*	*No help*	*Help*
First 24 hrs after arrival	48%	07%	15%	30%
First weeks	30%	04%	24%	41%
Actual situation (time of questionnaire)	30%		50%	20%

Table 1: International students with and without difficulties and help at different moments of their stay at the Catholic University of Leuven (N = 280)

difficulties, 63% of them with help. Most frequent problem groups in this phase are practical changes (30%), loneliness (28%), attending lectures (22%) and language (35%). In 71% of the help experiences, fellow-countrymen were involved, in 33% staff members and in 21% Belgian students. At the moment of the questionnaire 70% of the students had one or another problem, 71% of them without help. Asked for the reason of the latter fact, 30% answered that help was not necessary, 31% had no information about adequate help and 39% for one reason or another did not ask for help.

At the moment of filling in the questionnaire 61% of the international students consider themselves as well adapted but 36% estimate the adaptation as only moderate and 3% as really bad. Three quarters of the sample say this adaptation was reached within six months, in 18% of the cases the adaptation took more than one year! Adaptation is positively correlated with age: students older than 25 years old reach a good adaptation in 68 until 75% of the cases, students of 25 year or younger only have a good adaptation in 44% to 55% of the cases. The longer international students were in Leuven, the better the adaptation: only 17% during the first 7 months but 83% in the group living five years or longer in Leuven. In between these extremes we notice 51% good adaptation in the group 7 – 17 months and 69% in the group of 1,5 to 5 years.

90% of the international students is well integrated and 10% is not integrated. Out of the former group 71% feel connected with fellow-countrymen, 49% with Belgian students, 25% with international

students of other nationalities and 18% has contact with a Belgian family on a regular basis (we come back to this later).

In Table 2 we see the percentages of students experiencing specific problem-categories (in relation to the 'problem group' and in relation to the total student sample). As a matter of fact students can and surely will combine problem-categories. It is highly probable that study

Problem-category	% of problem group (N = 195)	% of total sample (N = 299)
Language	63%	41%
Study	35%	23%
Finances	34%	22%
Psychological	25%	16%
Housing	18%	12%
Medical	11%	07%

Table 2: Percentages of students experiencing specific problem-categories

problems will go hand in hand with linguistic difficulties. 41% of the total sample experiences study problems, followed by complications in the field of study (23%), finances (22%), psychological health (16%), housing (12%).

Adaptation is significantly related to several other problem aspects involved in this research (see Table 3). First of all we found a significant relation between adaptation and integration (Contingency coefficient 0.37***). The better the integration, the better the adaptation. This is not only the case for the general integration as such, but also for integration in the group of fellow-countrymen (0,24*[1]), of other foreign students (0,22*), of Belgian students (0,36***), in a Belgian family (0,22*).

Related aspect	Adaptation

---

[1] Level of significance: * corresponds to 5%-level, ** to 1% and *** to 1‰

		Well	Moderate	Difficult	N
Integration	**No**	27%	60%	13%	290
	Yes	65%	34%	01%	
Problems (general)	**Yes**	53%	43%	04%	278
	No	74%	25%	01%	
Language problems	**Yes**	49%	47%	04%	278
	No	68%	30%	02%	
Psychological problems	**Yes**	43%	49%	08%	296
	No	64%	34%	02%	
Study problems	**Yes**	43%	50%	07%	296
	No	66%	32%	01%	
Financial Problems	**Yes**	49%	47%	04%	280
	No	65%	32%	02%	

Table 3: Significant relations between adaptation and some problem-categories

Further on we see relations in the expected direction between adaptation and problems generally spoken, language problems, psychological problems, study problems and financial problems: the more problems, the more difficult the adaptation. Of course we are confronted with correlations and a simple causal interpretation is not allowed.

4. Cross-cultural psychology: A dynamic view and an *ecocultural framework*:

In the second edition of their book '*Cross-Cultural psychology. Research and applications'* Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (2002) define cross-cultural psychology (CCP) as follows.

CCP is the study:

* of similarities and differences in individual psychological functioning in various cultural and ethno-cultural groups;

* of the relationships between psychological variables and socio-cultural, ecological and biological variables;

* and of ongoing changes in these variables.

By this definition the authors position themselves as *universalists*: human behaviour is determined by biological and cultural factors and scientific research is possible by means of adapted quantitative and qualitative methodology (in contrast to *absolutists,* stressing the dominance of genetic factors, and *relativists,* stressing the dominance of culture).

The first part of the definition is a necessary reaction against an *ethno-centric psychology* with a tradition of '*psychic unity of mankind*'. The majority of research is carried out in only 12 out of 200 countries worldwide, with only 10% of the world population and most frequently restricted to the socio-economic 'elite' of higher education students. Mutatis mutandis the same can be said concerning the theory and practice of therapy and counselling.

Triandis en Lambert (Catteeuw and Van Crombrugge, 2003, pg. 9) state that psychological and educational theories are no more than '*parochial generalizations, based on ethnocentric constructions of reality*'. Not only massive legal and illegal migration to our countries but also the increasing participation of international students in Western higher education has been neglected by psychologists and educational workers. Often their voice was not heard in the societal debate and little effort has been invested in the analysis of the needs of a changing clientele. As counsellors we have to apply *the transport and test strategy* to our field, and not only in relation to different cultures, but also to ethno-cultural groups. The latter relates to groups with a different ethnic background, living on a permanent basis in our cultural environment.

The second part of the definition refers to the eco-cultural framework we come to immediately. The acculturation process, just like the one of enculturation, exerts influence over time, sometimes deliberately, sometimes less consciously or even against the will.

Finally the authors stress that we need a dynamic view on culture, enculturation and acculturation. Intercultural psychology accentuates the fact that more and more people are carrier of more than one culture. Legal and illegal migrants but also businessmen, workers of commercial companies and institutions of higher education and of course students are more frequently and for more extensive periods of time in contact with one or more cultures, different from their own. Phalet (2003) contradicts the static concept of culture and stresses the fact that culture can be acquired after childhood, is not necessarily shared by most of the members of a group and can be object of divergence of opinions and of conflicts (e.g. between generations).

Figure 1 on the next page shows a model applicable to international students: after their initial *enculturation* process they are experiencing an *acculturation* with oblique (from adults) and horizontal (from peers) culture transmission. Two questions are important: how much the 'old' (minority) culture is valued and how the new (majority) culture is welcomed? After some time the different answers to these questions lead to four different positions in relation to the majority culture: assimilation, separation (own choice) or segregation (imposed), integration and marginalization. The more differences between the majority and the minority group come down to race and physical appearance, the more members of the minority group will resist giving up their identity.

Culture "A" (own culture)
culture transmission

Culture "B" (contact culture)
acculturation transmission

Oblique transmission	Vertical transmission	Oblique transmission
From other adults		**From other adults**
1. General enculturation 2. Specific socialization	1. General enculturation from parents 2. Specific socialization from parents (child rearing)	1. General enculturation 2. Specific socialization

Individual psychological outcomes

Horizontal transmission		Horizontal transmission
1. General enculturation from peers 2. Specific socialization from peers		1. General enculturation from peers 2. Specific socialization from peers

Figure 1: Cultural transmission and acculturation (Berry et al.,2002, pg. 20)

The dynamic view on the fact that a person can have several cultural baggages, implies useful concepts as *frame-switching and tacid knowledge*. Culture puts a meaning on an experience in a concrete context and only then behaviour will be influenced. The *contextual acculturation model* states that people can switch to adaptation to the dominant culture in the public area, while in the private one it is perfectly possible to behave according the rules and values of the basic minority culture. Role differentiation is the extend to which membership in one role is independent of membership in any other role (Pederson, 1991).

Figure 2 (on the next page) shows an eco-cultural framework with classes of variables and their relevance for the explanation of similarities and differences in human behaviour across cultures. The surplus value of the framework comes from the diversity of factors involved (ecological, biological, cultural, socio-political), and from the dynamic relation between the background, process and psychological variables, with a population and at an individual level. McDevitt (1996) states this as follows: 'In all cross-cultural encounters the interplay between the individual, society, culture and history is dynamic and complex, each shaping the other and like icebergs most of this happens below the surface'.

Figure 2: Eco-cultural framework of relationships among classes of variables employed in cross-cultural psychology (Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen, 2002, pg. 11)

5.   Cross-cultural counselling: Culture shock and mental health
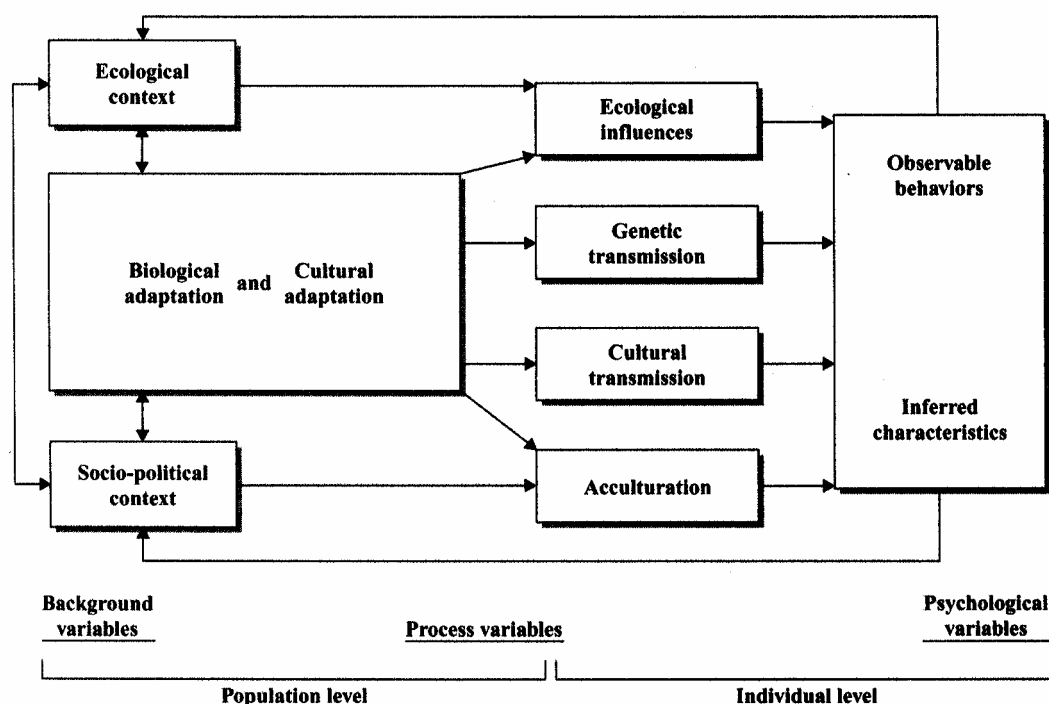
In the process of cultural transmission and adaptation of international students two facets can and have to be discerned: first the adaptation process on its own, and second the distress and negative psychological complications for the students involved. Recent theories stress not so much the link with a psychopathological syndrome, but rather the opportunities of a learning process (Pedersen, 1991; Shiraev and Levy, 2004). Psychological adaptation in the acculturation process implies 'shifts' in the acquisition of new languages, beliefs, attitudes, values, and skills (Berry, 1984). International students have to learn a variety of competing and sometimes contradictory values, rules, and even roles. When they learn enough and in a short delay of time, they can adjust. When they fail, confusion of identity and conflicts are debilitating consequences. But is it true that international students encounter a large number of different difficulties, and that a large number of international students encounter difficulties?

In general this process is accompanied by 'stress' and Peterson (1995) describes it as an evolution with a U-form. The first confrontation gives excitement, positive expectations, comparable to a honeymoon or a tourist visit. Because of the need to immerse into the academic project, for most foreign students this phase is short-lived. Next follows, after a short or longer time, a distressful period of some disintegration. Students feel dissatisfied, even disappointed with the host context. This phase is characterised by a firmer commitment to the culture of origin and rejection of the host culture. Some students are longing for home and are preoccupied to return home. The conflict can manifest itself in a vacillation between overshooting in host customs (e.g. clothing, life style without parental control) and accentuating one's own ethnic identity. This period is a risky one because involvement in academic

tasks can be hindered and access to new rewards is difficult. The third stadium is composed of reorientation and reintegration: by trial and error and often by observing colleagues, the international student learns to adjust.

Two explicit personal choices can be made (Berry, 1984):

1) Is my cultural identity of value and to be retained?
2) Will I seek constructive interactions with the local culture?

In essence an acculturation process relates to individual and social identity, and by consequence to the core of the human being. The right part of the U-form stands for the equilibrium of adaptation and resolution, taking the position of integration, assimilation, separation or segregation (Berry et al., 2002).

More and more authors describe the culture-shock-process as a W-form. After the four phases mentioned, for many foreign students follows another period of distress: the re-entry in the culture of origin or a reverse acculturation. For some this re-entry results in a clearer commitment to original values. For others dissonance is prompted: excitement about reunification, distorted equilibrium because they are aware of the degree of change, large discrepancies between euphoric hope and loss of host culture, renewed social integration, frustrations in the transfer of all kind of values and expertise to the home land.

Pedersen (1991; 1995) complains that there still does not exist an adequate theory, going farther than describing what can happen. Cross-cultural counsellors are especially interested in the factors determining when and why the process of acculturation will be fluent and constructive, and how we can define crucial debilitating influences, be it in the student, be it in the environment.

Shiraev and Levy (2004) define culture shock as a distressful psychological reaction to any unfamiliar cultural environment. This is normal. In a familiar cultural environment cognitive and sensory processes operate automatically, and often unconsciously. In unfamiliar environments mental and physical energy is needed to find practical and underlying meaning. Hyper-vigilance and distortion of communication lead to exhaustion. It has been empirically confirmed that people arriving in a new culture may easily develop all kinds of psychological and psychosomatic symptoms. Shiraev and Levy summarise the links between acculturation stress and nostalgia, disorientation and loss of control, dissatisfaction because of language barriers, loss of habits and lifestyle, perceived value differences on the one hand, and symptoms as longing for the familiar network, anxiety, depression, worry, desperation, isolation, feelings of loss, irritation and aggression on the other hand (pg. 330). Out of these symptoms depression is mostly mentioned, often hidden or covered up by somatic complaints or dissatisfaction with daily inconvenience.

The psychological adaptation in the acculturation process implies the way an individual deals with the new influences, and the existing and resulting personality characteristics (abilities, attitudes, values, identity…). Several crucial factors are observed on a regular basis.

Students identifying predominantly with either their own or the culture of the host country are less likely to experience major identity or self-concept problems. Those who feel torn between different cultures have more distress (Martinez, Huang, Johnson & Edwards, 1989).

Literature differentiates between internal and external adaptation. Internal adaptation is related to identification with an ethnic group. This social identity protects the individual and results in more well-being, lower distress, and by consequence less psychic and somatic dysfunctions.

It is Pedersen's opinion (1991) that the most severe culture shock does not result from dealing with external matters (food, climate, language, external appearance…) but from status loss and status change. Many researchers have studied the relation between acculturation distress and different influencing factors. Results are far from univocal. Some hypotheses will be mentioned here. A favourable acculturation process is possibly related to a safe ethnic identity and self-confidence. A strong self-esteem, with positive reinforcement of formerly established social skills and acquiring of new skills, facilitates adaptation (Arthur, 2004). The *multicultural person* (Arthur, 2004) is characterised not so much by cultural knowledge, but rather by openness to other cultures, tolerance, empathy, and flexibility in frame-switching. Van Deurzen-Smith (1996) in a former FEDORA-conference stated this as follows: freedom consists of not being attached to anything but attachments secure in the world and give meaning and context. Insecurity is composed of many different elements that each may seem insignificant in their own right, but together build a picture of disconnectedness and separateness which may seem unovercomable (pg. 1 – 2). McDevitt (1996) relates the essential problem to Bowlby's attachment theory. Separation creates anxiety and regression. Intelligent and powerful people can react as infants when losing their familiar context.

Along the individual factor, several authors stress that the greater the contrast between the individual's home culture and the host culture, the greater the severity of a culture shock reaction (Arthur, 2004). Frequently members of the host culture create pressure to assimilate to the local environment and have a restricted or no motivation to learn about the culture of the international student (unidirectional). Considerable differences in adaptation of foreign students have been found between host countries.

Finally a physiological variable seems to play a role: the resistance against versus vulnerability for a constant state of readiness. According to Selye's stress theory it is easily understandable that the already mentioned condition of hyper-vigilance and distortion of communication can lead to exhaustion, and by consequence to a plethora of psycho-somatic symptoms. Third-world students or students from outside the Europa-North America context have greater tendency to somatize psychological stress, the so-called '*Foreign student syndrome'* (Pedersen, 1991).

However it is often difficult to discriminate between the causing effect of the culture shock as such on the one hand, and the role of personal psychosocial factors (e.g. psychological vulnerability or family relations), and traumatic experiences prior to the arrival in the new culture on the other.

6.   Cross-cultural counselling: important issues

In this part we will try to summarize the main issues international students are confronted with.

6.1 – Academic issues.

Our research data illustrated that a large majority of international students chose to come to Leuven for academic purposes (fame of the university – 54%, personal ambition 12%). However, what is at stake is more than pressure for academic success. The threat of failure often is less of an individual affaire, more so a collectivist event. Returning home is, besides the embarrassment of self, family, or community, a rendering account for financial responsibilities towards sponsors.

International students often are academically not sufficiently prepared and do not meet the predefined standards of the host institution. In our research (Depreeuw, 1973) 63% of the students declare that, previously to their arrival, they had insufficient information about academic education. 33% had insufficient information concerning the linguistic requirements. Even when they had linguistic preparation of good quality before leaving their country, mastery can be highly insufficient in order to understand courses, especially in human sciences. In addition to this, many aspects of cultural background can impede normal study work. We refer to our example about the Indonesian language missing the word 'to be' but also having passed their youth in an authoritarian political context does not make studying 'Law of the democratic state' obvious (cf. Figure 2 under: Socio-political context). The latter not only has to do with terminology but even more with the implicit knowledge and emotional colour of concepts. When too many of such experiences occur, international students can conclude that the curriculum is irrelevant to them. Explanations and illustrations by local exemplary material can lead to total confusion! When I confronted the dean of the faculty of medicine with this obstacle, he positioned immediately on an (absolutist) standpoint by answering: 'The brain cells of Belgian and Indonesian students are the same: they are gray!'.

International students often have to adjust to teaching methods totally different from those they experienced so far. A previous autocratic, (over)structured teaching style can lead to missing structure, clear expectations and distant formality in teacher – student interactions. On the contrary, students coming from a constructivist teaching approach to a more structured one, can have feelings of suffocation and losing control over their own learning project.

Huge differences relate to individualist – collectivist achievement cultures. Both can be achievement oriented but in the former the individual student mostly follows an autonomous path with personal responsibilities for development. The latter stresses the group characteristics of the project with common responsibilities.

6.2 – Communication

Language proficiency is related to both academic and social adjustment. In our research we found a correlation of 0.34 between linguistic and study difficulties; 0.28 between linguistic and adaptation difficulties. Six components of linguistic competency have been identified (Arthur, 2004): cultural openness, empathy and flexibility (contrary to mono-cultural approach), knowledge of the host culture (history, values, verbal and non-verbal norms), language competence, adaptation, communication effectiveness and social integration.

Participation in group discussions can be limited by language proficiency but also by unfamiliarity with the host culture. International students can lose their self-confidence by thinking they have nothing to contribute and feel excluded. This negative trend can be accentuated by cultural differences in assertiveness. People judge mental abilities often by verbal communications. International students run the risk of losing their status of adult and are then no longer accepted as full. Then you try to find others who understand and speak your language to be reborn as a respected person!

Limited knowledge of the language restricts also expression of private thoughts and feelings, a considerable problem to student counsellors, but also relevant in academic and administrative problem solving.

6.3 – Social support

Leaving family, spouse and children, sometimes for several years, has a diversity of meanings and impacts in different cultures but mostly, at least after some time, it causes a far reaching effect on the academic and psycho-social functioning of international students. Going back to figure 1, we can say that within the changed social context the vertical, the oblique and the biggest part of the horizontal enculturation is missing, and the influence is replaced by the acculturation transmission lines (oblique and horizontal).

Student families living abroad are in transition as well. Socially they are isolated from the family members in the host country. Missing happy or painful family milestones can be difficult to live with. Especially loss of a loved one makes grieving more difficult or even impossible. Longing for return in order to attend the funeral or even after the funeral in order to participate in death rituals, can disturb personal (and financial) equilibrium.

Even more than in the case of individual students, they can experience changes in status and role. Young children, attending school in the host country, mostly have a sufficient language proficiency but the caring partner (most frequently the mother)does not necessarily. In most Western countries it legal work is impossible or strictly limited. Social isolation may be paramount.

Several authors (a.o. Pedersen, 1991; Arthur, 2004; Phalet, 2003; Van Deurzen-Smith, 1996) stress the overwhelming importance of social context (cf. example of Korean student: she lost identity). Self-esteem and self-image are validated by significant others, who provide emotional and social support in culturally recognizable patterns. Moving to a foreign country can deprive a person of these support systems. Loss of traditional social sources of self-validation, deprivation of familiar means of social support can debilitate psychological adjustment and enlarge the negative impact of life stresses. Anxiety: irritation, annoyance, panic, extreme pain, disorientation and for all depression can or will be undesirable consequences.

International students can become hesitant or even anxious because of language problems or concern about what constitutes socially appropriate behaviour. Cultural background is of overwhelming importance when interpreting environment and when giving experiences a meaning. Mismatches because of different meaning or word choice can lead to social alienation, to 'in- and out-

grouping'.

Many authors mention that international students form homogeneous groups with members of similar cultural background or from nations with geographical proximity (see also our research data). Status change and status loss are the main reasons why international students create a co-national subculture as the primary support system, even at the expense of intercultural contact or attending professional services. However, this network can be of great importance for success (Pedersen, 1991). Another reason for this strategy is that students from collectivist cultures have fewer but more stable friendships. Members of individualist cultures have many levels of friendship with varying degrees of responsibility, attachment and intensity. This is confusing (Triandis). Foreign students expect a higher level of interdependency in contrast to the perceived superficiality, associated with time and activity.

In addition in many host cultures, local students are rather passive and wait for the initiative of the international student. Making friends with local students is one of the most difficult and least successful areas of adjustment. A delicate point in the contact between different cultures is of extreme importance but can only be mentioned quickly here: dating practices and the role of gender in society as a whole. Foreign male students coming from more restricted cultures, have the impression that there are almost no limits in inter-sexual relations. Female students from such cultures feel ambivalent. Attracted because parties and the like are important social events. Threatened because of very strict norms they want to respect. Often they become socially isolated.

6.4 - Gender role expectations

One of the more harrowing and sensitive cultural gaps lies in the sharp contrasts between definitions of acceptable inter-gender behaviour. There is considerable confusion in boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate general behaviour and more so in sexual behaviour. Miscommunication can result in serious consequences (sexual harassment). Female students experience higher levels of distress because of greater adjustment in gender role behaviour. Partly related to their position within the families they are confronted with greater role conflicts. Maybe they suffer more than their male colleagues or partners from homesickness and longing for their family? Most students make transition to more liberal cultures, but the reverse is becoming more and more frequent. Students have to be prepared to transition to a culture with differential treatment of men and women.

6.5 – Life habits and cost of living

Mundane ways such as clothing, food, sports, entertainment can lead to intercultural conflicts as well. Striving to maintain their own values and practices means for foreign students feeling isolated from the mainstream culture, but abrogating their own culture may engender guilt, leave them feeling rootless and lonely, provoke opposition from family and friends (Martinez, 1989). Even simple decisions can evoke discomfort: Eating rice or bread? Wearing a sari or Western attire? Shaking hands? Direct eye contact?

When there is a shift in the cost of living between home and the host country, there are associated financial issues. Especially students who have enjoyed a relatively high standard of living in their home country but face higher costs of living, are more likely to experience issues of adjustment. Not exceptionally international students are financially dependent on their core family, extended family, foreign sponsor, government. Families may endure considerable hardship to send one of their children abroad. Resources can be extremely limited which then leads to extreme stress, and can distract the students from the academic tasks and adversely impact their sense of stability. The student can jeopardize academic success by taking on jobs. Many international students become very skilled in low-cost purchasing!

6.6 - Discrimination and racism

Transition from a dominant ethnic or religious group in the home country to a minority in the host country touches personal and social feelings of identity. Negative stereotypes may be transferred through subtle forms of bias or through blatant hostility.

Cultural encapsulation can be intentionally or not a part of the curriculum: ethnocentric views of academic subjects can attest to one 'right way' of understanding the world, including the explanation of historical events related to the home country of the international student. Staff is not alert enough concerning terminology when handling the home countries of all students they are teaching (e.g. primitives, backward, plagued with corruption…).

Pedersen (1995) warns for other expressions of unintentional racism. International students are at the lower end of a hierarchy of power and priority on many campuses. This has important consequences for the degree to which they share power and status with other groups on campus.

6.7 – Appeal on counselling

A combination of cross-cultural, religious, racial, socio-economical and personal problems can cause international students to feel isolated, outsiders on campus (Martinez, et al., 1989). When failing is culturally 'impossible', a global impasse can be expected.

In contrast with the foregoing many instances come to this general conclusion: international students under-utilise counselling services (Depreeuw, 1973; Pedersen, 1991; Arthur, 2004). We have to find out 'Why?'. Some explaining hypotheses are put forward. In many cultures it is simply no alternative to communicate a personal or family problem with foreigners from outside the immediate social circle. Rather an older authority will be consulted. Second, members of most Not-Western cultures do not like the authority figure in a horizontal, cooperative position but prefer a clear advice. On the other hand an informal cosy, convivial situation is preferred, in which problems can be discussed openly with several family members and 'friends' at the same time (e.g. while drinking tea or doing some household work). One could hypothesise that international students have a similar view of counselling: a continuum ranging from authority with directives and clear advices (expert), to an older relative or friend (warm, safe personal relation) (Kim, Ng & Ahn, 2005). Another hypothesis put forward is that international students do not appeal to the counselling services because they do not know the methodology and possible results. Lacking this information, they are not motivated and do not expect results. Many international students avoid consulting advisors of the dominant culture on topics related

to racism or discrimination. International students are not familiar with confidentiality and secrecy. Often they should feel shame while using psycho-social help: 'I have to be strong. I am not mad.' Exception to this state of affairs is when they want to share a problem they want to hide for their fellow-country men (Arthur, 2004). Another fact is that many international students combine Western scientific explanation of illness with traditional religious or mystic views. Often the world views of student and therapist do not coincide, which results regularly in ending counselling after only one contact (Kim, Ng & Ahn, 2005).

7. Future strategies for cross-cultural counselling

7.1 – A cross-cultural approach in general policy

The foregoing has made clear that international students share the problems of local students but by the acculturation process much more and different problems can show up. As an institution for higher education in general, and as a counselling service in particular, we have to decide our position in relation to absolutism, relativism or universalism. The first choice will leave the international student in an atmosphere characterised by a '*sink-or-swim-philosophy*', said otherwise, a kind of '*social darwinism*'. A relativist strategy risks to reduce all kinds of difficulties to cultural differences, which surely is not the case. A sound *universalist approach* looks for a good balance between stable (genetic) student characteristics, variable common characteristics and stable or variable cross-cultural characteristics. The differentiation is necessary but often rather difficult to execute. In this universal – culture-specific perspective we have to take into account that also the group of international students is far from homogeneous. Further within each subgroup a broad range of inter-individual differences exists.

An important point of general policy seems the choice to realise a climate for culturally (and otherwise) diverse learners. This includes surpassing the institution-centered decision making, the adaptation of service delivery and the optimalizing of staff attitudes and competencies in relation to international students.

7.2 – A cross-cultural approach on the campus

We are in favour of the general strategy of *culture learning on the campus*. International student policy should be a part of institutional and faculty strategic planning. All members of academic and administrative staff should be made conscious of cross-cultural differences and of the strategic goals of the institution.

If necessary – and by preference not after disruptive incidents – training should be given, especially to those who are in regular contact with international students and their families.

When foreign students do not reach the minimum standards some institutions give the opportunity to follow a part time academic programme while spending the rest of the time at upgrading their language or other skills (*two-tiered policy*).

Because the tremendous importance of social integration, we have to instigate interaction and communication by connecting intentionally and spontaneously local to international students. Eventually focused (peer) training can be given, possibly as a part of the curriculum. Mobilising members of the university community to accept being host family for one or more international

students is a cheap but effective strategy, as our experience in Leuven has proven (Depreeuw, 1973; see also Pedersen, 1991).

7.3 – Cross-cultural counselling

Student counselling needs urgently cross-cultural competent counsellors. When this is not realistic for each institution separately, we have to work it out per region. Part of such a project can be the composition of a multi-ethnic team. Several international students prefer, at least for common personal problems, counsellors sharing their ethnical background (Kim et al., 2005). Following the example of the APA – Division 17, we have to articulate specific standards and competencies. Arthur (2004) distinguishes four possible domains: self-awareness, knowledge, skills and organisation.

Awareness of personal values, beliefs, feelings and experiences interfere with counselling but often they are not only private but implicit (Dovidio). Developing intercultural sensitivity and empathy has to avoid or correct the following misconceptions (Arthur, 2004): *cultural encapsulation* (kind of unintentional ego-centrism), *cultural blindness* (kind of absolutism: everyone is equal; ignoring differences), *cultural spotlight* (relativism: everything is culturally determined).

The optimal attitude of the culturally competent counsellors is one of doing the counselling work by minimizing the negatively interfering cultural influences. Out of a cooperative mutual learning position of student and counsellor one can try to become conscious of cultural differences and obstacles and look for creative strategies to bridge them. This often implies a kind of cultural negotiation with indirect questions (Arthur, 2004): 'How would members of your family / habitants of your country deal with this?'.

Besides studying culture-specific information about the predominant groups of international students, the counselling contacts with students and informal get-together provide useful sources of knowledge. An important fact to know and to take into account is that *racial identity* is an essential part of the individual and social identity of all human beings (white, hispano, black, minority, Muslim…).

Services have to reflect on extension and adaptation of counselling skills. Skills of verbal and non-verbal communication, developing multiple roles (cross-cultural educational trainer for staff or local students, consultancy, advocacy, conflict mediator…). Anyway, we have to adapt our counselling intervention methods, striving for an adequate balance between innovative experiments, technical competency and ethical standards: groups, psycho-educational workshops on different topics (e.g. normal event of acculturation; the phenomenon of reversed acculturation; helping services in Western world), involving fellow-country friends or an interpreter.

Often counselling will not involve solving problems or adaptation, but training in appropriate skills how to learn the salient characteristics of the host culture and to enhance frame switching between a well developed ethnic (minority) identity on the one hand, and a flexible baggage of contextual (majority) identity on the other.

8. Conclusion: Think globally, Act locally

As counsellors we can and have to contribute to a human counterweight against the tendency towards considering of international students primarily as an economic value. A policy of internationalizing has

to provide sufficient resources allocated to ensure adequate campus infrastructure, maintenance of quality, preparation of academic staff (instruction, supervision, advising). Of course sufficient resources are needed in order to establish high standard student support, both academic and psycho-social. Research, development of adapted and creative counselling strategies, and making public our good practices are the general strategies for the future.

References

Arthur, N. (2004). *Counseling international students. Clients from around the world*. New York: Kluwer – Plenum.

Berry, J.W. (1984). Psychological adaptation of foreign students. In: R. Samuda & A. Wolfgang (Eds.), *Intercultural counseling and assessment* (235 – 248). Toronto: Hogrefe.

Berry, J.W., poortinga, Y. H., segal, M.H. & dasen, P.R. (2002). *Cross-cultural psychology. Research and applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bohm, A., Davis, D., Meares, D. & Pearce, D. (2002). *Global student mobility 2025: Forecasts of the global demand for international higher education*. Sydney NSW: IDP Education Australia.

Catteeuw, K. & Van Crombrugge, H. (Eds.) (2003). *Een wereld van verschil. Psychologen en pedagogen in een multiculturele samenleving*. (13 – 34) (A world of differences. Psychologists and educational scientists in a multicultural society). Antwerpen: Mukla – Garant.

Depreeuw, E. (1973). *Aanpassing, studie- en taalmoeilijkheden van buitenlandse studenten. Onderzoek en beleidsformulering*. (Adaptation, study and language problems among foreign students. Research data and suggestions to policy). Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

Kim, B., Ng, G. & Ahn, A. (2005). Effects of client expectation for counseling success, client-counselor worldview match, and client adherence to Asian and European American cultural values on counseling process with Asian Americans. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52*, 67 – 76.

Leong, F.T. & Ponterotto, J.G. (2003). A proposal for internationalizing counseling psychology in the United States. Rationale, recommendations, and challenges. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*, 381 – 395.

Martinez, a.m., huang, k.h., johnson, s.d. & edwards, s. (1989). Ethnical and international students. In: P. GRAYSON & K. CAULEY (Eds.). *College psychotherapy* (298 – 315). New York: Guilford.

McDevitt, C. (1996). A counsellor's observations on working in an intra-European context. In: Association for Student Counselling. *Conference papers from the 25th annual training event and conference: Culture and psyche in transition. A European perspective on student psychological health*, 78 - 81. Warwickshire: British Association for Counselling.

Pedersen, P. (1991). Counseling international students. *The counseling psychologist, 19*, 10 – 58.

Pedersen, P. (1995). *The five stages of culture shock*. Westport, CN: Greenwood Press.

Phalet, K. (2003). Cultuur, acculturatie en psychologische metingen. In:
Catteeuw, K. & Van Crombrugge, H. (Eds.). *Een wereld van verschil. Psychologen en pedagogen in een multiculturele samenleving*. (13 – 34) (Culture, acculturation and psychological assessment. In: A world of differences. Psychologists and educational scientists in a multicultural society). Antwerpen: Mukla – Garant.

Shiraev, E. & Levy, D (2004). *Cross-cultural psychology. Critical thinking and contemporary applications*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Van Deurzen-Smith, E. (1996). Alienation and adaptation: first hand experience of student migration. In: Association for student counselling. *Conference papers from the 25th annual training event and*

conference: Culture and psyche in transition. A European perspective on student psychological health, 1 - 5. Warwickshire: British Association for Counselling.

Wartenberg, E. (2004). Schwierige Gäste – Gäste met Schwierigkeiten. Internationale Studierende im Hochschulbereich. (Difficult guests – guests with difficulties. International students in higher education). *Fachtagung. Profilbildung in der Beratung*. Berlin: Deutsches Studentenwerk.

Experiences in combining didactic teaching, research and psychotherapeutic practice in aid of students from Warsaw

Key lecture

Piotr Pawłowski, MA

Faculty of Psychology
Warsaw University, Poland

joanna@farenda.waw.pl

The Academic Center of Psychotherapy was established in 1979. It is an integral unit of the Department of Psychopathology and Psychotherapy of the Faculty of Psychology at Warsaw University. Since its establishment, it has implemented three basic objectives:

1. service activity - carrying out psychotherapy for students of all colleges in Warsaw;

2. didactic activity - teaching psychotherapy to students from the Faculty of Psychology who choose the specialization in psychotherapy;

3. research activity

The following text is to make the reader familiar with the aspects of functioning of the Academic Center of Psychotherapy.

Service activity

Currently, there are ten people employed in the Department of Psychopathology and Psychotherapy of the Faculty of Psychology, whereas five of them are full-time employees of the Academic Center of Psychotherapy. All of the employees are engaged in the process of educating students of Psychology, who have chosen the specialization in psychotherapy. Also they participate in the service activity of the Center. They conduct consultations and individual or group psychotherapy for students. Most of the staff is clinical psychologists with a longstanding experience and psychotherapeutical practice. They possess certificates issued by Polish Psychology Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Psychologiczne) and/or Polish Psychiatry Association (Polskie Towarzystwo Psychiatryczne) (or/and any other similar institutions including the international ones) confirming competence required for conducting psychotherapy. A qualified psychiatrist with a certificate of a psychotherapist conducts a consultative medical supervision in the Centre.

When it comes to patients of the Academic Center of Psychotherapy, they are mainly students of all colleges in Warsaw. It is reported that since its beginning in 1979 there has been already 1042 students in therapy. In the previous academic year alone, there were 302 individual psycho-therapeutical sessions. In the Center there were also conducted 65 hours of group therapy and 192 single psychological consultations.

Psychotherapy in the Academic Center of Psychotherapy is free of charge, which constitutes to be significant for most of unemployed or merely paid students. In most of the cases, regardless whether it is an individual or a group psychotherapy, the session is held in the presence or with accompany of

co-therapeutists. Co-therapeutists are students of the fifth year of the Faculty of Psychology from the specialization in psychotherapy. The presence of co-therapists is connected with the necessity of realization of the second primary objective of the Centre, which is a didactic activity. It is a professional training in the psychotherapy for students who follow the programme of the specialization in psychotherapy. Right during the first meeting, patients are informed about the presence of a co-therapist and most of them agree to accept the psychotherapy on the basis of the given terms. Most individuals unwilling to cooperate with co-therapeutists are advised to contact other centers providing the psychotherapy. A deviation from this basic rule is accepted only on one condition, that is when the therapy regards the students of the Faculty of Psychology, Ph.D. students or employees of Warsaw University. Their psychotherapy is always conducted individually with no additional presence of co-therapeutists.

Typically, psychotherapeutical contracts are entered for a period of one academic year with the possibility to sign a new one for the following year if required.

Among the patients there are individuals suffering from anxiety disorders, connected with stress and problems with interpersonal relations. Unfortunately, the results of annual statistical reports reveal that higher percentage of individuals suffers from personality disorder. The Academic Center of Psychotherapy does not offer psychotherapy neither to addicted or deeply disturbed people, psychotic ones requiring a constant and regular psychiatristic care. After preliminary consultation, cases with such symptoms are directed to specialist centers.

Didactic activity – the specialization in psychotherapy

The specialization in psychotherapy is one of more than ten specializations that a student can choose from during the studies at the Faculty of Psychology at Warsaw University. Classes in this specialization include 360 hours of theoretical and practical items over the fourth and the fifth year of studies.

Training in the specialization in psychotherapy will not make students be ready to conduct individual psychotherapeutical practice. However, in reality, it accounts for the first true confrontation with a vocational role and responsibilities of a clinical psychologist. Thanks to acquired experiences, graduates may consider applying for further post-graduate training, which will allow them to become psychotherapeutists in the future. (Grzesiuk, in press, a).

The specialization in psychotherapy[2] implements seven following objectives:

1. Students participating in the specialization have an opportunity to gain personal therapeutic experience from their own psychotherapy and, generally, to broaden their knowledge about themselves as individuals. It is possible due to their participation in the psychotherapeutic training during the very first semester of studies in the specialization.

2. Students are trained in basic psychotherapeutic skills during psychotherapeutical workshops with the use of the semi-transparent window and a video camera. The emphasis is placed on the ability

---

[2] Grzesiuk discussed broadly the programme and the organization of didactic activity of the specialization in psychotherapy in her lecture conducted at an international conference in Bollogne in 1988 and Huflejt-Łukasik at the conference held in Wilno in August 1994 under the title: „Baltic Sea Conference on Training in Medical Psychology, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics" (Huflejt-Łukasik, 1994). The information from the above-mentioned lectures is regarded to be a foundation for this subsection.

to establishing and maintaining interpersonal contact with a patient, listening and leading the therapeutic dialogues, observing non-verbal messages and other abilities useful to undertake the role of a psychotherapist.

3. There are three key courses of lectures:

    1) lectures and practical classes regarding the mechanisms of psychopathology; students learn to understand and describe mechanisms of disorders from the point of view of various psychotherapeutical schools

    2) lectures devoted to psychotherapeutic phenomena occurring in the psychotherapy and to therapeutic techniques characteristic of different approaches

    3) lectures concerning group and family psychotherapy

4. Students are also given a possibility to take the role of the clinical psychologist and to participate in the process of psychotherapy. In this particular case, classes that take place in the Academic Center of the Psychotherapy signify the key role in learning psychotherapy. They are conducted during the fifth year of studies. Many students admit they have looked forward to these classes since the beginning of their studies. Every year only 24 persons have a chance to participate in them. Training is conducted in small groups consisting of maximum six persons. It is leaded by an experienced therapist, who conducts the psychotherapy of a patient but also devotes attention to all of the students and responds to individual needs of each of the co-therapists. Students can undertake the role of a co-therapist in a psychotherapeutic group or in an individual therapy according to the kind of didactic group they have chosen. Both, students being co-therapists and the employees of the Academic Center of Psychotherapy are obliged to follow the same regulations (for instance, the documentation of the patients can be used exclusively at the Academic Center of Psychotherapy).

5. The specialization programme also concerns classes on sexology and psychiatry, which are both conducted by medical doctors. Psychiatrists in small groups run lectures and classes on psychiatry. They are held at the closed ward of Mental Health Clinic. Students have a possibility to conduct interviews with patients and discuss with psychiatrists about the prospects of the therapy and initial diagnosing of different types of disorders;

6. Students' attention is directed towards the ethical problems in psychotherapy during the classes dealing with this particular issue.

7. Students can improve and develop their therapeutical abilities during the series of facultative workshops devoted to various specific therapeutic techniques such as: Erickson's Therapy Workshop or Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) Workshop, A Story and a Metaphor in Psychotherapy Workshop or Strategic Therapy Workshop;

Individual therapy

Training is conducted in groups of six, which provides a possibility for students to be co-therapists in individual psychotherapy. Students are divided into three teams formed out of two persons each.

Teams assist the teacher-therapist during the therapy of an individual patient. The therapist leads sessions together with one student who is a co-therapist. The other student observes the process of a psychotherapeutic session from behind the semi-transparent window and plays the role similar to this of a 'supervisor'. During the first therapeutic session, there are three members of a therapeutic team – a therapist, co-therapist and a 'supervisor'. During this first meeting, the patient is introduced to the therapeutical team and they together decide on a contract. Before, during one of the first consultations in the Academic Center of Psychotherapy the patient agrees on the participation of students in the therapeutic session. Next, the details of cooperation are discussed. Usually the patient is proposed 10 meetings with the possibility to prolong the time of the therapy. If, after ten sessions, the patient still needs the therapy, next ten sessions can be introduced. This time the patient also accepts the fact that students, a co-therapist and a 'supervisor', exchange the roles in the team. When the therapy is longer about two or three session, students' roles remain the same until the new therapy with a new patient begins.

All team members conduct the last session similarly to the first one. This provides a possibility to sum up and exchange ideas concerning the process of the therapy. Apart from the therapeutic sessions, the team – the psychotherapist, the co-therapist and the 'supervisor' -meet for 15 minutes before the session and for half an hour afterwards. It allows for the necessary preparation time and a short preliminary discussion about the next session. Later, the team can consider what was significant during the session, the sort of problems that appeared and how to manage with them in the future. It is also an occasion for exchanging views, perspectives and reflections between those leading the session and the person observing it from behind the semi-transparent window.

Once a week the therapist meets with all three teams, that is with six students from the training group. They discuss and practice different situations that have occurred during therapeutic sessions or those which may take place during future sessions of the therapy. Students learn about therapeutic techniques and discuss the case of their patients. For instance, several times during the therapy, each of the co-therapists presents their patients' cases. Within two semesters, six of the students are constantly observing the process of the therapy of six of patients. Moreover, the duty of the co-therapist is to give short up-to-date reports about the course of the psychotherapy, which are later attached to the patient's case history. After finishing the psychotherapy, the student also prepares the case history which covers the areas of patient's functioning, changes that occurred or not have been observed at all. All students are obliged to write about two cases of disorders of a patient – a preliminary diagnosis at the beginning of the therapy and a final diagnosis after its ending. These diagnoses are based on terms of ICD and DSM. This allows students to learn how to cooperate and contact with psychiatrists in their future psychotherapeutical practice. They also learn how to differentiate between the above two classification types.

Group therapy [3]

---

[3] The information about the organization of didactic classes on group therapy in the specialization of psychotherapy comes from the chapter devoted to training in psychotherapy in the academic coursebook 'Psychotherapy' written by Lidia Grzesiuk. (in press, a)

The participation in the group therapy didactic classes is based on rules similar to those current during the individual therapy training classes. A possibility to be a co-therapist in a group therapy is vital for students and it constitutes a form of familiarizing them with the role of a clinic psychologist.

Therapy group didactic classes consist of six students divided into two 3-person teams. Each of the teams participates in the half of a group therapeutic session, which takes place once a week and takes up to two hours and a half. There are six patients present in the session, a group therapist and three co-therapists (ten persons in total). The other three co-therapists participate in the group sessions next semester instead of the first team of co-therapists. Such process does not usually interfere the therapy, as the half of the patients knows 'new' co-therapists. During the overall therapy there are individual sessions between the co-therapists and the patients conducted simultaneously to the group therapy. According to Grzesiuk, 'the standing assignments of co-therapists during these meetings are'(in press, a):

- taking care of relations with a patient. The student's task is also controlling the level of depth in the relation and the level of emotional tenseness of the patient during the session; the objective of this task is assuring that the patient leaves the Center with a feeling of appeasement;

- making sure that a patient responds to the previous individual or group session by checking the kind of thoughts, fantasies or feelings patients had in relation to their reaction to them. Next, a co-therapist verifies if a patient understands the recent vital occurrences that happened during the last group session - especially when the patient was working on his or her problem during the psychotherapy.

- finding out whether during the preceding week there were any important and vital occurrences in the patient's life,

- encouraging a patient to mention about the problem during the group therapy session where a basic psychotherapeutic work can take place;

- considering the interaction patterns between a patient and a co-therapist. This task is usually the most problematic for co-therapists, mainly because of the denial mechanism present in patients' behaviour. On the other hand, the co-therapist is hardly able to notice a display of transference or counter-transference (Grzesiuk, in press, a).

The preliminary meetings are devoted to the gathering the necessary anamnesis information. Later on, the students implement the assignments to accomplish during next group sessions. The student must consider teaching the patient of the systematic relaxation techniques, conducting desensitization in the state of relaxation, identification of patient's negative automatic thoughts, role-playing in which the patient learns new behaviour types. After each individual meeting is finished, a co-therapist is required to write a report from the session and attach it to the patient's documentation.

Co-therapists are responsible for individual sessions conducted by themselves, even though the meetings are held only with the presence of at least one psychotherapist at the Center. Therefore, students can always ask for advice or support of an experienced therapist.

