
LEARNER GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

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I regard it as the foremost task of education to ensure survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity; an undefeatable spirit; tenacity in pursuit; readiness for sensible self denial; and above all, compassion. (Kurt Hahn)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Develop meaningful relationships to promote learner support
- Identify learner needs and problems
- Interact with learners to help them with their difficulties
- Analyse learner problems and decide on appropriate action
- Provide advice, guidance and counselling to learners
- Deal effectively with conflict
- Address learner anxiety and stress
- Refer learners to specialist guidance and external counselling services
- Evaluate performance to develop action plans for improved learner support

8.1 Introduction

The new outcomes-based approach to education, training and development is more learner-centred than the previous content-centred philosophy. This requires

the ETD practitioner to provide all the support to learners to ensure learners are able to progress through the learning programmes. Learner support needs to be seen against the backdrop of the social and economic challenges present in the education landscape of South Africa. The principles of the NOF indicate that learners should be provided with support and guidance to ensure that quality education occurs.

In this chapter attention will be given to the building of relationships between facilitators and learners, how to deal with anxiety as it relates to learners, the provision of advice to learners, learner well-being issues and interactive issues within the provision of support to learners.

ETD practitioners need to have a good understanding of and relationship with the target population they will be providing support to. This will be discussed below.

8.2 Building relationships

When providing learner support, the relationship between the ETD practitioner and learners needs to be optimised to facilitate the learning process. Particular skills that are useful for the ETD practitioner include the ability to understand the learners' behaviours and to interpret them correctly, to communicate effectively both verbally and non-verbally, to persuade and influence learners' behaviours, attitudes, opinions and beliefs and to use one's knowledge responsibly (Charoux, 2000:10). It is through effective relationships that the ETD practitioner is able to ensure that the learner has the best chance of gaining from the learning opportunity or the learning process.

Lemmer (1998: 39) indicates that the ETD practitioner's relationships need to be managed positively. Furthermore, learner's needs have to be understood and appreciated in order to provide the necessary learner support.

Learner support takes place in the whole learning environment, in other words the contact the learner gets from the training department before and after the training can also be regarded as learner support. Lemmer (1998: 39-40) reports that learners prefer facilitators who:

- are warm and friendly
- respect them as individuals, their feelings, their personal lives and diverse culture
- avoid embarrassing learners and create a safe learning environment
- give structure in the learning process so that expectations are clear
- provide assistance beyond the typical learning situation
- treat learners fairly and give encouragement, recognition and praise for effort and success
- create variety in the learning process to accommodate different preferences for learning and that present challenges to the learners
- demonstrate their own commitment to learning

The relationships the ETD practitioners are dependent on require the ETD practitioner to take clear actions to ensure effective learning. Lemmer (1998: 40-41) suggests the following to enhance relationships while supporting learners:

8.2.1 Knowing the learners

Facilitators should know the names of learners as soon as possible. Added to this the facilitator should get to know the characteristics that make learners different from each other, their circumstances, values, background and beliefs as a start to providing effective learner support.

To support learners it is useful to have a profile that would describe their most salient characteristics. Having a profile makes it easier to focus on those area and issues that are most common to the majority of learners. According to Hardingham (1996) and Kokong and Grundling (2000) at the most basic level information needs to be gathered about:

- demographics
- education background
- age group
- gender
- learner expectations and interests
- personal career development plans
- previous learning and work experience
- academic background
- learning skills
- rates of progression and completion of programme rates
- learning difficulties
- learning styles and habits
- logistics related to learning conditions
- facilities and resources available to the learners.

A variety of ways exist as to how this information can be obtained. This could be done by collecting information using questionnaires, in interviews and by telephoning (Kokong and Grundling, 2000:43). The method used would be informed by the context of the learning situation. Depending on the delivery of the learning programme, learners could be immediately available as in a training centre or may be geographically dispersed as in distance learning. Many facilitators have easy access to the information as they have personal contact with the learners. In such cases information can be collected by observing the learners and by the continuous assessment process. The facilitator is then in a position to provide learner support much faster and to focus it on the learners where required.