The group therapist monitors the group session and the way it is preceding. Co-therapists are present as participating observers. Their duty is also to make comments and take part in scenes and psychodrama.

Apart of participating in group therapy and individual therapy sessions, all co-therapists are also present during supervision sessions, which last two hours and a half. During the supervision, students and a didactic group trainer discuss any problems in relations between a patient and a co-therapist. Moreover, after finishing the group therapy session a three-person team of co-therapists undergoes through one-hour supervision. Thus, students spend inclusively approximately about seven hours a week in the Center.

At the end of the training classes on group therapy, co-therapists, just as their colleagues participating in the individual therapy workshops, prepare a case study of a given patient supplemented with the description of the group dynamics in the therapy.

Research activity

The third main branch of activity at the Academic Center of Psychotherapy is the research activity.[4] The Academic Center of Psychotherapy conducts the cathamnestic research among former patients. Its objective is collecting data about the effects of the psychotherapy. What is more, the head of the Center, Jadwiga Rakowska, leads there the research concerning the problem of a short-term strategic therapy effectiveness. This research is the basis for her entering into the process of habilitation.

According to Grzesiuk 'cathamnestic survey concerning the relation patterns between the group of variables: (1) reasons of entering the psychotherapy (2) the process of the therapy and (3) its effects, has been conducted by the Center three times so far:

- Research I concerned the patients treated in the Academic Center in years 1978-90.
- Research II, in which patients participated in treatment in the Academic Center in years 1990-96.
- Research III concerned the patients participating in the therapy in years 1996-2000.

Research II and III regarded exclusively the relations between the three above-mentioned groups of variables.' (Grzesiuk, in press, b) Moreover, Research I considered the differences between the respondents and non-respondents of the research, and the differences between the patients who finished their psychotherapy and those who dropped out from the therapy.

Respondents of the research

Participants in the process of the research were individuals who finished the therapy minimum one year before the research started. Patient's complete documentation with a correspondence address was in possession of the Center and the questionnaires were posted to those who met the above qualifications.

- In the first cathamnestic research (Research I) 423 former patients received the questionnaires; they were chosen out of 554 patients who were in the psychotherapy in the Center in years 1978-1990; this group included 48% of women and 52% of men. The questionnaire was sent back to the Center by 162 of patients (respondents accounted for 38%).
- In Research II the questionnaire was sent to those patients of the Center who were in the psychotherapy in years 1990-1996 and it was posted back by 71 respondents.

---

[4] Grzesiuk described it in an academic coursebook 'Psychotherapy' (in press, b). The information about research activity undertaken by the Academic Center of Psychotherapy comes from the above resource and from not yet published research data conducted by Rakowska.

- In research III, 93 of patients received the questionnaire and 34 persons sent it back to the Center (respondents accounted for 36%).

The percentage of the persons who responded to the questionnaires and sent it back to the Center point out that the patients, often after finishing their studies in Warsaw, changed their place of living and came back to their home towns, which made the contact with them difficult or even impossible. Table 1 presents the structure of relations between gender and age of the respondents.

	Research I	Research II	Research III
woman	51%	59%	71%
man	47%	41%	29%
age	21-30 years old	21-25 years old	21-25 years old

Table 1. Gender and age of respondents

It is observable that during subsequent researches I, II and III the number of female respondents systematically increased. What is interesting is the fact that in Research I the female respondents also slightly outnumbered the male respondents, even though this group subtly dominated at first, which indicates Table 1.

It is also worth mentioning that in Research II and III the age limit of respondents decreased. It is probably connected with the general tendency to graduating from studies and starting the professional activity earlier.

Research tools

According to Grzesiuk 'the primary research tool of variables in kathemnestic researches I, II and III was a questionnaire consisting of three principal parts; the author of the questionnaire was Urszula Fila (1993).

- In the first part there were four questions (1-4) related to the areas of the problems, specific difficulties mentioned by the patients in the pre-psychotherapy period as well as reasons or ways of deciding to apply to the Center;

- In the second part, there were questions from 5 to 20 which considered the patients' experiences related to the cooperation with the Center and also their opinion on the process of psychotherapy;

- The third part, consisting of questions from 21 to 31, includes the period from the finishing the therapy up to the moment of filling in the questionnaire. Its objective is above all gathering information about the patient's opinion about general effects of the therapy but also on the specific effects which relate to different ranges of patient's functioning in social situations. The questionnaire is also supplemented with the questions related to the socio-demographical data.' (Grzesiuk, in press, b).

Results

Due to the disproportion between the quantity of patients to whom questionnaires were sent and those who became the participants (respondents) of the research, a comparison was conducted between

these two groups. The basis for this activity was documentation stored in the Academic Center of Psychotherapy. However, there was no evidence found which could suggest that the above-mentioned groups differ from each other on the level of diagnosing, the form of the therapy, the quality of the therapeutical relation or demographical variables. Nevertheless, it was observed that the participants-respondents of the research were perceived by the therapeutists as those who improved their functioning to a larger extend. Moreover, they had more therapeutical sessions, finished the therapy at a fixed term and received the questionnaires within shorten time.

Reasons of applying for the psychotherapy

When considering the reasons of applying for the therapy, it turned out that the respondents participating in researches I, II and III undertook the therapy mainly because of the significant intensity of three (out of four mentioned in the questionnaire) areas of problems. Firstly, they mentioned about problems related with interpersonal relations especially in close relationships. Secondly, they reported problems with the level of self-esteem and complexes. Lastly, they pointed out problems connected with undertaken studies. There were no respondents suffering from addiction problems. Thus, one of the criteria of selecting patients for psychotherapy in the Academic Center of Psychotherapy was fulfilled.

The common and frequently mentioned problem (out of 17 named in the questionnaire) signaled by most of the respondents of researches I, II and III was the fear of failure. What is more, most of the respondents of Research I and II suffered form the concentration disturbance. The respondents of Research I and III often mentioned difficulties such as a feeling of solitude, depression and anxiety of different source. Moreover, diffidence was a commonly reported problem exclusively in respondents of Research I.

The general effects of psychotherapy

Patients provided feedback concerning the effects that they observed during the therapy. Their task was to observe any effects present directly after finishing of the therapy and in the moment of the research, that is a minimum one year later. Patient's opinions regarding the direct and deferred effects of the therapy are indicated after Grzesiuk in Table 2 and Table 3. (in press, b)

Direct effects	Research I	Research II	Research III
improvement	68%	80%	85%
no changes	22%	14%	9%
deterioration	5%	3%	3%

Table 2. The general feedback on the effects of the therapy

Deferred effects	Research I	Research II	Research III
improvement	73%	84%	91%
no changes	17%	11%	6%
deterioration	4%	3%	0

Table 3. The general feedback on deferred effects of the therapy

In the above three researches a consistent regularity is observable when comparing the data regarding the direct and deferred effects. The percentage of respondents indicating the improvement due to the therapy increases along with time. However, the percentage decreases of those who did not observe any changes or deterioration. It may suggest that no less than in some cases the therapy constitutes the beginning of positive changes present after the therapy. There is also a probability that changes in patients' functioning are connected with the events which occurred after their finishing of therapeutical sessions until the moment of the research (for instance until they gained some new experiences in life). The respondents alone linked those changes with therapeutical work, which they started during the psychotherapy.

Differences between patients finishing the therapy and those dropping out of the therapy
Finishing the therapy in time was a good predictor of positive direct and deferred effects of the therapy. Therefore, differences between patients finishing and those dropping out of the therapy were considered in the research. It showed that individuals who participated in both, group and individual therapy, more often finished their therapy in a fixed time. However, those patients who took part in only one from of psychotherapy more often finished their therapy earlier. The reason for this may be connected with two factors: frequency and intensity of therapeutical sessions. The quality of therapeutical relations was also significant. When the therapy ended, the individuals often regarded the psychotherapist positively. They also considered the contact with the therapist as a co-operation. However, those who dropped out from the therapy often believed that they were dependent upon the therapist. This data is not surprising when considering numerous researches underlying the significance of the therapeutical relation in comparison to the effects of the therapy. (Aleksandrowicz et al., 1981, Gunderson et al., 1989).

Reasons of applying for the therapy in comparison to the effects of the therapy
Research results conducted in the Academic Center of Psychotherapy were in agreement with the data from literature. They illustrated that psychotherapy is more effective for less disturbed patients. (Aleksandrowicz et al., 1982; Rakowska, 1996).
Research I indicated that more positive effects of the therapy were reported by patients with neurotic disorder in proportion to those with personality disorder. Moreover, more positive effects were observable among the patients of the Center who represented fewer symptoms of illness and with no previous psychotherapeutical experience.
What turned out to be vital for positive effects of the psychotherapy, was motivation for inner changes, e.g. patients wanted to make changes in ways of experiencing or thinking about their problems. Such individuals were in contrast to those who wanted to remove their interest exclusively from symptoms or receiving support. (Grzesiuk, in press, b)

Research also displayed the existence of relations between the expectations against therapy and effects achieved due to the therapy. It was found that the therapy was less beneficial for skeptical patients against the therapy itself. Table 4 depicts further observable relations confirmed by positive correlations between patients' specific expectations and reported effects of the psychotherapy. Significance of correlations was from 0,04 to 0,05.

Patients' expectations	Effects of the psychotherapy
Improvement in dealing with everyday life	• better functioning in everyday life • better self-knowing and self-understanding • change in the way of thinking and behaviour • decrease of the sense of solitude • aid in a difficult situation
Removal of symptoms of illness	• decrease in the intensity of symptoms • better functioning in everyday life • aid in a difficult situation
Self-understanding in the therapy	• better self-knowing and self-understanding • receiving support through the therapy • aid in a difficult situation
Expectations of support	• aid in a difficult situation

Table 4. Relations between the patients' expectations and the effects of the therapy

The agreement between patients' expectations and achieved effects is clearly visible when analyzing the data from Table 4. If a patient expected the improvement in dealing with everyday life, then this effect was attained. However, if a patient anticipated the deterioration of symptoms of illness, then after finishing the therapy the actual decrease in symptoms was observed. It may indicate the significant role of primary expectations in relation to the final effects of the therapy. Such finding appears to be intuitively comprehensible as the expectations of the therapy expressed in concrete therapeutical objectives foster their accomplishment. Nevertheless, there is also a possibility of other factors influencing the phenomena, due to the cathamnestic character of described research. After finishing the therapy and attaining the particular effects from it, patients reported their expectations from the period before the therapy. There is also a possibility that it is connected with their off target description and fault in judgment of primary expectations based on the attained results after the therapy. Patients may say for instance - 'Because, now, after the psychotherapy, I'm dealing with everyday situations better, then apparently I expected it'.

Another interesting effect of the therapy are patients' observations that, regardless of primary expectations, the psychotherapy provided them with the support and aid in difficult situations. Perhaps, it is a non-specific positive effect of the psychotherapy, which is not related neither to the kind of approach the therapist represents or the patients' problem considered.

The process of the therapy in comparison to its effects

According to our expectancy, it was acknowledged that further benefits from psychotherapy achieved those, who in their own opinion, co-operated and identified with the therapist, and easily adopted themselves to the circumstances of the therapy. In addition, they made their inner conflicts be the subject of the therapeutical work. In turn, patients who perceived themselves as dependent upon the therapist, undertook the fight with the therapist or had trouble in adapting to the therapeutical work attained worse results from the therapy.

Foregoing conclusions are with reference to the data indicating that the quality of relations between the psychotherapist and the patient eventually has a far more significant value rather than concrete therapeutical techniques. (Hoglend, 1994; Muran et al., 1997).

Research on the effectiveness of the strategic psychotherapy

Results from research conducted by Jadwiga Rakowska, the head of the Academic Center of Psychotherapy, are in the process of statistical study. Nevertheless, preliminary results are interesting. In short, research covers three areas of interest:

1. First area covered effects of the strategic therapy in comparison to the lack of interaction. An experimental group, which took part in strategic therapy, was compared (n=108) with the control group (n=108) consisting those awaiting for the psychotherapy. Both groups were comparable with the level and quality of psychopathological symptoms, and presented styles of dealing with stress. After psychotherapy, individuals from the experimental group exhibited seriously lowered level of symptoms and the development of more adaptive styles of dealing with stress, e.g. the development of task-oriented style or the weakening of emotion-oriented style.

2. First, characteristics of patients from the experimental group were measured. Next, the data was tested in relation to the final positive effects of the therapy. The strategic psychotherapy was the most beneficial for those who represented lower level of psychotic symptoms and had less psychological problems. Thus, they were considered healthier. Positive effects were not observed in those participants of the strategic psychotherapy who declared the lowest level of troublesomeness of symptoms. Therefore, it was assumed that those individuals had the lowest motivation for changes.

3. Factors of the process of the psychotherapy were considered in relation to the level of positive effects afterwards the therapy. The most beneficial effects of strategic psychotherapy were among those who believed in the success of the therapy. They were aware of their problems and received more information about ways of solving them. Moreover, they had a corrective experience during the session or during fulfilling the task. Those patients learnt new behaviour styles and thus they were more likely to exploit the therapist's support for their own sake.

   Complete results from the above-mentioned research will be presented fully during the process of habilitation of its author.

Summary

To conclude, the Academic Center of Psychotherapy has been conducting a free of charge psychotherapy for students since 26 years now. It also provides psychotherapeutical training for future psychotherapists and gathers the empiric data concerning the activity of the Center.

The persistent need for the psychological help among the students, but also among the employees of Warsaw University, encourages us to plan ahead further development of the Academic Center of Psychotherapy. In recent times, there has been a psychotherapeutical team broaden up to three more full-time employees. There are also plans for directing the offer to Warsaw University workers and Ph.D. students in a greater extend. Gradually, we perceive the need for new location facilities of the Center, so that the patients who are lecturers at the university would not meet the students-patients. We are going to popularize our activity largely via e-mailing system and the Internet. Lastly, we hope that the final realization of our objectives and plans for future will largely contribute to further development of the level as well as quality of our service and didactic training for students of the Faculty of Psychology.

References

Aleksandrowicz, J. W., Bierzyński, K., Romeyko, A. (1981). Porzucenie leczenia (drop-out) – próba analizy. *Psychoterapia, 38*, 49-58.

Aleksandrowicz, J. W., Kołbik, I., Romanik, O., Świątek, L., (1989). Research on results in psychotherapy. *Psychoterapia, 40,* 17-25.

Fila, U. (1993). *Badania katamnestyczne nad psychoterapia. Związek między problematyką pacjenta, procesem psychoterapeutycznym a efektami psychoterapii.* Unpublished MA diploma project Warszawa: UW.

Grzesiuk, L. (1988). *The follow up study on the psychotherapy*. Referat wygłoszony na konferencji: The Age of Adolescence and Youth and the Psychosocial Profile of the Uniwersity Student, 9-11, Bolonia, Włochy.

Grzesiuk, L. (in press, a). Doświadczenia dotyczące szkolenia studentów psychologii z zakresie psychoterapii. W: L. Grzesiuk (red.), *Psychoterapia.*

Grzesiuk, L. (in press, b). Badania nad psychoterapią prowadzoną w Akademickim Ośrodku Psychoterapii. W: L. Grzesiuk (red.), *Psychoterapia.*

Gunderson, J. G., Frank, A. F., Ronningstam, E. F., Wachter, S., Lynch, V. J., Wolf, P. J. (1989). Early discontinuance of borderline patients from psychotherapy. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 177*, 38-42.

Hoglend, P. (1994). *The relationship between patient characteristics treatment variables and long-term outcome: a follow-up study of 53 patients evaluated for brief dynamic psychotherapy.* Oslo: University of Oslo, Faculty of Medicine, Department Group of Psychiatry.

Huflejt-Łukasik, M. (1994). *The organization of Psychotherapy Training for the Students of Psychology.* The lecture from the conference: "Baltic Sea Conference on Training In Medical Psychology, Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics", 7-10 września, Wilno, Litwa..

Muran, J. Ch., Wallner Samstag, L. Jilton, R., Batchelder, S., Winston, A. (1997). Development of a suboutcome to measure interpersonal process in psychotherapy from an observer perspective. Journal *of Clinical Psychology, 53,* 405-420.

Rakowska, J. (1996). Badania nad procesem i wynikiem psychoterapii. *Nowiny Psychologiczne, 4*, 65-83.

A1

The changes in higher education counselling in Hungary in the year of Hungary's joining the EU

Magda Ritoók, PhD
Head of Department of Counselling

ELTE University, Faculty of Psychology and Education
Budapest, Hungary

ritookm@izabell.elte.hu / ritook.magda@ppk.elte.hu

Another decade of changes

Hungary joined the European Union a year ago, on the first of May 2004. Long before this special date, preparations had been made in several fields of the structure of economy and society in Hungary. Similar changes are going on in higher education as well. The author of this paper described the trends of highe education counselling in Hungary in the nineties (Ritoók, 1997). A decade that passed by since then brought about changes in the framework of the national higher education policy that had the priority of European harmonization of the national higher education system (Martin, 1997). The Bologna Declaration, in which initiative Hungary also took part, played an important role in this process. The main areas of changes are the following;

Since 1997, the number of students enrolled in higher education has increased dramatically.

-The changes of the numbers of students enrolled into higher education are shown in Figure 1 (Tarrósy, 2002, 250. p.).
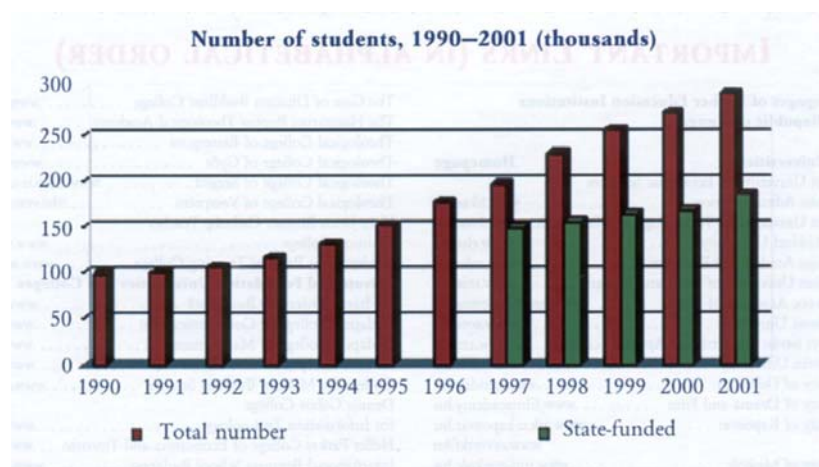
Figure 1

-The distribution of the students in the different educational categories is shown in Figure 2 (Tarrósy, 2002, 250. p).
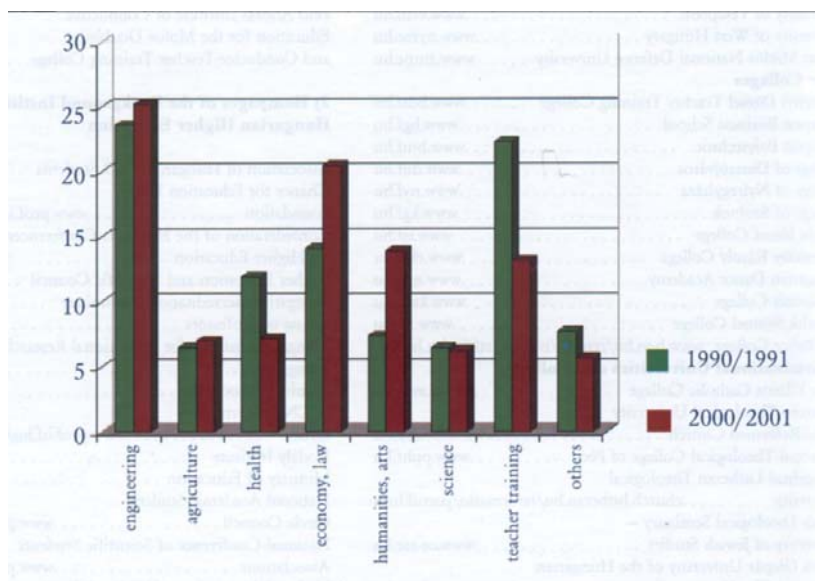
Figure 2.

- The distribution of the students in the different institutional forms of higher education is shown in Figure 3 (Tarrósy, 2002, 250. p.).
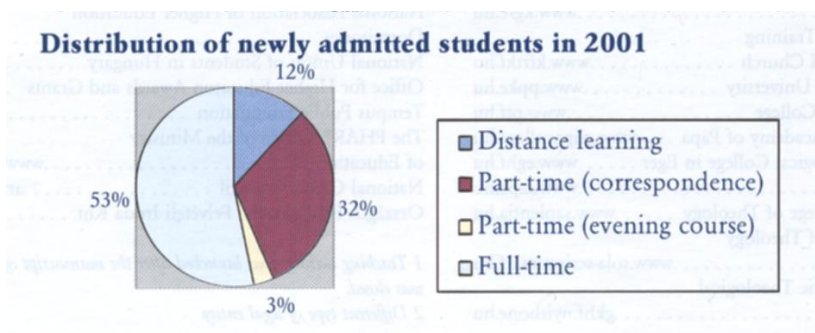
Figure 3.

The European credit system in Hungarian higher education

In the framework of the European standardization of Hungarian higher education, the European Credit System has been installed (Tarrósy, 2002).

The credit system provides a tool for the evaluation of the quantity and quality of work carried out by students. This system is more flexible than its predecessor, students may choose from more subjects, and study the same subject at a different faculty, university or even abroad.

In Hungary education has been monitored successfully but in an inflexible way through rigid curricula. With the transformation of higher education this system also needs to be reformed. The Ministry of

Education believes that the intellectual and physical mobility of students is highly valuable and the aim of the general introduction of the credit system is the establishment of flexibility within and among institutions both in Hungary and abroad.

Education based on a credit system in more flexible, students may have more opportunities, plan their studies tailored to their individual needs and study obligatory or optional subjects at a different faculty, university or abroad. Besides giving opportunities to study abroad the flexibility provided by the credit system has various other advantages. Achievement of a higher training level and career adjustment will become easier. Students will not be obliged to repeat semesters. The opportunity for studying according to an individual curriculum will increase students sense of responsibility and they may become more motivated due to the wider choice. Training structures of institutions will become clearer, the facility of studying abroad will strengthen the relations with foreign higher educational institutions and a healthy competition will emerge among teachers as well as institutions.

In 2000 the Government issued a Decree on the introduction of the credit system. Pursuant to this Decree, as of 1 September 2002 at the latest, all higher education institutions must offer graduate courses in line with the credit system.

The main objective of the credit system is to facilitate physical and intellectual mobility. Therefore the system to be introduced is in line with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The Decree requires institutions to prepere an Information Package based on uniform principles which helps students plan their studies in Hungary and abroad in a flexible way and to be able to resume studies in Hungary after studies abroad without loss of time. (Tarrósy 2002)

The Hungarian higher education changed in a rapid way after joining the Bologna Declaration. The changes can be characterized by the following processes;

The transformation of the structure of higher education in Hungary in the framework of the "Bologna Process" is now in progress, and by the fall semester of 2005 all universities and colleges recommended to apply the two-stage (B.A./M.A) system – and after one "transitional year", from the fall semester of 2006, it becomes a formal requirement.

From a student's point of view, the Bologna system has its impacts on the Hungarian higher education in two main areas; the traditional Hungarian *entrance examination system* to higher education (which has been a very strong selective entrance test). is now going to be abolished from the academic year of 2005. Students can apply to higher education institutions with a "higher standard abitur" that they can optionally, take in their home secondary education institutions, for foreign students its equivalent, the "International Baccalaureate" is to be used for applications.

The other important change is that the first phase of higher education, B.A. can be taken after the first three year of studies, and an *increased number of intermajor mobility possibilities* are now open for students for the second phase of studies.

The changes in Hungarian higher education as tasks for the system of higher education counselling

Although the number of the students increased dramatically, the academic staff remained the same, or even suffered from serious shortages.

The rate of academic staff by students is shown in Figure 4 (Tarrósy, 2002, 27. p.).
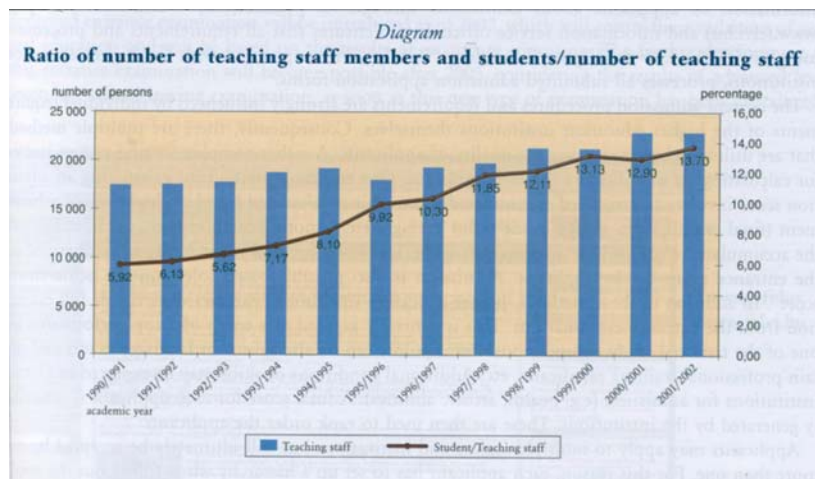
Figure 4.

The changes coming from the European standardization of Hungarian education created new tasks for the higher education counselling system:

Psychological counselling in higher education can only function in an effective way if it is integrated into the system of higher education services. Otherwise it remains isolated with a problematic rationale in the higher education institutions. This is why the developmental tasks of higher education counselling are elaborated on a broader scope, and formulated on a societal rather than a mental hygienic level.

- Students who are in the protective environment of higher education have to be prepared to face the new challenges in the labour market and career difficulties.
- Counselling services have to be re-structured according to the special problems that can characteristically present in the lives of special student populations (students with special needs, students who have to take the burden of extreme social mobility and social disadvantages, foreign students, students who represent minorities etc.)..
- The new credit system has an impact on the mental hygienic state of students, and counselling is an important possibility to help students to struggle with these difficulties, and to promote and maintain communities.
- To facilitate intentional study planning and career management.

- To provide equal opportunities to get into the higher education system, to decrease drop-out rate, and to help the integration to the labor market.
- To establish the norms of health conscious behavior, to provide a preventive strategy against risk behavior, especially addiction problems.

Since 1997, the following *results* has been achieved (Szövényi, 2004).:
- The number of institutions who provide systematic counselling services in higher education has increased.
- The number of counsellors has been increased.
- The profile of the system of activities has become more structured and complex (with the development of information systems, e-counselling services, career services)..
- The supervision system for psychological counsellors has been developed and maintained.
- New postgraduate programs were launched to train higher education counsellors.
- New fund-raising opportunities emerged with state-sponsored application systems.
- The international connections has been widened.

The development of higher education counselling services in Hungary was supported by the Soros Foundation. Between 1999 and 2002, 20 higher education counselling services received financial support from the Foundation, which meant approximately 100 million forints grant for the institutions (400,000 Euros) (Rajnai, 2001, Takács, 2004). After the Soros Foundation ceased its sponsorship – in the framework of their program to gradually reduce their presence in the new EU member Eastern European countries – a new situation emerged, and the already set-up services faced a difficult situation. In most of the higher education institutions, no stable financial sources were present for the maintenance of the services. However, in some institutions the counselling services could gain an official status by the academic year of 2004/2005, and fortunately the 20-year-old counselling service at ELTE university also gained a solid financial base from the university.

As a new development at ELTE University, Budapest, a psychology MA credit course on "peer counselling" could be inserted into the MA curriculum of the Faculty.

In 1997, Ritoók characterized the work of the "Peer Counselors Group" as the following;

"*Beyond the traditional forms, a new initiative is the Peer Counsellor Group organized by psychology students of the Faculty of Arts of the Loránd Eötvös University in Budapest. Involving students of other majors of the Faculty, this Group offers help and information for proper adaptation to university life. Similar work was started among the students of Szeged, and in the Teacher Training College of Eger.*" (Ritoók, 1997, p 37.).

The range of these professional activities has been broadened in a great extent since the author reported its foundation in 1997. Also, the Hungarian association for Higher Education Counselling (FETA) has become a powerful and model-provider forum for Hungarian counselors.

Research and development in the Hungarian Association for Higher Education Counselling

Our national professional association, FETA, which was founded in 1995, provides a real professional forum for counselors by organizing conferences, seminars, workshops, initiates research, publishes methodological handbooks in order to provide a professional background to the development of higher education counselling services (Rajnai, 2001; Takács, 2004.). After joining the EU, the possibilities to gain financial support for projects initiated by FETA increased dramatically – however, these projects do not substitute the standard and institutionalized governmental support of higher education counselling services.

FETA created research schemes and conducted research on the field of drug consumption patterns among students and young people, and the rehabilitational possibilities and special needs in higher education. These research programs were among the leading psychological research developments in Hungary in these areas.

Another research and development project was the collection of methodological, organizational and theoretical knowledge and findings in Hungary, to create a base for professionals. These efforts were founded by the National Research And Development Scheme. The Scheme was named by "Helping Relationships: models and their roles in facilitation adaptation in the society". The research, among other foci, focused on the topic of the mental hygienic setting of higher education counselling services. The research surveyed the *needs and expectations* of the students towards counselling services, the *mental hygienic problems* of the prospecting clients (our students), the different adaptation and life strategies and skills in higher education setting.

The research group of the Technical University focused on the organizational developmental background on counselling services, and these efforts are described by Ildikó Takács in the framework of this conference.

Research on the needs and expectations towards higher education counselling – research on the effectiveness and quality control of higher education counselling

The research among university students surveyed the mental hygienic status and health behavior of students. Important findings have been described in the field of the patterns of attachment and functioning in a *helping relationship, and the correlations among attachment patterns and mental hygienic background* (Lisznyai, 2005). According to the results, the needs and expectations towards helping – especially psychological counselling services – are shaped by two sources. One is the *increasing need towards psychological services* in the society; professional psychological services face a huge demand and especially among young people, professional help becomes a standard and acknowledged way of coping. This source is a mental hygienic one, and the expectations are formed by the *stereotypes and changing culture of psychology* in Hungary. The other sources are the crisis intervention needs; the ever-changing society, and especially the changing system of higher education in Hungary provoke a lot of crisis among young people. Students face controversial information about

their possibilities and the changes use a relatively low level of student participation. This situation create a special role for the psychological counselling services, where a special, person-centered environment can provide a re-integration possibility for young people in crisis (Lisznyai, 2005).

Another set of findings were elaborated on the field of career management of students, the notion of "*quarterlife crisis*" among young graduates (Horváth, 2004). After graduation and before entering the labour market – this life situation is problematic because of the missing professional models and roles for young professionals, and loaded with irrealistic expectations and vague information about the labour market in a changing Hungary. This situation can evoke a special crisis process with anxiety symptoms, depression, desorientation (Horváth, 2004).

However, there are some areas *still to be developed:*

- The results listed above were mainly funded by the state-launched applications – and this means that our achievements are mainly project works with a time-limited funding system. The system of higher educations counselling is maintained by experts with excellent professional background but mainly working on a voluntary basis. This way of functioning however, due to the changes in higher education and the pressing nature of new challenges, is outdated and has to be changed – the Hungarian higher education counselling services have to find their on-going sponsoring system.

This paper described some elements of the positive changes in Hungarian higher education – changes that integrate Hungary's universities into a global European setting. However, these changes created a lot of risk factors in the life of young people; the increased number of students in Higher education are provided with less structured services in a much more crisis provoking situation than earlier. The development of higher education counselling services is not enough in itself to improve this situation.

The reform of the Act on Higher Education in Hungary is a promising framework of a more global change.

The Act focuses on the social welfare services for students in higher education, and promotes excellence, facilitates mobility, and creates a setting for the use of welfare services for foreign students as well.

According to the planned reform of Act on Higher Education, the higher education institutions – in the framework of their "equal opportunities program" – provide the necessary welfare support and financial aid to improve the housing conditions and healthy environment of the students – and, last not least, provide *a system of higher education counselling services* for students to help their university career and career management after graduation.

This new legislation framework can improve the institutional system of higher education counselling. This new reform is put in front of the plenary debete session of the Hungarian Parliament in May 2005.

References

Antalovits, M. (2005). Egészségfejlesztés és tanácsadás szervezeti megközelítésben, *Alkalmazott Pszichológia, VII/1*. 32-49.

Hováth, T. (2004). *Kapunyitási pánik – elvárások és értékek. A pályaválasztás és a pályakezdés új szemszögből*. ELTE PPK, Budapest, (Kézirat).

Lisznyai, S. (2005). Elvárások egy segítő kapcsolattal szemben, *Alkalmazott Pszichológia, VII/1*. 17-31.

Martin, L. (1997). Patterns of student counselling in five continents: Summary, comparison and outlook, *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling. 19*: 73-89.

Martin, D. (2000). Changes Facing Higher Education in an Expanding European Union. In *FEDORA 2000*, 21-23.

Rajnai, N. (2001).. (ed). *Diáktanácsadók a felsőoktatásban*. Soros Alapítvány, Budapest

Ritoók, M. (1997). Student counselling in Hungary in the mid-nineties. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling 19*: 29-40.

Szövényi, ZS. (2004). Ahol minden egyes hallgató száz százalék, *Magyar Felsőoktatás, 2004/4*: 4-5.

Takács, I. (2004). (ed.). *Diáktanácsadás a felsőoktatásban*. Felsőoktatási Tanácsadás Egyesület, Budapest

Tarrósy, I. (2002). (ed). *Higher Education In Hungary*. Ministry of Education

A2

Some reflections on the current situation of students and psychological student counsellors

Ernst Frank, PhD
Psychological student counsellor

Psychologische Beratungsstelle für Studierende
Innsbruck, Austria

ernst.frank@uibk.ac.at

After the Christmas holidays I had an e-mail exchange with my colleague Mette Bauer in Copenhagen. We told each other how we were and that we were not quite enthusiastic about going back to work. Besides, now the students were coming back from the Christmas holidays that had only been disappointing because there was no cosiness and social warmth at home. Instead, there was a lot of stress and conflicts. They lamented. Now it was difficult for us student counsellors to lead the frustrated towards their too high expectations and aspirations towards their families and make them learn to accept reality.

Some weeks later I read about a representative survey among the Austrian population that showed that people in our society complain about increasing social coldness and lack of relationships. Besides, there were more and more depressions among children.

Thus soon I was in a dilemma, certainly not for the first time: Was it my task as a psychologist to make the people seeking my advice accept this social coldness and lack of relationships as a reality and "tell" them that they should do something for themselves? Become hard? Care about their ego, use their elbows, too?

Every change in society, or in terms of our topic, every change of studying conditions gives some individuals a chance to improve their situation while others may lose and are then called 'losers of modernisation'. They say that, when starting over, you cannot take everybody with you, some have to be the losers.

Thus the situation for me as a student counsellor is often difficult in two ways:

a.) How do we help those who may profit from changes and assist them in order to make use of the chance for improvement, i.e. in adapting to the new requisites?

b.) And how do we help those who do not have this chance? Or those who do not even want it because a change does not seem favourable for their development in the long run? Does this mean that we should help them to resist, to be able to say no and nevertheless be able to develop self-esteem?

Brief review of the Austrian 'psychological student counselling services' (PSCS)

Originally (in 1970/71), the PSCS in Austria were founded as an independent institution to provide a response to high university dropout rates, as a consistent continuation of existing psychological pupil counselling services. The idea for the establishment of PSCS came for the superiors of that time from the Anglo-Saxon countries where this kind of services was already in place.

Already at that time the requisite for employment at the PSCS was an academic degree in Psychology and additional psychotherapeutic training. This is still the case today. Personal counselling on all issues was and is our trade mark, from the choice of a university course to its completion. We offer our service free of charge, voluntary and if wanted, anonymous.

You can imagine that our way of working changed and had to change over time. Short-term therapies became more and more important, an increasing number of students had to be looked after in the same period of time, the statistics of individuals looked after had to be increased higher and higher in order to serve as a *raison d'être* for the PSCS, the tasks grew while the staff stayed the same or was reduced and so on. The development could have been described according to the increasing economic requisites as "modern business management". But obviously this was the interest of the corresponding superiors at the Ministry of Education, as our new superiors do not follow this path.

Nevertheless, the content and the way of working changed. The introduction of tuition fees exerted more time pressure on the students – and on us, too. Or: Although they are better informed, some new students seem even more stubborn in not knowing what they want. Many students have increasingly severe and complex problems when they come to seek our advice, e.g. depressions, confusions of identity, anxieties.

Let me summarise some disorders found in my work with students:

- They often want to "have" self-esteem (Fromm, 1996), but do not know how they can "become" self-assured. Covert low or no self-esteem with self-doubt is often present when they come.
- It is hard for them to distinguish reality and ideals; they are dominated by virtual concepts, ideals and aspirations of perfection.
- They have difficulties in dealing with time and periods of development
- Also students are victims of normative prerequisites about how you have to be (Bauer & Fredtoft, 2003). Otherwise they are among the losers, stay behind and are to blame themselves for their destiny. It is hard for them to grasp that this concept has been transferred to them beforehand.
- Increasing disruption between the internal and the external world becomes evident. The maxim of self-congruence often is only an ideal.
- Eating disorders as an expression of loss of self-control or over-control increase.
- Polarisations and disruption increase:
  - Students who stay in the family home for a long time vs. those that leave early
  - External coolness vs. internal fragility
  - Political and social commitment vs. lack of social interest
  - Separation vs. attachment
  - Desire for undivided attention vs. merely pragmatic desire for therapy

- Consequences of drug and alcohol abuse also have an impact on learning problems and lack of motivation

- Feelings of emptiness, senselessness and emotional neglect

- Consequences of family erosion and lack of education with symptoms of modern dilapidation

- Identity diffusion, narcissistic disorders ("I do not know who I really am; I do not know what I really want; I do no know who I want to be")

- Increase of phobias, compulsions, depressions, borderline disorders, hidden behind difficulties of establishing contact, exam nerves, writing blockades, lack of concentration, doubt about the career, loss of motivation and difficulties with fact of studying far away from home.

At the same time they want more effective "tricks" or a swifter elimination of their problems. I feel that the pressure on me is also increasing and I am asked to do something with this pressure.

The recent changes are all very quick and large. The zeitgeist favours quick changes and highly mobile characters. I cannot enumerate everything, but it includes the development and consequences of a global economy without frontiers, changes towards neo-liberal economy, neo-Darwinism, shift of the economic risk downwards, rising unemployment, new laws on services, opening borders, quick development of IT technology, computerisation of everyday life, communication via internet, changes in gender roles, re-privatisation of social services.

The question is whether the psyche of a human being is able to grow at this pace according to the changes of the external world and whether the negative psychic and physical impact is more important than the positive changes.

And what about the education sector?

There also are many and quick changes. Let me enumerate some problems of the Austrian universities. As far as I am informed they also exist at international level: the keyword is Bologna, i.e. the division of curricula into 3 parts that leads to levelling prescribed by the state, the Lisbon targets, the subsequent declarations of Prague and Berlin, the introduction or rise of tuition fees, stricter admission procedures at universities due to the high influx of students, massive financial cuts, the universities have been sourced out by the state, there are discussions about an elite university, the concept of utility and the requisite of more efficiency gets into the education and science sector (the principle of "faster, leaner, more efficient" is the new university doctrine), many basic science studies (called "orchid studies" in Austria) are to be cut down, there is much fuss about the PISA study with an impact even on universities, time pressure on the duration of careers is increasing by reduction of scholarships, thus the number of working students increases, studying abroad (with ERASMUS) becomes more and more compulsory, the expectations and prejudice against students are growing. In any case, all that has an influence and impact on students, their psyche and their period of studying.

I understand that special pressure is exerted on time and on the students' internal and external resources.

Consequently our psychological work with students is also changing.

There is no doubt for me, I often have to diagnose among the students who wants our help a commercialisation of psyche and behaviour, a mobility of superficial identifications and roles, a trend towards more conformity as well as more disorientation within collective goals, more personal, interpersonal and intercultural problems, in the context of a general lack of self-esteem. The finding that social processes leave their traces in the psyche and social structures get internalised by unconscious adaptation is widely recognised.

In order to make clear my requisites for the work of a PSCS - and not to be misunderstood as having too highly idealised expectations - I have to mention that psychological student counsellors in Austria are psychotherapists. I am sure that this has a strong impact on the way we work. It may be a difference between the work of a psychologist and a psychotherapist, i.e. the difference between guiding and counselling. Also whether I have in mind the current trigger of certain behaviour or take into account a deeper cause, too. For me this means that with every problem the student explains I have to take into account his personal background and way of life. This becomes evident for me in the approach followed by the student so far in order to cope with his problems or his approach to our counselling situation (is he passive, consuming, insecure, negating weaknesses, evading, stubborn etc.). I understand most difficulties during studying as a symptom of an underlying condition, such as fever in the event of an illness. The underlying disorders can be individual but also due to the system.

I try to see the behaviour not in an isolated way but in relation to identity contents, as an essential factor of life design. From which context did the exam nerves emerge, which links exist in the experience? Mere functionalisation in terms of success, i.e. functioning without taking into account the internal feelings of the student is hardly acceptable for me as a psychotherapist. Even in spite of this I am of course also for advices, trainings, learning aids, writing exercise offers, in some cases even self-coaching, self-management and the new mental coaching, but always in the context of explored and traced psychodynamics. I even dare to claim that responsible psychological treatments are only possible taking into account the deeper psyche. But this does not mean that the student always has to be conscious about everything in the context, but that I as a psychotherapist have to take into account e.g. the change of certain behaviour in an exam situation in the noticeable context of family relationships.

Thus the question for me is which consequences, relationship-related impacts and networks my intervention as an "expert authority" i.e. psychologist/psychotherapist may have. Otherwise it may happen that the success achieved in the exam may increase stealthily the discrepancy between actual and nominal condition and the student becomes increasingly depressed in spite of his success. His difficulties with the exam may be hidden denial towards his parents' pressure which he can neither respond to nor flee any other way. We all know them: perhaps successful, but pulled down by pulling oneself together.

The indicators identity and self-esteem

Which criteria of a student's psyche are important indicators and catalysts for me?

Let me emphasize and explain two factors.

They are "identity" and "self-esteem".

Not only because they are essential elements of the internal world but because they can easily be misunderstood and abused of. If an individual gives itself an identity or has self-esteem it can do so in a pathological way but according to the required and socially accepted expectations of its environment.

"Identity" as such, as part of the concept of person including subjectivity and individuality means accordance of what an ego feels as distinctively own and what it knows about itself. Identity must not be confused with role behaviour and image.

Identity does not only develop according to a human being's nature and culture, in the framework of family relationships but of course is also marked by society and this is nothing new.

As a matter of fact our western society today is organised largely according to economic points of view.

Let me explain the influence of this economisation on our psyche and thus on the formation of identity.

I hope it becomes evident that we do not form our identity as consciously and uninfluencedly as we often think and wish.

A lack of sense of natural stability and direction is a present problem of contemporary western culture and is a factor in today's reactionary trends in religion, politics, education, and other spheres.

As a consequence of this lack people can be afraid to fall into a feeling of diminishing structure, therefore nothingness and depression, and one of their possibilities can be to turn to the world of consumption, where they are promised to get everything they are longing for.

The "*marketing orientation*" (Fromm, 1996, see also FUNK, 2003 and 2004), giving 'orientation' and direction, has an influence on our life. Marketing strategy inspects almost every behaviour and every thinking and feeling of the individuals to look whether it is of use for the market. Not only goods and services are saleable, but also attributes of a personality such as intellectual and social competence, sociability, empathy, leadership qualities, to present or sell oneself well, self-confidence, the ability to assert oneself, authenticity and even charisma can be "bought" in a seminar. It seems there is nearly nothing that cannot be sold or be bought.

To increase the demands of people, a "*product-orientated marketing strategy*" was developed. That means that the products got a characteristic or idiosyncrasy which nearly has nothing to do with the product itself. Mostly they are characteristics like security, confidence, tenderness, activity etc., actually characteristics of human beings.

The customer is made to believe who buys N*ke shoes is active, who drinks the mineral water X is "sparkling", who buys downhill skis of the Olympic winner is a daredevil, and who wears L*vi jeans is a good lover. The product-orientated marketing strategy sells products full with human longings and

fondest wishes. It is working also with illusions and it is staging characteristics and qualities of human beings for products. People identify themselves with these products and "feel at home", the desires are fulfilled because the particular deodorant, beer and body lotion are also at home. Suggestion and manipulation is allowed and it works with the media. Identity and a self also can gradually be then like a "product". Therefore it can be taken away, like a driver's licence, and then there is the psycho-existential disaster. Or the dreaded loss of the permission to study further on when it is feared that exams are not passed.

Marketing-influenced students often have a mixture of illusions, "dreams", fantasies and experiences of reality, which is hard to unravel and differentiate.

Which illusions can be caused by the product-orientated marketing strategy?

For example:

- People get the feeling that they do not have to do something; the product will do it for them. "Smoke Marlboro, then you are an adventurer". "Become academic, then…"
- Not the person is active, his 'left-turning yoghurt' is activating him. People get to believe that what is coming 'out' of them is not valuable, only what is going 'inside' them.
- The illusion of magnificence: "Drink Red Bul and you get wings" (…and no problems with the mundane student everyday life?)
- The illusion of life without frustrations: the satisfaction is immediately possible, we do not have to wait long. Bank credits are booming – so are the private insolvencies. Or assurances.
- The illusion of life without anxiety. Harmony, beautiful nature, eternal youth and life... by cosmetics, bio products...
- The illusion of life without ambivalences: only "either-or", no "as-well-as", with all ambivalence-cleaned goods and offers.

Another part of the marketing character is the "*effectiveness*", also a central requirement of business life. We are in a "fitness time": everybody should be fit, not only healthy, but fit in the fight against others and for emotional freestyling.

In addition, today one has to be "successfully intelligent", a new item beside "emotional and social intelligence".

The psychic effect of this dependency on the marketing world is comparable to the obsequiousness to authorities. And it does not matter if they are dependent or in counter-dependence. In both cases, they can become alienated to themselves that is the crux of the matter. They can be alienated to their own power and their autonomous wills, which they would need and which they would miss there, otherwise they would have to mistrust their own power and cannot say: "I am sure I can do it and I will achieve my goal". The aspect of development and process, not a fixed status or product, is very important to be kept in mind, because the ability to make decisions, also to accept them further on and to handle it according to what came out (wrong or right), is a key requirement for self-realisation.

After the significance of identity and its possible contents I would like to touch the topic of *"self-esteem"*.

Also self-esteem may suffer a development that does not give the individual the positive feeling we usually associate with it. Somebody may be very successful in his studies but not develop self-esteem due to it. The success does not seem to "feed" him satisfying and correctly, it does not give a safe and consistent feeling of esteem.

There are many first interviews where the students give hints of lack of self-esteem. Be it in the progress of their studies, be it in their social relationships, be it in their dependence on the parental home.

Asked, how they could get self-esteem they often hardly know how that works or think it has to do with success.

According to my experience it has proven very helpful for the students to make a distinction between self-esteem and outside-esteem. What many people consider self-esteem is rather outside-esteem if you examine it more closely. Many people compare themselves or are compared to somebody else's values. "I am better and more attractive than the others, I am told. I can lead them to give me what I want from them". This seems to lead to self-esteem, but it does not automatically because esteem is in relation to other people and becomes evident mainly in comparison with them. Other outside people, for instance friends or examiners, give value ("I love you" or "You made a good examination") and when this occupies the place of self-esteem, then they have "others"-esteem, but not "self"-esteem. Because this can be taken away from the others and outside standings any time or just can change (a few days later the same person can say "I do not love you any more"). They are very anxious because of the possibility of separation, therefore dependent and longing for permanent praise, needing much support for their well-being.

"Self"-esteem, as the word "self" says, is the assessment of our own performance by ourselves in the course of time, not in comparison to others. In case of self-esteem I compare myself whether I made a positive development, e.g. from yesterday to today or during my whole life. How proud am I of this change? This feeling is much more stable, can not be taken away easily and less subject to disorders, especially valuable in times of dramatic changes than outside-esteem that is easily ruled by requisites of something that does not exist yet and can end in never-ending demands.

It is helpful for the students to recognise that especially during their period of study there are many occasions for comparison with other students due to the easy comparability of grades, length of studies (parents and other superficially interested people often ask for the temporal dimension "How far did you get in your studies?"), ranking tables so popular recently etc.

In the same context as self-esteem according to my definition we have to see the fear of talking in public where it should mainly be important that I want to communicate something and not so much what others may think of my discourse. Some students also fear to be good, they see success as a menace because they (mostly unconsciously) fear envy by the others which they cannot handle or simply taboo. The comparison with others, again a comparison, shifts in this context from the inferior to the uncomfortable superior. They avoid good success in their studies because they would have to

leave the others behind and would feel uncomfortable having them in their back. They fear to be denominated as "nerd" and be excluded from society. However, we often observe that others are devaluated in order to valuate oneself.

Our own situation as psychological student counsellors

I want to say the following in the first place: As there certainly is a difference between psychological and psychotherapeutic treatment there certainly are differences within the way of working and perspective of psychotherapists according to the school/direction/method of psychotherapy they follow. Thus certainly not everybody will be able to follow my opinion. I am convinced of the unconscious and preconscious, I believe in the strong significance of feelings having their own laws, in the transfer of patterns of behaviour from certain situations to others (such as the counselling situation) and in the interaction between society and individual. I have an education in person-centred therapy, psychoanalysis and group-dynamics.

According what I said before about students I would like to make some reflections on our own situation as psychological student counsellors as I had announced.

How can we as student counsellors handle the pressure we are confronted?

1.) We should – solidarily – insist on the fact that changes in terms of feelings take their time. It is known, although not widespread, that one cannot override certain laws of the psyche without accepting late effects. According to our experience a too quick handling of crises and problems leads to the necessity of post-processing some day. "Inexplicable" and especially insistent feelings of alienation, depressions, phobias and constraints often originate in missing out processing phases.

2.) We should take care not to exert an influence on the student's psyche without taking into account the characteristics and dynamics of the psyche. Otherwise we may easily surrender to the pressure by those who simplify the psyche and negate everything due to lack of time.

3.) In order to get a better overview we should observe relationships between individual behaviour and social influence. The understanding of other and foreign life forms needs critical relativisation of our own prejudice. Critical self-reflection thus is a protection against unconscious influences and dependencies.

4.) Another way not to suffer too much pressure is the PSCS's independence in terms of expertise and services which we should request as an important condition for our work. It should be desirable that we are not only available for externally pre-established targets but may determine our own expert targets and maintain our expert responsibility.

This basic attitude is necessary both towards the students seeking our help and towards the superior education authorities as well as towards ourselves. The psyche does not accept the prescription of working at the speed of economic markets; psychic work follows its own rhythm. It cannot be accelerated by desperate prayers of students without breath immediately before an exam. It cannot or should not be developed into a "fast food student psyche" due to the pressure by education politics.

Being part of society and of the university sector we are to be seen in dialectical interaction. We have close relationships to the students, to our colleagues and superiors. If e.g. the pressure on the students increases, we feel it as a buffer from one side (the students) and from the other (the superiors).

This, in turn, exerts pressure on the time factor and the quantity with the same or even better quality, often with the same or even less resources. Slowly, psychic work may then become the production of a "functioning psyche" that can be handled in any way.

Our response and reaction to it is the constant search for possibilities of coping with the problems, in terms of the (prescribed) expert "lifelong learning" apart from the aforementioned economic requisites. In further education we look for improved and time-saving psychological care possibilities (also in the PSYCHE working group reports on short-term therapies are always in demand), improved intervision in order to discover and repair developmental downtime, test questionnaires (computerised if possible) in order to save time during the case history and collection of pathogenesis. Again: without taking into account side effects due to this acceleration the development may be risky for all parties involved.

If we student counsellors are unable to cope with the pace and pressure we, too, may suffer the corresponding professional symptoms such as retirement and evasion behaviour, such as internal dismissal, change of jobs or illness. Also tensions among the colleagues are evidence of this. But we are not so different from other professionals with their burnout symptoms found more frequently in recent times. Realistically, our self-esteem is subject to individual variations but these, too, are due to external conditions. A good job climate could mitigate much of them, as could supervision as a self-evident element of psychological/psychotherapeutic work. Certainly successful efforts in the work with students compensate for some tensions. My personal self-esteem as the positive assessment of my own developmental capacity has become very decisive for my psychic health and stability throughout my job experience. Although I sometimes felt that my "batteries" got empty without being able to recognise the cause for the increased need of energy.

In order to provide an insight to our professional situation I may at the end propose a helpful exercise of fantasy. It is an exercise from systemic therapy in terms of options for change, the so called "miracle-question".

Afterwards I may propose a second exercise in order to gather our professional identity: our necessary tasks, qualifications and framework conditions.

Also the enlargement of the EU leads to the fact that it makes sense to stop and think about our profession and the differences between national PSCS. With all regional differences that in my opinion should be maintained we can at least collect under which legal conditions a common "state of the art" is conceivable for professional student counsellors.

In Austria there are laws regulating the work of psychologists and psychotherapists. I know that there are big differences at international level. The ECP (European Certificate of Psychotherapy) by the European Association for Psychotherapy (www.europsyche.org) is still rather the beginning of similarities. National professional identities and historical use are stronger and resist the idea of

unification. But it is also conceivable that positive development in other countries may serve as a model for implementation in the own country.

If the comparison with other PSCS is not seen as competition (what the national universities aim at in comparison) in my opinion the essential opportunity of learning form each other within FEDORA and PSYCHE will be fertile.

It is also important in intercultural psychological counselling/therapy to recognise the difference and the otherness without loss of self-esteem. There is not only personal self-esteem but also familiar, social (e.g. value of academics) and national collective esteem.

Intercultural aspects of our work

In general this means that our capacity of self-critic attitude towards our activity in psychological/psychotherapeutic practice is even more necessary in intercultural counselling/ psychotherapy. We have to look behind our own prejudices towards a student in terms of his peculiarities, social environment, values, cultural and religious background. This may sound easy but it is not.

This means for us student counsellors listening to and receiving reports and thoughts of our foreign colleagues that the difficulties of a potential implementation in our country have to be taken into account. It would be good to act as carefully as we would handle carefully an Erasmus student from Poland, Cyprus or Finland coming to our service. I also note it with the difficulty to communicate something to my Austrian colleagues in terms of the concrete value of international exchange and FEDORA conferences. I guess it is the hardly describable value of an experience that has to do with relativisation, self-reflection and immediate experience. Just like the value of a journey that is also hardly describable in terms of use and rather has to do with the rise of self-esteem and decrease of bias.

In the end I would like to stress how much gets lost if the individual student is not taken into account enough in terms of individuality, subjectivity and identity and his social, (inter)cultural and societal links are not accounted for, e.g. if he comes to our office for lack of concentration due to his context of origin. Strangeness and otherness that cannot be eliminated basically as disorders have to be recognised in principle in order to allow relations in spite of difference. For the student this also means to be able to improve the relation to himself if I help him to re-integrate the foreign and rejected parts of his personality making them available for re-processing. Not the external strangeness leads to self-alienation but the fact of having become a stranger to myself.

An effective psychological relationship is only possible if we do not adapt in term of culture and standards independent of the student's wishes but if we become aware of the restriction of our opportunities for experience and perception due to our social precondition. If we do not become aware of this we cannot handle it freely. It will be important to think about the cultural specificity of our counselling offer and to go beyond the objectives of efficiency and utility.

Thus I want to come full circle and to an end: many strange things may be nearer to us than we often believe and many well-known things are stranger than we often like.

References

Bauer, M. & Fredtoft, T. (2003). *Students in modernity.* Paper presented at the FEDORA-conference Odense

Fromm, E. (1996). *To have and to Be.* New York and London: Continuum Int. Publishing Group.

Funk, R. (2003). Die unerträgliche Realität und die Leichtigkeit der Illusion. Psychische Folgen einer inszenierten illusionären Wirklichkeitswahrnehmung. *Analytische Kinder-Jugendlichen-Psychotherapie, Heft 117*.

Funk, Rainer (2004). *Young people and the 'Post-modern' Character.* www.erich-fromm.de/data/pdf/Funk,%20R.,%202004a.pdf

- 54 -

A3

Students' Psychological Web-Counselling: A European perspective

George Efstathiou, MSc.
Clinical Psychologist

gefstath@psych.uoa.gr

Anastasia Kalantzi – Azizi, PhD.
Prof. of Clinical Psychology

kalantzi@psych.uoa.gr

Counselling Centre for Students
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,
Department of Psychology
Athens, Greece

This article outlines the reasons for establishing the web-counselling service at the Counselling Centre for Students at the University of Athens as well as its operating procedures. An intervention example is presented and analysed, and results regarding access and usage statistics and user and visitor evaluation, as measured by online questionnaires, are discussed. According to the data the Service enjoys high popularity among Greek students and its current functioning is deemed satisfactory by Greek users and visitors.

The major goal of the Counselling Centre for Students at the University of Athens is to help and support the students to face effectively all the possible problems that they may encounter during their university life. To this end, the web site of the Centre, besides providing information on students' matters and Psychological Student Counselling, has the main purpose to facilitate the use of counselling services by rendering psychological services to students via the Internet.

Computer Mediated Interventions

Recent developments in computer science had a strong influence in the science of Psychology and led to the development of new methods for providing psychological counselling services (Barak, 1999; Smith and Senior, 2001). The most recent developments in this area are related to the widespread use of the internet, which facilitated the application of computer mediated models of providing psychological counselling services in addition to the older models of computer-aided provision of psychological counselling services (Nickelson, 1998). Computer- aided programmes refer to strictly structured interventions where the computer assumes in essence the role of the counsellor, providing the necessary information and feedback according to user input (Marks, 2001). In contrast, in computer-mediated programmes the computer and the Internet is used as means for communication between a human counsellor and the client (Anthony, 2000).

There are various forms of computer-mediated programmes (Suller, 2000). The simplest model refers to the provision of information for psychological problems (Eysenbach, Powell, Kuss and Sa, 2002; Lissman and Boehnlein, 2002) and to the electronic administration of psychometric scales (Zetin and Tasha, 1999). Intervention models can be distinguished in two types: those that are based on written communication (Murphy and Mitchell, 1998) and those that are based on teleconference technology (Croweroft, 1997). Models that are based on teleconference technology offer a relatively high level of interaction between the counsellor and the client and could provide the means for the provision of a complete counselling intervention (Maheu and Gordon, 2000). The downside is that they require the use of high-cost broadband Internet connections (e.g ADSL), which at the moment are not widely used by Greek students.

Intervention models that are based on written language should not be considered as an intermediate stage until the provision of services via teleconference is feasible for the students' community. These models use asynchronous means of electronic communication (e-mail, discussion forums etc.), offer a different form of intervention with different characteristics and should be rather considered as an evolution of the interventions via the telephone (Barak, 1999). Unlike models that are based on teleconference (a) there is no visual contact and the sense of anonymity is stronger, (b) communication is asynchronous and therefore not spontaneous, and (c) there are important practical advantages (e.g. low connection and equipment cost). In comparison to interventions via the telephone, the answers provided by the counsellors are available to a large number of interested students and not only to the student posing the initial question (Vandenbos, & Williams, 2000).

Computer-mediated programmes have been put into practice in the USA, where a large number of programmes is offered (for a complete presentation see www.metanoia.org) not only for the general public, but especially for university students as well (Zalaquett and Sullivan, 1998; Chapman and DiBianco, 1996; Hsiung, 1997). The reason that special programmes were developed for students is twofold: (a) students are a high risk group due to the critical nature of the post-adolescent developmental phase (Rubio and Lubin, 1986) and the demanding nature of the academic milieu, and (b) students are accustomed to the use of the new technologies (Korgen, Odell and Schumacher, 2001; Commission of the European Communities, 2001), making them the ideal target group for this kind of intervention. Yet at the moment the use of these interventions in the student population is not widespread in Europe. Consequently, the adjustment, application and evaluation of similar programmes to European conditions issue a challenge.

Web Counselling at the University of Athens

A computer-mediated Web Counselling Service in question-and-answer form is available to students at the University of Athens. Communication is asynchronous and very strict technical arrangements ensure the security of the personal data and the anonymity of the students who make use of the service. Students submit a question to the clinical staff of the Centre using an online anonymous e-mail form and the only personal information they provide is their age and sex. New mails are collected

twice a week and the answer is published on the website along with the question after 48 hours. Messages are published as received, with the exception that any personal information that could be used to identify the user of the Service is eliminated. Answers to similar problems are grouped together and remain at the website for further reference by other students facing similar problems. In addition, students who so prefer may take advantage of the option of using their personal e-mail account in order to receive a personal response that will not be published at the web site. In order to support the operation of the Service, students have also access to psychoeducational material on common student problems (stress, self-confidence, academic problems etc.), to information about the Centre (how to arrange a meeting with a counsellor, whete is the Centre located etc.) and to selected Internet links.

The Service adheres to the Codes of Ethical Conduct released by the: (a) the American Psychological Association, (b) the American Counseling Association and (c) the National Board of Certified Counselors (USA), and the suggestions of (a) the International Society of Mental Health Online, (b) the American Psychological Association, (c) the Counseling Center Village and (d) the American Medical Informatics Association. Users are informed before submitting a question that the provision of complete counselling services is not possible via e-mail and that the service aims at providing simple answers to questions. They are also informed about the asynchronous nature of the communication and that if they are in immediate need for help, they should contact the Counselling Centre via traditional means or contact another Service offering psychological support via the telephone (in both cases they are referred to special sections of the website with contact details).

The technical provisions taken to ensure the users' anonymity are explained, as well as the possibility that technical problems may occur. Also the name and the professional title of the clinical staff responsible for the Service are published. In all pages where clinical material is presented (answers to questions, psychoeducational material etc.) there is a disclaimer stating that although the information presented is provided by mental health professionals, it should not be considered as an official diagnosis, and it cannot substitute the traditional in-person communication with a mental health professional.

The aims of the programme at its current form are not to replace traditional in person counselling. It is regarded as a supplemental delivery method for counselling services and as a means of transitioning students to traditional counselling, through the use of new technologies, familiar to students. In essence, the programme seeks to complement traditional counselling by providing information and psychoeducation on students' matters. It is also considered as a means for specific student groups to gain access to university-provided psychological counselling services. In this context beneficiaries include students with special needs (e.g. people with motor disabilities), students that do not attend (a very common phenomenon in Greece), students studying abroad (accessible counselling services in native language), and students with time constraints (mature, working etc.). In addition, parents,

friends or persons willing to help a student to face his/her problems or members of the academic staff confronting a problem with a student can benefit from the service.

An intervention example

The example presented here is the message of a student who asks about a friend facing emotional problems after the end of a romantic relationship. The message was selected because by nature it is appropriate for an online intervention and the demonstration of various clinical and practical aspects of what we considered an adequate answer. Not all the messages we receive lend themselves to all the interventions presented here. Another distinguishing feature of this message is that it is one of the first messages we received, and thus there were no other messages at the time to refer the student to in our answer.

The message arrived via the anonymous e-mail form and was send by a 26-year-old male student. The original text of the message was as follows:

"The matter I want to talk to you about concerns a friend of mine. About a year ago he and his girlfriend broke up and since then he's lost his self-esteem, his good humor, his will to do anything. He's decided to discontinue his post-graduate course; he's convinced himself that he'll never find another girl and that his physical appearance is horrible. He doesn't feel like doing anything and nothing scares him. Even death is a subject he talks about in a completely fatalistic manner: "Won't we all die one day? Perhaps it'll be a better place". The point is, he refuses to accept the girl's decision to break up with him, cannot make himself go on living like this, and feels it's meaningless. The questions are: how do I behave towards him? I've been treating him with patience, understanding and talking things over with him. How do I convince him to go see a specialist? He did that a month ago but claims no one can help him so he stopped. How do a make him interested in life again? The idea that he can find nothing in his life to be happy about scares me. The most important thing of all is that he's cut himself off completely from all his friends and has no one to talk to. He tunes out all the time, drifts off when I talk to him, has difficulty sleeping, and doesn't seem to have any spark left in him. Don't you tell me too that he needs to find another girl, the way he's acting there's no chance of that happening. Thank you for listening, and I hope you'll give me some idea on what else I can do."

We decided that the content of the message was adequate for an answer offering a diagnostic impression and suggestions on providing support to the friend in need and on facilitating the co-operation with a specialist. Special emphasis was given to issues related to suicidal ideation and conditions that make necessary the violation of secrecy. Our answer concluded with a comment regarding the "helper syndrome". The actual answer that was published was as follows:

Diagnostic impressions

"All the problems you describe your friend is currently facing could be interpreted as symptoms of a depressive kind. However, this in no way constitutes an official diagnosis; this can only be given through co-operation/consulting with a specialist."

Suggestions on offering support

"The way you have been treating your friend, i.e. with "patience, understanding and talking things over with him" is the best recommended one. You must try to be a good listener to his problems and encourage him to express himself. You must spend time with him, but must try not to pressure him. Encourage him to talk and keep n with your usual activities together as well as other things that you find both find enjoyable. If you want to, you could try and reassure him, reminding him that this is just a psychological condition, but you should be aware of the fact that you may have it repeat your reassurances quite a few times. Help him to stray away from alcohol and prohibited substances, to take care of himself, and not to become involved in patterns of self-destructive behaviour (dangerous driving etc). Accept his emotions; do not tell him that all will be well, and do not give promises that you cannot keep. Also, you should not give him precise instructions on what he should do with his life."

Suggestions on fascilitating cooperation with a specialist and on violation of secrecy

"As you have stated yourself, the solution for your friend's problems cannot be sought in a new relationship, for the simple reason that the very state he's in puts him off from even trying. His best chances lie with consulting with a specialist (being a post-graduate student he could come to Counselling Centre). Point out to him that a single negative experience should not be enough to convince him that no one can help him, and offer to accompany him on his first visit. Also you can suggest that he reads one of the following self-help books, in order to gain better understanding of the problems he is facing:

Gilbert, P. (1999). Overcoming depression; a self-help guide, using cognitive-behavioural techniques.
Burns, D. D. (1997). Feeling good!

Should all the above bring no positive results and your friend's condition worsen, you would do well to inform his family. Also, if he finds it difficult to go to a mental health specialist he could see another specialist that he trusts more, like, for example, the family doctor."

Prevention of suicidal behaviour

"The subject of suicide is a particularly delicate one. Many people with depression wish they could die so they would stop suffering. This is quite different from actually intending to commit suicide. You should ask your friend directly whether he's thinking of taking his own life. Talk with him about his thoughts and emotions, without appearing to be shocked at the concept of suicide. Accept whatever he tells you without judging whether the are right or wrong; however, do not promise that the things he tells you will be kept a secret between the two of you. Should your friend actually kill himself with you

the only one who knew his intentions, you will suffer from unbearable guilt. What should cause grave concern is your friend already having made a plan on how he is going to commit suicide. If you are convinced that your friend truly intends to take his own life, you must without a second thought inform his family, disclosing all the information you have, so that he may receive help from a specialist. Under no circumstances should you claim he is incapable of actually making a suicide attempt."

Dealing with the "helper syndrome"

"In the hopes that the above information will prove useful, we also hope you would allow as to make a comment regarding your own conduct. It is in all respects both useful and right that you are trying to help you friend overcome his problems, especially since he appears to be needing you. However, you should also try and avoid what psychologists call the "helper syndrome". Do not feel responsible for the things you cannot control/influence. You have already done a great deal, and if you follow the suggestions above you will have done everything that is in your power. Your friend's psychological condition is one that needs systematic help from a specialist. It is very important that you support and help him, but it is beyond your capabilities to "make him interested in life again". This doesn't mean that you should stop being there for him, but that you should stop considering yourself responsible for his "treatment", because you will simply have set a goal that is almost impossible to reach based solely on your own efforts. "

Evaluation of the Web-Counselling Service

In the 41-month time period from the 1st of September 2001 to the 31st of January 2005, the Service received 1384 students' messages. 92% of these messages (N=1273) were submitted using the anonymous e-mail form. Regarding the sex and the age of the users, data are only available from students who made use of the online form, since the relevant fields were required for the successful submission of a question. According to these data female students sent 64.1% of the messages, while the mean age of users was 25.08 years old (S.D. = 6.50).

Regarding the comparative use of available means of submission it seems that the vast majority of users felt comfortable with a published response to their question. During the period that the messages investigated here were received, 38.210 visits (different IPs) to the Service were recorded, according to the official logs of the Network Operation Centre of the University of Athens. Based on these data, it seems that the Service is popular among Greek students, and that an average of about 30 students read each published message, implying high utilisation of the published material.

With regard to questions related directly to the current Web-Counselling implementation an anonymous online questionnaire was used for evaluation purposes. Two versions of the questionnaire were prepared, one for users of the service (students who actually submitted a question) and one for visitors (students who visited the web site and read answers to other students' messages). The use of online questionnaires has been investigated empirically (Hewson, Laurent, & Vogel, 1996. Michalak, &

Szabo, 1998. Schmidt, 1997a, 1997b. Swoboda, Muehlberger, Weitkunat, & Schneeweiss, 1997) and the derived suggestions were taken under consideration.

Both versions of the online questionnaire contained a section on user characteristics (sex, age, residency, special needs etc.). The users' version contained a section on the evaluation of the answer they received, while the same section on the visitors' version referred in general to the answers published at the site (quality of answers, useful suggestions, time devoted to answer etc.). Both versions included questions regarding future use of the service and referral of fellow students to it. Users were asked what specific characteristics of the Service they found important when they chose to use the Service and visitors about the characteristics they find important in considering using the Service (ambivalence about traditional counselling, anonymity, speed etc.). In addition users were asked about the outcome of the intervention (intention to follow suggestions, intention to use traditional counselling services or to use a self-help manual if suggested), while visitors were asked about the reason the chose not to use the Service (question answered by published messages, ambivalence due to low quality of answers, difficulty in formulating personal concerns into a question etc.). A nine point Likert scale was used (1 = I disagree, 9 = I agree).

Table 1 on the next page shows the results of the evaluation based on the on-line questionnaire. It is interesting that the majority of users who took part in the survey were female (68,4%), while a very low percentage of female visitors chose to participate. About one forth of users and visitors reported living abroad or away from home. It is also interesting that about one forth of the visitors are students that do not attend, while only one in ten of the users of the service are students who do not attend classes. In a similar manner, the percentage of visitors that have dropped out was twice the percentage of users that have dropped out.

Overall, users and visitors evaluated the quality of the answers favourably, although users seem to give more positive evaluations. Users also reported that they found that the lack of personal contact, the anonymity and the use of written communication facilitated the expression of deeper thoughts and feelings. Users also stated that they used the Service about problems that they perceived as very intense ($\underline{M}$ = 8.01) and that they intent to follow the suggestions provided in the answers they received. They reported a comparatively lower level of intention to conform to suggestions to seek professional help or to use a self-help guide, but not low by absolute standards.

The leading reasons that students gave for using or considering to use the Service was ease of use, speed and anonymity. Over 50% of visitors stated that the reason they hadn't used the Service was the difficulty in formulating their question, while one in five visitors found answers to their questions in the published answers and other on-line material. Low quality of answers was reported as a reason by only 6.5% of the visitors. Finally, the vast majority of users and visitors stated that they intend to use the service in the future if needed and to suggest it to fellow students facing personal difficulties.

	Group			
	Users		Visitors	
N	152		459	
Age M (S.D.)	24.75	(5.94)	25.31	(7.41)
Sex (% female % missing)	68.4	28.9	4.4	65.8
Living abroad or away from home (% yes)	28.3		25.4	
Special needs (% yes)	1.3		1.5	
Does not attend (% yes)	10.5		23.5	
Drop-out (% yes)	7.2		16.6	
Evaluation of answers M (S.D.)				
Quality of answers	7.09	(1.51)	6.41	(1.78)
Necessary information	6.80	(1.77)	6.40	(1.84)
Useful suggestions	6.86	(1.82)	6.54	(1.93)
Time devoted	7.90	(1.50)	6.93	(1.94)
Knowledge about the problem	7.92	(1.50)	7.21	(1.81)
Understanding of the question	7.50	(1.75)	7.09	(1.84)
Help from previously published questions	6.70	(2.27)	-	-
Misunderstandings due to written communication	3.31	(2.62)	5.23	(2.48)
Online disinhibition – no personal contact	6.54	(2.65)	-	-
Online disinhibition - anonymity	7.49	(2.29)	-	-
Online disinhibition – written communication	7.07	(2.18)	-	-
Outcome of intervention M (S.D.)				
Follow provided suggestions (intention if suggested)	7.18	(1.69)	-	-
Seek professional help (intention if suggested)	5.74	(2.37)	-	-
Use self-help book (intention if suggested)	5.69	(2.49)	-	-
Intensity of problem discussed	8.01	(1.33)	-	-
Reasons for (considering) using the Service M (S.D.)				
Ambivalence about traditional counselling	5.51	(2.89)	6.22	(2.94)
Preparation for traditional counselling	6.22	(2.33)	6.44	(2.36)
Free of charge	7.00	(2.59)	6.82	(2.65)
Anonymous communication	7.49	(2.29)	7.02	(2.63)
Speed	7.89	(1.73)	7.24	(2.17)
Ease of use	8.19	(1.41)	7.62	(1.99)
Future use				
Referral of fellow student to the Service (% yes)	88.8		88.5	
Future use (% yes)	85.5		86.5	
Reasons for not using the Service (%)				
Previously published messages	-		14.2	
Psychoeducational material (on site)	-		2.0	
Pyschoeducational material (links)	-		5.9	
Low quality of answers	-		6.5	
No personal difficulty at the moment	-		14.6	
Difficulty in formulating question	-		56.0	
No reason stated	-		5.9	

Table 1: On-line questionnaire evaluation results.

Discussion

According to the data presented the Service enjoys high popularity among Greek students and its current functioning is deemed satisfactory by both users and visitors. An intervention of this type seems to offer significant advantages, such as (a) the creation of a "database" of information regarding students' issues, accessible to all future visitors, (b) the asynchronous nature of the communication which allows for better preparation of the material on the part of the counsellor and on the part of the client, (c) the facilitation of the disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings (online disinhibition effect) and (d) the accessibility of the provided services. In addition, the extent to which users make good use of the information and conform to the suggestions they receive seems satisfactory.

There is concern about possible misunderstandings due the use of written communication, mainly expressed by visitors of the Service and other issues not tapped by the on-line evaluation method used, such as the exclusion of computer-illiterate students. Other problems are related to the strict anonymity offered, for example in cases of students expressing suicidal or criminal intentions.

The project's adjustment, application and evaluation according to Greek and European conditions are still under way and at the moment all aspects of the Service continue to be closely monitored. The ongoing investigation seeks to complement the results obtained by the online questionnaire with findings from the content analysis of questions and answers. Topics important in the context of this investigation are (a) the users' complaints (type of complaint, adequacy of complaint, seriousness of complaint, whether the complaint refers to the user himself or a significant other), (b) the characteristics of students' questions (length, interest in anonymity, type of information presented) and (c) the characteristics of the answers provided (length, type of information, suggestions, referral to other answers, referral to traditional counselling, referral to online material, referral to self-help books).

Taken into account our experiences thus far, we believe that web-counselling may well constitute a major means of delivering psychological counselling services to students in the future. FEDORA and especially FEDORA – Psyche form the ideal framework for the development of a coordinated effort at a European level.

Further plans include the enhancement of the service with other forms of online communication (chat-rooms, forums etc), the development of a secure online intake procedure (screening etc.) and the empirical investigation of teleconference-based interventions.

References

Anthony, K. (2000). Counselling in Cyberspace. *Counselling Journal, 11*, 625-627.

Barak, A. (1999). Psychological Applications on the Internet: A Discipline on the Threshold of the New Millenium. *Applied and Preventive Psychology, 8,* 231-246.

Castelnuovo, G., Gaggioli, A., & Riva, G. (2001). CyberPsychology meets clinical psychology: The emergence of e-therapy in mental health care. In G. Riva & C. Galimberti, *Towards CyberPsychology: Mind, cognition and society in the Internet age*, 229-252. Amsterdam: IOS Press.

Chapman, L., & DiBianco, P. (1996). Beyond high school: College and career guidance online. *Multimedia Schools, 3(5),* 26-30.

Cohen, G. E., & Kerr, A. B. (1998). Computer-mediated counseling: An empirical study of a new mental health treatment. *Computers in Human Services, 15(4),* 13-27.

Comission of the European Community (2001). *eEurope 2002 Benchmarking: European youth into the digital age*. Brussels: Comission of the European Community.

Croweroft, J. (1997). Supporting videoconferencing on the Internet. In K. E. Finn & A. J. Sellen, & S. B. Wilbur, *Video-mediated communication: Computers, cognition, and work*, 519-540. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Eysenbach, G., Powell, J., Kuss, O., & Sa, E. (2002). Empirical studies assessing the quality of health information for consumers on the World Wide Web: A systematic review. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 287,* 2691-2700.

Hewson, C. M., Laurent, D., & Vogel, C. M. (1996). Proper methodologies for psychological and sociological studies conducted via the Internet. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, and Computers, 28*, 186-191.

Hsiung, R. C. (1997). The Student Counseling Virtual Pamphlet Collection: An innovative resource. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments and Computers, 29,* 154-157.

Korgen, K., Odell, P., & Schumacher, P. (2001). Internet Use Among College Students: Are There Differences By Race/Ethnicity. *Electronic Journal of Sociology, 2, 2.*

Laszlo, J.V. , Esterman, G. &, Zabko, S. (1999). Therapy over the Internet? Theory, Research & Finances. *CyberPsychology & Behavior. 2(4),* p.293-307.

Lissman, T. L., & Boehnlein, J. K. (2002). Health information on the Internet. *Psychiatric Services, 53,* 348.

Maheu, M. M., & Gordon, B. L. (2000). Counseling and therapy on the Internet. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 31,* 484-489.

Marks, I. (2001). *Living with fear.* McGraw-Hill, UK

Michalak, E. E., & Szabo, A. (1998). Guidelines for Internet research: An update. *European Psychologist, 3,* 70-75.

Murphy, L. J., & Mitchell, D. L. (1998). When writing helps to heal: e-mail as therapy. *British Journal of Guidance and Counseling, 26,* 21-32.

Nickelson, D.W. (1998). Telehealth and the evolving health care system: Strategic opportunities for professional psychology. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 29*(6), 527-535.

Rubio, C.T., & Lubin, B. (1986). College Student Mental Health: A Person-Environment Interactional Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 42*(1), 205-212.

Schmidt, W. C. (1997a). World-Wide Web survey research: Benefits, potential problems, and solutions. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers, 29*, 274-279.

Schmidt, W. C. (1997b). World-Wide Web survey research made easy with WWW Survey Assistant. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers, 29*, 303-305.

Smith, M. A. & Senior, C. (2001). The Internet and clinical psychology: A general review of the implications. *Clinical Psychology Review, 21,* 129-136.

Swoboda, W. J., Muehlberger, N., Weitkunat, R., & Schneeweiss, S. (1997). Internet surveys by direct mailing: An innovative way of collecting data. *Social Science Computer Review, 15*, 242-255.

Suler, J. (2000). Psychotherapy in cyberspace: A 5-dimensional model of online and computer-mediated psychotherapy. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 3,* 151-159.

Tait, A. (1999). Face-to-face and at distance: The mediation of guidance and counselling through the new technologies. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 27,* 113-122.

Vandenbos, G. R., and Williams, S. (2000). The Internet versus the telephone: What is telehealth anyway? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 31,* 490-492

Zalaquett, C. P., & Sullivan, J. R. (1998). Counseling Center Help Screens: Students' use and evaluation of an Internet-based program. *Journal of College Student Development, 39*, 494-498.

Zetin, M., & Tasha,G.(1999). Development of a computerized psychiatric diagnostic interview for use by mental health and primary care clinicians. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 2,* 223-229.

A4

On Counselling the Procrastinator in Academic Settings

Henri C. Schouwenburg, PhD

Psychologist/researcher/trainer Academic Assistance Centre (Studie Ondersteuning)
University of Groningen, The Netherlands (retired)

henri@schouwenburg.be

The term "Procrastination"

Merriam-Webster's dictionary dates the term "to procrastinate" to as far back as 1588, with *pro* meaning forward and *cras,* meaning tomorrow, which together provide the meaning: to put off intentionally and habitually something that should be done. The Cambridge dictionary defines the term as the act of continuing to delay something that must be done, often because it is unpleasant or boring. A third dictionary, Collins Cobuild, asserts that, if you procrastinate, you are very slow to do something, because you keep leaving it until later. From these definitions it becomes clear that there are at least two ways to interpret procrastination: (a) as a behaviour, and (b) as a generalized habit or trait.

Early researchers on procrastination focused entirely on a behavioural interpretation, regarding procrastination as a task-specific avoidance behaviour. Accordingly, the treatment they offered consisted of behavioural measures such as improved time management and the application of study habit techniques. Today, this behavioural interpretation forms the base for pragmatic intervention methods aimed at creating a kind of maintenance schedule for keeping one's procrastinatory tendencies within socially acceptable limits.

Deficiencies in time and task management are indeed essential in this interpretation. They manifest themselves in temporal gaps between intentions and their corresponding goal-directed behaviour. Behaviour oriented measurement scales, such as my own Academic Procrastination State Inventory Scale APSI, investigate whether students had begun studying when they had intended, had studied the subject matter that they had planned to do, interrupted or gave up studying, and the like. Only behaviour from the past week is investigated in this measure, and a summed score on this scale provides a summary of current levels of procrastinatory behaviour.

Not all postponement, however, should be considered procrastination. Deferment can be purposely planned, and it can be a wise strategy to postpone doing something. For example, in Europe, for many students at university, it would be wise to postpone preparing for an examination until the exact subject has been announced. If postponement is unplanned, however, this is procrastination. When such procrastination becomes habitual, or chronic, delaying can be interpreted as a typical response, or as a habit or trait; in that case, we speak of trait procrastination.

Trait procrastination

Today, most researchers and counsellors regard procrastination as a personality trait, that is, as a tendency to exhibit a typical response in a variety of situations. Traits are inferred tendencies to produce consistent patterns of individual behavioural responses that are repeatedly aroused by a wide range of stimulus situations. Accordingly, measurement scales for traits, such as Lay's Procrastination Scale, inquire into behaviour that is displayed often, usually, or generally, in a variety of situations. A trait is inferred from the observed inter-correlations of a number of different habitual responses. For example, Lay's Procrastination Scale consists of 20 habitual responses that are strongly inter-correlated, producing one single trait: procrastination.

On the basis of their inter-correlations, traits can be grouped into higher-order concepts in the analysis of personality. One of the most impressive achievements in personality psychology during the last 15 years is the consensus that most traits can be grouped into a very limited number of higher-order concepts or factors, of which the so-called Big-Five is one of the most prominent models. By convention, these five factors are numbered: (1) Surgency, or extraversion-introversion, (2) Agreeableness, (3) Conscientiousness, (4) Emotional stability, and (5) Intellect or Openness to experience.

Procrastination as a trait appears to be strongly associated with low Conscientiousness (3-), and to a lesser extent with low Emotional stability or Neuroticism (4-). There are also relatively small effects of introversion (1-) and low Agreeableness (2-). In sum, then, factor 3 (Conscientiousness) plays a dominant role in explaining the variance in procrastination trait scores. Some additional variance is explained by other Big Five factors, notably by Neuroticism, but to a much lesser degree.

Consequently, the overall personality profile of procrastinators, in terms of the Big-Five, may provide some general guidelines for therapeutic interventions. As their position on factor 3 (Conscientiousness) ranks people in terms of behaviour (say active versus lazy), basic intervention methods for procrastinators should be directed at behaviour. Additional therapeutic principles might be derived from secondary factors involved. For example, factor 4 (Emotional stability) ranks people in terms of sensitivity. Interventions for people low on this factor should therefore be directed at affect. A ranking on factor 1 (Extraversion) reflects how people view themselves in terms of temperament: exuberant versus inhibited, self-directed versus other-directed, primary versus secondary reacting, and the like. Therefore, interventions with respect to this factor should be directed at self-evaluation, self-worth, and self-efficacy, etc. The intersection of Big-Five factors 3, 4, and 1, respectively, will cover most of the variance in trait procrastination. The other two factors, however, also contribute, although to a lesser degree. Of these factors, factor 5 (Intellect) ranks people in terms of reflective thinking. Interventions should therefore be directed at cognition. Finally, factor 2 (Agreeableness) ranks people in terms of basic social attitude: kind versus hostile. Corresponding interventions should therefore be directed at attitude change.

Trait and state procrastination

Research on procrastination has been conducted mainly among students. Most procrastinatory behaviour in this situation concerns the completion of academic assignments, such as preparing for examinations, doing homework, and writing term papers. Some researchers refer to this form of procrastinatory behaviour as academic procrastination.

Trait procrastination in students is a source of their procrastination of study behaviour, resulting in intention-behaviour gaps with respect to study tasks. This disposition may also be viewed as a behavioural style in their engagement in other activities, activities that are often less important, but more rewarding in the short term.

In other specific situations, state procrastination is concerned with the completion of non-academic life routines, such as getting up, paying bills, washing dishes, returning telephone calls, and the like.

My own research data suggest a strong relationship between state and trait procrastination. For example, in data collected among university students in various phases of their academic career, median splits of scores on both Lay's Procrastination Scale (PS) and academic (state) procrastination, measured by the Academic Procrastination State Inventory (APSI), result in three subsets (see the Venn-diagram in Figure 1).
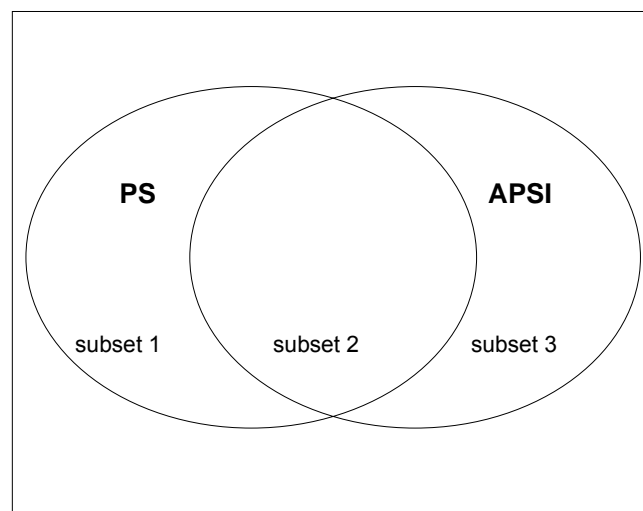
Figure 1.

Venn-diagram of subsets of procrastinating students, based on median-split scores on Lay's Procrastination Scale (PS) and Schouwenburg's Academic Procrastination State Inventory (APSI).

In this diagram, the *first* subset (1) contains students high on trait procrastination, who report little academic procrastinatory behaviour (24%), the *second* subset (2) contains students high on trait procrastination while reporting strong academic procrastination (48%), and the *third* subset (3)

contains students reporting strong academic procrastination, but who are low on trait procrastination (28%).

Looking at the data, there can be little doubt that academic procrastination can best be understood as the expression of trait procrastination in an academic situation. The trait is expressed explicitly in the students of subset 2.

On the other hand, students in subset 1 may report little procrastinatory behaviour in an academic setting because they have adapted to a non-procrastination style of studying as a result of high intrinsic motivation, effective training, or simply because they study under a strict regime of relatively short study tasks. Their high level of trait procrastination, however, reveals that there must be other areas in which their procrastinatory tendencies do show.

Finally, students in subset 3 may report strong academic procrastination in relative absence of the procrastination trait as a result of loss of motivation, or of evaluation anxiety, or from influence by the peer culture at school, or a strong preference for other activities. As these students do not show the trait, many of the interventions proposed for procrastinating students do not apply to them.

Prevalence and Base-rate of Procrastination in a Student Population

How widespread is procrastination among students? Figures in the literature vary from 20-70%, but these figures are usually poorly documented, if at all. It may therefore be helpful to look at the distribution of scores on Lay's Procrastination Scale, collected from 2088 university students in the first half of the last decade (Figure 2).
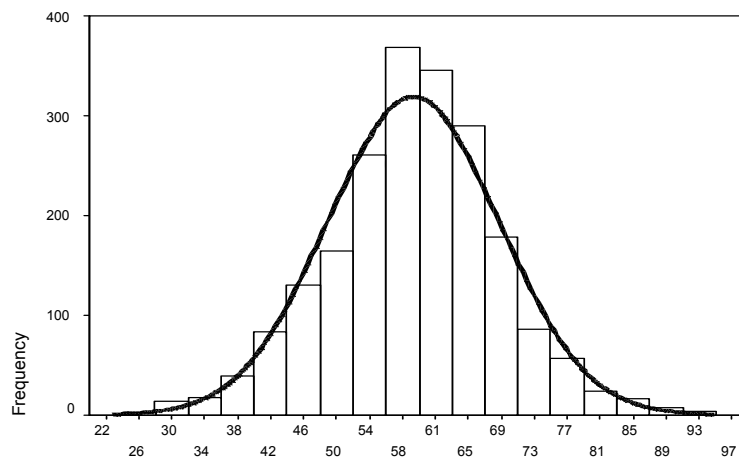
Figure 2.

Frequency distribution of scores on Lay's Procrastination Scale in a large student sample (n=2088).

The first thing that is apparent in the figure is that the scores are approximately normally distributed (Mean 58.82; *SD* 10.30; Range 20-100), which means that almost everybody procrastinates to some extent and that a considerable amount of procrastination is average and thus normal. Now, what amount of procrastination should be considered problematic? There are a few arbitrary conventions,

such as the upper three stanines (67-up), the upper 10% (71-up), or the upper 5% of the distribution (77-up), while for research purposes a simple median split dichotomization is the rule. Another arbitrary rule is to consider persons more than a standard deviation above the mean of the distribution as problematic or severe procrastinators. In our data, this rule would result in 190 participants, which is roughly some 10% of the students. So the question "how widespread is procrastination among students?" can be answered in an exact way pointing to the above score distribution and its moments, but cannot very well be answered without reference to some comparison group. Unfortunately, reliable information regarding groups other than students is still largely lacking.

It is therefore useful to reflect on the above score distribution itself. Its mean, for example, reflects a relatively high base rate of habitual procrastination in the (academic) population. Why is this so? To understand this, it is important to realize that to procrastinate is not the same as doing nothing. It is simply doing things other than the activity that was intended. People in everyday life, and students in particular, pursue a multiplicity of goals and intentions that call for corresponding activities. These activities may vary in their importance or priority at some point in time.

In contrast, the normal distribution of procrastination scores implies that there is a considerable number of students that have a below base-rate procrastination score. These students obviously succeed in counteracting the effects of distractions that lead to procrastination of study tasks.

Students showing base rates in procrastination well above the norm may be viewed as excessive in their behaviour and this behaviour may be problematic in their lives. In various areas of their lives, notably in their studies, they experience a repeated discrepancy between what they intend to do and what they do in reality. They can therefore be viewed as chronic procrastinators, or, as I have referred to earlier, trait procrastinators.

Procrastinators: The Search for Types

Clinical observations suggest that there are at least three fundamental types of procrastinators: anxious procrastinators, happy-go-lucky procrastinators, and rebellious procrastinators. The conviction that anxiety is involved in student procrastination is shared by many student counsellors. Empirical research among student populations, however, shows that - on average - anxiety and procrastination are unrelated. This result may point to a selection effect, because counsellors are apt to see students in need of help, implying some extent of anxiety, but does not exclude the possibility that there may exist homogeneous subsets of procrastinating students with mutually different characteristics.

In procrastination research, only a very few studies have addressed the issue of separate types of procrastinating students explicitly. Based on established Big Five positions of procrastinators, I would add to these few studies and propose the following hypothetical taxonomy.

All procrastinators share extreme low scores on Conscientiousness, which predisposes them to disorganization, lack of time management, weak impulse control, and lack of work discipline. As a result, their academic achievement tends to be lower than could be expected on the basis of ability scores. In addition, some of these procrastinators are also high in Neuroticism (or low in Emotional Stability), making them anxious, fearful of failing, perfectionistic, and probably working hard in order to compensate for their lack of organization. Their worries make then seek help at counselling services.

Some procrastinators, however, do not combine low Conscientiousness with high Neuroticism. This makes them free of anxiety, and therefore not prone to consulting counselling services. Their academic underachievement, however, will not be compensated by neurotic dutifulness, so they will be identifiable in general student populations by high scores on trait procrastination, low scores on Neuroticism, and low achievement.