To further support learners it is useful to keep a record of what has been



- access to the changing needs of learners so as to provided a learner centered learning environment
- monitoring of the delivery systems appropriate to the majority of learners – do all have access to the methods of delivery used or that are cost effective?
- identification of typical problem areas for immediate attention
- provision of resources that rely on other organisations or departments for support (for instance libraries and media centres)
- provision of input into the application of instructional technology used (for instance paper based material versus electronic means)
- identification of learners with special needs and the extent to which alternative means and access have been made available to those learners.



8.2.2 Sharing attention evenly

Attention during the initial learning event needs to be shared evenly. Only after all have gained from the initial event should further attention be provided where needed. The attention sharing must be done with a view to treating all learners with equal dignity and respect.

8.2.3 Setting clear boundaries

The facilitator is often in a dual role of wanting to have a friendly relationship and needing to control the behaviour in the situation. This dual role may at times be difficult for learners to understand. The facilitator needs to set rules for conduct and expectations by setting boundaries and applying the rules consistently.

8.2.4 Creating a safe and non-threatening learning environment

Learners need to know that they will not be abused in any manner. Teasing and behaviour that would affect self-esteem must be avoided. All behaviour should communicate respect for all at all times.

8.2.5 Using effective communication

The outcome of all communication should leave the learner feeling cared for and respected whoever or whatever they may stand for.

8.2.6 Communicating high expectations

Providing even attention to all learners and expressing high expectations of all learners contribute to learners' need to perform at their optimal level. This is further supported by the setting of challenging activities. Integrating these actions will develop good relationships which will contribute to effective learning.

8.2.7 Interacting with learners

When supporting learners, it is advisable to keep records of the interaction or actions taken. This is especially necessary when providing support to large numbers of learners.

This should be kept within the context of the learner profile and records of learning. This could be useful especially when learners need to be referred to other professionals for further guidance. Such records would be necessary when making the referral. Such records should be kept confidential to ensure that trust is maintained in the relationship.

In addition to building relationships with learners at a more general level, at times it will be necessary to establish a more personal relationship with particular learners. This will require an interview or counselling session.

8.3 Counselling and interviewing learners

In the context of learner support, counselling is the process of helping the learner deal with issues that are important to his or her future. For some learners, this may be a life changing event where decisions need to be made. Support provided may or may not contribute to future behaviour. It is useful to use a basic counselling model. The model is intended to give structure to a process that may be followed.

Nelson-Jones (2000:66-79) proposes the "relating-understanding-changing" model for helping. The support given to the learners is help provided to the learners so as to achieve learning outcomes.

The following stages relate to the model that is proposed for use when counselling learners. While the model has process stages, the stages merely give an indication as to what needs to happen to give direction to the counselling. It is unlikely that the stages would happen with this level of predictability (Nelson-Jones, 2000:67).

The role of counsellor in this situation is where the ETD practitioner provides support in a one-on-one situation. The purpose of the support is to guide the learner in promoting learning.

When a decision has been made to counsel a learner, the counsellor must have a specific purpose in mind. It is the purpose that will give direction to the session and to the eventual action taken to find a solution to the learner's problem.

8.3.1 Relating

At this stage the counsellor and learner establish a working relationship. The learner may volunteer an issue that requires attention or the counsellor may indicate to the learner using feedback, that an issue requires attention. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that the learner experiences the initial part of the session as respectful. If the experience is not positive, the learner is unlikely to be co-operative in the support interventions required.