My own archived data provide some support for this distinction. These data include 118 cases in which Lay's Procrastination Scale scores are available in conjunction with Study Problems Questionnaire scores. One of these study problems, Lack of Work Discipline, is highly saturated with (low) Conscientiousness, while another study problem, Fear of Failure, is highly saturated with Neuroticism or low Emotional Stability. Figure 3 shows scores on these two study problems for 190 students with a Procrastination Scale score higher than one standard deviation above average. These study problem scores were standardized with respect to student populations.
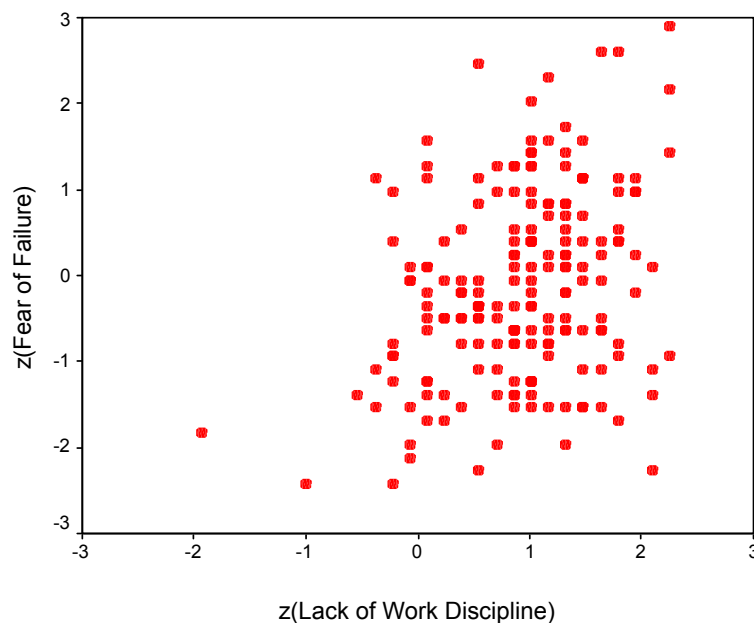
Figure 3.

Bivariate scores on relevant scales of Study Problems Questionnaire (Schouwenburg, 1995) of 190 severe procrastinators (Procrastination Scale score more than one standard deviation above the mean).

Figure 3 shows that almost all procrastinators lack work discipline. In addition, they are more or less continuously distributed on fear of failure. Although not an indication of "types" in a strict sense, this distribution underlines the clinical usefulness to discriminate between emotionally stable and unstable trait procrastinators.

This taxonomy could be extended meaningfully by individual positions on Extraversion-Introversion. For example, neurotic procrastinators who are also extraverted, and thus be easily distracted by social interactions, may show feelings of guilt as the most prominent clinical symptom, while neurotic procrastinators who are introverted may rather be prone to feelings of depression. On the other hand, emotionally stable (i.e., not-neurotic) procrastinators who are also extraverts may constitute the

familiar type of unrealistically optimistic happy-go-lucky procrastinator, while the introverted emotionally stable procrastinator may be typified as rather a dreamer.

Theory: Procrastination as Lack of Self-Control

One can do but one thing at a time, so there is always competition among possible activities. It is a rational assumption that the activity or project that will win out will depend on the project that is judged most important. Self-control theory postulates (a) that people permanently evaluate the importance of competing potential activities, (b) that they engage in those activities that are evaluated as most important, (c) that subjective importance is a function of both "objective" importance and delay, and (d) that "objective" importance of a behavioural alternative is largely a function of perceived reward associated with it. This implies that, at every moment, the subjective importance of an event that is relatively far away is discounted from its objective importance, as shown in Figure 4.
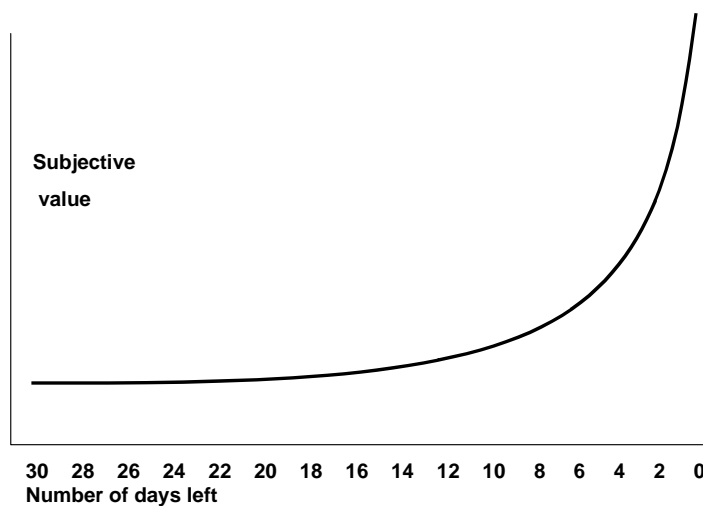
Figure 4.

Subjective value of a reward (on an arbitrary scale) as a function of the number of days left to receiving it.

This is especially relevant for students. When studying, they are typically engaged in activities that are directed to relatively far away deadlines. Obtaining the reward involved will take a long time. At any moment, there will be other personal projects in their agenda, such as the desire and plans for social contact, or the need and intention to water their plants, that are judged "objectively" as much less important, but present themselves as rewarding on a much shorter term. As a consequence of discounting, these lesser projects frequently may take precedence over the objectively judged much more important task of studying. In other words, their intention to study will be put off in favour of the less important, but non-discounted tasks or activities. This general and well-documented psychological mechanism may account for the intriguing high base-rate of dilatory behaviour in the population.

In self-control theory, the term self-control is used for the behaviour of persisting in the pursuit of a long-term goal in spite of the influence of competing short-term temptations; the opposite behaviour is called impulsiveness, but may as well be identified with procrastination.

Keeping oneself to the task of working on a long-term (study) goal in an environment characterized by the influence of temptations of various kinds requires not only "willpower", but also regulation of a number of other study-related psychological processes. These include the students' ability to concentrate, to protect their study intentions from other temptations and to persist at the task, as well as their overall satisfaction with their understanding of the subject matter.

In other words, students will have to self-regulate. The prefix "self" in self-regulation refers to the more or less automatic way in which these types of control operate, while the term "regulation" refers to a mechanism of negative feedback. In the basic paradigm of regulation, an ongoing behaviour is monitored and compared to a norm or goal. The detection of discrepancies triggers compensatory behaviours, the effect of which is fed back to the monitor.

It can be argued that procrastinators are weak in all components of this control mechanism. For instance, there is ample research evidence that they are weak, or deficient, in setting norms or goals. Also, monitoring involves self-reflection and this is generally not a strong point with procrastinators. They find it difficult to focus their attention on their study behaviour, their concentration is often impaired, they underestimate the time needed for completing study tasks, and they are unrealistically optimistic about the effectiveness of their studying behaviour.

Valid comparisons of monitor values and norms can only be made by the individual if the "comparator" functions well. There is some evidence that in procrastinators this is not so. In procrastinators, the comparator function seems to be biased in such a way that they seem to discount the value of future events much stronger than other people do, which makes them unprepared victims of short-term temptations.

An assessment of self-control theory, as exemplified in Figure 4, provides a number of ideas for successful intervention methods. For example, as a first component of intervention, an increase in the reward value of a long-term goal may be considered. Although this may not be feasible materially in academic settings, an immaterial way of increasing the reward value of passing an exam, or handing in a writing assignment, may consist of putting the student's reputation among peers at stake. This is exactly what happens in group interventions that continue long enough for participants to witness the attainment of long-term goals, such as Task Management Groups.

A second component of intervention consists of blocking the access to short-term temptations, thereby decreasing their reward value. Such effects are produced by common study skills techniques for preventing distraction, such as studying in a library, while studying keeping the desktop clean and the door closed while studying, and so on. All cognitive-behavioural interventions proposed for treating procrastination in students include this component.

Finally, a third component of intervention may involve an explicit increase in the height of the motivational curve in Figure 4. This is done by splitting up the task of the long-term goal into many

short-term sub-goal tasks, for example into weekly study tasks, as advocated by study planning techniques. Again, Task Management Groups offer a good illustration of this principle.

A related procedure is to decrease the height of the motivational curves of short-term temptations by deliberately considering the importance and urgency of any disturbance of the studying process. This is the essence of time-management techniques that are used in most cognitive-behavioural interventions.

The exertion of corrective action upon discrepancies detected between ongoing behaviour and a norm requires considerable effort by individuals. The aim of this corrective action is to make higher processes override lower processes. A certain amount of willpower is necessary to complete such corrective action successfully. This is a vital weak point in the character of procrastinators. In assisting students in this optimising process, and in helping them develop willpower, an extensive program of intervention may be necessary, comparable to the psychotherapy process.

Implications for treatment

In the present context, procrastinatory behaviour is regarded primarily as a product of trait procrastination. Behavioural control techniques may be called for to counteract this primary effect. Beside behaviour, however, there are other effects of the trait, including cognitions such as false estimates of time needed to complete a study task, misconceptions about the influence of discounting on study motivation, and low self-efficacy. These side effects may themselves contribute to continued procrastinating. Interventions may be directed at promoting cognitive control in order to break the reinforcing effects of cognitions on dilatory behaviour. Finally, procrastination may frequently be accompanied by negative feelings or affect, such as depression, or feelings of dejection. Tackling these negative feelings by promoting emotional control may be another way in trying to weaken the effects of trait procrastination on actual academic behaviour.

Intervention programmes

The development of counselling programs in various academic centres in North America and Europe for students who procrastinate is in its initial stages. To a large extent, these intervention methods have been developed independently of one another and little communication about these programs has followed. The specific focus of such programmes depends on the view the counsellor takes on the nature of the procrastination problem.

Views on the Problem of Procrastination

Different underlying interpretations of the nature of the procrastination problem seem to be implicit in the counselling approaches proposed by counsellors. By the nature of the treatment, such interpretations may be either rather optimistic or more pessimistic. Optimistic views seem to share the conviction that relatively easily modifiable characteristics, such as behaviours, cognitions, and motivations, lie at the base of the procrastination problem. Relatively pessimistic views, on the other hand, seem to acknowledge the strong resistance to change in procrastinators by stressing the

addiction-like aspects of procrastination or even the notion of a personality disorder underlying procrastination. I discuss these major emergent views in more detail below.

Procrastination as (mainly) a Behavioural Problem

Counsellors who focus on the control of dilatory behaviour may view procrastination as mainly a behavioural problem. In this view, students are observed procrastinating when instead they should be studying. As a result of this view, the target of intervention is simply to decrease the rate of procrastination, or the percentage of time spent procrastinating, and to increase the rate of studying. It should be noted that this view may also be adopted by counsellors who recognize other interpretations of the procrastination problem, but who may regard the modification of behaviour as the only feasible route given the limitations of a short intervention program. In interventions based on this view, counsellors use the standard toolbox of the behaviour therapist, including (a) instructing, (b) modelling, and (c) conditioning.

In line with this approach, instruction in time-management and planning techniques, and subsequent modelling are elements of some interventions proposed. Operant conditioning methods are also used in rewarding short periods of studying, and classical conditioning is adopted by promoting associations of working hours with studying. Conditioning of this sort, however, requires repeated practice. Therefore, very short interventions may possibly fail at conditioning the intended study behaviour. Such counselling approaches provide, as it were, nothing more than a "maintenance schedule" for "normal" procrastination.

Procrastination as (mainly) a Cognitive Problem

Counsellors who view procrastination as mainly a cognitive problem believe that people procrastinate because they have wrong thoughts or beliefs about their work, its conditions and its consequences. They share, as some authors phrase it, a "procrastinator's code" consisting of a mixture of absolutistic demands on the self to do well at almost anything, and of low frustration tolerance showing itself in the demand on the task at hand that it should be performed smoothly and without too much effort. A common characteristic of such beliefs is that they are unrealistic. Therefore, the target in purely cognitive interventions is to change this procrastinator's code. The most frequently accepted road to changing unrealistic beliefs may be Rational-Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT).

What can be the expected outcome of such cognitive approaches to counselling the procrastinator? Empirically, such approaches show that they produce some decrease in dilatory behaviour given the limited number of sessions. This seems, however, not to result in a dramatic improvement. There is no real indication of "cure" in this type of counselling approach although, as I note later in this chapter, this may well be in part a reflection of the lack of meaningful outcome-related research as well.

Procrastination as (mainly) a Motivational Problem

The view that procrastination should be interpreted as a motivational problem results from the observation that procrastinators do not seem to be just lazy and unmotivated, but actively engaged in,

and obviously interested in, activities other than the task they put off. These other activities usually lie in the sphere of leisure or pleasure, such as socializing, watching TV, or surfing the internet.

Counsellors who adopt this explanation tend to include the complete context of the behaviour involved. They regard this context as a choice situation in which each option has a certain motivational force. In an academic setting, the motivational force for studying is simply less than the motivational force of one of the other options. The observable result is procrastination of studying. This explanation amounts to a combination of self-control theory with current expectancy-value theory of motivation.

Procrastination as (to some extent) an Addiction

Counsellors who view procrastination as an addiction will focus on their clients' persistence of and relapse in exhibiting high levels of dilatory behaviour. Psychological theories of addiction attribute such behavioural tendencies to the fact that, in addictive behaviour, the overall balance of costs and benefits favours a positive outcome of the addictive behaviour. In addicts, this will produce a diminished control over the behaviour, impaired self-regulation, and finally lowered self-efficacy expectations. A combination of low self-efficacy expectations with maintained positive outcome expectations may lead to the adoption by the addict of defensive tactics, such as unrealistic optimism about possibilities to change their behaviour.

Such a point of view, which is, in essence, compatible with a motivational problem view on the nature of procrastination, seems to apply strikingly to procrastinators. In fact, some school teachers may find this point of view revealing when applied to their procrastinating students.

Viewing procrastination as an addiction acknowledges the difficulties in overcoming procrastinatory tendencies completely. Counselling approaches based on this view will therefore not aim at "curing", but at a certain acceptable level of control, or at maintenance of dilatory behaviour at a "normal" rate.

Procrastination as (possibly) a Personality Disorder

There seems to be a certain personality structure underlying procrastination, both in academic and in other settings, to be characterized as extremely low Conscientiousness, defined by such characteristics as aimlessness, unreliability, laziness, carelessness, laxness, negligence, and hedonism. Procrastinators may share these characteristics with people who are impulsive. In fact, empirically, strong correlations have been found between procrastination and impulsiveness.

Personality *disorders* are rigid patterns of personality traits resulting in insufficient adaptation of the person to changing circumstances, and, as a consequence, in vast and recurrent problems in relationships, work, and social functioning. Personality disorders, however, are not discrete instances of psychopathology, but should be viewed as exaggerations of normal personality traits. Although not explicitly distinguished in the DSM classification, chronic procrastination could be viewed as a personality disorder, involving an exaggerated level of trait procrastination or low Conscientiousness.

Treating personality disorders is a holistic enterprise, like psychotherapy, and cannot be limited to separate deficits. As a consequence, based on a total picture of the personality for each patient in terms of strengths, excesses, deficits, and dysfunction, many different kinds of treatment decisions must be made. Modern treatments for personality disorders are focused on specific aspects of the

disorder, while the selection of specific techniques depends on the nature of the problem, the breadth of the treatment goals, the depth of therapy experience, and the reactance level of the particular patient.

In sum, there can be little doubt that procrastination is a behavioural problem, a problem of "not doing" what one intends to do. It is also clear that procrastinators share unrealistic thoughts about their work and themselves. Yet, viewing procrastination by students as mainly a cognitive-behavioural problem, which could be modified in a limited number of counselling sessions, might be too simple.

Another outstanding feature of procrastinators is that they find the tasks they postpone aversive, and that they lack self-efficacy with respect to study task completion. This points to a motivational problem. A further characteristic of procrastinators is personality. As mentioned before, procrastinators share extreme low Conscientiousness, as well as related traits such as lack of self-discipline, distractibility, lack of organization, low need for achievement, lack of self-regulation, and impulsiveness. Because of these *extreme* characteristics, it may be appropriate to speak of personality disorders, and this would imply that treatment should be prolonged and intensive; a requirement that is not met in most intervention methods proposed by counsellors.

Finally, because of the persistence of procrastination and frequent relapse after treatment, the perspective of addiction may add to our understanding of the procrastination problem. For counselling purposes, this perspective draws attention to a need for prolonged treatment in which counsellors must be prepared for frequent episodes of relapse.

A more comprehensive view on the nature of procrastination, therefore, would imply that we understand procrastination as a motivational problem, with both behavioural and cognitive components firmly rooted in personality and with addictive features. Such a view could pave the way for a more realistic counselling approach that will probably be closer to long-term psychotherapy than to short-term behavioural interventions.

An "ideal" intervention program

Although the intervention programs presented in this volume do show some effect, this effect might be increased considerably if the intervention was focused more strongly on the main causes of student procrastination, as represented in a motivational view on the nature of the procrastination problem. That is, such an ideal intervention program should connect more closely to both theory and research findings in stressing: (1) the relatively low value of the long-term task, (2) the relatively low expectancy in individuals to complete such task successfully, (3) the relatively long delay in obtaining reward for completing this task, and (4) the procrastinator's relatively high sensitivity to the effects of this delay. In this final section op the chapter, I outline the components of such an "ideal" counselling program as well as related issues such as client identification, treatment duration and the assessment of outcomes.

Components

Interventions based on the extended motivational view outlined above would be directed at (1) improving self-regulation (setting goals, monitoring progress, and managing time), (2) enhancing self-efficacy (promoting success experiences, disputing unrealistic beliefs), and (3) protecting goal behaviour from distractions.

Such intervention goals have a firm theoretical basis in the combination of self-control and expectancy-value theory. They are aimed at increasing the value and expectancy components of motivation, and at decreasing the delay in which a reward for goal behaviour is obtained.

For example, the subjective value of an activity that is easily procrastinated could be increased by making explicit personal needs and goals, such as intellectual curiosity and the need for achievement, and by stating concrete long-term goals as well as specific short-term goals. This could be supplemented by adding small tangible external rewards to goal attainment, and by attempts at arguing away one's feelings of aversiveness of the task at hand through self-talk.

In addition, success expectancy could be enhanced by increasing the client's awareness of the small, everyday successes that can be obtained by working according to concrete and feasible short-term plans in a suitable working environment and with an allocation of sufficient time. By additional monitoring of the progress of the long-term task, through the use of step-by-step plans and subsequent evaluation of each step, clients may acquire a sense of general self-efficacy that, in the long run, may result in an increase of specific success expectancies.

No doubt, the "royal road" to decreasing the delay in which a reward for goal behaviour will be obtained, is to split up a large long-term task into a series of small short-term tasks. Because of the discounting mechanism proposed by self-control theory, this will automatically result in increased levels of motivation for the task at hand. In addition, sensitivity to delay can be managed by applying a variety of self-help techniques, such as establishing fixed working hours, committing oneself to task completion with the help of one's social environment, and guarding oneself against distractions during working hours.

In a combined expectancy-value and self-control motivational theory of procrastination, the perceived value of a behavioural alternative, its success expectation, its delay in obtaining reward, and the person's sensitivity to delay, are all seen as proximal causes of procrastination. Each of these proximal causes, however, may be influenced by other factors that represent relatively distal causes of procrastination, and are therefore expected to correlate only relatively weakly with procrastination. An example may be the role of unrealistic thoughts. It can be seen easily that such thoughts may influence success expectancies and, in some cases, also perceived value. Thus, unrealistic thoughts may be viewed as distal causes of procrastination, and would be expected to correlate only weakly with procrastination. This, in fact, seems to be the case. Consequently, in spite of its attractiveness due to current mainstream psychotherapy, intervention approaches that focus primarily on reframing unrealistic thoughts might not be very fruitful.

The effects of this multi-target approach to counselling procrastinators, however, still do not seem to go beyond the ones discussed in the preceding section. This may be due, in part, to the short duration of interventions. Such interventions are intended as a "take-off" or beginning-point for change, and not

as therapy. Given the personality structure involved, and given the more or less addictive nature of procrastination, tangible change would require much longer periods of treatment.

Conclusion

Procrastination is an important problem, both in daily life and in the academic setting. A society that is based on deals, deadlines, and achievement, will find it hard to tolerate procrastination by its members. On the other hand, people who suffer from procrastination chronically not only produce procrastinatory behaviour frequently, but are also tormented by feelings of low self-esteem and lower subjective well-being. In short, procrastination makes both society and the procrastinator unhappy.

Counselling procrastinators, therefore, is a needed and worthy pursuit. Luckily, a number of counsellors, both in North America and Europe, have taken the initiative to design counselling methods for procrastinators, especially for procrastinators in academic settings. The recent book by Schouwenburg and his colleagues (2004) presents a first overview of their work. Although their results are promising, much refinement remains to be done. Psychological counsellors and other colleagues in the field of counselling are invited to join in these efforts.

Reference

Schouwenburg, H.C., Lay, C.H., Pychyl, T.A., and Ferrari, J.R. (Eds.). (2004). *Counseling the procrastinator in academic settings*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

B1

The past and the future: Flash for the new challenge (Bologna process)

Mrs. Ildikó Takács, PhD
Associate Professor

Budapest University of Technology and Economics
Department of Ergonomics and Psychology
Budapest, Hungary

takacsi@erg.bme.hu

The student counselling system was organised at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics in 1998. At that time we had to invest a great effort to organise a new student counselling system at our university. The structure of the counselling centre is traditional: educational, career and psychological advice and counselling. Nowadays, due to the changes in our educational system – joining the Bologna process – work of the counselling centre has to be reorganised.

Promoting the career orientation

At present, the higher educational system is very strictly organized in Hungary. The universities and colleges have their own profile and from the beginning of study the directions are determined. E.g. if somebody wants to be a teacher of Hungarian language and literature he/she begins to learn subjects belonging to this field and parallel by the teacher competencies (pedagogy, psychology and methodology) as well. I case somebody wants to be an engineer, he/she will start as the student of civil, mechanical, etc. engineering faculties.

The Hungarian higher education has joined the Bologna process by the decision of government.

Due to joining the Bologna Process, the structure of the higher education is going to change significantly in comparison with the former structure.

The possibilities for professional alternatives decrease, as I mentioned, at present there are approximately 400 options in higher education. After joining the Bologna process this number will significantly decrease. One of the changes in the reforms of higher education is reduction of the number of the initial specialities and the widening scope of the subjects which result in possible specialization only at the Master level. Consequently in the initial stage of the higher education counselling has to play an important role in informing the student candidates about the presumably changing characteristics of higher education.

One of the ways of raising student awareness can be to provide information bulletins to a great number of secondary school pupils who are interested in higher education with description of higher education structure and partly the characteristics of the institutes. According to present plans the introduction of the new education system will take place in 2006, the information bulletins have to be completed and sent to the secondary schools in 2005 latest. Since the new structure is unknown both

for the future students and their teachers, the latter have to be helped, too. We should let them get acquainted with the features of the new structure to make them able to help their pupils in career orientation. The information bulletins can be prepared by students' counselling organisations jointly, too. They should be based on the common pieces of general information, and they have to try not to exceed the information emitted through official channels. On the other hand the bulletins have to answer the questions both of the pupils and the teachers.

Reforming the counselling forms

The changes in higher education will definitely keep several important and presently operating counselling tasks unchanged, but there will be tasks to be set up due to the changes. Nevertheless the old tasks will be enriched with new colours, since the novelty of the system raises lots of questions.

Transition from secondary school to higher education, integration

Helping and catalysing the procedure will be different from the present one because due to the increased numbers amongst the students more and more boys and girls will appear in higher education. Due to their socioeconomic status in their previous socialisation they had fewer opportunities to be acquainted with the expectations of the higher education because they saw fewer samples of it. So in facilitation of the transition the task of the counselling is to bridge this social gap meaning to get acquainted with use of the different forms of helping the learning procedures and to practice them. On the other hand, relations amongst the students have to be set up (service clubs, groups of students gathered to do common activities) that speed up the process of getting acquainted with the requirements of life at the university and to help adaptation.

Out of the individual and group activities a subject of the first semester will properly fit, which gives chances for the students to get acquainted with

1. the educational rules of the university
2. features of the credit system
3. the sources to use in their studies and in their organization (library, reading-room, computer services)
4. learning methods to do their "invincible" educational tasks in an organised way.

On one hand, this subject can present the knowledge of the university life; on the other hand, it can provide the students with a primary social form by discussing common problems by themselves and with assistance. In addition to this subject as a kind of practical form, the adaptation programme can contribute to helping freshmen in adaptation in student hostels.

<u>Psychological questions of the transition</u>

In this stage of the counselling the questions of setting up the individual lifestyle and the responsible autonomic way of living have to be dealt with.

Behind the manifest learning problems of the first period often significant emotional crisis can be found: home-sickness due to break-away from the family, instability due to moving into another settlement or to significantly bigger cities, questions of adult identity.

Counselling can contribute to helping the adaptation, to recognising and exploring the problems by organising group meetings dealing with these questions indirectly, offering common activities, games, events, talkings to freshmen.

Coping with university requirements has a significant importance amongst the issues of psychological counselling. Among others, it is a great difficulty for the students to take the chances of freedom, so that they can adapt to the lack of the continuous and rigorous control; in their personality and behaviour they have to find the sources organising their self-control and activities. Since the credit system – in comparison with the former way of educational systems – allows them torecover their undone tasks without any "penalty", due to the lack of their self-adjustment lots of them complete their studies in an extended way.

In the first months it causes great trouble for the students to face the lack of competence. Lots of students fail on the written tests – due to the lack of practice in processing great deal of materials to learn and because the use of "freedom". The students that were formerly excellent in the secondary schools, perceive the bad results a failure that seems to be a lack of competence and is in contrast with the existing self-concept of the student.

Freedom and the considerable educational requirements are contradicting to each other and this contradiction cannot be solved easily. Students must admit that if they want to manage their capabilities and energy they have to accept: to achieve good results with the loads of the higher education extraordinary efforts have to be taken. This is why it is necessary that an efficient educational counselling system serves the students. Amongst its forms for the freshmen it is very important to present the group learning methodology offering help and directives to cope with the virtual lack of competence.

In addition to the matters mentioned above, the irregular workload in the academic year causes a problem. Primarily, the teachers can help by informing the students about the tasks, their volume and the deadlines. This means, at the same time, that the counsellor has to report the institute about the symptoms which cause troubles for the students. In this process the counsellor can help the students with strengthening the information, that is, by calling their attention to the availability of the information, where and how it can be found.

Not only can the institutes demand from the students, but the students can demand from the institutes, too. The organisation of counselling system in the institute can be a mutual catalyst in getting acquainted with these demands.

At completing the Bachelor level, the role of the counselling system will change significantly in comparison with the previous times. The Bachelor level does not provide direct knowledge and qualification that can be used on the labour market in several professional fields. So the educational counselling has to play an important role in the further career orientation. This means that the counsellors need to have the knowledge enabling them to help the students complete the Bachelor level to find new educational routes if they cannot or do not want to or have no way to study more on Master level.

The counsellor expert must have significant information to select the type and the contents of the Master level. These pieces of information are needed already in planning the Bachelor level education when the students select their "major" subject that is when they plan and complete their educational requirements needed for the Master level.

A properly informed counsellor – especially in the first years of the changes, when there are no patterns for the students – can have a significant helping and orienting role.

The properly selected subjects – by that the educational requirements for the Master level can be met – can be profitable both in terms of invested energy and time.

Since in the changing higher education the number of fee paying students will increase, the number of students will also increase, taking a job to cover the costs of education.

This phenomenon will induce a new situation in counselling:

1. Time scheduling problems resulting prolonged/extended educational period (with extra costs)
2. Difficulties in completing educational requirements

In these situations, it is the task of the counselling system to find sources for the students, filling in applications for scholarships contributing to reduce the costs of the education thus reducing the needs to work in significant time.

In addition to the factors above the credit system also contributes to the prolongation and the extension of the education of the procrastination type students. So the educational difficulties, competence doubts appear together with procrastination will be come the most challenging tasks of the counselling jobs in the changing higher education system. This task will involve recognizing the cases and individual analysing the characteristics of the procrastinating behaviour. The result of the counselling work hopefully will be: the students will learn how to overcome their procrastinating behaviour.

To solve these tasks the higher education institutes need counsellors who know the characteristics of the new higher educational system, and who are well trained in the educational counselling.

The postgraduate training for counsellors is available in an organised form at one of the universities in Budapest. Additionally new forms of education have to be developed to help candidates to make the preparations for the new tasks. The frameworks can be worked out by the union of counsellors of higher education (FETA) and the union can promote it in a wide range.

Summary

A counsellor of the higher education has to face the following tasks due to the 2-level-education to be launched in 2006:

1. Helping the transition from the secondary school to higher education
2. Organising time frames: setting up harmony between educational freedom and performance obligation
3. Getting acquainted with the education tasks and their completion
4. Helping personal well-being of the students in critical situations and states

Prevention has a significant role in counselling jobs. To reach this aim the counsellors have to observe thoroughly the characteristics of the operation of the institutes, and they have to report to the management of the institutes if certain decisions of the institute would cause troubles, problems that can hardly be solved for certain groups of students. Additionally, it is the counsellors' definite job to give the chance to participants to develop their problems on group meetings and to find the solution, and these forms must offer improving methods helping the students to adapt themselves to the changing circumstances.

References

Takács, I. (1996): *The Influence of Changing Educational System for Student Psychological Health*. Conference Papers. Association for Student Counselling. The University of Sussex. Brighton

Takács, I. (2004): Practice of Student Counselling in European and American Higher Education. In: Takács, I. (ed.): *Student Counselling in Higher Education-2003*. FETA, Budapest (in Hungarian)

Watts, A. G., Van Esbroeck, R. (1998): *New Skills for New Futures*. Higher Education Guidance and Counselling Services in th European Union. Brusselles: VUBPRESS and Louvain-la-Neuve: FEDORA

- 86 -

B2

After the 'honeymoon'

Alison Barty, MA
Senior Student Counsellor and Student Services Co-ordinator

School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London, UK

alisonbarty@aol.com

Nigel Humphrys, BA Hons.
Head of Counselling

University of Leeds, UK

n.r.humphrys@leeds.ac.uk

Shahnaz Raven, BSc
Counsellor with Special Responsibility for International Students

University of Reading, UK

s.raven@reading.ac.uk

UK universities and colleges compete actively to recruit international students, marketing the quality of the education offered. University authorities agree that international students bring an important dimension to institutions, enhancing the experience of local students. Yet it appears that significant contact between international students and local students is frequently limited.

Counselling services offer services to students who may be isolated, lonely, struggling academically or socially. These services commonly report that international students are under-represented in their client workload. The authors describe a range of innovative programmes that offer counselling services a different way of accessing this particular student group

Terminology

'After the honeymoon'
The title, 'After the Honeymoon' refers to the W curve model of cultural adjustment posited by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), developed from Oberg (1960). The model describes a process of initial excitement (the 'honeymoon' stage) followed by increasing disorientation and discomfort as the impact of cultural difference is felt. While the empirical validity of the model has been questioned, it is one with which, subjectively, many continue to identify.

International students
The authors recognise that international students are a highly diverse group and that the term 'international student' risks obscuring that diversity. However, the one thing international students do

share is the experience of making a decision to leave their familiar social and educational environment to study abroad, with the consequences that may bring.

Background

The difficulties and disappointments experienced by international students in engaging fully with members of the host community are well documented (Bochner, Mcleod and Lin, 1977; Allen and Higgins, 1994; UKCOSA, 2004; Spencer-Oatley and Xiong, to be published).

Other research (Mak, 2000) demonstrates that international students can be disadvantaged by the perceived cultural differences in communication styles. Their behaviour may be judged as inappropriate and yet the members of the host community rarely explicate the differences.

Most recently, in an extensive national survey, conducted by UKCOSA: Council for International Education (UKCOSA, 2004), students were asked to rate their satisfaction rates for different aspects of their student life in the UK, academic, financial, social etc. While students reported high levels of satisfaction with teaching and learning, induction programmes, support services and accommodation, the area of lowest satisfaction was contact with local students and local people. Universities and colleges and those professionals working within them seek ways of facilitating this engagement so as to provide a deeper intercultural experience for both international students and host students.

However, the true extent to which universities and colleges provide help for students in the adjustment process varies. Where orientation information and education is provided it is often provided during the early stages of adjustment, soon after students' arrival and before their studies begin seriously. However the 'W' curve model suggests that it is later that students start to experience more discomfort, when less support may be available.

This article introduces the following:

- ➢ A rationale for developing programmes to assist international students to adjust to the host culture and engage with it
- ➢ A variety of models used in institutions in the UK, Australia, the US, with the intention of facilitating social and cultural engagement
- ➢ The experience of implementing these programmes, with identified pros and cons

Rationale

In addition to the widening participation initiatives of the UK government and UK universities, designed to make higher education more accessible to underrepresented groups, many counselling services are actively addressing a different kind of widening participation: the under-representation of international students among their client groups.

Most UK universities provide support services to students, including advice, counselling, careers, health, accommodation, study support services and sometimes specific, specialist services for international students. Provision, however, is often reactive, relying on students referring themselves or being referred for support and guidance.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that international students do not see counselling services as offering support sufficiently relevant to their needs and that the stigma attached to consulting a service associated with mental health inhibits their access. A number of institutions in the UK, Australia, Canada and the US have developed innovative programmes to try to bridge this gap, reaching out to international students rather than waiting for students to make the first approach.

Models

The models below share a similar premise, based on the experience of the authors and others who have developed the programmes: that many international students (despite their diversity) are affected by the process of transition and often feel deskilled socially and academically in their new setting. They can as a result become isolated from their peers. The models offer different ways to enable students to understand the unwritten cultural rules or 'maps' which affect social and academic interactions in their adopted environment. They encourage students to examine the process of transition and at the same time develop confidence through the development of intercultural skills..

Programmes used in the UK

- Globalink

Globalink was developed at the University of Reading counselling service, based on a belief that 'mutual cultural enrichment is fundamental to preparing students for understanding and success in a global economy'.. To this end, the programme seeks to involve both international students and students from the UK.

The aims of the programme are as follows:

- Opportunities for home and international students to meet for mutual cultural enrichment
- Opportunities to develop interpersonal and communication skills
- Opportunities for international students to improve their conversational English and to assist in their cultural adjustment, both social and academic

Home students who volunteer to join Globalink undertake a half-day's training, which aims to equip home students in facilitating informal group conversation/discussion. Students are expected to give language support in terms of practice in everyday spoken English and not formal tuition. Supervision and ongoing support are available to volunteers and further in-house training is available as needs arise.

The programme is based on both home and international students meeting on one evening a week for approximately two hours. The first 45 minutes are devoted to a specific area of study skills (e.g. how to get the most out of tutorials and seminars) given by a member of the university academic staff. This may be presented in varying forms, e.g. lectures, workshop format, interactive/discussion. The second part, followed by a coffee break (hosted by home students) is spent in small groups of varying nationalities engaged in informal conversation/discussion, facilitated by one or two home students. Group formation remains fluid right through the scheme, depending on attendance.

The benefits for both home and international students, beyond that of friendship and cultural enrichment, are that it offers an opportunity to develop interpersonal and communication skills, both of which are an increasingly important factor in the employment market. At the end of the scheme, students are offered a certificate of attendance which can be added to their personal profile when seeking employment.

The scheme is monitored throughout. A verbal review takes place half-way through the programme followed by a full survey at the end of each term. Both home and international students fill in evaluation forms.

Examples of a term's events

Autumn term

Week 1   **Introduction to the British Education System**
       This interactive talk will give you a broad understanding of the British education system and help you to recognise different aspects of your own educational experience with those offered by the British system.

Week 2   **Academic Culture Shock**
       Following on from Week 1, we will look at some of the challenges faced by international students learning to adjust from one academic culture to another.. Participants will have the opportunity to examine more closely what is expected of them in the course of their study.

Week 3   '**Getting to know you'**
       How to initiate conversations? How to join in a group politely? A
       variety of activities will be introduced to enable participants to get to know one another and to get some ideas about how they can make the most of the social side of university life.

Week 4   **Country Dancing**

- ExcelL

This programme was originally developed at the University of British Columbia and expanded in partnership with the Australian universities Griffith University and the University of Melbourne. Within the UK it was successfully piloted at the Universities of Leeds, South Bank and Oxford Brookes.

The programme is based on weekly workshops of between 2 - 3 hours' duration. The student participants commit themselves for the duration of the programme which maybe 4, 5 or 6 weeks depending on the number of areas included. The programme focuses on areas considered key to students' day to day experience of study abroad: participating in groups including lectures and seminars; establishing social relationships; seeking help; and expressing disagreement or refusing a request. Ideally the facilitators include an 'insider', someone who has grown up within the culture the students are coming into and an 'incomer', someone who has had an experience similar to theirs and has the authority of one who has navigated the transition successfully.

The initial session provides an introduction to the programme and incorporates exercises to enable students to get to know each other, to explore the cultural diversity of the group and to build relationships within the group, together with setting ground rules.

In subsequent sessions students, with the course facilitators, are encouraged to describe how each interaction would be conducted in their more familiar environment, with a discussion of the underpinning values. The facilitators in turn present a possible cultural map of how the same interaction might happen in the context of the university environment, with their explanation of the underpinning cultural values. After exploring the different 'maps' in detail, students have an opportunity to role play interactions using the suggested 'British' cultural map. Feedback is given and they are encouraged to find a style that fits for them. The 'map' is not offered as a better or even definitive map but as a generally culturally acceptable approach. At the end of the session students plan how and when they might practise using the new 'cultural map' outside the group: this homework will be discussed at the beginning of the next session.

Those using the programme have found that students appreciate the explanation of different cultural behaviours as well as the opportunity to practice different ways of approaching situations. Students also develop a valuable support network between themselves.

From the point of view of the counselling service, the programme provides a service to students which is perceived to be directly relevant to their needs and which is less potentially 'shameful' than one to one counselling.

Session 1	**Focus: Introductions and preparation** Introduction of programme facilitators Description of programme aims Group introductions Negotiation of course programme
Session 2	**Focus: Participating in groups** Eg speaking up in seminars, project groups, team meetings, asking questions in lectures and seminars
Session 3	**Focus: Establishing social relationships** Eg Arranging to meet someone, 'kitchen' conversations, 'small talk' and 'big talk'
Session 4	**Focus: Seeking help** Eg from tutors, departmental/faculty staff, student services etc
Session 5	**Focus: Appropriately expressing disagreement, refusing unwanted requests/saying no** Evaluation, feedback, endings

Other programmes

- How to talk like an American

This programme was developed jointly between the Counselling Service and the International Office at New York University, and has run successfully for over 6 years. It was presented to the NAFSA (National Association for Foreign Student Advisers) Conference in 2001 alongside other institutional programmes with similar aims.

It consists of a sequence of 4 weekly workshops in the first term of the academic year. Like the ExcelL programme it is based on a psycho-educational development model which places its emphasis on the skills or 'tools' international students may require to understand and interact successfully with the 'host' culture. It covers similar areas: social interactions, classroom expectations and negotiation skills, exploring the underlying attitudes and values common in US culture. The programme developers found that through the medium of workshops which focused on specific practical skills, readily identified by students as relevant to their academic and social success, many underlying emotional and psychological dimensions can emerge and be explored, in a supportive environment.

The programme looks at differences in cultural beliefs and norms in a variety of ways including presenting scenarios to highlight difficult interactions. Each session is evaluated individually with the evaluation used to inform the next session.

Within NYU the programme has been offered alongside other activities. These have included formal talks and a support group focused on cultural transition. This programme has had a more successful take up than the more conventional support groups.

Session 1	**Focus: Understanding US culture** **The meaning of culture in a diverse society such as the US** Learning about attitudes and values Questions and concerns
Session 2	**Focus: Getting comfortable and connecting** **When is someone just being friendly and when do they want to be a friend, what friendship means in the US** How to meet people in the university Social relations in the US
Session 3	**Focus: Communicating in the Classroom** An exploration of classroom culture What is expected in the US classroom? Why is it competitive? Tips and tricks for talking to professors and classmates
Session 4	**Focus: How to get what you want** Developing negotiation skills Understanding how organisations and bureaucracies work What is the best way for getting things done? Practical tips for asking for what you want by negotiating 'US style'

- Carleton College

Carleton College, a small private liberal arts college offers an academic programme which is designed to increase students' "intercultural competencies" and taken as a subsidiary course. It is open to all students and not only international students, thereby facilitating dialogue and integration.

The focus of the programme is the experience of transition, the development of cultural identity and the development of inter-cultural sensitivity, studied through a wide range of texts drawn from psychology, sociology, anthropology and literature as well as through the study of film and art work.

The programme lasts over three months, in the second term or semester and consists of attending a twice weekly class.

The programme is assessed on class participation, written work, group projects, a presentation, a group 'poster' project and so carried full academic credit. Although essentially an academic programme, there is scope within it for the participation of counselling service staff, in a teaching or facilitating capacity.

Adapting programmes to your own institution

Each of these programmes, developed by practitioners working directly with international students has elements that can be transferred into other institutional settings. They each provide a forum for international students to explore, with staff, and in some cases students, from the host culture, the process of adaptation and transition. They encourage students to share their experience with each other and treat the experience seriously. The focus on the universality of the transitional process, the practical application of cultural communication skills and the opportunity to socialise with other students means that the potential stigma of seeking help for perceived failure is avoided. The models are flexible enough to be adapted to the time available and the target group of students. In the authors' view the essentials are to validate students' own experience and when exploring appropriate cultural behaviour to allow choice and adaptation rather than impose a particular interpretation or model of behaviour as 'correct'.

Recommendations and pitfalls

These models appear to be most successful when seen to be of direct relevance to students. They can be offered as 'opt in' sessions for students to attend voluntarily or incorporated into students' timetable, with or without credit. A social element can be of great value, enabling students to interact informally and indeed practice their social skills.

They are resource intensive, in terms of the time required of students to attend and the time required of staff in preparation and delivery. Due to the workshop style format, they can be difficult to deliver to large numbers of students. Though there maybe scope for translating the programme onto interactive media, this maybe at the cost of group support and cohesiveness.

Conclusion

Models of this kind offer counsellors the opportunity to use their skills in facilitating exploration, attending to process and containment in a setting that may be more attractive and more acceptable to some international students. They also lend themselves to collaboration between counselling and other student services staff, such as international advisers and academic staff.

References

Allen and Higgins (1994) *Higher Education: the International Student Experience.* Leeds: HEIST

Bochner, S., Mcleod, B.M., and Lin, A. (1977) Friendship patterns of overseas students: a functional model. *International Journal of Psychology*, *12.* 277-297

Gullahorn, J.T. and Gullahorn J. E. (1963), An Extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues, 19*. 33-47.

Mak, A. (2000) Extending the Social Skills for Success in International Education: The ExcelL Programme. *International Education – ej, 4.*
Available at http://services.canberra.edu.au/uc/educ/crie.2000-2001/ieej1
(Accessed 7 April 2005).

Oberg, K. (1960), Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments. *Practical Anthropology, 7.* 177-182.

Spencer-Oatley, H., and Xiong, Z. (to be published) Chinese Students' Psychological and Sociocultural Adjustments to Britain: An Empirical Study.

UKCOSA (2004) Broadening Our Horizons. London: UKCOSA.

Further reading

Barty, A. and Raven, S. (2003) Reaching out to international students. *AUCC Journal: Widening Participation – Meeting Great Expectations, Special Edition.* 13-15.

Harris B (1998) Why ExcelL if not to ExcelL. *Journal of International Education 9, 2.* 10-18.

Kay V (2003) A group for international students. *AUCC Journal,* 2. 11-12.

Lago, C. (2004) Welcoming the visitor long after the welcome is over *AUCC Journal: Student Retention and success, Special Edition.* 41-43.

Mak AS, Westwood MJ, Ishiyama FI (1999) Developing sociocultural competencies for success among international students: the ExcelL programme *Journal of International Education 9.* 33-38.

- 96 -

B3

Counselling Services at the University of Granada (Spain):
A three year experience

Arco, José L.
Heilborn, Verónica
Willekens, Eva F.

Co-authors: Fernández, Francisco D.
López-Ortega, Sagrario
Maroto, Nuria
Giménez, Eva

Counseling Services
University of Granada
Spain

jlarco@ugr.es

The University of Granada, located in southern Spain, enrols 60,000 pre-graduate students and more than 3,000 postgraduate students, with a staff of 3,500 teachers distributed among 28 schools. Created in 1531, is a long and prestigious university that is nowadays the 4th Spanish university in enrolment.

Background

The University of Granada has for many years provided a wide range of supportive services to students that strengthened and grew significantly during the last 10 years. Some of those are:

- University admission and registration
- Internships and practicum
- Employment and self-employment
- Social services: housing special programs, students with disabilities, special grants
- Health and sexual information and advice
- Grants and scholarships
- Legal advice
- Mobility – national and international exchange programs

In 1993, the University of Granada created a University Counselling and Guidance Services that provided information and guidance to students, with a special attention to prospective students from high school institutions. In 2000, a new counselling services' proposal was developed, where psychological services through individual and group intervention were enhanced, as well as preventive programs and outreach activities were launched. In recent years, Spanish universities are undergoing

deep reforms, driven by internal (e.g. Spanish Organic Law of Universities) and external forces (e.g. Bologna Agreement) that frame the need to improve the quality of our higher education system.

The lack of tradition and experience of Spanish Universities in providing this type of services came up as one of the main obstacles for the creation and development of Counseling Services (GPP). The lack of material resources, including financing, as well as the scarce training and instruction on counselling provided by our degree programs, emerged as the three most significant barriers we had to overcome. As an example, one of the few reports regarding this issue, produced by the University of Leon (Spain) and the Spanish Office of Education, concluded that Universities' services providing guidance were heterogeneously organised and poorly structured and systematised (Vidal, Díez y Vieira, 2001). Even then, the Organic Law for University (Ley Orgánica de Universidades, 2001) passed in 2001, did not include specific reference to any organised system or structure in charge of developing and providing counseling and/or guidance for the students.

Counselling Service design process

Due to the lack of tradition and experience in Spain, we conducted extensive and systematic web research among European and US universities. Several web sites, institutions and people were identified and contacted as providers of information. The Universities of New York, Chicago, Wisconsin, Victoria, New Mexico and Texas, among others, as well as the American University and College Counseling Centers Directors – AUCCCD- and its dissemination resources -such as the Counseling Center Village- served as excellent reference tools. Our final proposal was as Table 1 displays:
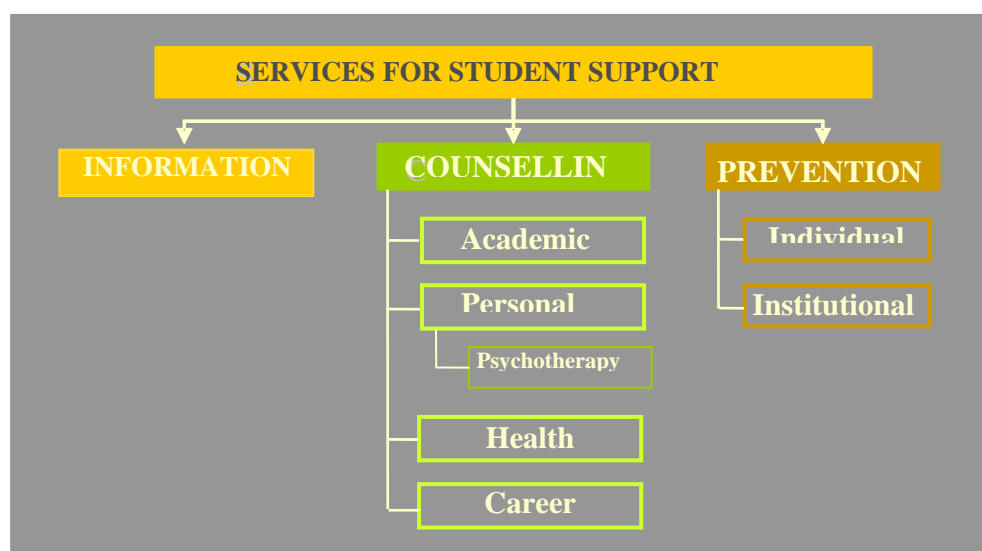

Table 1: Initial proposal

Current services and programs

Due to institutional and financial constraints we could only develop certain services and infrastructure to respond to the areas of needs listed in Table 1. For instance, even though health services are not provided for students within the University, sexual and health information is provided by a local NGO funded by the Regional Youth Institute in partnership with the University Students Affairs Office. Professional and career services are provided by Students Affairs, but exclusively for graduate students, which generates a significant percentage of undergraduate students needing vocational and career advice that are not being served. Therefore, our services were focused on academic, career and psychological services for undergraduate students, but including PhD programs students. Table 2 displays the chart of services that the GPP provides.
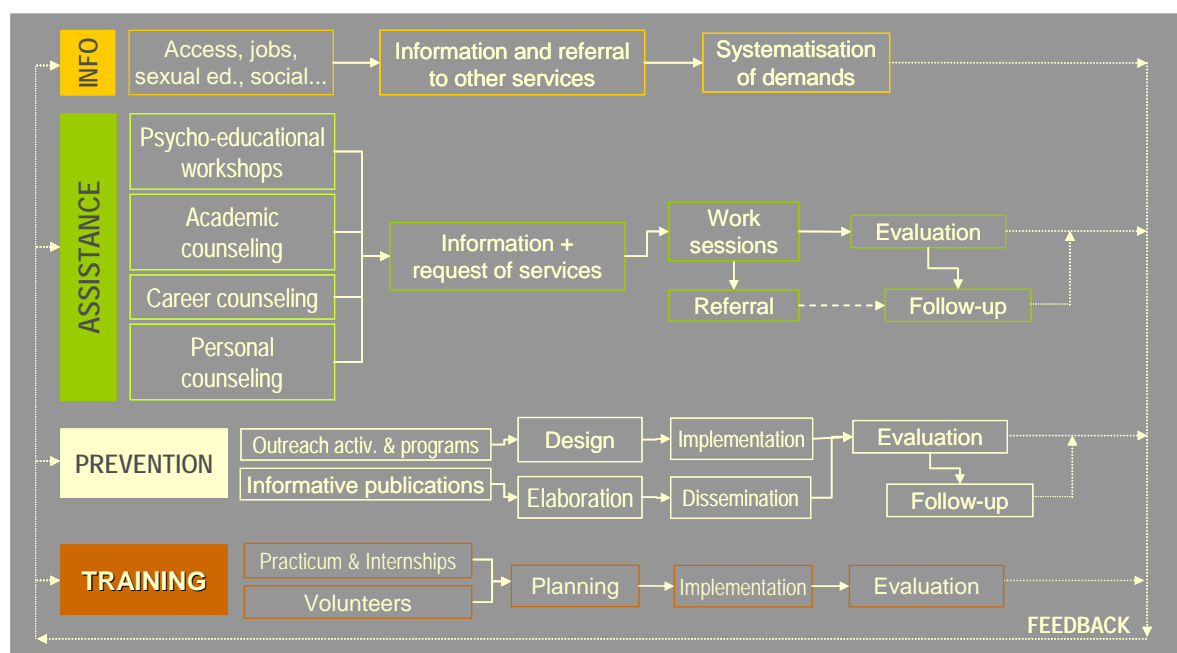
Table 2: Current services flow chart

Key issues related to the Intake, Assessment and Intervention processes.

Probably one of the key policy issues related to the functioning of this type of services is to determine at first who will be eligible for our services. In this regards, when deciding when, who and what type of services we would provide, we followed what other services consulted were applying, although adapted to our situation; that is our staff training profile and their part time dedication. Therefore, at moments of large demand, the GPP would prioritize students with academic problems, vocational/career needs and other "personal" problems that were placing them in risk of low academic performance and/or dropping-out the University. Of course, we also had to learn how to manage the waiting list.

Another relevant and demanding issue was fulfilling the basic need of monitoring the whole process of intervention, from intake to impact evaluation results. By doing this, we intend to guarantee a service

that is fully accountable for what we would do both, in terms of money and impact on students' retention and graduation rates. A convincing policy on confidentiality as well as a "client informed consent form" was developed to reduce reluctance among students related to those issues. Manageable databases and forms to register demands over the telephone or personally at the front desk, were also developed to compute all demands among clients. Control measures like students handing in their grades report when asking for services or taking standardized tests when assessing their demands, were also introduced in order to screen students' real status and needs. Clients opinions' survey were also developed to obtain the necessary feedback and evaluation from users. Other measures aimed at following up students' performance and adjustments to the University requirements are still being developed and improved.

Students' demands or problems that did not apply to our service were all those severe or long-lasting psychiatric o psychopathologic disorders, problems that would also require the involvement of other people, and/or for longer periods than eight weeks (the longer time available for each case), or require a very specialised service provided by other institutions.

Our data about students' most frequent concerns and demands are related to:
- the lack of emotional and cognitive self-regulation skills (e.g. depression, anxiety, decision making 'crisis');
- lack of social-interpersonal skills (e.g. isolation, dating/couple problems);
- poor academic performance and output (e.g. procrastination, lack of motivation, over achievement);
- transition to job market.

Our main concerns, however, are the increasing number of students with substance abuse problems demanding our service and the inadequacy of our service to satisfy their demands; the growing number of cases of regular and long-lasting substance abuse (basically cannabis derived products), along with other socio-economic processes, and the increase of diversity and severity of students problems. These issues coincide with the International Association for Counseling Services report about counseling centres' directors main concerns (Gallagher, 2002).

Our strategy to respond to the students' demands is two-fold. On one hand, by integrating and synthesizing elements coming from the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy –ACT- model (Hayes et al., 1999), along with several concepts from the Functional Analytic Psychotherapy -FAP- (Kohlenberg et al., 1991), we have extended the functional analysis of human behavior further. The result consists in a brief therapy intervention model with academic and clinical significant results for students with academic performance and anxiety problems after three, six and twelve months. On the other hand, we have developed several psycho-educational workshops aimed to promoting more adaptive personal habits and academic behaviors to better cope with University' personal and

intellectual demands. Workshops titled "Public speaking fear and anxiety", "Study habits and skills", and "Learning how to relax", have high demand and participation rates.

The institutional, scientific and social role that this kind of services is called to play can be measured by several outputs. For instance, by providing the personal, academic and career counseling, we have improved the quality of life of hundreds of students, and are impacting the University's retention and graduation rates. By constantly monitoring and supervising the GPP's services, processes and activities, we have produced several papers published on high scientifically rated journals, both national and international. Those papers allow us to compare our results against international standards on important indicators like adherence, number of sessions per case, short and long term impact, development and exchange of key brief intervention elements, users profile, and the like. Other materials with a more proactive function among students including pre-university students, have also been widely requested and accepted. By publishing annual reports with figures on key functioning indicators, clients feedback and comments, significant evaluation data and reflective conclusions, we intend to inform institutional decisions about students needs and consequently, advocate for more effective policies, that hold this public higher education institution accountable. The collaboration with other projects related to quality of education and staff development have also been established and are in the process of consolidation.

Other key issues towards 'consolidation'

If we do continue providing counseling services to the University community, we have to introduce new and more advanced tools to consolidate our practices. In this regards, we have to incorporate more effective and accurate information systems that increase utility and applications of our database. We do also have to improve our evaluation and intervention model so that higher levels of impact on academic and personal performance and development can be accomplished. And finally, we do have to extend our network and partnership with other centres both at national and international level, particularly if the mobility among students in Europe continues to increase and if the University of Granada keeps being a preferred destination for European *Erasmus* students.

References

Arco, J.L., López-Ortega, S., Heilborn, V.A., y Fernández, F.D. (in press). Terapia breve en estudiantes universitarios con problemas de rendimiento académico y ansiedad: Eficacia del modelo la Cartuja. *Revista Internacional de Psicología Clínica y de la Salud.* [Brief therapy among university students with poor academic performance and anxiety: efficacy of La Cartuja model]

Gallagher, R. (2002) *National Survey of Counseling Centers Directors 2002.* Alexandria (VA): International Association for Counseling Services

Hayes, S. C., Strosahl, K. D., & Wilson, K. G. (1999). *Acceptance and commitment therapy. An experiential approach to behavior therapy.* New York: Guilford.

Kohlenberg, R. J., & Tsai, M. (1991). *Functional analytic psychotherapy. Creating intense and curative therapeutic relationship.* New York: Plenum.

Ley Orgánica de Universidades (2001). *Ley Orgánica 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades.* http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2001-12-24/pdfs/A49400-49425.pdf [april 2005] [Organic Law of Universities]

Vidal, J., Díez, G., & Vieira, M. J. (2001). *La oferta de los servicios de orientación en las universidades españolas: innovación y ajuste a las necesidades de la comunidad universitaria.* Universidad de León: Informe técnico no publicado.

B4

The use of internet technology in supporting university students

Robert M. Topman, MA
Student Counselling Services
Leiden University, The Netherlands

RM.Topman@ICS.Leidenuniv.nl

Mrs. Sabina Beijne, MA
Student Counselling Services
Leiden University, The Netherlands

S.Beijne@ICS.Leidenuniv.nl

Mrs. Dieta Kruise, MA
Student Counselling Services
Leiden University, The Netherlands

DA.Kruise@ICS.Leidenuniv.nl

Introduction

At Leiden University 'Counselling Services' , a team of professionals are available to offer information, advice and counseling to students. Applications of internet technology are being used as a modern means to inform, advice and support students as well as to provide e-tools to intermediaries (e.g. Student mentors, student advisors). In this paper the use of an interactive website, digital coaching, and experiments with non-verbal affective images will be discussed.

The *Study Support Website* (http://www.studietips.leidenuniv.nl) is intended to deliver support to students not only through information but also through interactive exercises, checklists and questionnaires. In 2004 the website was visited by 28.051 'first users'. Analysis brought forward that nearly 50% of our users can be considered to be active users. Topics on procrastination in academic settings were visited relatively often (Topman, Kruise, & Beijne. 2004).

With the support of the tools on the website students can 'diagnose' their problems themselves and find advice on how to overcome problems[1]. Also, intermediaries can refer to the website and discuss the problems and suggested solutions with the students.

We found interactive *Digital Coaching (DC)* useful to procrastinators, a subgroup of students who suffer from serious emotional problems, poor study results and/or dropout of university (Topman, Kruise, & Beijne. 2004). The main goals of treatment are self-control, time management, goal setting and self-efficacy.

---

[1] see for instance English version of study questionnaire SMART;
www.leidenuniv.nl/ics/sz/so/study_support/smart_q/smarteng.htm

Procedure

The first phase of digital coaching serves as a diagnostic tool to investigate the participants' problems. Prior to the start of this first phase, a first face-to-face interview is held. A second face-to-face interview is held to mark the end of the first phase. In this session therapist and client discuss the progress the student has made and specific plans for the second phase of the program.

The second phase of digital coaching is called 'work in progress': the goal is to set about behavioral change. Main techniques used are time-monitoring, modeling, shaping, and setting clear rules and regulations. This phase has a time schedule of 10 weeks. At the end of the project, the questionnaires are filled in again as a post-measurement.

In this paper the results of a study of the effects of DC are discussed.

Method

Academic- and Test Competence, Time management, Strategic Studying and average number of hours spent studying per week was measured by the study questionnaire SMART (Topman, et al., 1992). To measure the frequency of test-related thoughts the "SOM-test" was used (Topman, Kleijn & van der Ploeg, 1997). Depression was measured by the Dutch version of the BDI (Beck & Steer, 1993). Trait procrastination was measured by the Dutch adaptation (Schouwenburg, 1994) of Lay's Procrastination Scale (Lay, 1986), LPS. To measure psycho-neuroticism the Symptom Check List (SCL-90; Arrindell & Ettema, 1986) was used.

Results

In a series of paired -samples t test, pre- and posttreatment scores of SMART, SOM, LPS and SCL-90 were compared. In table1 only the significant differences are presented.

	Pre (n=14)	Post (n=14)	T-value	Significance (2-tailed)
Time Management	6.29	19.93	-8.31	.000
Study hours / week	12.64	20.93	-3.68	.003
BDI	10.50	7.50	2.59	.022
LPS	80.20	71.87	5.01	.000
SCL-90				
Agoraphobia	10.07	8.36	2.48	.028
Depression	35.29	27.07	2.57	.023
Insufficiency of thinking and behavior	20.29	16.21	3.71	.003
Interpersonal sensitivity	31.86	28.21	2.28	.040
Hostility	10.00	8.00	2.35	.035
Psneu	161.93	134.86	2.85	.014

Table 1: Significant differences of scores before and after Digital Coaching

Table 1 shows Time management improved from 6,29 (very weak) to 17,93 (good). Study hours / week increased from 12,64 hours (very low) to 20,93 hours (rather low). These two scores are indicating an important improvement in approach of the study.

BDI scores decreased from 10,50 (moderate depressive) to 7,50 (mild depressive).

LPS scores decreased from 80,20 (strong tendency to procrastination) to 71,87 (moderate tendency to procrastination). Although the LPS score is presumed to represent a trait and not a state, decrease in the tendency to procrastinate is evident.

Also the scores on subscales of SCL-90 decreased from 'very high' to 'high' (Depression, Interpersonal sensitivity), or 'high' to 'high average' (Agoraphobia, Insufficiency of thinking and behavior, Hostility, SCL-90 Psneu) indicating an important decrease in level of psycho-neuroticism.

No significant differences were found for Academic- and Test Competence scales, and "SOM-test"-ratio. These scores are more or less reflecting self-efficacy expectations in the domain of academic performance. The reason could be, that the period of Digital Coaching is too short for convincing students of their improvement in academic performance and academic performance (Topman, Kruise, & Beijne 2004).

The research on the effects of digital coaching is ongoing, and includes comparisons with alternative forms of treatment.

Discussion

The results so far indicate that internet tools are a useful in addition to traditional help. Internet advice and digital coaching have a low threshold and attracts clients who would not seek traditional help (because of fear, shame, or immobility caused by geographic distance or disability). Digital Coaching has certain advantages over traditional counseling as it intensifies homework assignments such as time monitoring. In addition it constantly reminds clients of their plans to change behavior. Student counselors might work more efficiently as they use partly pre-fab assignments and texts, although it is time-consuming to prepare these. A disadvantage from the viewpoint of student counselors might be the difficulty to deepen the relationship, although many a student and intermediary is comfortable with that.

It is now of our interest to find the right extent (sufficient and not too time consuming) of support students need and to find ways for intermediaries to use our tools and expertise. Therefore, experiments with *'DC-light'* – a support system provided to intermediairies - are in progress. Results will be discussed.

Finally, experiments with non-verbal affective 2-D and 3-D images *(Thinkbox of the Procrastinator)* (http://www.leidenuniv.nl/ics/sz/so/thinkbox/intro/) are carried out. These experiments are modern versions of the 'emblemata' and 'imagines agents' of the humanistic tradition. These images are a means to offer experience instead of straightforward advice. Students who are not easily convinced by serious advice and warning might be influenced while viewing the images and searching for their

meaning. They may be confused and startled – and hopefully start to question the behaviour that is the object of the images. Examples will be shown and discussed.

References

Arindell, W.A. & Ettema, J.H.M. (1986). SCL-90. Een multidimensionele psychopathologie indicator [A multidimensional psychopathology indicator]. Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Beck, A.T. and Steer, R.A., (1993). *Manual for the Beck Depression Inventory.* Psychological Corporation, San Antonio.

Lay, C.H. (1986). At last, my research article on procrastination. *Journal of Research in Personality, 20*, 474-495.

Schouwenburg, H.C. (1994). *Uitstelgedrag bij studenten.* [*Academic procrastination*] Proefschrift (Dissertation) Universiteit Groningen.

Topman, R.M., Kleijn, W.C., Ploeg, van der H.M. & Masset, E.A.E.A. (1992). Test anxiety, cognitions, study habits and academic performance: a prospective study. In K.A. Hagvet & T. Backer Johnsen (Eds.), *Advances in Test Anxiety Research*, (Volume 7, pp. 221-240). Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger.

Topman, R.M., Kleijn, W.C., Ploeg, van der H.M. (1997). Cognitieve balans van negatieve en positieve gedachten en examenvrees [*Cognitive balance of negative and positive thoughts and test anxiety*]. *Gedragstherapie, 30*, 85-102.

Topman, R.M., Kruise, D. & Beijne, S. (2004). Digital Coaching of Procrastinators in an Academic Setting. In H.C. Schouwenburg, C.H. Lay, T.A. Pychyl & J.R. Ferrari (Eds.), *Counseling The Procrastinator in Academic Settings*. APA Books

B5

Pesso Groups

P. F. van Duuren, MSc

Radboud University Nijmegen
The Netherlands

I propose to give a workshop in order to show a new combination of a short-term-psycho-dynamic group-psychotherapy and a body-oriented therapy, named Pesso exercise-groups.
First I will shortly discuss the four stages of group-development and then specify how body-oriented exercises can intensify the stages. This part will last for about ten minutes. Some familiarity with groups-psychotherapy is advised.
Next there will be a practical part of about 40-60 minutes (depending on the number of exercises). In this part participants will get the opportunity to practice the exercises themselves, to reflect on their experiences and to discuss them.

Number of participants: 12

C1

Promoting university students' quality of life

Evangelos C. Karademas, MSc, PhD
Assist. Professor, Department of Psychology

University of Crete, Greece

karademas@psy.soc.uoc.gr

Anastasia Kalantzi-Azizi, MSc, PhD
Professor, Department of Psychology

University of Athens, Greece

kalantzi@psych.uoa.gr

Abstract

Several studies have shown that university students are frequently met with obstacles that undermine their quality of life. Three major risk factors can be identified: stage of development, growing personal and educational demands, and lack of resources or skills to effectively cope with adversities. Higher Education can promote students' quality of life through counseling services for students. In this respect, this paper presents two examples of such activities: a group cognitive-behavioral stress-management program, and a volunteerism initiative. Activities like these can enhance students' well-being directly and, indirectly, by promoting a well-being-enhancing academic environment.

Students' quality of life

World Health Organization (WHO) defined quality of life as the perception of personal position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which the person lives and in relation to his/her goals, expectations, standards and concerns (document retrieved from the WHO website, July 3rd, 2004). According to the WHO, quality of life is a broad concept, which is affected in a complex way by physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, and social relationships. WHO, under the umbrella of the overall quality of life, includes domains such as physical and psychological health, level of independence, social relations, environmental issues, and spirituality/religion/personal beliefs. Schalock (2004) further adds social inclusion, personal development, self-determination, and material and emotional well-being. Finally, Vaez, Kristenson and Laflamme (2004) highlighted four fundamental components that apply to the student population, namely, life satisfaction, self-esteem, health and functioning.

A search in PsychINFO, using 'quality of life' as a keyword, revealed 12,696 articles since 1980 (April, 2005). However, researchers have paid limited attention to university students-related well-being and quality of life issues (Vaez et al., 2004).

Transition to higher education represents an emerging adulthood, which involves a series of significant changes with respect to self-concept, interpersonal relations, sexuality, occupational preparation, etc. Furthermore, being away from home, perhaps for the first time, shift in social network, new demands regarding achievement, new developmental tasks, are all stressful situations that can put significant pressure on students (Rosenthal & Schreiner, 2000). The interaction between developmental changes and the stressful conditions of academic life makes university students a rather vulnerable population.

In fact, several findings indicate an increasingly troubled student population whose perception of actual opportunities and resources is fading. Students nowadays are highly concerned by more 'practical' issues. Disch, Harlow and Campbell (2000) found that college students' highest rated areas of importance are career/employment, use of time, and consumer/finance issues (e.g. acquiring funding for their education), whilst they are more apathetic about social issues and less personally involved in comparison to previous generations. Staats, Armstrong-Stassen and Partilo (1995) reported that higher education students in 1992 had lower ambitions regarding material well-being and lower optimism about the future in comparison to students almost a decade earlier. They also found that the 1992 sample reported lower overall levels of subjective well-being, while at the same time were far more concerned about occupational and financial matters.

Students' lower quality of life is also reflected in Vaez et al. (2004) study. The authors found that, for both males and females, first-year students' average perceived quality of life was significantly lower than of their working counterparts, while a high proportion of students rated their health as 'average' or 'low'. Authors tried to explain these findings on the basis of students' precarious living and studying conditions. Heavy workload, limited appreciation and feedback, living within a competitive and individualistic labor market may also serve as a cause for students' problems (Vaez & Laflamme, 2003). Additionally, students are faced with learning and achievement problems, procrastination, anxiety (especially test-anxiety) and high-risk behaviors (e.g. drinking and smoking) (Vaez & Laflamme, 2003). Other studies have also shown a high rate of stress, anxiety and other emotional problems amongst students (Ashton & Kamali, 1995; Stewart-Brown et al., 2000). Kalantzi-Azizi (1996) reports that almost 15%-20% of the student population could benefit from some kind of psychological counselling.

Shifting to quality of life determinants, perceived stress is an important risk factor for low mental health, which is a central determinant of students' quality of life, as Bovier, Chamot and Perneger (2004) showed in a study of 1,257 students. Also, Stewart-Brown et al. (2000) and Vaez et al. (2004) showed that perceived quality of life among students is more strongly related to psychological health than any other aspect of well-being.

Risk factors for students' quality of life

Students are faced with three significant conditions that may act as risk factors regarding their quality of life and well-being.

The first risk factor relates to students' stage of development. There is a 10 to 15 year gap between biological maturation and taking over adult roles and responsibilities. Students are 'post-adolescents' that have really neither adolescents' nor adults' roles and rights. This situation can be quite

distressing, since the student enters a period of prolonged 'moratorium': he/she is an adult in biological terms, but psychosocially can not act like one. Furthermore, in our competitive times, adult roles are becoming increasingly complex and therefore difficult to obtain (e.g. expanding studies, higher goals, increasingly sophisticated skills to be learned, more financial and societal demands, etc).

The second factor refers to the multiple stressful personal and educational demands. Students are frequently met with serious stressors, such as difficulties in relationships with family, difficulties in sexual relationships, financial problems, worries about the future, the need to adapt to a new and demanding educational environment, high competition, pressure for success, repeated examinations and tests, heavy intellectual workload, etc. The relation of stress to health and quality of life is of course well examined and documented (see for example, Cruess et al., 2004; Dohrenwend, 2000).

The third risk factor refers to the possible lack of resources or skills to cope effectively with adversity. For example, insufficient coping abilities, mismatch between coping efforts and situational demands, social or economical strain, low social support, concurrent stressful events or situations, etc in interaction with other risk factors can cause significant problems and thus put a student in a particularly vulnerable position.

However, higher education as part of the broader educational system, could promote almost every aspect of students' quality of life. Key actions that higher education can take in this direction include: assessment of students' needs and problems, psychosocial interventions, management of personal, interpersonal and academic difficulties, initiatives for students with special needs, wide prevention programs, and innovative activities (e.g. web-counselling, internet-based intervention, training programs, knowledge dissemination, common action collaborations). Counselling centers for students are the proper services to implement these activities.

In this regard, this paper presents two examples of such activities: a stress- management group intervention program developed at the University of Athens Laboratory of Students' Psychological Counselling; and a volunteerism initiative that is taking place at the University of Crete Counselling Center for Students.

A Stress-management program

As noted above, the difficulties that students face, in combination with various individual developmental issues, are related to the growth of problems (Aherne, 1997; Kalantzi-Azizi, 1996; Rott, 1986). Stress management programs can effectively help students in the confrontation of difficulties such as anxiety and anxiety disorders, anger and aggressiveness, and depressive symptoms (for a synopsis see, Lehrer et al., 1993; Palmer, 1997).

Within this context, a cognitive behavioral group intervention program for the management of stress and its negative consequences was developed. The program is addressed to students who encounter difficulties in handling everyday stress (e.g. they have problems in studying, with their family, with peer-relationships, etc), or to students that face negative stress consequences, both physical (e.g. headaches or other pains) or psychological (e.g. intense distress, problematic self-image, low self-efficacy expectations). The aims of this program were to help students improve their psychological

health and to train them in skills necessary for handling stressful situations. The structure and the philosophy of this intervention program, as well as certain preliminary results from its first application with four groups of students are presented bellow.

Structure and philosophy of the program

The program is of cognitive-behavioral concept and philosophy. Accordingly, it includes relevant techniques and processes that aim to: (1) inform the participants of the nature, the processes, the reactions, and the consequences of stress, (2) help them to lower their psycho-physiological arousal, (3) train participants in new skills and strengthen the existing ones, (4) introduce them to basic ways for the analysis and modification of dysfunctional automatic thoughts, cognitive schemas, and processes, and (5) help participants to better comprehend their personal limits, values and motives (a 'self-awareness' ingredient). The overall aims of the intervention program are the effective management of stress reactions and negative consequences and the alleviation of psychological symptoms. It is noteworthy that an emphasis was put on the enhancement of self-efficacy expectations. High self-efficacy expectations are related to more use of functional strategies for the confrontation of stressful situations (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, the enhancement of self-efficacy can strengthen an individual's readiness to find and use effective coping strategies.

The techniques and strategies included in the program are the following: To achieve the first and the fifth goals, education on stress and stress reactions (based on personal examples) takes place. The participants' strengths and weaknesses in dealing with pressing situations, the type of coping strategies they use and their effectiveness, as well as personal objectives and the role that they play in the stress process are discussed. At the same time, the sources of stress that participants face and all relevant factors are also examined. The self-awareness perspective includes discussions concerning: the major stressful situations that participants have faced in their life, their beliefs about what they can or cannot change in their life, the abilities and the weaknesses they consider they have, and finally their short- and long-term goals and motives. These discussions contribute in drawing conclusions useful for the rest of the program. To achieve the second goal, participants are trained in the application of specific techniques such as progressive neuromuscular relaxation, diaphragmatic breathing, distraction, and guided imagery. The third goal is achieved by training in and application of techniques such as problem solving, anger management, assertiveness, and time management. The fourth goal is achieved through processes of cognitive restructuring that is finding out, challenging and replacing dysfunctional beliefs and processes. In order to achieve this, diary keeping and other relative techniques (e.g. technique of the 'vertical arrow', drawing cognitive maps) are used. Table 1 on the next page presents the weekly program of the meetings.

Initial Contact	• Interview
	• Preliminary information
1st session	• Getting acquainted with each other.
	• Discussion/information about stress (sources, processes, reactions, consequences), coping strategies, etc.
	• Introduction in daily diary keeping. Three column (ABC) diaries.
2nd session	• Self-regulation/discussion based on diary recordings.
	• Discussion on personal goals and motives, as well on their relation to the stress process.
	• Information about stress, coping, etc (continued).
3rd session	• Self-regulation/discussion based on diary recordings (continued). The emphasis is put in dealing with one specific problem each time.
4th session	• Controlled (diaphragmatic) breathing.
	• Problem solving I.
	• Discussion on personal stressful situations.
5th session	• Progressive neuromuscular relaxation.
	• Problem solving II.
	• Introduction to cognitive theory.
	• Five column diary keeping.
6th session	• Progressive neuromuscular relaxation II.
	• Challenging and replacing dysfunctional thoughts and schemas: An introduction.
	• Distraction and relevant techniques.
7th session	• Challenging and replacing dysfunctional thoughts and schemas II: Cognitive errors, automatic thoughts.
	• Progressive neuromuscular relaxation.
	• Anger management techniques.
8th session	• Problem solving and graded (step-by-step) practice.
	• Challenging and replacing dysfunctional thoughts and schemas III.
9th session	• Challenging and replacing dysfunctional thoughts and schemas IV: The vertical arrow technique.
	• Participants as 'trainers' (helping a friend deal with his/her stress).
	• Time management.
10th session	• Challenging and replacing dysfunctional thoughts and schemas V.
	• Progressive neuromuscular relaxation (a rehearsal).
	• Assertiveness training – introduction I.
11th session	• Challenging and replacing dysfunctional thoughts and schemas VI: Drawing a personal cognitive map.
	• Assertiveness training – introduction II.
12th session	• Rehearsal on the concepts of stress, coping, cognitions, problem solving, relaxation, etc.
	• Coping with possible set-backs.
	• Conclusions and impressions.
	• Evaluation of the program by the participants.
Follow-up sessions	30 days and 6 months later.

Table 1: Brief presentation of the content of each session

The program is completed in 12 meetings (duration 90'-120'), the first six of which are carried out at two per week and the remainder at one per week. In each meeting, participants are provided with printed informative material about the topics that are discussed in the meeting. The size of each team is usually fixed at 6-8 individuals, whilst two coordinators work with each team.

A preliminary clinical interview takes place before the beginning of the program. Those who are presented with symptoms of major depression or signs of personality disorder, substance abuse, hypochondriasis or psychotic symptoms are excluded from the program. Those who have recently begun psychological or pharmaceutical treatment or have low motivation are also excluded. These criteria are important for the achievement of the objectives of the group work considering the restrictions that it imposes (Free, 1999). It should be stressed that students that showed certain depressive or anxiety symptoms or were already engaged in psychological or pharmaceutical treatment were not excluded where their therapists allowed their participation.

Preliminary review of the program effectiveness

Nineteen (19) students have completed the program up to now (15 females and 4 males) in four groups. Their mean age was 22.14 years (SD = 2.75 years). Participants were from families of average socio-economic status (according to the education level and the profession practiced by their parents). Of the 19 students, four were presented with symptoms of generalized anxiety and depression and one was under psychiatric treatment for major depression. The remaining fourteen students reported various symptoms either psychological (e.g. intense distress, inability to handle difficult situations) or physical (e.g. pains, fatigue, tachycardias, perspiration). Those students who were excluded due to severe psychopathology were referred for individual treatment.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, the participants filled out two questionnaires before the beginning of the program, during the preliminary interview: a) the *General Health Questionnaire-28* (GHQ-28), as adapted in the Greek population by Moutzoukis et al. (1990). Higher scores indicate more intense psychological problems. b) A "*self-efficacy scale*" for the measurement of self-efficacy expectations (SEE) for dealing with stressful situations (Karademas, 1999). This scale was used as an indicator of the changes in the ways that participants evaluated themselves and their environment. The scale consists of 17 questions, which refer to the ability to successfully face stressful situations by using various resources and abilities. It consists of two factors: (i) the "general SEE" subscale, which evaluates the general self-perception that the person possesses the essential skills in order to deal effectively with pressing situations (e.g. "How well can you deal with a problem, no matter how serious it might be?") (Cronbach α = .81); and (ii) the "SEE for the application of effective coping strategies" subscale, which evaluates the expectation that one can precisely determine what the problem is and apply specific strategies in order to deal with it (e.g. "How effectively can you apply a specific solution to a problem?") (Cronbach α = .80). Higher scores indicate stronger self-efficacy expectations.

At the end of the program, the participants filled out the same questionnaires again during the last meeting and for a third time six months later during the second follow-up meeting.

In order to evaluate the changes noticed in the results before and after the application of the program, the Wilcoxon non-parametric *z*-test (for paired samples) was used. This criterion was selected due to the small size of the sample. Therefore, the medians and the maximum and minimum values of the variables included in the study are presented here.

		Medians (*Md*), Maximum (*Ma*) και Minimum (*Mi*) values	*z*-values		
			Before and after program	Before program and in the follow-up	After program and in the follow-up
Global GHQ-score	Before program	*Md*=41.00 *Mi*=21.00, *Ma*=59.00			
	After program	*Md*=26.00 *Mi*=13.00, *Ma*=55.00	4.16*	4.02*	.50
	In the follow-up	*Md*=28.00 *Mi*=13.00, *Ma*=58.00			
General SEE	Before program	*Md*=11.00 *Mi*=7.00, *Ma*=16.00			
	After program	*Md*=16.00 *Mi*=9.00, *Ma*=23.00	4.04*	4.06*	.83
	In the follow-up	*Md*=15.00 *Mi*=11.00, *Ma*=20.00			
SEE for the application of coping strat.	Before program	*Md*=15.00 *Mi*=10.00, *Ma*=20.00			
	After program	*Md*=24.00 *Mi*=13.00, *Ma*=29.00	4.13*	3.81*	.75
	In the follow-up	*Md*=24.00 *Mi*=10.00, *Ma*=24.00			

* *p* < 0.01

Table 2: Medians, maximum and minimum values of the GHQ-score and the self-efficacy expectations (SEE) subscales before and after the intervention and in the follow-up

The medians of the GHQ-score and self-efficacy scales are reported in Table 2. The global GHQ-score was significantly decreased after the intervention (Median before = 41.00, after = 26.00, *z* = 4.16, *p* < 0.01). The reduction in the GHQ-score was noticed in both maximum and minimum values. Additionally, the medians of both SEE sub-scales were significantly increased. The improvements in the GHQ-score and in self-efficacy expectations were maintained 6 months later, as shown by the findings of the follow-up assessment.

This preliminary review of the effectiveness of the intervention program indicates that it functions effectively. These first results are encouraging. However, it should be stressed that the results are preliminary and therefore only indicative of the effectiveness of the program. The rather limited number of variables included in the study and the lack of control groups represent important restrictions to the reliability of the results.

A rather innovative part of the program was the inclusion of certain self-awareness aspects. According to the participants' evaluation (at the end of the program), this self-awareness perspective was particularly important and helpful. Our future objectives are to further evaluate the effectiveness of the program by using control groups, as well as to publish the complete program with all its material (i.e., exercises, techniques and the informative material it includes).

A volunteerism initiative

'Volunteerism' has become a widely used word with more and more organizations, officials or laypersons referring to it, as well to the need for more 'volunteers'. In fact, there are certain US States (e.g. Maryland) who mandate that students complete 75 hours of community service in order to receive their high school diploma (Nelms, 1997).

Volunteer activities are doubtless useful. Besides the priceless help that offer to those in need, volunteers themselves can also profit. Nelms (1997) underlines some of these benefits, such as expanding life experience, discovering special interests and talents in areas outside the traditional educational environment, reducing self-centeredness, increasing empathy, etc. Furthermore, Price (2002) argues that, within a democracy, all citizens (and thus students) must maintain a reasonably high level of participation in society. Volunteer work and community service can stand as a way of civic engagement.

Clary et al. (1998) identified six motives for volunteerism: career enhancement, learning new skills, social integration, escape from negative feelings, personal development and expressing prosocial values. Recently, Carlo et al. (2005) in a survey of 796 college students showed that certain personality factors (i.e., agreeableness and extraversion) and prosocial values play a significant role in shaping volunteerism.

For all these reasons, volunteerism can enhance quality of life determinants. The Counselling Center for Students at the University of Crete is therefore trying to act as a facilitator in the interaction between students and local society. Those students who are interested are working as volunteers for local fellowships and non-governmental organizations such as services for persons with special needs or other severe handicaps, for individuals or families under great strain, for psychologically disturbed persons, etc. More than 40 students are taking part in this initiative each year.

The specific aims of this program are to help students formulate a more precise picture of the societal needs and to gain knowledge and skills that they will use later on in their personal and professional lives. The entire process is being monitoring by the Counselling Center, while the psychologists who work in the Center help students work out emotions or difficulties resulting from their experience. However, the 'benefits' and the quality of the experience gained by the volunteers have not yet been assessed. Such evaluation will take place in the next academic year.

Epilogue

Students are a young and an overall healthy population. Nevertheless, they are confronted with a series of stressful situations that sometimes tax their adaptation abilities and thus endanger certain aspects of their quality of life. A series of research and intervention efforts is concerned with the quality of life of different populations. However, this does not appear to be true with respect to students, despite the fact that their quality of life is also a significant issue.

In this paper, we have discussed certain issues impacting students' quality of life, several indicators of this, relevant risk factors, and the role that higher education can play in promoting students' quality of life. We have also described two such initiatives launched by the counselling services at the universities of Athens and Crete.

Our next goal is to establish common research efforts in order to investigate the quality of life of the Greek student population as a whole, as well as the factors that are related to it. We are also planning common intervention programs with a twofold aim: altering for the better specific domains of quality of life (e.g. psychosocial health, health-related behaviours), and creating a 'quality of life enhancing' environment (e.g. by facilitating certain policies). In this way, university counselling services could form the 'first line' of defense against the factors that undermine quality of life, as well as the 'advance-guard' for the promotion of students' well-being.

References

Aherne, D. (1997). Student stress: A developmental perspective. In A. Kalantzi-Azizi, G. Rott, & D. Aherne, *Psychological counselling in higher education,* 89-111. Athens: FEDORA-Ellinika Grammata.

Ashton, C.H., & Kamali, F. (1995). Personality, lifestyle, alcohol and drug consumption in a sample of British medical students. *Medical Education, 29.* 187-192.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy. The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

Bovier, P.A., Chamot, E., & Perneger, T.V. (2004). Perceived stress, internal resources, and social support as determinants of mental health among young adults. *Quality of Life Research, 13.* 161-170.

Carlo, G., Okun, M., Knight, G.P., & de Guzman, M.R.T. (2005). The interplay of traits and motives on volunteering: agreeableness, extraversion and prosocial value motivation. *Personality and Individual Differences, 38.* 1293-1305.

Clary, E.G. Snyder, M., Ridge, R.D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A.A., Haugen, J., & Miene, P (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivation of volunteers: a functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74.* 1516-1530.

Cruess, D.G., Schneiderman, N., Antoni, M.H., & Penedo, F. (2004). Biobehavioral bases of disease processes. In T.J. Boll, R.G. Frank, A. Baum, & J.L. Wallander, *Handbook of Clinical Health Psychology,* vol. 3, 31-79. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Disch, W.B., Harlow, L.L., Campbell, J.F., & Dougan, T.R. (2000). Student functioning, concerns, and socio-personal well-being. *Social Indicators Research, 51.* 41-74.

Dohrenwend, B.P. (2000). The role of adversity and stress in psychopathology: Some evidence and its implications for theory and research. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 41.* 1-19.

Free, M.L. (1999). *Cognitive therapy in groups: Guidelines and resources for practice.* New York: Wiley.

Kalantzi-Azizi, A. (1996). The European perspective of psychological counseling for university students. In A. Kalantzi-Azizi, *Psychological Counseling for Students: European dimensions and the Greek experience,* 49-74. Athens: Ellinika Grammata Pub. [in Greek]

Karademas, E.C. (1999). *The role of self-efficacy expectations as a mediating variable in the stress-psychosomatic health relationship.* Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Athens, Athens. [in Greek]

Lehrer, P.M., Carr, R., Sargunaraj, D., & Woolfolk, R.L. (1993). Differential effects of stress management therapies on emotional and behavioral disorders. In P.M. Lehrer & R.L. Woolfolk, *Principles and practice of stress management,* 539-570. New York: Guilford.

Moutzoukis, C., Adamopoulou, A., Garyfallos, G., & Karastergiou, A. (1990). *The General Health Questionnaire Manual.* Thessalonica: The Mental Health Hospital Pub. [in Greek]

Nelms, B.C. (1997). Volunteerism: Why do we need to require it? *Journal of Pediatric Health Care, 11.* 255-256.

Palmer, S. (1997). Stress counselling and management: Past, present and future. In S. Palmer & V. Varma, *The future of counselling and psychotherapy,* 82-111. London: Sage.

Price, B. (2002). Social capital and factors affecting civic engagement as reported by leaders of voluntary associations. *The Social Science Journal, 39.* 119-127.

Rosenthal, B., & Schreiner, A.C. (2000). Prevalence of psychological symptoms among undergraduate students in an ethnicity diverse urban college. *Journal of American College Health, 49.* 12-18.

Rott, G. (1986). Challenges to the counsellor in a changing world - The impact of the environmental change in universities on the concept of student counselling. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 9.* 237-249.

Schalock, R.L. (2004). The concept of quality of life: what we know and do not know. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 48.* 203-216.

Staats, S., Armstrong-Stassen, M., & Partilo, C. (1995). Student well-being: Are they better off now? *Social Indicators Research, 34.* 93-112.

Stewart-Brown, S.J., Evans, J., Patterson, J., Petersen, S., Doll, H., Balding, J., & Regis, D. (2000). The health of students in institutes of higher education: An important and neglected public health problem? *Journal of Public Health Medicine, 22.* 492-499.

Vaez, M., & Laflamme, L. (2003). Health behaviors, self-rated health, and quality of life: A study among first-year Swedish university students. *Journal of American College Health, 51.* 156-162.

Vaez, M., Kristenson, M., & Laflamme, L. (2004). Perceived quality of life and self-rated health among first-year university students. *Social Indicators Research, 68.* 221-234.

C2

Cultural psychology in psychotherapy

Sandor Lisznyai, MA
Assistant Professor

Faculty of Psychology and Education, Department of Counseling
ELTE University, Budapest, Hungary

Lisznyai.Sandor@freestart.hu

This paper uses the author's practice to illustrate the special ways and practices of his counseling work with foreign students. The main conclusion however should be stated in anticipation. The counseling process can overshadow cultural elements; the therapeutic space in which the helping process develops creates an environment in which the helping communication is not biased, not modified by cultural and language differences.

Culture does not intervene into the regressive space. The process involves cultural elements only in a personalized form: the same emotional loadings weigh the objects as in a relationship that is not come against a background of such cultural differences.

Cultures can disappear even on the level of language usage – this notion can be captured in everyday life as well; sometimes we miss the encoding, the language when trying to remember a certain event. We can remember the stories, the meanings, emotions, but sometimes we miss the words. A bit more precisely: we remember the words just as reconstructions; we produce them again when we reconstruct the whole Gestalt of the event.

However, culture can be detected as an important part of the communication, and can serve as a carrier of emotions, relations, resistance – culture is the symbol and aggregated context of our experiences in socialization, and we can talk about our family, our parents, our loves and hates, successes and failures just talking about or referring to culture.

In the following, first *I will introduce briefly my personal approach to counseling and psychotherapy*, just to create a professional context for the following ideas.
Then I quote two areas when I could detect the special features of counseling foreign students; first *the problems of use of cognitive appeal in an intercultural context*, then *a scene of psychodrama as an example* how cultures gathers the blockage factors, resistance and accommodates authority in the therapeutic process.
Finally I try to draw some *conclusions*, connecting my own approach to counseling towards the cultural intentionality of the counseling process.

The method: Counseling by focusing and managing "integration"

The counseling approach of the author is based on the "management of the integration process" (Lisznyai, 2000). This approach contains the following elements.

Integration

We refer to "integration" as a basic process and function of the personality; the automatic process when the self incorporates material from the outside world. Aspects of integration can be;

- The efforts of the client to find a meaning for sentiments, emotions, elements of behavior; the naive psychology of the client is a structured and reflected product of the ongoing integration processes.
- The attribution processes to find causes of events in the social world;
- The efforts of the client to create narratives of his/her problematic behavior or symptoms;
- In case of psychiatric problems, the perception of illness is shaped by the integration process; the different models of illness reflect the relationship between the self and the problematic part of the personality. The "psychiatric definition" for instance describes an alienated relationship between "diseased" emotions, feelings, behavior elements and the personality – the illness is "split off" from the personality.

Integration is an inevitable process, which is a core part of most of the psychotherapeutic methods. However, traditionally integration is not in the focus during the counseling process; moreover, most frequently, the professionals attitude towards integration is determined by professional prejudices. According to the psychiatric models: disease exists, and you have to "fight against" human suffering; diagnose and identify dysfunctions, help the clients to identify them and control them. According to most of the psychodynamic psychotherapies: symptoms and human problems have a history; nothing is without causes and causes always can be made explicit. These approaches are problematic not just because of they are right or wrong (the author of this paper does not have a definite position in the debates, adopting mostly Akiskal´s (in: Arató, 1988) psychiatric model of the "final common pathway" of psychiatric problems and the interplay between the psychological and biological systems), but most importantly, because of their hijacking of the integration process. Either the blockage of integration or the involuntary forcing of the process can cause serious damage to the therapeutic relationship. Integration should only be "managed"; facilitated. The author uses this managing approach in addition to the constant monitoring of the fluctuation of the integration efforts.

Managing integration

This integration-managing approach is very similar and closely related to Rogers´s *person centered approach* (Rogers, 1961). According to Rogers, the facilitative therapeutic environment is "rehabilitational", can re-settle the self into an original congruent interpersonal space, facilitating the congruence among the elements of the self-concept.

The non-directive nature of the person-centered approach is related to the belief of the autonomy of integration. The personality, according to Rogers, has an inner capacity to move towards development in an *automatic way*, after experiencing the elements of the therapeutic environment (unconditional positive regard, congruence, empathy).

The differences to the person-centered approach is that this integrative approach does not have a prerequisite of facilitating positive changes – just manages integration, no matter what the end result is. It is more "liberal", and does not sensitive to co-dependence; the integrative approach does not necessarily focus on the "positive" outcomes. Anything the integration process brings up to the surface, is accepted; on a longer term, the counselor believes that the client can find a way towards self-completeness.

Another closely related concept is *self-presentation*, which is a new attempt in the scientific literature to understand and interpret the result from psychotherapy effectiveness research (Kelly, 2000). Anita Kelly tried to interpret the controversial data on the correlation between *client concealment* and therapy effectiveness, and the *high level of discrepancy* between the counselor's and the client's *perception of the therapeutic process.* This discrepancy was even more spectacular in case of "negative" material – client confessions that contained elements the clients found "shameful". The therapists expected that these confessions meant a big step towards catharsis and therapeutic change, while the clients often evaluated these sessions as fallbacks. As a result, Kelly proposed a self-presentational model of psychotherapy: according to this model, the therapeutic process is based on the automatic, inevitable self-presentation by the client. The counselor/therapist serves as a reinforcing person, and his/her task is to help the client build positive self-beliefs into his/her self-concept. This is why it is not the counselor's task to invade into the clients self-system – he/she can only manage the ongoing self-presentational, i.e, self-building process of the client.

The author of this paper uses both of the concepts above, and fights against alienation within the self – believes that every feeling, idea, the most serious symptom that comes from the client can be handled and managed, and tries to send this message to his clients as well in a congruent way.

The management of integration concept is most closely related to the psychotherapy model of Wilfried Bion, elaborated recently by Patrick Casement (Casement, 1999).

The problem of directives, re-framing - Cognitive appeal in intercultural context

One of the most problematic part of the counseling interviews was the *re-framing* elements, especially when it required a greater extent of self-involvement and self-disclosure from the counselor.

As we noted above, when referring to skills and manageable, unit-like elements of the counseling interviews, we use the classification of microskills by Ivey and colleagues (Ivey et al, 1987). Re-operationalisation and reframing refers to the episodes of the interviews when, in the framework of a cognitive therapy-oriented approach, clients are asked to formulate their feelings, experiences, beliefs in a more concrete, analytic level, in order to re-build their concepts. One part of re-framing is the

"operationalisation" (according to Ivey's terms, or "translating broad goals into specific goals", "learning how to be concrete" according to Corey (Corey, 1990)). The other part is the re-establishing of the assembled concepts, goals, beliefs etc.

Apart from the standard behavior and cognitive techniques, this "episode" in the interviews (especially if the therapeutic framework supports mainly "talking", and the intervention of structured techniques seems difficult) is supported by the counselor's communication.

One of the most characteristic moments of the counseling process is when cognitive appeal (see next paragraph) and self-disclosure contributes to this process. This means that the counselor uses some standard "examples" to "attack" the conventional, rigid dysfunctional attitudes. An example can show this element of the interviews:

Cl(ient - Andrew):	OK, our next meeting is in next Friday. But one last question, can I have one last question?
Co(unselor):	Sure, go ahead.
Cl:	I am in a desperate need to know… to know how to live through my life. I can see no reason to live my life, my experiences are totally negative. I find no true love, no true attachments, no true relations among people… People are dishonest and I can see no chance to find real value in life. I imagine that you can understand this, that you also had depression and depressive thoughts, but you still find meaning in life.
Co:	No meaning in life? You mean, you cannot find a proper meaning for concepts like "love", "attachments"…?
Cl:	Well, I can see no meaning for them… I mean I guess there are no meaning of them.
Co:	What is the meaning you would like to find for them?
Cl:	Well, I mean relationships are about being true to each other, being honest and sharing a great deal of your inner self with each other, and not being dishonest and not cheating on the other… being confidential, handling the deep thoughts and ideas as confidential. Being on the same platform, sharing the same values…
Co:	*Well, I do not believe love is about sharing the same values… well, love is not about always telling the truth to each other. Sometimes quite the opposite….*

After all the last utterance from the counselor is an intangible one. It seems to be about "debating" at first glance; quite of an unreasonable idea from the counselor. However, it has to be noted that;

(a) The whole conversation is about of the end of a first interview of a counseling session when just about the end of the whole interview, when the time and date of the proceeding sessions had been fixed, the client rises a highly sensitive and problematic issue related to "how to cope with life until we meet again" not to "commit suicide". The responsibility is high, and the settings are inadequate – the first interview session is about to be over, there is no time to continue – and the risk of leaving the client is *mentioned*. If the counselor decides to follow the already agreed schedule (and not to call for crisis intervention procedures), some new aspects should be raised to occupy the cognitive system of the client until the next time. As the client is closed up into his own trap of thinking about life, some "windows" should be opened as hope and resources until the next session.

(b) Most of the operationalisation actions require a certain deal of "cognitive appeal" (Patton, 1997). Cognitive appeal refers to the concept of the counselors intervention that removes the client out of the dysfunctional cognitive schemes. Cognitive appeal is closely related to the use of humor, confrontation, suggestions, being personal in interpersonal communication; cognitive appeal is one of the core concepts of the rational-emotive psychotherapy developed by Albert Ellis (Ellis, 1970, Gladding, 1998).

An example for this "appeal" from an original Ellis interview;

Ellis is talking to a teacher who is worrying about his own professional competence and about the reactions from the parents of his students.

"Patient: Because the others, the parents say "Why are my son's grades poorer than that other person's grades?" And then it looks bad for me. But I know I am doing a better job than she does.

Therapist: All right, then why do you care, why do you give a shit whay *they* think? They're not firing you, as you said before. They're calling you names. Sticks and stones will break your bones, but names will never hurt you, unless you sharpen them up and stick them in your own breast, which you"re beautifully doing."

(Ellis, 1970, in Hersher, *Four Psychotherapies*, p 71, italics in the original).

The "appeal" is not necessarily as confrontative as it can be seen above, but the symbolic, persuasive nature of the communication can be detected in Ellis's utterances.

Cognitive appeal provides an important change in the counseling process, and according to Karl Menninger (Patton, 1992) it is an important step in the circular process of therapeutic change:

Insight - the client recognizes
the past in the present

The client's problems

The client's interpretations

Empathic response and counter-transference

The client's past

Cognitive appeal

Transference reaction
from the client
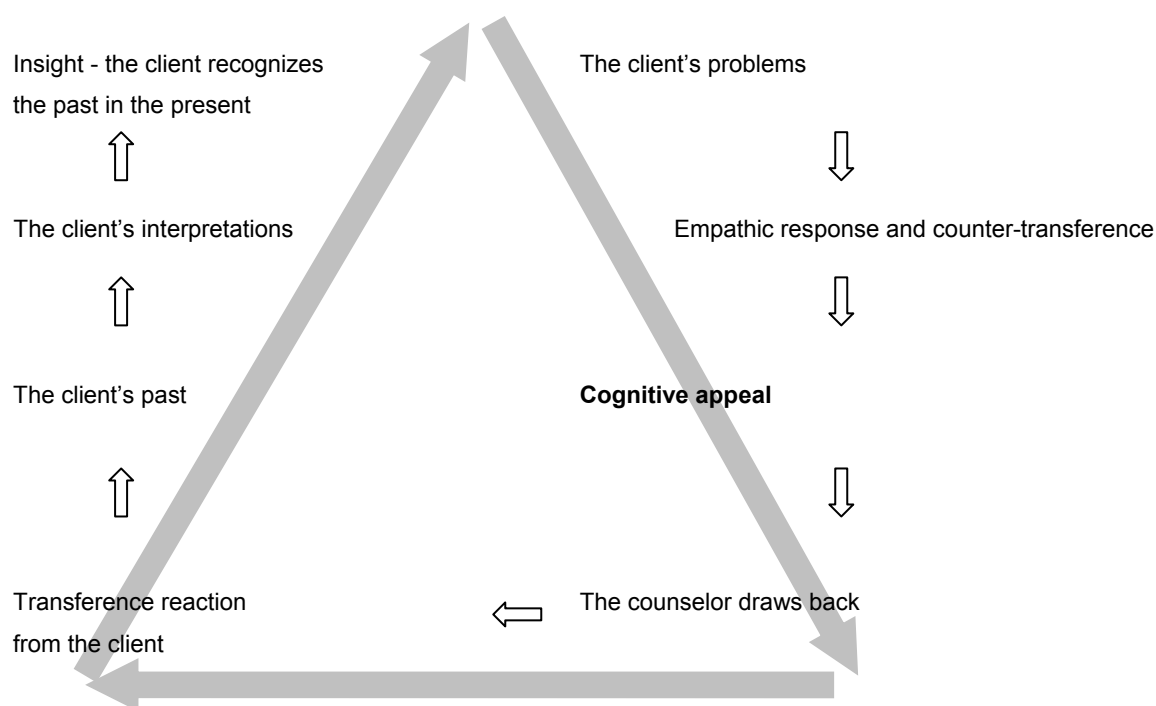
The counselor draws back

Figure 1 Menninger's 'flow of insight' model

According to the author's experiences, the *cognitive appeal* part of the communication was one of the critical elements of the counseling process. While it contains very sensitive **references** to cultural elements (e.g. in the use of humor), it can be very easily hijacked by the different cultural representations. These problems can emerge at least in two different forms and from two different sources; (a) on the level of associations and references, (b) on the level of the global perspective, evaluation of a perspective.

An example from the cases:

Mona was living together with her boyfriend but had serious problems in their relationship. She got involved in an occasional sexual relationship with another man and got pregnant – the serious decision whether trying to manage her unpleasant but at the same time desired motherhood was in the focus of the interviews.

Cl(ient, Mona):   I feel desperate because I have to end my relationship… the situation, the circumstances force me to do it. I have always wanted to end it anyway. But I just cannot tell him what happened, it seems too much to bear it, the disappointment and the mourning of end it anyway…

Co(unselor):   I understand, it is frightening to imagine how he will react, after everything seemed very calm and stable, even too calm and stable…

Cl(ient):   Yes, and I feel I cannot end things, I am afraid of ending things at all…

Co(unselor): *Well, after all, it is better to end something rather than to start it, hmm? (With a warm smile and the intention of create some flexibility in the situation using humor).*

Well, the latter sentence might seem somewhat clumsy, however, it contained some (according to the counselor's estimation) bonafide content and connotations. The whole conversation was about the "bad fate" being present in life, dilemmas that have no good solution, things in life that always have to fade and end. From this "spiritual" perceptive it is true – however, should not be as one-sided. In life, things end just to let new things invade the open spaces (at least, according to the counselor's optimist views). This perspective cannot be forced upon the client, and an open expression would have been both professionally inadequate, sounding phony and superficial. It seemed to be a more challenging solution, to use a directive statement from the Book of the Predicator, without naming the source (just using the uncertain sense of authority, the uncertain feeling that it is not something meaningless and not coming directly from the counselor).

However, this action is at the same time a *"Hungarianism"* – an example of using pessimistic, negative ideas to play, in order to feel control over fate (Lendvai, 2003). As Lendvai quotes:

"…In Hungary life was different. We were all involved in an ongoing struggle for almost everything we wanted. Sometimes we won; sometimes we lost; but we always survived. It did not bring us to an end, not in my case anyway. People need such challenges, and these have existed throughout Hungarian history".

(Paul Lendvai quotes Ede Teller in his book, *The Hungarians – A thousand years of victory in defeat*, p 474).

This "experience" is really being present in Hungary's culture – and serves as a base of the dry sense of humor that is traditionally used in the everyday life of the country. This kind of "black humor" (for which the above is only a very mild example) does not always find a way to foreign people, and can evoke reverse effect when used as an element of therapeutic communication.

However, this slip did not cause big problems – even more, this misunderstanding helped to get out of the trapped perspective of the difficult situation. In the case of *cognitive appeal*, when a more open perspective is the aim of the communication, sometimes it is good to realize how different your counselor is (insinuatingly, he can be a visitor from the Mars (Lendvai, 2003)).

A scene of psychodrama

In the framework of the compulsory internship training program of the university, our students have to participate in a one of the method specific training programs. In the spring semester of 2004, a psychodrama training program was offered for the students, just to let them have a first experience in the method and to gain a personal experience in psychodramatic self-discovery. The whole program consisted of 60 hours and could be accredited as a part of the participants´ BA credit schedule.

To illustrate my point of the cultural embededness of personal cathartic material, I will show only one protagonist scene with the resolutions, and some elements of the final sharing round.

The protagonists was a 22-year-old girl from the former Yugoslavia (for this article, Vesna), who had one of her family scenes set up into the stage. Vesna was a very thin young girl with long red hair, always chewing her fingers and speaking in a high and indolent, nervous voice. She was a social type anyway, with a lot of loving and caring friends.

The scene was coming from a title of "immobility", and represented this topic in a picturesque way; Vesna's father was a dominating man with a calm, but very strong attitude towards the family, her mother was a supporting but weak figure. She played herself in a scene when she was 14 years old, wanted to go out with her friends, but didn't even dare to ask for permission from her father. She could not even speak, just sighed in a frightened way to her mother for help and mediation to her father. This proved to be unsuccessful anyway - as she expected, her father took it as an outrageous irresponsibility to even ask about the possibility, the "little bitch" wanted too much, and should not even think about it anymore.

This scene is not without precedents and examples, but it is worth listing the dynamic elements of the scene - just to use them when looking for the "cultural elements" within the deep structures of the scene.

- The fear of being "swept away", being exterminated, abused by the aggressive and omnipotent father;
- The problem of the - anyway desired - identification with the strong and impulsive father;
- The missing of the loving, caring father;
- The lack of the possibility of the identification with the caring, mild father figure;
- The problem and blockage of the aggressiveness towards the father;
- The problem and blockage of love and attachment towards the father.

In psychodrama play, our attempts are focused on

- Playing and acting out of the problematic parts of the self;
- Integrating the selves;
- And developing the missing elements in a creative way (usually, with a lot of struggling efforts).

These attempts were also tried, struggling through the mountains of fear and resistance. It is quite reasonable; the overpotent and hugely aggressive father is one of the most important and most difficult opponents and identification partner in our lives. The protagonist found some creative solutions and started a way towards self-integration. However, the sharing round produced some strange forms of resistance from some members of the group;

"You might do it here (i.e, to produce new, phantasized reactions in the father-scene), but not in Yugoslavia or in Greece"
"It is culture. Women cannot do anything there."
"You might even be killed. How come to resist that way?"

These resistances kept on emerging even when the leader faced the group with the controversy of phantasised reactions; we were in a safe environment of the therapeutic group, and we did not have to necessarily produce the same scenes in reality (well, it is strongly *not recommended*). However, culture emerged as an unbreakable form of resistance.

The whole scene developed into a resistance and criticism towards the method itself and an unusual critical attitude towards the group leader. The feelings and impulses communicated a message like "You here in Budapest cannot understand us, living far away in the Balkans. You others could not even imagine how hard and unbreakable is the authority there".
This attitude maintained and some members of the group (who lived in the Balkans, at least in the sense of solidarity, not true geography; Greece, Cyprus, Serbia) refused to develop the theme further. "It is a cultural, not a psychological issue", as they said, and telling the truth, the leader could not find an immediate intervention to the problem.
The question arises; is it the culture that strongly backs up the authority roles, making them strongly built in to the self, and protecting them from re-elaboration, re-integration? Or the group used culture to re-build the figure of the overpotent, over-aggressive father? Of course, it is both, but I would prefer the latter solution. I believe in the group dynamics that worked there, camouflaging itself as culture. Culture was present, in the sense of something unbreakable, undisputable – like the position of the father of the Yugoslavian girl.
However, culture is not only a container of the symbols – a strong symbol itself, using **penetration** as an additional emphasis on each situation. This time, the scene was not only difficult, but definitely dominated over the individual personality. Identification is global and personalization is almost impossible; *you cannot change your nationality*, you can move anywhere, it does not help. The feeling of immobility comes again, in an even stronger form.
In a group session, sometimes it is necessary to focus on culture itself when the participants are in an intercultural context, otherwise resistance can use these "differences" and formulates as a heavy mountain of immobility. The group members should find their individuality and independence – not just from family, originating communities, but cultures themselves.

Conclusion – From Integration to Intentionality

The experiences can be concluded with an attempt to combine the "managing integration" approach to counseling and the cultural notion and problems that arose within the individual and group counseling processes. As a conclusion, culture shows an important sign that integration is not a linear and not a one-sided process; in order to integrate elements of the world into the self, we must disintegrate to some extent as well. In order to understand, we must forget some old things; in order to help people change, we must change ourselves. Culture proved to be an obstacle, but an important obstacle with full of insights; when we understand people *with culture,* it helps them overcome their cultural barriers.

As a model of counseling, I proposed that the "integration process" should be managed and lifted into the focus of the therapeutic process. This means that culture should not be overshadowed, but used. The leader of the psychodrama group made a mistake when tried to persuade the members that individual stories are not coming from culture; in order to help people let go their dependencies, we have to give them a chance to understand themselves altogether with their dependencies.

Cultural intentionality (Ivey, 1987) is a concept that *keeps the process open for integration of cultural elements at any time during the counseling sessions*. This attitude is a special example for the "integrative" approach, however, one of the most difficult stance to implement into real practice.

References

Arató M. (ed, 1988) *Depresszió*. Budapest: Medicina.

Casement, P. (1999) *Páciensektől tanulva*. Budapest: Animula.

Corey, G. (1990). *Manual for Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy.* Brooks/Cole, Belmont.

Corey, G. (1990). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Brooks/Cole, Belmont.

Ellis, A. (1970) Rational Emotive Therapy. A Case Example. In: Hersher (ed) Four Psychotherapies. London: Butterworths.

Gladding, T. (1998). *A pszichológiai konzultáció*. Budapest: Bárczi Gusztáv Gyógypedagógiai Fôiskola.

Ivey, E, Ivey, M, S. Downing, L. (1987). *Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Simon and Schuster, New Jersey, 1987.

Anita E. Kelly (2000). *Helping construct desirable identities: A self-presentational view of psychotherapy*. Psychological Bulletin, 126(4), 475-494.

Lendvai, P. (2003) *The Hungarians. Thousand years of victory in defeat.* London: Hurst.

Lisznyai, S. (2000). *Elements of Practical Training of Counselors in Hungary - Psychoanalitic Counseling Approach*. Annual Congress of the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Berlin, 2000.

Patton, M., Meara, N (1997). *Psychoanalytic counseling*. New York: Wiley and Sons.

Rogers C., R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

C4

Reliability and Validity of the College Adaptation Questionnaire in a Sample of Greek University students

Gadona, G.
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Stogiannidou, A.
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Kalantzi-Azizi, A.
University of Athens

College Adaptation Questionnaire was originally used in several evaluation studies of educational innovation programs at the Technical University in Eindhoven (Crombach, 1968; Klip, 1970). Van Rooljen (1986), studying the convergent validity of the questionnaire, found that the more highly adapted the students were, the less they experienced depressive affect and loneliness and they were more satisfied with various aspects of their life, such as financial and residential situations. The more adjusted students were more satisfied with their interpersonal relations and were less helpless interpersonally. Adaptation was also negatively related to stress symptoms.

The questionnaire was designed to assess general adjustment to the University. However, Baker & Siryk, (1984, 1989) assumed that adjustment is multifaceted in that it requires adjustment to a variety of demands. Thus, they proposed four specific dimensions of adjustment: Social Adjustment refers to how well the student deals with interpersonal experiences at the University, Emotional-Personal Adjustment is an indication of psychological distress, Institutional Attachment refers to the degree of commitment the adolescent feels towards the University as an institution. Finally, Academic Adjustment shows how well the student manages the educational demands of his/her school.

The present study is an attempt to examine the reliability and validity of the College Adaptation Questionnaire in a sample of Greek University students. Reliability was assessed through internal consistency coefficient alpha as well as corrected correlation coefficients which show the correlation of each item with the sum of all other items. Regarding validity, construct and concurrent validity analyses were performed. In line with earlier factor analysis results from alternative measures of University adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Gadona, Stogiannidou & Kalantzi, 2003), it was expected that the College Adaptation Questionnaire would also support a multifaceted structure of adjustment. Finally, concurrent validity was assessed through correlations with the factors of an alternative questionnaire of adjustment (SACQ, Baker & Siryk, 1989). It was expected that each factor would have the highest correlation with the respective factor of the other questionnaire.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 300 first year students of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, 148 male (49,3%) and 152 female (50,7%), with an average age of 18,8 years. Regarding the place of origin, 33% of the students came from Thessaloniki (the second larger urban center in Greece) and the other 77% came from other urban and rural areas of Greece.

Table 1 shows the distribution of participants as to University Departments:

Department	N	Percentage
Electrical engineering	90	30%
Primary education	67	22,3%
Forestry & natural environment	29	9,7%
Agriculture	44	14,7%
Pre-school education	44	14,7%
Informatics	26	8,6%
Total	300	100%

Table 1: Department of study

Measures

The College Adaptation Questionnaire (CAQ) (Crombach, 1968)

It consists of 18 statements assessing how well the student has adjusted to the university environment. Students answer on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Eight statements indicate good adjustment and 10 statements indicate the lack of it. The total score for adjustment is the sum of the item scores, after having reversed the scores in the items which indicate poor adaptation. In a test validation study at the Free University in Amsterdam (Vlaander and van Rooijen, 1981) with a group of psychology students, the adaptation scores proved internally consistent and they were not influenced by social desirability.

Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1989)

The SACQ (67 items) provides subscale scores on four aspects of students' adjustment to University: **Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Emotional Adjustment and Institutional Attachment.** Scores on SACQ were found to be reliable and valid in samples of freshmen European students (Beyers & Goossens, 2002).

Demographic Questionnaire: Assesses personal and academic information (18 items).

Procedure

Data were collected in May 2003 through prearranged visits in University classrooms. Participants responded to the questionnaire at the end of a teaching hour. Average completion time was 30´.

Results

Reliability analyses

The questionnaire proved to have satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0,83).

Means, standard deviations and item-restscale correlation of each item with the sum of all other items (r_{it}) are shown in Table 2. Respective findings of a Dutch sample (van Rooljen, 1986) are also presented in an attempt of cross-cultural comparison of university students' adaptation. The item "I never feel bored here" has the lowest item-restscale correlation in both samples and it was excluded from further construct validity analysis. In the Greek sample, only two item-restscale correlations are < 0,3 (items 7 and 11) while the others are between 0,36-00,59. These findings support the reliability of the questionnaire.

Item		Greek Sample			Dutch Sample		
		M	SD	r_{it}	M	SD	r_{it}
1.	am very satisfied with the course of my studies.	4,5	1,72	0,36	4,73	1,75	0,35
2.	Sometimes I want to give it all up.*	5,39	2	0,51	5,2	1,91	0,44
3.	3I often ask myself what I am doing here.*	5,43	1,95	0,59	5,55	1,75	0,54
4.	I 'd prefer to study somewhere else.*	5,54	2,01	0,37	6,24	1,52	0,39
5.	I made many friends here.	4,9	1,55	0,48	4,31	1,73	0,38
6.	I don't feel very at home here at the University.*	5,54	1,66	0,49	5,76	1,68	0,43
7.	I never feel bored here.	3,54	1,71	0,26	4,27	2,06	0,25
8.	Sometimes I feel very discouraged here.*	5,11	1,72	0,51	5,09	1,86	0,50
9.	I find life as a student very pleasant.	5,4	1,56	0,5	5,16	1,58	0,41
10.	Sometimes I feel rather lonely*	4,7	1,88	0,53	4,93	1,97	0,44
11.	Sometimes I don't know what to do with my time.*	4,58	2,04	0,28	6,23	1,48	0,34
12.	I find it hard to get used to life here.*	5,76	1,6	0,53	6,35	1,26	0,51
13.	What I miss here is someone to talk to freely from time to time.*	5,06	2,15	0,4	6,01	1,66	0,43
14.	I am satisfied with my way of life.	4,91	1,57	0,53	4,82	1,55	0,48
15.	If I feel blue, my friends will help me to get out of it.	5	1,71	0,36	4,64	1,98	0,28
16.	I find it difficult to adjust to student life*	5,7	1,52	0,52	6,02	1,54	0,49
17.	I am glad that I came to study here.	5,61	1,63	0,47	5,06	1,82	0,44
18.	I feel very much at home here.	5,07	1,88	0,54	5,21	1,62	0,57

Note. Means calculated after inverted recoding of starred items. Each r_{it} is statistically significant.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Item-Responses and Item-Restscale Correlation Coefficients (r_{it})

Construct validity evidence

In order to further study the item responses of the Greek students we applied exploratory factor analysis. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation resulted in 3 factors that accounted for 50,36% of the variance. The eigenvalues of the three factors were 5,31, 1,76 and 1,44, respectively. Table 3 shows the highest loadings forming each factor (loading >0,4).

	Factors		
Items	**1**	**2**	**3**
5. I made many friends here.	0,68		
9. I find life as a student very pleasant.	0,66		
14. I am satisfied with my way of life.	0,61		
15. If I feel blue, my friends will help me to get out of it.	0,67		
18. I feel very much at home here.	0,65		
1. I am very satisfied with the course of my studies.		0,47	
2.Sometimes I want to give it all up.		0,70	
3. I often ask myself what I am doing here.		0,81	
4. I 'd prefer to study somewhere else		0,76	
8. Sometimes I feel very discouraged here		0,43	
17. I am glad that I came to study here.		0,63	
6. I don't feel very at home here at the University.			0,41
10. Sometimes I feel rather lonely			0,68
11. Sometimes I don't know what to do with my time			0,58
12. I find it hard to get used to life here.			0,68
13. What I miss here is someone to talk to freely from time to time.			0,70
16. I find it difficult to adjust to student life.			0,52

Table 3: Varimax Rotated Three-Factor Structure for The College Adaptation Questionnaire

The first factor accounts for 31,49% of the variance, it consists of 5 items and assesses **Social Adaptation** of the student. The item with the highest loading on this factor is item 5, indicating the major importance of friends to the satisfaction the student gets from his/her social environment. The second factor, is formed by 6 items, accounts for 10,39% of the variance and evaluates students' **Attachment** to their school. Particularly, it estimates the extent to which the student feels that he/she belongs to the specific academic environment. The third factor accounts for 8,47% of the total

variance and contains 6 items. It assesses **Emotional- Personal Adaptation to University** and includes feelings of loneliness, leisure management and well-being in general.

Concurrent validity evidence

Pearson correlations between different aspects of adjustment to University as measured by The College Adaptation Questionnaire and the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (Gadona, Stogiannidou & Kalantzi, 2003) are presented in

Table 4. As shown, every factor has the highest correlation with the respective factor of the other questionnaire. Thus, the highest correlations are between Emotional Adjustment SACQ and Emotional Adjustment CAQ, Social Adjustment CAQ and Social Adjustment SACQ, Attachment CAQ and Attachment SACQ and General Adjustment CAQ and General Adjustment SACQ. These findings support satisfactorily the concurrent validity of the questionnaire.

SACQ Factors	CAQ Factors			
	Emotional Adjustment	Attachment	Social Adjustment	General Adjustment
Attachment	0,33*	0,72*	0,38*	0,59*
Emotional Adjustment	0,59*	0,43*	0,38*	0,57*
Social Adjustment	0.41*	0,34*	0,57*	0,54*
General Adjustment	0,54*	0,70*	0,52*	0,73*

Note. *p<0,01

Table 4: Pearson Correlations between CAQ factors and SACQ factors

Discussion

Scores on the CAQ were found to be reliable and valid in a sample of first year students in Greece. Internal consistency of the total score was satisfactory and corrected correlation coefficients supported its reliability, too. Corrected correlation coefficients of the Greek sample were similar to those of the Dutch sample. Items 3 and 18 showed the highest item-restscale correlations in both samples while the item 7 had the lowest correlation in both samples. Feeling comfortable and not having doubts about the University attendance seem to be the most important positive adaptation indices for both Greek and Dutch students. On the contrary, feelings of boredom seem to be less relevant to adaptation for both samples. The item with the highest correlation difference between the two samples is item 5. Having many friends seems to be more crucial for Greek students' general adaptation.

Exploratory factor analysis resulted in three factors confirming the multifaceted structure of University adjustment. Thus, each factor addresses a specific aspect of first year students' adaptation to University environment. The assessment of the particular dimensions of students' adjustment entails

the ability of studying adjustment patterns and therefore the processes through which students manage to adjust to the University environment.

Finally, we believe that concurrent validity was adequately established. Correlations between CAQ factors and the respective dimensions of SACQ were all significant in the predicted direction. These results are consistent with Beyers & Goossens (2002) concurrent validity findings of the SACQ. This study was conducted on a student sample from the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium and found similar to the present study correlations between CAQ x SACQ.

To sum up, the above findings suggest that CAQ is a valid and reliable questionnaire and may be used for research and counseling purposes in Greece as well. Its psychometric properties are similar in Greek and Dutch samples and CAQ seems not to be influenced by cross-cultural differences or the specific features of European University systems.

References

Baker, R. W. & Siryk, B. (1984). Measuring adjustment to college. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31*, 179-189.

Baker, R. W. & Siryk, B. (1989). *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, Manual*, Western Psychological Services, Los Angeles.

Beyers, M. & Goossens, L. (2002). Concurrent and predictive validity of the student adaptation to college questionnaire in a sample of European freshman students. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 62*, 527-538.

Crombag, H. F. M. (1968). *Studiemotivatie en studieattitude*. Groningen, Wolters.

Gadona, G., Stogiannidou, A., & Kalantzi, A. (2003). *First Year Students' Adjustment to University Life: An Exploratory Study in Greek Student Sample*. Poster presented at 1o P.S.N.G. Congress, Volos, Greece.

Klip, E. (1970). *Studiebegeleiding aan eerstejaarsstudenten*. Groningen, Wolters-Noordhoff.

Van Rooijen, R. (1986). Advanced students' adaptation to college. *Higher Education, 15*, 197-209.

Vlaander, G.P.J., & van Rooljen, L. (1981). New data about the Adjustment Questionnaire. *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsresearch, 6*, 33-37.

C5

Problématiques et souffrances liées au déplacement

L'expérience d'une structure d'accueil pour les étudiants étrangers : le relais social international (Paris)

(Specifics problems and suffering of cross-bording students (international students: Our experience to welcome and counsel foreigners students in the Relais social international)

Karine Brutin-Rouquet

Enseignante université
Antenne BAPU au Relais social international

karine.brutin@ciup.fr

coauteurs: Dominique Hinsinger
Pascale Zaréa
psychologues-psychanalystes

La France qui accueille chaque année 200 000 étudiants étrangers dans ses institutions universitaires commence à développer des structures d'accueil spécifiques pour cette population, rendue potentiellement fragile par les déplacements géographiques, linguistiques et culturels et parfois par l'insuffisance des structures d'accueil et des conditions matérielles à l'arrivée.

En effet, on peut dire que, malgré les efforts engagés ces dernières années, il n'y a pas en France de réelle politique d'accueil, mais son ébauche, le parcours d'un étudiant étranger relevant encore du « parcours du combattant ». Les diverses enquêtes révèlent que la décision d'aller étudier en France est liée à de nombreux facteurs socio-économiques, culturels, individuels ou familiaux (rapport Coulon-Paevandi pour l'Observatoire de la Vie étudiante). Les difficultés rencontrées par les étudiants sont multiples. Elles peuvent être matérielles (administratives, visas, carte de séjour, difficultés à se loger, à percevoir leurs bourses), psychologiques et individuelles, d'adaptation sociale (on parle alors de « choc culturel »), ou scolaires.

Prenant en compte la multiplicité de ces facteurs, la Cité internationale universitaire de Paris en concertation avec la Fondation Santé des Etudiants de France a crée une structure, le Relais social international associant dans un même lieu divers interlocuteurs susceptibles d'aider les étudiants dans leur parcours. C'est ainsi qu'à côté d'un accueil généraliste se préoccupant de toutes les démarches matérielles, s'est ouverte une antenne BAPU (Bureau d'Aide Psychologique Universitaire) composée de psychologues- psychanalystes et d'une enseignante détachée de l'université.

C'est donc des problématiques spécifiques des étudiants étrangers dont nous allons parler sur les plans psychologiques et universitaire, tel que nous pouvons les formuler depuis cette structure d'accueil, elle-même inscrite dans un lieu d'hébergement, la cité internationale qui rassemble 5000 étudiants venus de tous les pays du monde. Ce qui nous a semblé organiser notre pratique spécifique au Relais est l'accueil du sujet en déplacement, et non pas l'accueil du sujet souffrant comme au BAPU, même si la souffrance peut apparaître au décours de l'expérience.

I. L'accueil psychologique (Psychological counselling)

Les points suivants vont être développés. Ils sont ici simplement indiqués.

1. Qu'est-ce qu'être étranger ? (what is the meaning to be a foreigner ?)

C'est la question qui se travaille dans les entretiens psychologiques quand les jeunes gens constatent qu'être étranger ici, c'est normal, alors que dans leur pays, ils pouvaient se sentir étrangers sans légitimité. Ils sont alors conduits à questionner « l' étrange » de leur histoire.

Dans ce contexte, le déplacement est une sorte de mise en acte qui leur permet d'inscrire dans le réel quelque chose qui n'avait pas d'expression symbolique. Ils se sont accrochés à un idéal (Paris, La Sorbonne) pour franchir une frontière qui marque une séparation physique alors que ce qui les enfermait dans leur pays était une impossible séparation psychique.

2. Le cas de la panne d'écriture (the case of the writing's block)

Les jeunes gens peuvent consulter pour des difficultés à travailler ou des pannes d'écriture qui mettent en échec l'injonction de la réussite obligatoire à laquelle ils sont soumis, non seulement vis à vis de l'entourage et de la famille, mais vis à vis de l'état : l'obtention de la bourse interdit l'échec.

3. La question de la langue (The choice of french language for therapy)

La langue choisie pour la thérapie est à 98% celle du pays d'accueil. On formulera des hypothèses sur ce constat.

4. Effets du déplacement (Effects of cross-bording on the way to think about yourself)

Le sujet n'est pas soumis aux mêmes règles ni aux mêmes censures. Ce qui fait règle (une certaine façon de penser sur soi) est réinterrogé à partir d'un autre univers culturel qui permet du coup de réinterroger l'univers d'où on vient.

II L'accueil pédagogique (Counselling in learning process)

La place singulière occupée par l'enseignante dans le dispositif lui donne accès à la problématique de l'étudiant-chercheur confronté à la construction de son objet dans une autre langue que sa langue maternelle.

1.Les sujets de recherche choisis par les étudiants (the themes of research in France, a new way to consider their home country and origins)

L'enseignante été frappée par le fait qu'un grand nombre de sujets de maîtrise, de DEA, de thèse impliquaient dans leur énoncé le pays d'origine et ceci dans toutes les disciplines

Première remarque sur ces sujets : certains d'entre eux (les populations déplacées en Angola, en Colombie, les traces laissées par la dictature dans la ville de Buenos Aires) de façon évidente tentent d'observer, de mesurer, d'analyser au travers du prismes des disciplines choisies les effets des catastrophes politiques, économiques et humaines qui se sont passés en un point du globe et qui ont concerné le pays de leurs auteurs.

Deuxième remarque
Ces sujets font entrer dans l'université française des expériences qui lui sont hétérogènes et à ce titre l'enrichissent et contribuent à élargir le champ de la pensée et de la recherche qui se conduit en France, son rayonnement aussi.

Troisième remarque
On peut penser que l'expérience du déplacement crée une perspective nouvelle sur le sujet à traiter et qu'il faut l'affiliation à un autre pays, une autre culture, un autre système universitaire, une autre langue pour pouvoir penser et formuler depuis un autre lieu et j'y viendrai plus tard, une autre place, la question qui insiste et qui implique le pays d'origine. Venir en France ou aller étudier ailleurs crée une extériorité qui est à l'œuvre dans la construction de l'objet de recherche. Cette réorganisation à la fois de l'objet de la recherche et du sujet qui la pense implique la traversée d'une expérience bouleversante, la traversée de l'espace temps de l'exil

2.Temps universitaire et langue de l'autre (University deadlines and studying an another language)
S'ouvre alors pour l'étudiant un espace-temps où sont mis en suspens tous les points de repères familiers qui constituaient son identité de sujet dans un environnement connu. Tout est inconnu : le climat, les lieux, les personnes, les mœurs, la langue, la culture universitaire. Il faut se familiariser avec tout cela suffisamment vite pour pouvoir produire dans la contrainte de temps, le premier travail de recherche, généralement le DEA : l'étudiant dispose d'un an.

Un an pour franchir cette mise à l'épreuve de soi dans un monde inconnu régi par d'autres codes et d'autres exigences, et dont beaucoup, à l'arrivée, ne maîtrisent pas la langue. Et pourtant, ces étudiants vont produire au cours de cette première année, peut-être en deux ans leur premier mémoire en langue française.

On formulera des hypothèses sur les capacités auxquelles ils doivent faire appel pour affronter cette expérience qui peut être extraordinaire une fois traversée.

D1

Therapy with a young refugee from the Middle East following war trauma and integration challenges.

M.A. Borg Cunen, M.A.
Counsellor

University of Malta

maryann.borg-cunen@um.edu.mt

Malta is hosting hundreds of newly arrived forced migrants from Africa and Mediterranean countries. Many have been through multiple traumas both in their countries of origin and during their journeys that ended up in Malta. I had the opportunity of working with a young woman, a university student, in an acute state of turmoil over a number of years as she and her family were hosted in Malta. I tell of the stages in her therapy (humanistic) as she re-defines herself and comes to terms with her past. I describe the internal and external struggles she has to tackle in order to find a place in a culture foreign to her.

I have written this paper with "Rasha". In order to obtain her permission to write it some personal information and personal details were removed both to protect her identity and also because Rasha felt it too exposing of her and her family at such a vulnerable time of their lives. The resulting paper is a joint effort but she would like to remain anonymous.

Introduction

In recent studies of refugees hosted by Western countries, higher levels of mental distress have been consistently found, in comparison with levels found in the general population. The symptoms include depression, anxiety, demoralization, stress, fear pain, and PTSD (Silove & Steel, 1998; Edvall-Dahlgren et al., 1989). It is estimated that 50% of the world refugees are children under the age of 15. In some countries children under the age of 18 comprise 27% of the caseload in torture and trauma. These often-traumatized minors also come into contact with a diverse range of professionals from doctors to educators who are often ill equipped to deal with the problems they are facing (Mehraby, 2005). Malta was host to hundreds of persons seeking refugee status in the past few years. Many of these were under 18. The following paper illustrates the issues faced by such children drawing extensively on a case study.

I first met Rasha when she was referred to me by the counsellor of her sixth form college. I took her on as part of my load at the University Counselling Services even though she was not a university student. Neither she nor her parents were able to afford the usual fees, and the counselling services were flexible as regards which students are accepted as clients. This contact, on a professional level

continued for some five years, initially on a weekly basis and subsequently on her request for a few sessions during a time of confusion or pain.

The fact that Rasha was receiving 'charity' from various quarters (including from me in the form of free sessions) was of a mixed blessing. She came from a proud family. The father did not even want to apply for refugee status in order to avoid the 'label' of doing so. Her self -concept had to change from one of self-respect to that of "Misqin", Maltese for "Poor creature". The Maltese are exceptionally generous and kind; as long as they can look down on the person they are helping. The latter should adopt a grateful stance, and adopt an identity of a person of lower status. This perhaps was the one thing that hurt Rasha most. The fight to earn back her self -respect was a constant one. But more on this later.

Background

At the time of my getting to know Rasha she and her family had been here for almost three years. She herself had been 14 when she arrived, with an elder sister of 16 and a younger brother of 4. The family was seeking refuge from an oppressive and stifling political and social environment. Malta had temporarily opened her borders to tourists from her country (a few months after arrival the family did ask for refugee status), if I recall well, in an effort to boost the tourists' numbers on the island for that period. This proved providential for Rasha's family as the father was unable to pursue his profession as a film producer, and the mother was being increasingly restricted in her professional activities. The country as a whole was becoming more and more fundamentalist as reflected in its laws and attitudes. It had also been involved in a number of wars with neighbouring countries and suffered heavy human losses in the process. Above all the parents wanted to offer their three children a better future, in a place where freedom of thought and action was possible. However Malta, due to its size does not offer permanent asylum to refugees so Rasha's family expected to move to England or Canada within a few months. The family was not part of a group of families in the same situation and this made the experience so much harder.

This caused Rasha a great deal of insecurity. She was unable to put down new roots in this country. Her primary aim was to survive, and to learn English, which would help her in her future.

Culture shock

In her first two years in Malta she had managed to not only learn English, and some Maltese, but also obtain 12 'O'levels with A or Bs. On her arrival in Malta she had been immersed in an English and Maltese speaking, Catholic environment. Both of these were previously unknown to her.

Although she made quick progress in the acquisition of the language, and she converted to Catholicism within a couple of years following her arrival, her assimilation into the culture was patchy at best. Her years at secondary school seemed to have been spent in a daze. She felt alienated for her classmates who saw her as some kind of alien. She recounts a story: "I was in the school toilet. Two or three girls ran into the bathroom, shouted "Mohamed" and rushed out again before I could see

who they were". This happened quite a few times, reinforcing the sense of strangeness and being different.

She says of herself at that time "I was too different. I had so much to learn all at once: I felt like a two year old. It was as tough I had to learn everything again, from the bottom up". Even after learning the language the rift between her and her classmates remained:

"I noticed I was talking with in a Middle Eastern style: very polite with great attention to etiquette rules and with flattery. The students used to pick on me for this, because here they speak with a more 'practical' style."

Fitting in

Her conversion to Catholicism was, at that time, an attempt to fit in better. She says now with the benefit of hindsight:

"The Catholic conversion did help my integration, but to be honest for me that was more part of the whole culture habits rather than actual religious practice which helped. I mean again the 'label' of Catholic made people safer with me, just like my clothes having been more attractive could make them accept me more. It is so artificial but true unfortunately. The spiritual development that I had through Catholic faith came AFTER I was settled. So before that it was more the 'label' of being a Catholic and seeing me in a church that helped rather than actual Catholicism as such. This is where I was convinced it is not the religion itself that makes difference between people but their *attitude TO religion*!!"

Despite this helpful label she suffered from a sense of deep isolation. At an age when a child usually leaves the safety of the family environment and invests in friendships, and in laying down a basic understanding of the culture she/he lives, in Rasha was struggling with language acquisition and a basic orientation to the norms and meanings of this new culture.

Guiding conception for therapy

"Throughout history many individuals and groups have affirmed the inherent value and dignity of human beings. They have spoken out against ideologies, beliefs and practices that held people to be merely the means for accomplishing economic and political ends. They have reminded their contemporaries that the purpose of institutions is to serve and advance the freedom and power of their members. Humanistic Psychology is a contemporary manifestation of that ongoing commitment". (Association for Humanistic Psychology).

Many clients come into the relationship from social and familial contexts which have long denied their personal authority. Compliance with familial or societal norms and obedience to authority figures has been deeply inculcated. Psychotherapy inspired by humanistic ideals is well suited for work that involves rediscovering personal freedom and self- determination. Rogers viewed the therapist's provision of a *relationship* with particular attitudinal qualities, (principled non-directiveness, congruence, empathic understanding of the client's internal frame of reference, and unconditional

positive regard - the latter two attitudes necessarily being perceived by the client to some degree) informed by principles of the trustworthiness of persons and respect for persons as the necessary and sufficient conditions for change (Rogers, 1951). This assumption has been borne out in practice with clients over many years (Zimring, 2001). Thus I felt that I could offer Rasha what she needed. Person-centered counselling attitudes and techniques were ideal in this case. Rasha needed a place where to feel accepted and respected, and where she could unravel the confusion all these experiences had caused.

I choose to present this case because working with Rasha enriched me and I want to share this with you. It helped me familarize myself with the issues a refugee faces, and experience, through the client, the healing process. Although this is not a case where the client experienced extreme trauma it still sheds light on the process of recovery of a young asylum seeker in a host culture.

I knew almost nothing of the culture that Rasha came from and this slowed down the counselling process, as she had to patiently explain it to me when I failed in understanding the impact of certain events or experiences.

However also I echo what Judy Ryde of the Bath Center for Psychotherapy and Counselling, says about working with refugees: "Although being sensitized to the kinds of differences between cultures that may be present is important, we also know that each person is an individual so try not to think we already understand what that person's world is like for him or her. We try to keep an open and inquiring stance and be alert to when we are misunderstanding our client in some way." (April 2004). In my case I had to be alert also personally not to project my own experience onto that of Rasha.

Similarities and differences with my experience

In some ways I was in a unique position to understand Rasha. I also had come to Malta as a young girl, of 8 in my case. I came from the U.K. and had Belgian parents but my experience of integration was also painful and fraught with difficulties. One of these involved religion. Although I was Catholic already, the particular religiosity of the Maltese contributed a culture shock in me, one that took years to resolve. Like The client I also was living in Malta from moment to moment not knowing when my adventurous parents would move again. However I had no experience of the culture from which she came and neither of the effect an oppressive system could have.

Nor was I a refugee. Jorge Aroche & Mariano Coello, describe the difference between migration and exile: "Although both processes have many similarities, the experience of exile differs from migration in the way that the decision to leave the country is made, the amount of preparation possible, the amount of trauma associated with the decision to leave and the process of leaving, and the impossibility, temporary or semi-permanent, of returning to the country of origin. Therefore, although both are transitional processes with enormous disruptive potential, their emotional and psychological connotations can be very different."

(1994, http://www.swsahs.nsw.gov.au/areaser/startts/publications/article_1.asp)

I did not discuss these differences and similarities with Rasha but she did know that I had moved here as a child also.

The Crunch

"Refugee children are uniquely vulnerable both to trauma exposure (especially war trauma; (Mollica, Poole, Son, Murray, & Tor, 1997) and subsequent symptom development (Westermeyer, 1991), the latter being associated with risk factors that are trauma specific (e.g. type of trauma; Breslau et al., 1998), intrinsic (i.e. educational level; Breslau, Davis, & Andreski, 1995) and antecedent (e.g. prior interpersonal relationships; Brown & Harris, 1978)." In Lustic, et al, 2004, P.2)

Rasha's biggest challenge occurred when she entered a prestigious Jesuit sixth from. The young people at this school came from well to do families, or high-class families. All the youngsters would also have obtained top grades in their "O" levels. She had earned her right to be there vis-à-vis her grades, but the college saw her as a "charity case", contributing even financially to the family, and again she had to balance between proper gratefulness and, so much needed self-respect.

In this challenging environment, one were genders were mixing freely after years of being kept apart by the Maltese educational system Rasha had additional challenges. In her culture when genders do meet the encounter is marked by self-restraint and "seriousness". Flirting is frowned upon, and modesty is the norm. Malta is far more westernized, and provocative behaviour on the part of the girls is a way of assessing their power and status in the group. In this game Rasha was a non-starter. The great strain, which she had been under, finally got the best of her and she went through a very difficult time. This is when I first met her. She was an intelligent and motivated client. I developed a strong relationship of trust and acceptance with Rasha. She was suffering from acute anxiety and depression. It was not difficult to relate to this sensitive and expressive girl. It was somewhat more difficult to understand her meanings and experiences.

Therapy was a collaborative experience and with time I felt I understood some of her inner world. The most important element in her therapy was the communication of respect, understanding and commitment.

When she heard I was going to write about her she spontaneously wrote this to share with my readers:
"What was so important for me during meetings with Mary Ann that always landed me with security was the expression of dignity with which she looked at me! At that time I was feeling so alienated because of the language, codes of behaviour, clothing, etc., that every time people looked at me like I was some strange creature simply made things much worse for me like I did not belong there. I had to try so hard to prove to everyone that I was the same a human being who could be very intelligent with university degrees, with nice looks, with high level of language, until I could obtain that 'dignified' expression when people looked at me and communicated with me.

But with Mary Ann, at the time when I had no money to pay her, no money to look after my appearances, no personal resources like degrees or social status, no good use of English language, no knowledge of social codes in Malta, she still looked at me with such dignity and spoke to me with such respect. By now that I have gained social status, learned about the culture, speak good English, have money to look after my clothes and appearances etc people show me a lot of respect, but for me what counts is the respect that is given not on basis of a person's prestige, but on basis of a human being's dignity which puts every one on an equal level for love. All I needed at the beginning to start integrating was to be looked at with eyes that show I 'belong' and I am not an 'alien', and that I deserve 'respect' even if I was still young without social status, or different from the others in my culture."

Her anxiety was blocking her ability to understand her new reality. Relaxation techniques helped her to control this anxiety and freed her ability to adapt. She continues:

"The second most important thing that helped me a lot in Mary Ann' counselling hours, was her extreme gentleness and sensitivity to anything I said. She always managed to analyze things for me and show where the pain was coming from and how I could deal with it. She explained the differences in thoughts from my culture to that present in Malta without the slightest touch of looking down on my cultural thoughts/mentalities. For me seeing that my culture was not looked down upon it was easier to bend in, and integrate it with the new one because there was no need for me to protect or prove that it was good! She never made me feel inferior I mean. So I did not feel defensive towards my culture. But of course as an adult now I choose what I like, and don't like, from any culture because of my being mixed with several cultures (my partner is again from another culture)."

At that time however she was struggling to cope. She was finding it very difficult to concentrate in class and for the first time in her life she found herself failing in exams. Her need to have more power over what was happening in her life became a strong force, and one, which, as her therapist, I felt, was an important one. She needed to assert herself and provide herself with an environment in which she felt safe and self-directed.

Taking control
"Suffering ceases to be suffering in some way at the moment it finds a meaning". Viktor Frankl
An opportunity to gain control was presented by her a wish she slowly discovered: to leave 6th form and go to a vocational school. The pressure her studies were putting on this conscientious person was tremendous. She feared hurting and disappointing her parents, and she feared that a future without 'A' levels would spell disaster. Yet she was becoming increasingly frustrated and anxious in the classroom situation. This was a first task to reassert her wishes, her needs and her ambitions. The struggle between her "duty" and her desires was fierce inside her and, at this period, but she finally faced her parents with her decision. However they surprised her by accepting her wishes and supporting her in her change of direction. Thus she gained again in her task of self-definition. In taking this step Rasha was setting out on a road of non-conformity (it is an unusual choice in Malta for an

intelligent student) she that reflected her 'different' background but help her in the integration of her past and present.

Thus Rasha found her own way of achieving one of the basic tasks of late adolescence: autonomy (Erikson, 1950). She did not go through the usual rebellious behaviour expected at this age, but her choice to follow her artistic giftednes*s* rather than her academic giftedness provided her with this opportunity.

At this time also Rasha went through a time when she found it very difficult to enjoy the freedom that she was experiencing. Her thoughts were with those who she had left behind, who were still experiencing repression and hardship. Her sensitive nature made her unable to forget what her family had left behind. And she was filled with "survivor guilt" (Chung, 2001). She experienced a resistance against enjoying her life, which paradoxically now was starting to be less of a struggle, and more of something which can be enjoyed and savoured. In counselling she was helped by making tentative plans of how she would one day return to her country and help others achieve the freedom she now enjoyed. This provided her with the permission to get the most out of the situation she found herself in; she would need all the skills and learning later when she returned to her country. Thus her life took on a new meaning also.

Establishing boundaries

Rasha 's sensitivity and relative rootless ness, and the years of isolation and lack of acceptance made her prone to wanting to please others and do whatever she could to help them. She says of herself at that time " I had really become so desperate with loneliness and not being respected as much as I wanted, so I was ready to do anything to have that from others". This state left her open to being taken advantage of but also made her anxious; anxious to be in the good books of others, to be seen as doing something of value, to be making the best of her gifts and so on. She was prone to feelings of guilt if she was not always kind and generous. A number of incidents with 'benefactors', family members and potential boyfriends helped her, through counselling, to feel she could say 'No' and establish firmer personal boundaries. This also freed her from excessive anxiety.

Earning a living

As Rasha continued in her vocational training she grew in strength and self respect. She graduated from the school and found part time employment in a secondary school. For the first time in her life she could earn her own keep and contribute towards the expenses of her family. Through having a job she also became a person who was part of society and was even training the young of that culture.

She also started making a name her herself as a professional dancer. Her first performances were well received and she was launched into the world of art. Unusually I felt that I should accept her invitations to the performances. My affirming her in this role would be an adjunct to her therapy. I was not disappointed as it both helped her and was an enjoyable and enriching experience for me.

Her self-esteem continued to grow, as did her resolve to make a difference in the world through her art and campaigning for international dialogue. Yet she continued to be amazed at the feeling of "normality' she was experiencing. It seemed unbelievable to her that life could be smooth and relatively trouble free.

This experience was in fact not to last. As Judy Ryde says: "Some clients were, in the past, prospering at home with a stable family and community life and fell on difficult times when political turmoil hit them. Memories of appalling experiences haunt them, particularly in their dreams. In the relative safely of Britain the memories come back with greater force." (Bath Center for Psychotherapy and Counselling, 2004)

Intrusive memories
'Horrifying memories of the past interfere with their concentration, causing the survivors of war trauma, torture, political violence and various other forms of physical abuse to be anxious and withdrawn' (Silove, 1999; Silove, Ekblad & Mollica, 2000. P.1). About this time she was confronted with increasingly recurrent intrusive memories and dreams linked to her past life. As she struggled with the awakening of her sexuality she was confronted with images of heavily veiled women. In counselling she recounted her experience of a veil being imposed on her from the tender age of seven and her resentment of it and of the lost freedom it imposed. She recounted vivid images of the punishment she, as a school child was threatened with if she were to be indecent in any way. She drew this image of herself being hung by her hair completely naked for public ridicule. This was what was in store for any girl who violated the decency codes. In confronting these images and talking about her repressed sexuality she relaxed in the realization that this threat no longer hung over her. Her own internalized restrictedness relaxed and she allowed herself to mentally explore her sexual nature. In her dance she started to delight in the human body and was conscience that this would have been impossible in her own country. I encouraged and facilitated this self-discovery and provided a non-restrictive environment that so contrasted her own internalised world.

Thus there seemed to be a natural transition from the awareness of external freedom to an awareness and re-experiencing of internalised inhibitions. She recounts that as a child in primary school she was an exemplary student who took pleasure in pleasing her teachers. Thus she was all the more open to their influence. At that time the teachers were expected to enforce the norms of fundamentalist reformists and set out to mould the minds of their young students. She remembers being told by the headmistress of her school that if a girl was found wearing nail polish her hands would be cut off. Believing this completely Rasha was too young to rebel or question. She simply took in the message that making oneself attractive was dangerous. Rasha was highly influencable and took in their teachings without awareness of how it was damaging her comfort with her own female body. Helping Rasha formulate her own values and accepting her own sexuality was the therapeutic task at this time in counselling.

A few months later Rasha returned to counselling having been plagued by nightmares. These usually involved being taken away by a giant, or being in a great deal of danger in the midst of great confusion. When we explored these we recovered memories of Rasha at the age of 3 in the midst of the war in her country being carried to safety by her father, but witnessing violence and experiencing physical danger. She discussed these memories with her parents who confirmed them, she used art to express her recollections, and her nightmares gradually stopped.

Independence

Rasha stopped regular counselling after this last work. She had returned to her studies by this time, reading a degree in Political Sciences. She is doing well and enjoying it also.

She says of herself 'I have learned not to hold on to anything too tightly. I am here now but I do not know where I will be tomorrow. I cannot put my guard completely down, or put my security in anything or anyone entirely.' Thus the ghosts of the past continue to haunt Rasha, but she has converted her weaknesses into strengths and used her bitter experience to help those in need.

As I was putting the finishing touches to this paper Rasha had a dream and shared it with me : I want to tell you last night I had a fantastic dream... I dreamt I saw myself at school when I was 6/7 at primary school, lining up for the morning assembly, and I was without a head cover, looking extremely happy and healthy. I spoke to her there saying: " Oh is that me!" Her (my) eyes were shining, and she was so vibrant.

I will leave you with a poem Rasha wrote following the struggle she had with the feelings of shame she experienced when she read my first draft of this paper.

Where was the shame?

Was the shame on me,
For having to leave my home country?
Or it was on those who took up dictatorship and
Used machine guns on civilians!

Was the shame on me,
For needing help as we had no money?
Or it was on those who gave us no right to work!

Was the shame on me,
For needing medicine as my body failed its balance?
Or it was on those who failed to see my fragility
And need for nutrition!

Was the shame on me,
For becoming an outcast at school?
Or it was on those whose snobbery and pride over-rided their humanity!
 Was the shame on me,
For fearing men?
Or it was on those who destroyed my delicacy
And frightened my soul as a child!

Was the shame on me,
For a broken self-esteem?
Or it was on those who kept squashing my pride
To keep themselves above me!

Those are the ones to whom
The shame belongs!
The persons violating Human Dignity!
The persons inconsiderate
Of Human Dignity,
That is where the shame is.

For information about the refugee situation in Malta see:
http://www.ecre.org/conditions/2000/malta.shtml

References

Aroche,J & Coello, M.(1994) Paper presented at the 4th International Conference of Centres, Institutions and Individuals Concerned with Victims of Organized Violence: "Caring for and Empowering Victims of Human Rights Violations", DAP, Tagaytay City, Philippines, December 5-9.

Association for Humanistic Psychology, (2001), http://www.ahpweb.org/aboutahp/whatis.html

Breslau, N., Davis, G. C., & Andreski, P. (1995). Risk factors for PTSD-related traumatic events: A prospective analysis. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 152*, 529–535.

Breslau, N., Kessler, R.C., Childcoat, H.D., Schultz, L.R., Davis, G.C., & Andreski, P. (1998). Trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in the community. The 1996 Detroit Area Survey of Trauma. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 55,* 626–632.

Berliner P., Nikkelsen E. M., Bovbjerg, A., Wiking, M. (2004). Psychotherapy treatment of torture survivors. *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation. 8,* 85-96.

Brown, G., & Harris, T. (1978). *Social origins of depression: A study of psychiatric disorder in women.* New York: Free Press.

Chung. R, C. (2001). Psychosocial Adjustment of Cambodian Refugee Women: Implication for Mental Health Counseling. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 23, 115-127

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and Society.* New York: Norton.

Frankl, V. E. (1963). *Man's search for meaning: An introduction to logotherapy*. New York: Pocket Books.

Lustic S, Weine S, Saxe G, Beardslee W. R. (2004). Testimonial Psychotherapy for Adolescent Refugees: A Case Series, *Transcultural Psychiatry, Vol 41(1*): 31–45

Mehraby N. 2005. Therapy with Refugee Children, Startts publications, www.startts.org/ (under 'Research Articles'). http://www.swsahs.nsw.gov.au/areaser/startts/publications/article_2.asp

Mollica, R.F., Poole, C., Son, L., Murray, C., & Tor, S. (1997). Effects of war trauma on Cambodian refugee adolescents' functional health and mental health status. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 36(8),* 1098–1106.

Rogers, C.R., with Dorfman, E., Gordon, T., & Hobbs, N. (1951). *Client-centered-therapy. Its current practice, implications, and theory*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Ryde J. (2004), Developing a Specialist Counselling Service for Refugees and Asylum Seekers . Talk given at refugee action information day in Bristol April 21st 2004.

Silove, D. & Steel, Z. (1998*) The Mental Health & Wellbeing of On-shore Asylum Seekers in Australia.* Psychiatry Research and Teaching Unit

Silove, D. (1999) The Psychological Effects of Torture, Mass Human Rights Violations, and Refugee and Trauma. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 187; 231-236*

Silove, D., Ekblad S. & Mollica R.F. (2000) Health and human rights. The rights of the severely mental ill in post-conflict societies. *Invited Lancet commentary April, 29, 1548-1549.*

Westermeyer, J. (1991). Psychiatric services for refugee children: An overview. In F. L. Ahern & J. L. Athey (Eds.), *Refugee children: Theory, research, and services (pp.127–162).* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Zimring, F. (2001). Empathic understanding grows the person... In S. Haugh and T. Merry (Eds.), *Empathy.* Ross-on-Wye, UK: PCCS Books, 86 – 98.

- 150 -

D3

Development of a Coherent System of Support Services for International Students

Geraldine O'Connor

International Counselor/psychologist

Leiden University, The Netherlands

GP.OConnor@ICS.LeidenUniv.nl

This paper describes the development of psychological support services for international students at Leiden University, the Netherlands. The development is still in its early stages and I'm pleased to have this opportunity to describe what has been done to date and to discuss with colleagues the many aspects of counseling services for international students.

Suited to the characteristics of an international population I would say that a prominent feature the service development has been flexibility, in the sense of adaptability, cooperation and crossing borders.

Two years ago I began working as a psychologist in the university student counseling service, and was fairly quickly appointed international counselor. At this stage there were no services specifically focusing on international students and one of my tasks was to set up such services. From my position as psychologist and international counselor, I was interested in developing support services (i) tuned to the needs of international students, (ii) fitting in with the existing psychological counseling service structure for Dutch students and (iii) which would be effective and efficient. The goal of the services was to increase positive academic and psychosocial consequences for international students.

In this paper I will first look at some aspects of the background against which the services were developed. I will then consider factors which have been found in the literature to be associated with the psychological well-being of international student sojourners. Next I will present the findings of a short needs study that I conducted with a colleague. Lastly I will describe the services which have been developed to date, and cast a critical eye on the developments so far.

Background

Internationalisation has become an important aspect of tertiary education in the Netherlands. This has had wide-ranging implications for policy and academic programs. But the resulting growth in international student populations also raises questions for university counseling services.

International courses. In 2003, Leiden University, along with other Dutch universities, introduced the Bachelors-Masters (BaMa) degree structure to replace the doctorandus degree. As part of this change, many English-language master's courses have been developed, and students world-wide are

encouraged to apply for these programs. Foreign students, often exchange students, are also able to enrol in shorter courses (e.g. for one trimester), taught in English, at a bachelors level. In addition, foreign students can enrol in regular Dutch bachelor's programs, after first completing a Dutch language competency course. In 2004-2005 there were 1600 international students enrolled at Leiden University.

Backgrounds of International students. International students attending Leiden University come from all over the world: Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, the USA, South America, Australia, Canada, China, Taiwan, South-East Asia, Africa, Russia.

With their diverse cultural backgrounds there is wide variation among international students in the educational system they come from, the financial resources they have at their disposal, their English (or Dutch) language ability and the expectations they have of their study abroad experience. All these factors can have an impact on their academic results, their ability to adapt to the foreign culture and their psychic well-being. In addition, individual differences in personality and coping skills can also affect their ability to function adequately in their new environment.

I would now like to briefly present some of the findings that have emerged from the research literature on psychosocial factors related to the well-being of international students.

Well-being of international students

Literature review

Over the past two decades, increasing globalisation has led to increased interest among mental health professionals and researchers into the effects on individuals of cross-cultural moves. It is now recognised that even though moving to a new country or a sojourn in a new country can be enriching and challenging, cross-cultural moves also bring with them personal losses and adaptations which can be associated with physical, social and psychological problems.

The concept of 'acculturation' has been developed to describe the process of change that takes place as a foreigner learns to make his/her way in the host country, with its different values, attitudes, norms, customs and forms of social interaction.

The importance of social relationships has long been recognised in theories of acculturation. Bochner et al (1977) an early, but still influential theorist looked at the functions that different sorts of social relationships have for students, distinguishing between relationships with co-nationals, host nationals and other foreigners. According to Bochner, friendships with co-nationals, the primary network, have an emotional function, helping students maintain a sense of cultural identity. Friendships with host nationals have a utilitarian function, facilitating academic and professional progress. Friendships with other foreigners have a mainly social function.

Today, social relationships still occupy a central place in the literature, but the focus has changed to intercultural adjustment, with more recent approaches making use of current theory on stress and

coping. Within this framework social support is said to have an important 'buffer' function, alleviating stress and mitigating psychological symptoms.

A more recent approach to acculturation, then, looks at cultural adjustment in terms of stress and coping. This approach makes use of the concept of 'acculturative stress', which refers to stress that is specifically related to the process of adjusting to a new country. It is being increasingly recognised that acculturative stress is an inevitable consequence of cross-cultural moves.

There have been many studies focusing on acculturative stress in international students. Many of them have attempted to identify specific factors which are related to acculturative stress. Factors which have emerged include lowered socioeconomic status in the foreign country, unrealistic academic expectations, feelings of isolation and alienation, perceived discrimination by members of the host country, family-related pressures (Leong & Chow, 1993); language problems, low satisfaction with social support networks, and a lack of a feeling of connectedness to others (Yeh & Inose, 2003). The match (or mismatch) between expectations and actual experience in the host country has also been found to be an important factor (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001).

Language fluency and social support systems consistently emerge as being particularly important. Language problems can cause academic difficulties, and since international students are often highly motivated and have had academic success in their own country, problems here can be especially distressing. Language problems can also be a hindrance to the formation of adequate social networks. With regard to social support, many students experience a strong feeling of loss on leaving their home country. Cut off from their familiar social and emotional support systems, the absence of a trusted network system in their new environment can leave them feeling inadequate in their attempts to make their way in the new system. It is important that they develop new, albeit superficial, social networks to maintain their feelings of self-identity and self-effectiveness.

Besides studies investigating acculturative stress, other studies have looked at the presence of psychological problems in international students. Anxiety and depression (Shenov, 2000) and homesickness (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994) have been frequently demonstrated. However, an accurate picture of the types of psychological problems in multicultural international student populations is, for technical reasons, difficult to obtain. In non-Western cultures, for example, emotional concerns may be expressed as somatic complaints (Shenoy, 2000). It is also well-known that international students, tend to under-use counseling facilities, especially for emotional problems, and when they do use the facilities it is often for more superficial, practical problems (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

However, psychological and physical complaints do not characterise all international students. Some students adapt to their new environment without too many difficulties. Personality characteristics and individual coping skills can play a large role here. But there are two general concepts which seem to be important in accounting for adjustment. The first is *culture-distance*. According to this, the greater

the gap, objectively or subjectively, between the familiar and unfamiliar cultures, the more likely it is that difficulty will be experienced. The second concept, already mentioned a number of times, focuses on *social networks, at various levels.* This approach suggests that because different types of social network can have important psychological functions, the more contact students have with compatriots, other international students, academics, advisors, and the better the quality of the social contact, the better they are to be able to adapt.

Problems among international students at leiden university

Staff interviews

In order to gain some concrete evidence of the problems and needs of international students at Leiden University a small needs assessment study was carried out by interviewing staff members in regular contact with international students.

A total of 12 interviews were conducted, with staff members from Psychology, Space Law, Islamic Studies, Information Science, English, and Dutch Studies.

The interview was semi-structured and covered the following areas: contact points in the department, strengths and weaknesses of the international students, approach to study and learning, contact with teachers, psychosocial problems, contact with Dutch students, language skills, academic skills, intercultural adjustment, relationship between expectations and the reality of studying in the Netherlands, website suggestions.

Results

From the interviews, the following factors emerged as relevant when considering the difficulties encountered by international students in Leiden: **External/organizational aspects** of the academic system; **Intrapersonal factors,** such as language ability, expectations/orientation; **culturally determined differences in mental model of learning and communication**, influencing learning style, participation in tutorial groups, individual contact with staff, academic skills.

The difficulties which emerged were in general consistent with the research literature and with my observations as international counselor. Several of these influences are explained in more detail below.

External Academic Factors

(i) Type of student/enrolment. In considering the problems of the students and the provision of appropriate services, the distinction needs to be made between types of student/enrolment. For the purposes of classification, in this paper, I am not referring to 'allochtone' students or refugee students. The distinction needs to be made between:

(1)   Exchange students or students on a scholarship, residing in the Netherlands for 3-6 months and taking individual subjects.

(2)   International students following a postgraduate Master's program – duration mostly 1-2 years. These courses are mainly taught in English.

Some of the master's courses described by the interviewees exemplified a best practices approach: they were geared to the academic and social needs of the students, providing many social and academic supports, and had teaching staff who were aware of the influence of cultural background on the learning process.

(3)   International students enrolled in regular Dutch Bachelor's programs. These programs are generally taught in Dutch (except in language departments). Duration of a regular degree course is usually 3 years.

Students in such programs appear to be a vulnerable group. They lack the contact opportunities often structurally available in the master's courses – i.e. academic advisors and social counselors - and an international student network. Courses with high student enrolment may present particular difficulty due to fewer opportunities for individual academic guidance, language-related academic problems and a lack of contact with Dutch students.

(ii) Contact persons within the courses of study. It was not possible to obtain an overview of the availability of contact persons for international students, but there appeared to be wide differences between departments and courses on this point. Several masters programs appeared to give excellent support, providing separate contact persons for social/ practical matters and academic guidance.

With regard to international students in regular Dutch undergraduate courses, in large departments with high student enrolment, the contact persons seemed to have difficulty dealing effectively with the problems of international students.

Intrapersonal factors

(i) Language.   Despite an acceptable TOEFEL-score, or completion of a preparatory Dutch language competency course, the language skills - English or Dutch – of international students often prove to be a stumbling block to their academic progress, especially in the first year of study.

This can be particularly stressful for highly motivated students, or students used to obtaining high grades. Continued lowered performance can trigger a set of negative emotional and behavioral reactions which are counter-productive to dealing effectively with the study problem.

(ii) Expectations/ Orientation. There is a need for more support for students in the first 6-8 weeks after arrival to help them adapt to and find their way in their new surroundings. An underlying problem here is the lack of a 'service' orientation in the Netherlands. Two specific areas can be pinpointed as leading to unnecessary distress:

(1)   Insufficient access to practical information. Although the students are provided with an information booklet, international students need word-of-mouth and personal contact for important information.

(2)   Absence of information on the study 'climate'. Students need to be provided with information related to studying successfully at Leiden University: e.g. sources of difficulty, intercultural differences in approach, exam resits, contact persons, counseling facilities.

Cultural background/ mental model of learning

(i) *'Active' vs. 'passive' learning style*. The Dutch approach to academic learning, consistent with the Anglo-Saxon approach, emphasizes an active, independent, critical handling of the material. This approach is different from that in many other countries, e.g. China, Indonesia, some southern European countries. International students from these countries are often regarded in the Netherlands as having a 'passive', uncritical approach to learning. Students whose academic background is based on a learning style in which the emphasis is on the understanding of and respect for the work of scholars may need guidance in developing a critical approach. Such guidance is given in a number of programs.

(ii) Culturally determined behavioral norms – group participation. Consistent with the independent, critical academic style at Dutch universities, an active, vocal style is also valued in group discussions. International students, especially from Asian cultures were often described as silent and inactive in group discussions. This observation is in agreement with the literature, where this difference in participatory style is accounted for in terms of differences in social roles and communication styles between collective and individualistic cultures.

Individual contact with staff. International students may have difficulty in their individual contact with staff members. Many international students come from cultures in which the communication style is formal and hierarchical rather than 'egalitarian'. In such cultures the student-teacher relationship is generally formal. The apparent informality of the Dutch approach may lead to confusion about expectations and limits in student-teacher contact. Communication problems can also result in misunderstandings and disappointments which can have serious implications for a student's study progress.

These were the main findings that emerged from the staff interviews. They immediately suggested to me the need for the following: workshops for incoming students on intercultural aspects of studying in Leiden; increased awareness in teachers of intercultural differences and their implications; website tips on intercultural aspects of studying abroad for international students.

Further evidence of the needs and problems of international students was provided by other staff members, especially the *decanen* (advisors for legal and financial matters), who deal with areas such as housing problems, financial and administrative difficulties. My own experience suggests that the students who are likely to seek individual counseling are those susceptible to worry, anxiety and mood changes which make them more vulnerable to the extra stress encountered in an international experience.

Development of psychological support services for international students

First, I would like to make a quick reference to the literature to point out some general approaches to counseling services for international students.

Counseling services. In response to growing international student populations, there has been increasing interest among professionals, over the past decade, in developing services that meet the specific needs of international students. McKinlay et al. (1996), on the basis of a review of existing research on facilities in general for international students, concluded that the well-being of international students can be improved through: coherent, well co-ordinated support services; a support system that addresses student needs all year round and that reaches all the students – not merely via an orientation program; the development of good documentation of the support system; and for students who are in a host country for only a short-term stay, less emphasis on integration and more emphasis on the development of friendships with co-nationals. Sandhu (1994) concluded that counseling services should incorporate the following: be pro-active - seeking out students who may be vulnerable; continuous - and not limited to orientation sessions; include 'buddy systems'; provide 'less stigmatised', more informal support.

Guided by the background theory, concrete indications of student needs and the principles of 'meeting students needs, continuous, co-ordinated, proactive and informal' a structure was developed.

Leiden University Counseling Service. The services for international students are part of the regular counseling services for Dutch students. This means that the structure of the services follows that of the regular services, and that the international counselor works in a team of psychologists, and has close contact with other support staff, in particular, the student *decanen*.

The regular psychological services include: *guidance for individual students*; *workshops*; *training courses; information* (web texts, brochures, flyers, advertisements); *information and training to student advisors; crisis intervention*. These services are in Dutch and are geared towards regular Dutch students. This structure formed the basis for the services for international students and the springboard for flexibility, cooperation and crossing borders.

The strategy used was to target salient areas in order to increase positive psychosocial consequences for students. Targeted salient areas were: intercultural themes, information provision to students, information provision to teachers and support staff, adequate preventive support provision, increased awareness in staff of cultural backgrounds of students.

The service development was characterized by:
- services being offered in English by staff with an international background, i.e. with intercultural experience and awareness of cultural relativity
- communication with different bodies: e.g. International Office, study co-coordinators and advisors, other members of the student counseling services

-

Services which have been developed to date:

- Individual counseling. Most international students are referred to the international counselor
- Series of 3 workshops, held monthly, each consisting of two sessions. The workshops focus on adjusting to the Netherlands, effective studying, and social emotional difficulties. The general idea here is information provision in combination with students' sharing of experiences. The workshops are informal, provided on a continuous basis and are aimed at prevention.
- Website information on the counseling service, and on the workshops. This is provided in cooperation with the International Office. More information is planned, especially tips for students.
- Open consultation hour (given daily - a regular Dutch service). International Counselor holds the Open Consultation hour on a set day
- Walk-in consultation hour for international students – a buffer. Crisis prevention, advice, short intakes.
- A brochure 'Counseling for International Students' has been made and distributed.
- Participation by international counselor in orientation meetings.

An often-mentioned aspect of services for international students is that, despite an apparent need, existing services are often underused. With this in mind, a critical feature of the service development was communication and advertising. This is where an attitude of flexibility, adaptability and crossing borders has been needed. A point of departure was the idea that international students are not focused on Dutch information provision. Information provided alongside and in the same format as information to Dutch students would not be read by international students. So new channels needed to be developed in order to reach the students. This required co-operation with, for example, the International Office, but also co-operation from many colleagues to allow the introduction of a different way of working. The emailing of information to study advisors and co-coordinators, the emailing of information to international students, making advertising posters with a style different to the Dutch posters all required the acceptance of 'international students' as a separate agenda point requiring a distinctive approach.

Critical appraisal: The numbers of international students seeking individual counseling seems to be on the increase, suggesting that the service is becoming better-known. The workshops are attended, but with an attendance of only 2-4 students. The next step is to look more closely into target groups for the workshops and ways of reaching them. More work is planned on increasing awareness in staff of intercultural differences and on developing website texts.

Reverences

Leong, F. and Chou, E.L. Counselling international students. In P.B. Pedersen, J.G. Draguns, W.J. Lonner and J.E. Trimble (Eds.), *Counselling across cultures* (1993) (4th ed., pp.210-242. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Murphy-Shigematsu, S. Understanding and counselling international students with acculturative stress. *Journal of International Student Advisors and Educators*, 2001, Vol 4.

Sandhu, D.S. and Asrabadi, R.B. Development of an acculturative stress scale for international students – preliminary findings. *Psychological Reports*, 75 (1 Pt.2), 435-448*.*

Shenoy, U.A. College stress and symptom-expression in international students: A comparative study. PhD dissertation. (2000). Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Virginia.

Ward, C., Bochner, S. and Furnham, A. *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, (2001) 2nd ed., Sussex, G.B., Routledge.

Yeh, J. and Inose, M. International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 2003, Vol 16, No. 1, pp, 15-18

- 160 -

D4

The Application of E-learning within Psychological Counselling

Helga Knigge-Illner, PhD.
Counsellor and Psychotherapist

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

knigge@zedat.fu-berlin.de

This contribution reports on an E-Learning Project at our Counselling Services. Audio-visual learning modules for students, presented via the Internet, complement our psychological counselling. It will be pointed out that E-Learning is appropriate for imparting basic study skills. Advantages and functions of E-learning modules in our concept of psychological counselling will be discussed and illustrated by examples.

In this contribution I intend to report on an innovation in our Academic Advising and Counselling Services at the Freie Universität Berlin. I will introduce an E-Learning project, with which we have developed audio-visual learning modules for students, presented via the Internet. These learning modules consist of a moderation video, connected by a special software system (2PresentPro, Pepper11) with a set of transparencies containing text presentations, graphics, photographs, etc. The system is also able to combine the video with interactive tasks and exercises.

E-Learning is currently gaining an important place in university teaching. At present, however, its dissemination is still limited to individual specialty fields. In Germany, E-Learning projects are sponsored by public programs.

Some of the audio-visual learning modules we have developed complement our psychological counselling services. *In my opinion, E-learning is not able to replace person-to-person counselling, but, as pointed out here, I believe that E-learning is appropriate for imparting basic study skills, which play an important role in our counselling approach.*

Let us first determine what E-learning means*.*

Characteristics of E-learning

E-learning – meaning electronic or electronically supported learning – involves instructional and informational units offered electronically as online products or via CD. They are independent of time and place, enabling the user to learn individually and in a self-directed manner. (Dichanz& Ernst, 2002) E-learning can be characterized by the following aspects: (Scheffer&Hesse, 2002; Lang, 2002).

- *Computer-based:* Because E-learning is computer-based; it permits the storage of huge amounts of data, as well as the networking of computer systems. It also permits the combining of different aspects of general knowledge.

- *Multimedia*: E-learning uses and integrates different kinds of media, ranging from verbal-analytical data – like texts, tables, graphics – to integral-pictorial data – like pictures, video, film, and simulations. The attractive and varied media that address the user's different senses are intended to improve motivation and learning success.

- *Hypertext:* The learning units are not structured in a hierarchical or sequential way. Each text segment is linked with a large number of other segments. The segments are organized into subject-related clusters. This structure allows the user an individual approach, as well as the possibility to move easily from one segment to another.

- *Interactivity:* The flow of information is bidirectional. The learner is able to react to the teaching system – for example, by responding to multiple choice questions, or by giving more complex answers. He or she can choose appropriate tracks or can enter into a dialogue with a tutor.

- *Communication:* E-learning is intended to further communication between different users by offering them chat rooms, news groups, etc.

- *Multifunctional:* E-learning can mediate very different learning objectives, ranging from elementary knowledge and orientation patterns, to such complex objectives as attitude and behaviour dispositions.

- *Learning as a process of constructing:* E-learning interprets learning as a process of dialogue, in which learners construct and reconstruct their individual knowledge for themselves.

E-learning places high demands on its didactical development and quality. But in reality these demands are seldom fulfilled. The main criteria for developing learning units include the following:

- *Definition of learning objectives*: The intentions or objectives of learning should be made clear in advance.

- *Analysis of learners*: Data about the characteristics of the target group should be gathered or their abilities at least assessed.

- *Media adequacy:* Use and design of the available media should be adequate to the kind of learning objectives.

- *Evaluation:* Learning effects should be empirically controlled.

The Advantages of Multimedia Presentation

Visual pictorial presentation in multimedia systems may use the following functions: (Weidenmann, 2002)

1) **Demonstrating function**
2) **Representing situational experience**
3) **Constructing function**

Ad 1) A variation of realistic and abstract pictures *demonstrate* the object or its relevant parts to the user. Different visual codes are used to optimize the presentation. Steering devices – like arrows and colours - are used to direct the learner's attention. Structuring the performance through graphics improves clarity and makes the material more memorable. The application of graphics, drawings, colours and interesting designs has a positive effect on learning motivation.

Ad 2) Photographs, video scenes and other real life recordings are used to *represent* situations that speak to the experiences and accompanying feelings of the learner. The user is involved in events through this kind of true-to-life learning. In addition, situations reduced to more simplified representations can be more effective, due to their focus on the essentials. Direct attention to the personal situation of the user – for example, the problems of the "long-term student" or the "procrastinator" – can awaken a readiness to change personal behaviors.

Ad 3) Didactic strategies are intended to mediate the *construction* of mental models of the object of study. These strategies present the elements in a well-structured, step-by-step manner. Thus the learner is able to integrate the knowledge into his or her own cognitive structures.

Our E-Learning Project

We started our project one year ago, developing modules to introduce students to such university-related topics as

- Different kinds of courses at the university;
- How to organize a semester time schedule;
- Information about the new bachelor and master degree programs.

Other topics include methods of academic learning, e.g.

- Active reading (SQ3R-method);
- Time management during exam preparation periods;
- Rapid reading.

The system's technology makes possible well-structured and clear performance by means of the following elements (transparency):

A moderation video, located in a small window in the upper left quadrant of the screen: On the large screen itself, presentation of transparencies consisting of graphics, drawings, and text-related photographs. Additional video sequences can be shown in the moderator window. Interactive exercises can be offered within the module or at the end. In addition, the student can print out information sheets and other accompanying material.

Production of E-Learning Modules by Teamwork

In order to use the possibilities of media adequately, cooperation between different experts is necessary. Our audio-visual learning modules were produced by a team composed of a scriptwriter, graphic designer, video maker, moderator, computer programmer and technical assistant. Our team mainly consisted of graduate students, and some experts hired on freelancer basis. We developed the necessary know-how in a common learning process.

Advantages and Functions of E-learning Modules in our Concept of Psychological Counselling

1. Choosing the appropriate content

The medium requires the well-considered design and preparation of learning material, and invites the producer to make optimal use of presentation modes. But that demands a relative high amount of time and money. Therefore it should be considered which subjects and learning objectives should be chosen for this kind of audiovisual learning. We chose the subject of study strategies that we mediate in most of our workshops and groups for students, allowing us to delegate this mainly instructive function to the medium.

Another aspect of choice could be the orientation towards a designated but anonymous problem group, like "long-term-students" or the so-called "procrastinators".

2. The advantage of individual self-directed learning

E-Learning makes individual and private learning possible at home: The user can determine the learning tempo and need for repetition while sitting at his or her own PC. Participants of our workshops can get the necessary knowledge at home in advance. They can, for example, deal with the principles of time management individually, and can bring their special questions to the next group session - or to the next meeting with a counsellor. This enables the group leader to start from a relatively homogeneous level of knowledge.

3. Teaching complex learning objectives

E-Learning modules are not only capable of conveying simple knowledge; they are also suitable for more complex learning objectives, such as strategies and skills. Media qualities are even suitable for influencing attitudes and opinions. The personal statements and behaviour of people or demonstrations of typical attitudes offer models or characters with which students may identify. By this, the students are encouraged to deal personally with the subject. In our module on time management during exam preparation, we tried to evoke reflection on their attitudes towards planning.

4. Interactivity allows training of s kills

E-Learning can supplement psychological counselling by offering exercises and training for the development of study skills and proficiency. Our learning modules on Active Reading (SQ3R-Method) and on Fast Reading are characteristic examples.

The module on active reading offers a reading text in its exercise part and gives special instructions for carrying out the different steps of the reading method. A time limit is given for every step.

(The module on rapid reading first describes the difference between peripheral and focussed seeing. Then it explains the aspects of information processing in seeing – like recognizing connections and applying rules and knowledge by experience. The following strategies are recommended for rapid reading: looking for key words, rapid grasping of sense, training of different reading directions, reading with special questions.

In the module's special training part users can first determine their speed of reading. Afterwards the different techniques can be practised within given time limits.)

5. Taking on certain functions of group counselling

E-Learning modules can take on important functions of our workshops and groups by mediating study skills. Through this, the group leader can gain more time for more psychological tasks, such as enhancing group process or dealing therapeutically with the students' individual difficulties.

From the beginning, our psychological counselling concept included conveying some central study skills as an important objective. Starting from our experience that our clients often lack some of the necessary study strategies for coping with their work, we gave them the opportunity to learn them in our groups. Thus my workshop "Coping with Exam Anxiety" includes two separate primary objectives: to cope with anxiety on the one hand and to learn effective strategies - like time management and active reading – to cope with the demands of their studies. (Knigge-Illner, 1996; 1998; 2002)

Graphic: Objectives of the Workshop "Coping with Exam Anxiety"
- Building up a positive motivation for coping with exams
- Coping with exam anxiety: understanding one's anxiety, analysing intermediating cognitions, reinforcing self confidence
- Relaxation training against anxiety arousal
- Furthering self organization by time management
- Improving study strategies: Active Reading, Learning by structuring
- Behaviour training for exam situations by role playing and exam simulation
- Cognitive strategies for coping with exam situations: giving a presentation, answering questions, etc.

6. The objective of prevention

By its broad usability, E-Learning can prevent study problems in advance. As we have always connected a preventive objective with our psychological counselling – especially with our group-offers, which are open for everyone – we are deeply interested in the new medium of E-learning. E-Learning, or online-Learning, makes it possible for a large number of students to profit from our program.

7. Reducing inhibition levels towards psychological counselling

E-learning can reach users having inhibitions about psychological counselling, and can ease their access to more intensive and personal counselling. Using an E-Learning module is easily followed by

feedback contact per E-mail, and sometimes personal contact with the counsellor will result. In this way E-Learning is also helping us to fulfil our general psychological and psychotherapeutic tasks.

Our new Project

At the moment we are developing a new project called "Network for final exam**".** At its first part it is especially addressed to long-term-students; but later on it will be appropriate for all students preparing for exams. We want to offer students a platform by which they can get helpful information, learn effective study strategies and get feedback for their working steps. We intend to accompany them for a certain period of time. Our project will contain the following media:

- *Audiovisual E-Learning modules*: The first one deals with the obstacles impeding progress with their studies and determines the necessary preconditions for being successful. A second one is planned on how to cope with exam and especially with exam anxiety.

- *An interactive system, based on Blackboard software*: By this medium we hold contact with our students via Internet, giving them information and helpful devices for their work, presenting questionnaires, by which they can assess themselves or giving them feedback for their working progress.

- *A forum, organized by chats and newsgroups:* by which students can communicate with each other and find partners for cooperation.

- *Personal meetings* are completing our virtual media.

References

Dichanz, H. & Ernst. A. (2002*). E-Learning – begriffliche, psychologische und didaktische Überlegungen*. In Scheffer, U., & Hesse, F. W. *E-Learning*. Die Revolution des Lernens gewinnbringend einsetzen. 43-66. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Knigge-Illner, H. (1996*). Coping with exam-anxiety. The effects of a multidimensional group concept*. Conference papers from the 25. Annual Training Event and Conference of the British Association for Counselling at the University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, March 1996.

Knigge-Illner, H. (1998). Prüfungsangst bewältigen. Konzept eines Workshops zur Examensvorbereitung. *Das Hochschulwesen*. 46. 3. 163-171.

Knigge-Illner, H. (2002). *Ohne Angst in die Prüfung. Lernstrategien effizient einsetzen*. Frankfurt a. M.: Eichborn.

Lang, N. (2002). *Lernen in der Informationsgesellschaft – Mediengestütztes Lernen im Zentrum einer neuen Lernkultur*. In Scheffer, U. & Hesse, F. W. *E-Learning*. Die Revolution des Lernens gewinnbringend einsetzen. 23-42. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Weidemann, B. (2002). *Abbilder in Multimediaanwendungen*. In: Issing, L.J. & Klimsa, P. *Information und Lernen mit Multimedia und Internet*. Weinheim: Beltz.

E1

An Investigation into Levels of Wellness, Psychological Distress and Change in a Student Population

Susan Lindsay, PhD
Catherine Whelan, MSc
Student Counselling and Psychological Service
Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland

susan.lindsay@dit.ie

Current research, both in Ireland and in the UK suggests that there is a very high degree of psychological distress among the age group 15 to 35, with the 18-25 age group appearing to be particularly vulnerable. A report by the National Task force on Suicide (1998) revealed that in 1998, 504 suicides were recorded in Ireland for the age group 15 to 24. The study confirmed that younger men are still the group most at risk of taking their own lives. Given that a significant percentage of the college population fall within this age category, it is not surprising that many third level counselling services are witnessing an unprecedented increase in demands for help from young people with mental health difficulties and psychological distress. A study by the Mental Health Foundation (1997) revealed that that 50% of university students showed signs of clinical anxiety and more than one in ten suffered from clinical depression. Maters et al. (1993) found a relatively high level of psychiatric morbidity with almost half of the clients presenting to the counselling services troubled by their problem for more than a year. Another study by Surtees et al (1998) revealed that almost 40% of students reported that they had previously sought consultation for psychological difficulty. 45% of that group had considered suicide with 6% of them reporting attempts.

There are a myriad of factors within the college environment which may explain this increase in levels of distress among this population; such as potentially stressful lifestyle changes - including moving away from home for the first time, developing new friendships, learning to function as mature adults and keeping up with the demands of a new academic environment, etc. There are also wider psychological, social, familial and other factors which have been shown to impinge upon the well being of this population; for example, breakdown of family units, societal shifts, etc. There have been particular concerns highlighted by both the media and health professionals in the area of mental health about the negative cultural and social influences which are impacting upon the well being of young people within an Irish context. Many of the recent discussions in this area have focused on the growing pressures exerted upon young people to engage in maladaptive behaviors such as drinking alcohol excessively plus the abuse of other drugs like ecstasy. The effects of consumer pressures have been also highlighted in terms of one's self worth being defined by what one owns. Aherne (2002), who carried out research into student suicide in Ireland (2002), found that half the student sample had either a previous substance abuse history or were under the influence of alcohol and concluded that that substance abuse played a significant contributory factor in attempted suicides.

Furthermore he suggested that a decision by a young person to take their own life may be more of an indictment of the role that they left behind than a reflection of the individual themselves.

Within the Irish higher education context there are, however, only a small number of studies conducted by student counselling and psychological services which have obtained data about levels and patterns of distress and suicide among the student population. In 2003, psychologists operating within the DIT Counselling Service, initiated a study examining levels of psychological wellness and distress among the student population using a well validated psychological instrument: the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R), developed by Derogatis, 1983. The purpose of this study was to firstly measure levels of distress among a sample of first time contacts to the counselling service and secondly to compare these levels of distress to a matched group of non users of the service and to measure changes in levels of distress among a sample of service users following at least 4 therapeutic sessions compared to students who do not avail of the service.

Using the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R), in a test-retest experiment over a 4-6 week timeframe with over 150 students (phase 1), it was found that student distress levels measured between one and two standard deviations above the standardized mean for the instrument. Students presenting to the Counselling Service measured consistently higher on entry, with significant reductions in distress levels observed over a 4-6 week period, while no significant change was indicated in the matched control group. In phase 2 of the study (January – May 2005) local norms will be established using over 300 students in the first year, undergraduate population. These data will be used to establish relevant localized norms for this undergraduate population as well provide valuable input into the development of specific mental health interventions for students in the Dublin Institute of Technology.

Within the context of a seminar, the researchers propose to present the findings from this research and put forward some specific recommendations in regard to interventions which may help to enhance the well being of the student population. It is hoped that this seminar will create opportunities for participants to engage in a lively discussion about the factors impacting upon the mental health of young people within modern society and the role that counselling psychologists can play in assisting young people to develop positive well being

Instruments

SCL-90-R

The Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R,) developed by Dr Leonard R Derogatis (Derogatis, 1983) is a self report symptom inventory designed to reflect the psychological symptom patterns of community, medical and psychiatric respondents. It is a measure of current, point-in-time, psychological symptom status. Each of the ninety items included are rated on a five-point scale of distress (0-4), ranging from 'Not at All' to 'Extremely'.

Nine primary dimensions (including Somatisation, Obsessive-Compulsive, Interpersonal Sensitivity, Depression, Anxiety, Hostility, Phobic Anxiety, Paranoid ideation and Psychoticism) are measured as well as three global indices of distress.

The SCL-90 was chosen by the team for a number of reasons:

1. It is a well established measure of psychological distress in therapeutic (including third level counselling) settings, with many published papers to its credit.
2. It is very sensitive to change in levels of psychological distress, focusing as it does on a one-week time referent relevant to clinical assessment.
3. It is easy to understand requiring a reading age of sixth grade,
4. It is simple to administer, taking less than 12 minutes in all, through on-line laptop administration,
5. It is cost and time effective to score and generate profile reports.
6. It can be used repeatedly to document formal outcomes or pre-post therapeutic evaluations.
7. It can be used with adults and adolescents, having separate norms for both groups.
8. It has superior test-retest reliabilities, with no significant practice effects.

Methodology

Sample: The procedure for obtaining data collection for phases one and two were the same with the exception that phase two targeted first year students as it was observed that this group represented the largest number of students presenting to counseling in phase one of the study.

Phase 2

Client Group

This research was conducted by invitation to all first year students who entered the counselling service from January – April 2005. It was explained to each student that participation was without obligation or prejudice and would not affect any aspect of their counselling should they decline the invitation. The only criteria required for participation was to be currently in the first year of their course, have a willingness to take part in the study and sign a consent form after reading an information sheet about the study. Respondents were then advised that if they were still attending counseling at the fourth sessions they would be asked to retake the test. The student then proceeded to complete the SCL 90-R online.

Control Group

A Large number of mixed gender first year students attending a diverse mix of courses in different faculties were targeted and invited to participate in the study in the same period January - April. The criteria were the same as for the client group except that they had not benefited from counseling interventions. They were informed that all first year students attending the counseling service were invited to participate in the study and that their participation in the study was to provide a normative and comparative group both for the Irish population and the current study.

Therapeutic Intervention

While evaluating the effect of particular therapeutic approaches was deemed to be outside the scope of this present study, it was agreed that the dependant variable was the level of change in psychological distress, as measured by the SCL-90, concurrent with at least 4 sessions of counselling/psychotherapy.

The following simple principles were agreed as a guide to interventions: – therapy should be (1) brief, (2) solution-focused, (3) directed towards change.

All team members were requested to collect SCL-90 data on participating new contacts over the period from January until April and to re-administer the SCL-90 to the clients who received four appointments or more.

Data Collection

The researcher went to the various classes being targeted, where the questionnaire was completed and collected on the same day. A representative sample of first year students, drawn form class groups across the six main DIT sites, will be assessed. The control group signed a consent form prior to doing the test and were informed that some of them might be asked to participate in retaking the test in four weeks time. Data collection took place in the class room with the administration of a paper and pencil version of the test.

Results and data evaluation

Detailed statistical evaluation of SCL-90 scales and the degree of change in levels of psychological distress scores over time will be carried out after the 3rd term using the SPSS statically package.

References

Aherne, D. (2002). Student Suicide in Ireland. *Eisteach*, Spring, (3) 22 -26.

Derogatis, L.R. (1994) SCL–90-R Symptom Checklist-90-R Administration, *Scoring and Procedures Manual- Third Edition*

Mental Health Foundation (1997). *Suicide and deliberate self harm*. London. Mental Health Foundation.

Mathers, N., Shipton, G. & Shapiro, D. (1993). The impact of short term counselling on general health questionnaire scores. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* 21, 310 -318.

National Task Force on Suicide (2003). *Report on the National Task Force on Suicide*. Dublin: The Stationary Office

Stanley, N. (2002). *Student mental health needs: problems and responses*

Surtees, P.G., Pharoah, P.D., & Wainwright, N.W.J. (1998). A follow up study of new users of a university counselling service. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 26 (2), 255-272.

E2

Communicating Emotions: a workshop to improve social skills

Prof . Pierpaolo Luderin Phd
Dr. Anna Tortorella M.Sc.
Dr. Alessandra Castellini M.Sc.
C.U.O.R.I. University Guidance and Counselling Centre of ESU
ESU of Venice, Italy

cuoriesu@unive.it

Introduction

The C.U.OR.I., University Centre for Counselling and Information of the ESU, the Regional Body supporting the Right to Higher Education, has been conceived and set up as an information, guidance and counselling services Centre for students attending the Venetian Universities – Ca' Foscari, IUAV Architecture, Fine Arts Academy and Conservatory. Students attend the Centre to get information and/or a professional or study guidance as well as psychological counselling.

Our psychological counselling service is well known among students and succeeds in satisfying their requests; nevertheless, on the basis of our acquired experience, the necessity of thinking about how to be able to intercept hidden aspects of discomfort which seem to have most widespread in the last years, has emerged. This is due to several reasons, among others disorientation connected with the changes introduced by the recent University reform in our country.

As a result of this, the time spent attending the University has been reduced to full attendance and examinations periods, an academic system which also aims at a shorter conclusion of studies and consequently a speedier entrance into the labour market. For our students – most of them non-resident in Venice – going to the University could just mean to attend the lessons and then coming back home for their leisure activities, maybe to the detriment of those socialisation moments – undoubtedly more fostered by the old university organisation – with one's peers, exchanging and sharing moments not only among students, but also with teachers and tutors.

For this purpose, having realized during our guidance and psychological counselling experience with students the existence of shared difficulties and problems related to expressing their feeling and communicating their emotions, we considered the opportunity of proposing a workshop connected with these topics by utilizing both theoretical and active partecipation – modalities led in small groups.

Emotions: variations on a theme

Resorting to the small group is brought back to the social psychology of Kurt Lewin, who spoke about the creation of "change agents" and who proposed the small group as a learning context among peers linked to the "to do" and the " to try" dimension; moreover, the taking part in a small group activity facilitates the emerging of emotional aspects and lets the individual express his own doubts and perplexities in a non-judging environment (Lewin, 1997).

The choice of the topic "emotions" – an issue that enjoyed a lot of popularity in the last ten years thanks to the Goleman's publications too (1995) – is linked, on the one hand, to the importance of recognizing one's own emotional experiences and, on the other hand, to the consideration that talking about "anxiety" or "emotional difficulties" could lead to refusal and non-identifiable positions, as terms that could be meant as pathological and distant for who isn't aware of the reasons of one's own uneasiness yet.

Talking instead of "emotions", i.e. of something which lies between the interior experience and the recognizable relationship with the other, in other words between the experience linked with the feeling and what is perceived through the body, could greatly favour the interception of difficulties related to the feeling sphere, the self-vision, the conflicts, the fancies of communicating/being understood from others without the word intermediation - as through a direct channel – or other kind of fancies linked to those disturbing and "bad" elements which are supposed to be expelled from the self through behaviour and acting out. What is well known is the relation between the denial of emotions and the assumption of unhealthy behaviours – such as disorders or the drug addiction –, as the research on emotional stress witnesses, from Selye (1956) onward.

Oatley and Johnson-Laird (1987) and Oatley (1992) have already hypothesized that the function of emotions is of a communicative kind, both inside the cognitive system – among the different parts of the system – and inside a social group – among its members. The emotions are not only involuntary physiological mechanisms, but they bear also social meanings and produce effects on our interpersonal relationships. We know (Anolli, Ciceri, 1997) that emotions are not simply ways of feeling or instinctive reactions, they are systems composed of more components. Every emotion is a complex subjective state of mind, which comprehends physiological, expressive and motivational cognitive aspects as well as aspects of inner experience (Battacchi and other, 1995). According to the appraisal theory, from Lazarus (1966) onward, the emotive response has not to be considered as directly activated by stimulus, but rather as mediated by the appraisal given by the subject on the stimulus itself.

Emotions filter information coming from the environment, allow action to have its effect on the world in order to answer to its request in a flexible and efficient way; they govern the expressive-behaviouristic response by permitting the communication of what we feel and the confrontation with the relationships' network. The sense of being fitted or not to our own emotive response, but afore to the stimulus appraisal, suffers the confrontation with the rules and the values of the social group that works as a reference point. We know then from cross-cultural studies (see Duncan and Grazzani-Gavazzi, 2004) how emotion can be understood to be a fully encultured phenomenon; for instance, if we compare young Italians with young Scots, Italians reported positive feelings as a result of engaging in hobbies and social interaction, while the Scots more often when they were relaxing alone. If there are no significant differences in self-reported life satisfaction, there is a significant difference reported in self-rated intensity of positive emotions, mainly experienced by the young Italians.

Continuing on the topic of how emotions can be recognized and communicated, studies on the emotional lexicon (see Zammuner, 1998) have shown that some emotional terms – like anger, disgust, embarrassment – denote emotional experiences very different from each other, i.e. similar labels are ascribed to different emotions; in addition to this, the different kind of interpersonal relationship affects

the definition of the emotive experience, in particular when it is has a negative tone. However, the social communicative prospective (Russel and Fernandez Dols, 1997) underlines the importance of the relational context and the interaction. Facial displays, for instance, are considered as a communicative act which affects the interaction, more than an indicator of a specific emotion.

Another aspect that has been brought out by the studies of emotion – besides the stimulus appraisal, is its pleasantness/unpleasantness rate and its divergence from expectations and beside its relation with the needs and goals of the subject – consists of the subject's appraisal of his own capacity to cope with the stimulus which puts into action the emotion and its consequences. It is not the non-exposition to stressful events or emotions that is part of the resilience concept, but the coping, that is, the dynamic process and its ability of facing negative events and of recovering. Resilience is intended as a multifactor concept (Olsson and other, 2003), with protective devices which interfere at different levels: individual, family, and social ones. On an individual level different vulnerability and toleration rates by the adolescent and the young person facing the uncertainty of the self, the doubts related to his/her own value and the outcomes of his/her growing up seem to exist. Some elements have been determined which exert a sort of protection on the psychological and behaviouristic equilibria of the individual – defensive elements whose balancing characteristics towards the discontinuity of existence could be strengthened through prevention initiatives.

Those protective mechanisms are bound to the sociability rate – the responsiveness to others, the pro-social attitudes, the attachment to others – and to the personal attributes – the tolerance for negative affect, the self efficacy, the self esteem, the trust of his/her own action into the environment, the self control of the impulses and of behaviours, the ability to postpone the gratification, the optimistic expectations, the striving for and following of goals, the adaptation to changes (Ravenna, Berti 1987).

Starting from these considerations what emerges is the idea of a target-oriented preventive intervention, which tends to strengthen some abilities – for instance emotional or academic resilience.

Adolescents today: touch and go?

The adolescent phase shows itself as a critical self-development moment, which implies evolution tasks of such importance that have to be depicted in a problematic way and whose elements are close to pathology; but at the same time it is a normal stage, just on the basis of its complexity, of its lying between childhood and adulthood, a stage demanding a rather radical negotiation with one's self up to the acquisition of one's own individual structured personality.

This "mutation phase" (Pietropolli Charmet, 2000) rotates around some basic problems: the confusion of not knowing who we are, how we wish to be, what to do to become who we wish to be. The essential opposition seems to be the one between the being and feeling oneself dependent on the family – by delegating part of one's own responsibilities, what implies delegating a part of one's self-confidence – and the drive which urges the self to assume one's own responsibilities through engagement, by initiating projects or by following satisfying tasks. Acting out of strong personal uncertainty is connected to this, on the one hand referring to the ability of mastering one's own choices, on the other hand referring to the questions about one's own real capacities: am I able to?

Am I capable of? These kind of questions refer to the basic question who am I? that forms this development phase.

To this purpose what we can infer from the post secondary school guidance project, that we have led for several years, is well-fitting. In its core phase students are handed out a questionnaire on their choice of intention called "*Self-portrait*", which explores items such as their interests, their attitudes and their personality. During the individual counselling sessions on the results of the questionnaire it happens quite frequently that students, confronted with their resulting profile, react with a "that am I!" instead of a "this am I", which witnesses the effort of the evolutional task of taking possession of the self, of one's needs and desires that have to be part of a satisfying life project. In this sense Semi (2004) notes how this "need to find one's own way of life" could run the risk of being outlined as a "punctiform repetition of situations of satisfaction" instead of an elaborating psychic process of one's desire.

It seems clear that those questions could become pressing when taking a choice or at the beginning of the university career and enact states of anxiety of different intensity. One possible way of governing the interior states of anxiety finds expression in the behaviours connected to the body. Hence the well known attempts to regain control over what happens outside one's will in order to recognize the body as ours, though it is out of control: all the possible interventions from the hair cut to the piercing, the tattooing, the diets, the body building, the drug assumption… The body is easier to master than the obscure world of the self, of one's own inner world and it is consequently more immediate to cope with it and through it. We have to deal with behaviour which are functional to identity and its building, since through these experimentations the adolescent put at stake big parts of his inner world and learns how to govern his/her emotions: starting from acting out before coming to thought.

Crawford and Associates (2004) study Eriksons concept of identity development through the confrontation between the Cluster B symptomatology of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fourth Edition and the welfare state; the subjective well-being was operationalized by using scales for role satisfaction, life satisfaction, self-esteem and locus of control. Talking about emotions, both the excess of emotive expression – which refers to the histrionic symptoms scale – and the unempathic interpersonal behaviour – for the narcissistic symptoms scale – are indicators of a low self satisfaction. By utilizing Winnicott's (1966) image of the adolescence as "normal illness", the resort to temporary maladjusted defences – brought back to the Cluster B concept – has the function of protecting oneself from the dissatisfaction arising from a poor consolidated identity (p.38).

Mejers (2002) proposes to create – in a close examination of vocational guidance– "guidance services for emotions" (p. 162), on the basis that an awareness has been acquired, in that field too, of the emotions' role in the building of a vocational identity: in a society where roles are not defined, the acquisition of the competence to construct an identity has become, in modern society, a learning process that begins with uncertainty and the negative emotions and where the imagination and the coupling emotions and meanings are important.

To this inner condition so strongly characterized by uncertainty is to add a loss of external reference points: in our society progressive steps towards adulthood are not present anymore, while the step

sequence which marks the adult life and which the subject needs to definitely acquire his/her own responsibilities was more defined one or two generations ago.

Moreover, the adolescence time has extended. For instance, to have a job neither implies to interrupt studying, nor means leaving the parents' home; staying at parents' home up to 30 years old or more neither affects the social respectability of the young, nor implies restrictions and dependence on behaviour in other essential spheres; leaving the parents' home doesn't necessarily imply the existence of a partner and if he/she exists, the common living doesn't necessarily imply generating children in a short term.

From the point of view of the relationship modality we can recognize as typical for the adolescent age the "slipperiness", the "fleetingness", which are constantly coupled to an opposite and strongly felt desire of closeness, of meaningfulness, of authenticity; a sort of hunger, often with a "touch and go" style, which could be outlined as a privileged modality of relationship by the adolescent. It is useful in this case to resort to the enlightening etymology: adolescent is the present participle of the latin verb *adolescere*, which derives from the verb *alere*, that means nourish. It is a common experience of people working with adolescents the frequent character of "urgency" and firmness of their requests, what confirms the intensity of the perceived need; in case of a request which has no effect, it isn't all the same a less true, less sincere request. A frequent example is the request for the first counselling appointment, which often takes place by going personally to the premises with the idea of being immediately welcomed.

It is sufficient to consider the hastiness in building relationships among people of the same age or among groups and their frequent breaking up to build them up again somewhere else. The passage from a "short but strong" style to the possibility of an emotional continuity, to the transforming the emotion into feeling is a subsequent evolutionary achievement. This process involves the tendency to perceive and to be perceived – in both an emotional and cognitive sense – whereas we simply differentiate juxtaposed semantic clusters with a few shades of meaning.

The relational challenge directed to the adult becomes then the assuming of a position, facing the fleetingness and the ideological wavering positions so typical for the adolescents, which implies at the same time an opposite and complementary duration capacity, i.e. which is respectful and comprehensive of the adolescent style but at the same time different in what concerns continuity. The message emerging from the interventions and projects thought out for the young and for their health safeguarding is the existence of an adult and far-sighted community that cares about them, when there is a challenge to stand, a request for help to welcome or to prevent dangerous situations. From this the importance of long-term prevention projects derives in general without confining them to extraordinary social actions. In the adolescent's request for authenticity we find the possibility of intervention from both the protective/preventive and the recovering of potential pathological situations points of view.

Focusing on emotions and their communicability – having to do with late adolescents and young adults – allows a work on the learning-by-doing process, following the relation word/emotion on which converge different items as:

- the confrontation with the reference group and the social rules;
- the sense of adaptability and self-esteem;
- the behaviouristic component, the feeling able or not to cope with;
- the recognition of an inner world and the communicability to another person as the sharing of inner universes.

The setting up of a workshop on the recognition of one's own perceiving would meet the possibility of strengthening the adolescent's resources and competences by exploiting the group context and its intrinsic mirroring function, by giving a first level stimulus and by putting in motion processes through which he/she becomes aware of the relational and intrapsychic dimensions. This target achievement is facilitated from the small group characteristics, in which is possible at the same time to work and to stimulate the three levels present in every interaction: the emotive-affective, the cognitive and the experiencing one.

The Workshop

The workshop is divided in two daily sessions and addressed to a small group – from 15 to maximum 20 students – led by two psychologists.

The two-days development follows a methodological path which starts from the self knowledge (recognition of one's own emotions, possibility of a dialogue with oneself) to the opening of a transitional space which allows the common building up of emotive and relational meanings (Winnicott, 1971); hence a space in which communication is meant to be towards the other, a person separated but connectable to me through the communicative bridge (on the dialogue as bridge among persons see Resnik reflections, 1972).

Communication marked by conflict and the confrontation with negative emotions from a theoretical point of view are in the end dealt with, what makes plain the notion of assertiveness and the possibility of ameliorating the relational skills. The theoretical aspects are cast on the background and are linked to the topics in discussion.

In fact we opted for an active methodology, which stimulates the emotive/affective, the cognitive and the experiencing levels together with the working on the "to-be-skill". To this purpose situations eliciting a feedback of an emotive kind, which then plays a role in the relationships, have been built up or have been taken from the literature on the subject. As exercises we utilize the drawing, the role-playing, the projection of a strip of blank movies, useful stimuli for the reflection on the interactive modalities and for the exploration on one's feelings.

A first exercise deals with the stimulus-question "what does communicating mean and to whom?", followed by a proposal of writing down a short individual and personal description of one's one communicative style; lately, one is asked to depict the communication between two persons by making a choice among geometrical pictures – for instance a circle, an oval, a triangle.

Answers are collected and displayed on a board.

The main idea is to draw the attention to the recognition or non-recognition that the first communication step takes place with ourselves, with our emotions, that the communication with the other is possible only if we recognize the existence of an "I" and a "You" as persons or entities which are separated, but are precisely connectable through the communication. In addition, we want to focus on the communicative space as a space of the listening, but as well the misunderstanding, the distortion, the communicative failure. Starting from the communicative patterns we can outline the notion of sharing space as openness and acceptance of an intermediate and transitional space.

A second exercise deals with the experienced emotions in the relation with the other and the sharing of verbal expressions. At the beginning students form face-to-face couples with the task of keeping silence for three minutes (from Manes, 1988, modified). Then they are invited to write down on a sheet their moods and feelings ("I felt myself – even on a physical level…"; "I've got difficulties in…"; "I liked very much the…"). Then the couple exchanges the sheets, always keeping silence, and only after the reading they share their experiences.

Hence we come back to the big group with the sharing and the underlying of the more significant aspects: how emotion takes place in a relation and how the sensation to be observed – on the two sides of the being discovered/being recognized – sets in motion barriers and defences or openness experiences. We talk then about emotions as systems, about aspects related to the feelings, the context and the relation: nuances and differences in labelling; alexithymia, empathy, emotive contamination.

The second day focuses on the mastering negative feelings and conflicts. A strip of blank movies is projected, where a relation marked by strife is shown and then a guided reflection both on the feelings of the two chief figures and of the possible functional strategies.

A second exercise relies on the frustration deriving from the gap between the real and the ideal self image. The following stimulating sentences are proposed: "I assume to be…"; "I would like to be…"; "I would like the other to be…"; "What I can't stand about him is…". Then a role-playing comes where the subject has to face his "difficult person". The group, in its chorus role, is invited to suggest possible modalities to make that conflict constructive.

Topics as anger and frustration, the fight/avoidance/flight response and eventually the assertive skills are treated from the theoretical point of view.

An evaluation questionnaire is handed out to verify the satisfaction rate of the workshop – as it usually happens at the end of other seminars of the Centre; three months later we make a phone-call to the participants to get a feedback of how useful they perceived the workshop to have been.

References

Andreoli, V. (1995). *Giovani. Sfida, rivolta, speranze, futuro.* Milano: rizzoli

Anolli, L. Ciceri, M.R. (1997). *La voce delle emozioni.* Milano: f.angeli

Battacchi W., renna M., suslow, T. (1995). *Emozioni e linguaggio.* Roma: carocci

Benasayag, M., schmit G. (2003). *Les passions tristes, souffrance psychique et crise sociale.* Paris: editions la découverte

Bettelheim, B. (1998). *Un genitore quasi perfetto.* Milano: feltrinelli

Bion, W. (1962). *Learning from experience.* London: w.heinemann

Crawford, T.N., Cohen, P., Johnson, J.G., Sneed, J.R., Brook, J.S. (2004). The course and psychosocial correlates of personality disorder symptoms in A*dolescence: Erikson's developmental theory revisited.* Journal of youth and adolescence, 33, 5, 373-387

Duncan, E., grazzani-gavazzi, I. (2004). Positive emotional experiences in scottish and italian young adults: a diary study. *Journal of happiness studies*, 5, 359-384

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence.* New york: bantom books

Gordon T. (1994). *Genitori efficaci. Educare figli responsabili*, firenze: la meridiana

Greenson, R. (1978). *Explorations in psychoanalysis.* New york: international universities press

Lazarus, R.S. (1966). *Psychological stress and the coping process.* New york: mcgraw-hill

Lewin, K. (1997). *Resolving social conflicts and field theory in social science.* washington, d.c: american psychological association

Manes, S. (1998). *83 Giochi psicologici per la conduzione dei gruppi.* Milano: franco angeli

Matarazzo O. (ed.). (2001). *Emozioni e adolescenza.* napoli: liguori

Mauri, A., tinti, C. (2002). *Formare alla comunicazione.* Trento: erikson

Meijers, F. (2002). Career learning in a changing world: the role of emotions. *International journal of advancement of counselling, 24*, 149-167

Oatley, K. (1992). *Best laid schemes. The psychology of emotions.* Cambridge: cambridge university press

Oatley, K. , Johnson-Laird, P.N. (1987). Towards a cognitive theory of emotions. *Cognition and emotion, 1*, 29-50

Olsson, C.A., Bond, L., Burns, J.M., Vella-Brodrick, D.A., Sawyer, S.M. (2003). Adolescent resilience: a concept analysis. *Journal of adolescence, 26*, 1-11

Pietropolli Charmet, G. (2000). *I nuovi adolescenti.* Milano: raffaello cortina

Ravenna, M., Berti, C. (1987). *I percorsi del consumo di droghe "leggere" e "pesanti". Ipotesi per una prevenzione di tipo secondario.* Bologna: rapporto cnr

Resnik., S. (1972). *Personne et psychose. Etudes sur le langage du corps.* Paris: payot

Russel, J.A., Fernandez-Dols, J.M. (eds.). (1997). *The psychology of facial expression.* Cambridge: cambridge university press

Schimmack, U. (2003). Affect measurement in experience sampling research. *Journal of happiness studies, 4*, 79-106

Selye, H. (1956). *The stress of life*. New York: Mcgraw Hill

Semi, A.A. (2004). Trasformazioni in atto del soggetto contemporaneo. In P.Luderin, M.Boni, *Foto di gruppo con autoritratto da giovane. Scenari della transizione scuola-università-lavoro dei ragazzi veneti* (pp.27-37). Venezia: Esu di venezia-cafoscarina

Vanni, F., Sacchi, M. (1992). *Gruppi e identità*. Milano: cortina

Winnicott, D.W. (1966). Family *and individual development*. London: Tavistock Publications

Winnicott, D.W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London: Tavistock Publications

Zammuner, V.V.L.(1998). Concepts of emotion: 'Emotioness' and dimensional ratings of Italian emotion words. *Cognition and Emotion, 12,* 243-272

- 180 -

E3

Cognitive Therapy: Working with Ongoing Groups

Mrs. Paula Meesters, MA
Student Psychologist

Student Facility Centre
Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

p.c.m.meesters@tudelft.nl

The psychologists of the Student Facility Centre at Delft University of Technology (The Netherlands) would like to share some of their experiences on psychotherapeutic support for students. Any student can approach psychologists from the university. Depending on their problems they can get individual help (psychotherapy, personal coaching, counselling) or group training.

Some of the training groups are:

- Cognitive training (in Dutch: "Training Constructief Denken") which deals with perfectionism, fear of failure and stress behavioural reactions (including the physical stress reaction, RSI) or 'anxious' procrastination;

- Training in social effectiveness (assertion training) which deals with social anxiety and presentation anxiety;

- Autonomy training which deals with complex stressful life events or family histories as well as problems in the fields of autonomy and identity;

- "Beat the Blues" (in Dutch: "Grip op je dip") which deals with prevention of depression or with light or moderate depression. This training programme can also be used as a relapse prevention programme.

The training groups are all based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and contain elements of Solution Focused Brief Therapy. (The autonomy training also contains elements of Client Centred Therapy and Psychoanalytic Therapy and the dominant technique used is psychodrama.)

Considering the high prevalence of perfectionism – and the consequences such as failure anxiety, 'anxious' procrastination (Topman, Kruise & Beijne, 2004) and behavioural and physical stress reactions – in academic settings new approaches are needed. The above mentioned cognitive training is a successful approach. The goal of treatment in this approach is not only to overcome perfectionism, but also to acquire productive competencies and study skills. But in order to provide appropriate services for students who were referred to the psychologists of the Student Facility Centre it was necessary to develop effective and efficient ongoing training groups.

A major strategy to achieve efficiency was to give therapy in groups. There are a number of formats for group therapy, including individual group therapy, and group therapy in which interaction among all

the members is regarded as important. The psycho-educational approach was one of the earliest formats used and involved the application of a number of behavioural techniques in teaching specific behaviour (see assertion training) (Free, 1999).

A new development in the group training programmes in Delft has been the change to ongoing programmes. At most of the universities in The Netherlands, psychologists tend to have ongoing autonomy training groups for students. New in Delft is the development of an ongoing group programme for all of the training groups. This new procedure has enhanced efficiency; new students can begin to participate in a training programme at any given moment, which shortens waiting time for students (no waiting lists).

Furthermore the ongoing group programme is based on short-term treatment. The students follow an individual programme within their group; they can join the group at any time and can leave the group whenever their personal goal has been reached. Short-term treatments are as effective as long-term treatments, but more efficient and the costs are low (Methorst, Hoogduin en van der Velden, 1997). It is effective because the focus is on setting clear and reachable goals.

The use of cognitive therapy is a logical one. Cognitive therapy aims to be time limited and the sessions are structured, see Judith S. Beck (1995). Cognitive therapy is educational and aims to teach clients to be their own therapist. And cognitive therapy is goal oriented and problem focused – the emphasis in the treatment depends on the clients' particular disorder(s). Clients will learn to identify with, evaluate and respond to their dysfunctional thoughts and beliefs. There is also an emphasis on relapse prevention.

Many of the thought patterns of perfectionist students can be characterised as cognitive misconceptions about successful performance, which may lead to patterns of powerlessness. It is hypothesized (Young, 1990/1994) that from childhood on for example parents set impossibly high standard and got angry whenever the person failed to meet these standard: Core beliefs developed such as schema 'incompetence or failure' and schema 'unrelenting standard'.

The main difficulty in ongoing training groups is the development of high levels of group cohesion. Group cohesion is an important aspect in enhancing the effectiveness (a positive treatment outcome) of the training group and it represents a buffer against premature termination of the treatment (Snijders, 2004).

In training groups that responds well people can learn from each other. They can do exercises together and discuss with each other important topics and thoughts. Intimacy must be at a high level and therefore the authority of the trainer must be low (de Galan, 2003). But a new participant who has joined a group needs to feel safe and therefore needs a trainer to be a strong authority figure. The trainer must support the new participant and at the same time should offer the 'older' participants the freedom and intimacy of a well responding group.

Clinicians and researchers agree that for therapy to be ethical it must be as effective and as efficient as possible. It is necessary to evaluate therapy and thereby to improve efficiency and effectiveness. 'Well-established' empirically validated treatments fulfil criteria including the following (Free, 1999):

- A demonstration of efficacy in two controlled outcome studies conducted by independent researchers and when compared to placebo or alternative treatment;
- The use of manuals to guide treatment;
- A clear specification of the client group for whom the therapy is intended.

Controlled outcome studies: A lot of research has been done on the effectiveness of therapy in CBT groups but to our knowledge no evaluation of the effectiveness of ongoing CBT groups has yet been carried out. The first data of the study in Delft on the effectiveness of ongoing cognitive training will be discussed at the lecture.

Manual based therapy: Although it is possible to evaluate any therapy it can be argued that it is much easier to evaluate therapy when the procedures are clearly and specifically prescribed. It is also relatively easy to have therapy conducted by other therapists, thereby reducing the possibility of bias from the influence of individual clinicians. However, using a manual does not in itself make a treatment better or empirically validated – in as much as it represents a form of cognitive therapy closely related to other well-established empirically validated treatments. The manual for our cognitive training will be presented.

References

Beck, J.S. (1995). *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Free, M.L. (1999). *Cognitive Therapy in Groups: Guidelines and Resources for Practice*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, LTD.

Galan, K., de (2003). *Trainen: Een praktijkgids.* Pearson Education Benelux.

Methorst, G.J., Hoogduin, C.A.I. en Velden, K. van der (Red.) (1997). *Kortdurende Ambulante Behandeling in de Geestelijke Gezondheidszorg.* Houten/ Diegem: Bohn Stafleu Van Loghum.

Snijders, J.A. (2004). Groepscohesie: een empirisch ondersteunde therapeutische factor? Een overzichtsartikel. *Tijdschrift voor Psychotherapie, [30] 4,* 245-265.

Topman, R.M., Kruise, D and Beijne, S. (2004). Digital Coaching of Procrastinators in an Academic Setting. In H.C. Schouwenburg, C.H. Lay, T.A. Pychyl and J.R. Ferrari. *Counseling the Procrastinator,* 133 - 149. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Young, J.E. (1990/1994). *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders: a Schema-Focused Approach.* Sarasota, Florida: Professional Resource Press.

- 184 -

E4

Delay Leads to Illusion

Binnert Boeke, MA

University of Twente, The Netherlands

B.P.P.Boeke@utwente.nl

Introduction

In the work of Piet Paaltjens, the pen name of Francois Haverschmidt a Dutch poet and writer (1835-1894) the expression the "Eternal Student" was introduced for the first time. When you search the internet nowadays you will find more than twenty thousand hits on the Dutch combination "eeuwige student" (eternal student).

More than a century later the concept of procrastination is still a subject of thought and research. It is a subject about which many are concerned and this has stimulated the development of all types of advice, suggestions, academic procedures and help from for example the University Counselling Services.(M.D. Woolf and J. A. Woolf: The Student Personnel Program, McGraw-Hill New York 1953; Ad Gelens: "wanneer studeer je nou eens af", a booklet in the series "Mededelingen Over Studenten Zaken" Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht 1979; Jane B. Burka, Lenora M. Yuen: Procrastination, Why You Do It, What to Do About It, Perseus Book Group, Cambridge 1983; and H. C. Schouwenburg e.a. ed.: Counselling the Procrastinator in Academic Settings, American Psychological Association, Washington 2004).

The problem of procrastination, especially in the academic world, is of all times and not yet completely understood let alone solved. But students continue to come for advice and guidance and hope to get out of their impasse.

In the following contribution I will present my thoughts about the theoretical backgrounds and basic concepts to do with the problem of procrastination by presenting three different cases.

I will also explain about the Graduates Group as it has been given at the Bureau Student Psychologists at the Twente University for more than a decade as a means to overcome procrastination in the final phase of the study.

The goals, procedures, and tasks of the psychologist-supervisor of the group are also described. Some conclusions, results and critical remarks are given at the end of my paper.

Theoretical backgrounds and basic concepts.

Jane Burka and Lenora Yuen started their work with students groups in the late seventies in the Counseling Centre at the University of California at Berkeley. They state that a student can only do something about his or her delaying behaviour if they have some idea about why they are putting things off. Procrastination has a protective function against different types of fear and in their book they describe some suggestions. (Jane B. Burka, Lenora M. Yuen: Procrastination, Why You Do It, What to Do About It, Perseus Book Group, Cambridge 1983).

As Schouwenburg concludes: "dilatory behaviour is regarded primarily as a product of trait procrastination. Behavioural control techniques may be called for to counteract this primary effect. Besides behaviour, however, there are other effects of the trait, including, cognitions such as false estimates of the time needed to complete a study task, misconceptions about the influence of discounting on study motivation, and low self-efficacy."(H.C.Schouwenburg e.a.ed.: Counselling the Procrastinator in Academic Settings, American Psychological Association, Washington 2004).

However as I mention in the title of this article and as I find in my weekly sessions with the Graduates Group, the concept of personal illusions, which tends to grow uncontrollably in the minds of the students, is in my opinion also an important part of investigation and discussion when one tries to understand the dynamics behind procrastination. What Burka and Yuen call the "Comfort Zone" and is defined as mental and physical space between the fear of separation and the fear of attachment, is according to my view, also the place of mentalization, imagining and more specifically: illusions.

Freud wrote in Die Zukunft einer Illusion (S. Freud: Die Zukunft einer Illusion, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, Leipzig, Wenen, Zurich 1927) that the characteristic feature for the illusion is that it stems from the conscious wishes of man. On the one hand it can, pathologically, expand to rigid beliefs, dissociations or even hallucinations, on the other hand it can be part of the daily misconceptions and mistakes.

When we bring all these concepts, findings and experiences together and put them alongside the experiences of the students who come for help, we find an outline for the guidance these students need to overcome, if only temporarily, their procrastination.

Note: For further reading on behavioural theoretical backgrounds and programmes or procedures helping students to overcome their procrastination the book of Schouwenburg e.a. is highly recommended.

The students

In the next paragraph three vignettes are presented of students who came to the The Bureau Student Psychologists at the University Twente. It is mainly put in their own wording and it is their view of the problems as they are facing them in trying to end their study.

Vignette Walter

A student (26 years, Engineering Technology) came to the Bureau on the advice of his housemates with the following story:

In his bachelor years he studied regularly and had one planned year off as chairman of a sports club. In the master phase of his study he hoped to make the best out of it because now he could make his own choices in the programme. He worked for six months in his field as a student in a traineeship in a small engeneering bureau and did three extra months in the same setting to earn some money. His work and companionship were appreciated there but he had neither the possibility nor the intention of returning there. He developed an idea for his master research and thesis that would be a real

invention in his field and he had the enthusiasm of his former colleagues of the same engeneering bureau behind him.

He had set aside his sports club evenings and worked four afternoons a week at a call centre. After almost one year he still had to write his practical term report and had only a vague layout of the apparatus he wanted to develop and test.

He told me during the intake that he had lost contact with his tutor because he had nothing new to tell him and nothing much to show him yet on paper. Most of his friends had finished their study by now and in the sports club no one knew him anymore. He filled most of his days making sketches, excerpts from other research articles and mathematical models. In the student house he lived in he often helped the youngsters.

Vignette Alex

A 27 year old student Computer Sciences is referred by the dean of the faculty to the Bureau. He looks pale and must be prompted with questions to get the information about himself and his study. His study went quite well until two years ago. He had done his traineeship at the faculty and he had finished writing his report.

During the intake he told me that he had very little else to do besides his study. He could spent hours at the internet and played Dungeons and Dragons with others behind the computer. His sleeping pattern had become quite disturbed. He was sure about wanting to try to finish his study and about returning to the faculty and work for his PhD.

When asked about the two years that he had done nothing about his study he could hardly mention other activities that had taken up his time. In the years of his adolescence he reported also times of withdrawal and lack of social interest except for computers.

Vignette Mary

A student, 24 years old (Applied Communication Sciences), came on her own initiative to the Bureau. She was doing her master thesis at the City Hall and was paid monthly by them for her work. She told me that she liked working at the City Hall but also that she had come into conflict with her tutor at the university because he had asked her for a more theoretical foundation and more methodological accountability of her work. At the City Hall they were content with her work but the end of her contract with them was nearby. She had to start facing the university and the tutor and she was worried about the delay which was already building up because she had been avoiding everything concerning her study for the last three months. She said she was afraid of the often sharp comments of her tutor. In the background there was also a conflict about the ownership of the data she had collected during her work: was it hers, was it the faculty's or did it belong to the department at the City Hall?

Although these three vignettes differ in many aspects, all three students were proposed to join the Graduates Group to help them overcome their procrastinating behaviour and finish their study.

Entering the Graduates Group

Before entering the graduates group, all students had a second individual appointment with the psychologist-supervisor of this group. During this appointment they were told about the aims, the rationale and the procedures of the Graduates Group and also about what was expected of them. The two other main themes concerning the student that must be focussed upon during this intake session are: "the exploration of the illusion" and the "actual day to day behaviour". The illusion has been developing and continues to develop constantly during the delay in which the student finds himself.

In the case of Walter it was the illusion of the great invention, the making of something really new. It had its roots in his earlier experiences with reality (the enthusiasm of his colleagues) and his earlier successes. The delay started with the three months extra work he did at the engineering bureau and with the postponing of the writing of his report about the traineeship by going on a well-earned and long vacation.. By doing so he set himself off course and opened the venue of the illusion of success. In the daily labour of the engineering bureau he himself and his plans were constantly confronted with colleagues and reality in general. Now he was by himself and alone.

In the case of Mary the central illusion was that she could solve the conflict between the faculty and the City Hall by doing the right things and that she could please and appease her tutor.

The first time she forgot an appointment with her tutor was when she did some urgent job for her principal at the City Hall and then the postponement started. Her admiration for his sharp intellectual abilities turned into fear.

Alex was more stuck in his procrastinating behaviour. One could say he had come to a complete standstill. He was literally brought to the Bureau by the dean of the faculty. He was also referred to a psychiatrist for a further intake and to consider the use of medication. He had in some way been "woken up" by these activities but he still didn't know how to handle his situation. He desperately wanted to pick up his study again. From his tutor at the faculty he got a place to work but he didn't know what to do while sitting behind his desk all day long. His illusion and coping style were the numerous adventures he made in his own fantasy and with others while for example playing Dungeons and Dragons with them behind his computer. It had an all involving dissociative character, about which he found it almost impossible to speak.

For all the participants of the Graduates Group it was the same: They had plans, ideas and even ideals but they could not turn them into reality.

The second main theme involves the "actual day to day behaviour".

For all the participants of the Graduates Group, there is one prerequisite condition: they must write down their daily activities in some form and note the time of the beginning and the end of each activity. It is made clear that first of all they must keep daily track of what they do and write it down, even if it was nothing but sitting in a chair or lying awake in bed. If they don't succeed in doing so a few individual appointments are made to try to make this a daily routine. If the applicants for the Graduates Group don't succeed in doing this then there is another serious problem at hand and the whole study may be at stake at this moment. They are given the rationale that stopping any activity at a previously

set time is just as important as starting a planned activity at a set time. The main rationale behind writing the activities down is: "One must first Know what One Does Before One can make a Plan".

The result is that they can start reporting, comparing and discussing with the other members of the group how much time they spent on their study in general and its different parts in particular (e.g. reading, writing, appointments with the tutor). Other activities that are of importance to the individual student are also worth noting down. Life besides the study is as important as the study itself. It depends on the individual student how much attention he wants to pay to his social life in the Graduates Group.

In short: "what do you do when" must be made clear and communicable in the group before one can start telling of one's plans with the end phase of the study in mind.

The Graduates Group, goals, procedures and tasks

The group consists at the most of eight participants. The meetings are every Friday from 16.00 till 17.15 hour and continue all year round except for the days the University is closed. The students can enter the group at any time of the year after the intake procedure. They can leave the group, in principle, when they leave the University, this means after graduating or stopping the study. When they can't come to a session, they are obliged to sent the group an e-mail. In this e-mail they have to explain why they couldn't come to the group that week. They also have to note down the time they have spent on their study during the previous week and the results of their work and give an account of their plans for the following week together with a time estimate. This e-mail is send to the group and read out loud by the psychologist-supervisor.

Another important feature is that every member has his own time sheet. This is a personal flip over on which a bar-diagram is made of the hours worked during the past week and next to it of the hours planned for the next. On the vertical axis the time and on the horizontal the week number is noted. These time sheets are hung on the walls of the room in which the Graduates Group meets.

On entering the session the students note down on their bar-diagram the hours study-work-time. Before leaving everyone has to explain his plan and translate it into hours on the bar-diagram for next week. The rest of the session is less structured.

I see it as a task of the psychologist to stimulate the discussion between the students and to ask the difficult confronting questions which the students usually try to avoid asking or answering, for example simple questions like: "When and how exactly will you contact your tutor?" I find it also important to help the student to be pro-active in their contact with their tutor. Instead of being the one asking the tutor questions like what he thinks of a chapter or what he proposes the next step should be, the student could be giving his own opinion and ideas and come with his own proposals. In the sessions the students sometimes practice this by doing role plays.

Also important is the fact that the students try to explain to each other more about the content of their work in detail. Because they are from different faculties they can easily stick to vague descriptions. When this happens and no group member asks the questions of clarification then the psychologist-

supervisor has to bring in those questions even if it breaks the illusion: "we are all the same and in the same boat and do not want to make it any more difficult for each other".

In general a balance must be made between the unique person who the student is with his –often lonely- study tasks and the group with its support, recognition and understanding of the desperate and shameful situation of procrastination.

The group has also developed their own proceedings. They give a treat to each other during their last visit to the group. They form sub-groups to work together and they read each others papers.

In short the group is a never-ending medium to use in circumscribed ways as long as the student needs it to help him end his study.

Conclusions, results and discussion.

Most of the time the graduating research and the writing of the reports is a soloist endeavour for the graduating student. The appointments with the tutor are usually irregular. Students can go to a tutor when they need to and they are welcome when they have results to show. Both of these reasons to contact a tutor leave plenty of room for hesitations, delay and illusions. The normal contact with fellow students tends to also diminish during the end phase of the study.

This is one of the reasons why the choice was made to work in a group setting in which each student can also work on his own individual tasks. This happens to be an efficient method and it is also in accordance with Jane Burka and Lenora Yuen.

The Graduates Group offers a setting in which there is:

1. continuity and structure
2. a rigid individuated self monitoring done weekly by all the participants
3. self monitoring which is explicit and reality oriented and which offers a start for making decisions and realistic plans
4. a very structured start and finish to each session which involves structuring of behaviour, thoughts and planning.
5. a companionship in the vicissitudes of graduating
6. a safe testing ground of ideas and even illusions of the present and of life after the study
7. a psychologist-supervisor who asks the difficult and confronting reality-oriented questions, who can say: "less is better than nothing" and who has basic knowledge of methodological themes in research and the general rules and procedures in the academic world.

As far as the results of participating in the Graduation Group are concerned, one could say that the students who attended the group consequently would also graduate. It was calculated that of the students who joined the group during their seventh year 85% graduated, compared to 65% of the other students in the same year.

Some words of warning are also justified here. The Graduates Group and its psychologist-supervisor could turn out to be an illusion also. The expectation that both the weekly attendance and the closely monitoring of ones work would guarantee the grade in the end, could also be an illusion. Research done with the aim to graduate could be an endless endeavour and so could the ongoing continuity of

the Graduates Group be. In this case the student could find himself getting lost in a never ending exercise and the inherent qualities of the group could turn out to be a disadvantage and feed this seemingly everlasting process rather than help stop it.

The presence of external realities, as for example in the case of Alex, are an absolute necessity to avoid this to happen and to help bring the illusions, which delay or even prevent graduating, to an end and to face reality.

I want to also mention here the important role the tutor can play in the whole process of graduating. He is a person who is not under the control of the students in the Graduates Group or the psychologist who runs the group. He can be experienced as someone representing the real world but he can also be perceived as someone who joins the illusion. Much could be said about his role but I don't want to expand any further on this topic in this paper.

When graduating becomes the goal per se it can be forgotten by all the members of the group including their guide that there is also a life to be lived while studying and after the study: the three f's of family, friends and finances must not be forgotten.

I want to finish my paper with the three students I introduced earlier in the vignettes and who helped me shape the Graduate Group and this article. Walter learned to accept and live with the idea that he had after all only made a small contribution in the engineering research. His thesis was not the crown on his study and on his stay at the University as he had imagined it would be. He had had hopes for a long time and he had spent much time on fostering his illusion. But after observing more closely what he had done and after realizing more what he was content with, he came to the following conclusions, unexpected for himself and others: he decided that he liked to instruct and that he liked teaching. While writing his thesis he found out why most of his previous plans and earlier engineering inventions did not work out. He proved his discoveries and then he graduated.

Alex graduated after a two year stay in the Group. He took part in a therapeutic day programme at an institute to which he was referred and for a long time the group was the only connection he had with the University. He also spent a few hours a week at the faculty to keep his assignment going. He is now working part-time at the University in a sheltered situation. His imaginative ideas and his very neat work have proved to be very helpful to students and professors alike.

Mary stopped pleasing and appeasing her tutor and complaining in the Group, took responsibility of her anger and decided to fight for her rights. Her anger and willingness to fight were also necessary in her family situation as at the same time her parents were in the middle of their divorce. Mary felt supported by the Group in her decision to stay with her own plans. She presented her thesis to her tutor and to the head of the department at the city hall. She was convinced that her thesis was of an adequate academic standard even if others were not sure about this. She even threatened to put her case before the exam committee if necessary. She had been very precise in keeping track of what she did during her attendance of the Graduates Group and this turned out to be convincing evidence to defend her case.

In my paper I have emphasized the importance of graduating and I now want to end my paper on a different note. A student who had left the Graduates Group after unsuccessfully trying to bring his study to an end once told me:

"It was worth trying and it was an interesting experience. But I have learned more from my daily live and from my wife and child than I have ever learned from my books, from studying at academic standards and from scientifically sound experimentation. I have had it, I quit. Studying and graduating is no guarantee for happiness!".

References

Woolf, M.D. & Woolf J.A. (1953) *The Student Personnel Program*, McGraw-Hill New York

Gelens, A. (1979) *"wanneer studeer je nou eens af",* a booklet in the series "Mededelingen Over Studenten Zaken" Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht

Burka, J.B. & Yuen L.M. (1983). *Procrastination, Why You Do It, What to Do About It*, Perseus Book Group, Cambridge.

Schouwenburg, H.C., Lay, C.H., Pychyl, T.A., and Ferrari, J.R. (Eds.). (2004). *Counseling the procrastinator in academic settings*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Freud, S. (1927). *Die Zukunft einer Illusion, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag*, Leipzig, Wenen, Zurich

Brandt Corstius, J.C. & Haverschmidt, F. (1956). Romanticus van de verloren jeugd, in: *De Nieuwe Taalgids 49*.