8.3.2 Understanding

At this stage the issues to be dealt with are clarified so as to create a common understanding of the issue or problem that requires attention. This may relate to communications, behaviours and actions that require attention. In obtaining the information to decide on what to do, questioning will be required to develop the level of understanding required. The types of questions that need to be asked should include specific detailed questions. To obtain the largest range of possibilities, open-ended questions need to be asked, such as "How would you...?" Where specific answers are required, the counsellor would use wording that requires a more direct response, such as "At what times do these things happen?" Or "Were you there? Yes or no?"

8.3.3 Changing

The learner needs to change so that the behaviours or problems can be dealt with effectively. The counsellor and the learner would typically set goals and decide on how the goals are to be achieved in a plan of action. The plan of action would also be used for the monitoring of the changes and improvements required (Nelson-Jones, 2000:198).

The process described above may be enacted in a formal structure in a series of sessions, or may even be enacted in a group situation where counselling is provided on an individual needs basis while facilitation of a learning programme is in progress.

The content of the counselling may range from dealing with specific learning problems to personal problems. It is the ETD practitioner's role as counsellor to reflect on their own particular competence to deal with the more serious problems. Where appropriate, the learner should be referred to the appropriate service provider or professional. With the profile of learners, the ETD practitioner needs to develop a list of service providers and professionals with their specialities for reference when required. Where a problem arises that requires competence beyond that of the counsellor, other ETD practitioners should be

practitioner should also decide on the level of support for the future, as it may be decided to work in collaboration with another professional while the learning continues. (Nelson-Jones, 2000:201-202).

To obtain the best results, a joint problem-solving approach would be helpful where goals are set, options are explored as to what and how things could be done, and a specific plan of action is developed with specific steps as to achieve the results required (Nelson-Jones, 2000:214).

For example:

The problem situation. Joe has not complied with the requirements of a learning programme. Some of the specific outcomes were not met.

Joe's overall goal. Joe wants to achieve a positive result on at least one of the outcomes required each week for the next four weeks.

Options. The options would be to do extra classes, to develop the skill with another facilitator, to spend time with another group doing similar proactive exercises or to practise on his own and ask for help if required.

After considering the options choose the option that will yield the best results in the shortest space of time.

Specific goal. Joe will work with another facilitator to achieve each of the outcomes required (Adapted from Nelson-Jones, 2000:217).

After counselling, dealing with conflict in one way or another is part of the day-to-day negotiation with learners progressing through the learning programme.

8.4 Handling conflict

Conflict management in the learner-centred environment is a challenge. Conflict needs to be handled so that the conflict in itself can be a learning opportunity for learners. To manage conflict constructively those involved need to be aware of what is happening and how they feel about the situation. They have to be able to step back and take a wider view and to respond positively (Crawley, 1992:17). Elements that are present in the handling process are:

- clear perception and good judgement
- understanding and taking charge of one's feelings and behaviour
- stepping back and taking a balanced view
- responding in a constructive manner.

When dealing with conflict on a common issue among learners, the steps to take to stop the argument are:

- calm those involved, and separate if necessary
- establish the facts and find alternatives or solutions
- then gain agreement on the way ahead.



8.4.1 Using "I" statements

In conflict situations, there is the danger of reverting to blaming others. To avoid this, it is useful to make use of "I statements" or messages. The facilitator uses "I statements" that indicate how he or she is feeling about the issue. Using "I statements" addresses the problem and the effects, without attacking the self-esteem of the learner. It also ensures that the party using the "I statement" is taking responsibility for the statement being made. For example, "I see (I statement) that some have not completed their assignments; this makes me anxious (feeling) because the work is important for the final assessment (impact)" (McCown, Driscoll and Roop, 1996:337; Crawly, 1992:120).

8.4.2 Conflict resolution steps

When dealing with conflict, the steps below are useful. Conflict handling is also a typical problem-solving activity. These steps can also be used for other problem-solving situations.

- (i) Define the problem together. Identify the real issue, then allow each party to explain in detail his or her expectation of the outcome of the situation. Listen carefully to the views of the learners.
- (ii) Develop as many possible solutions as possible without evaluating the merits of the solutions (this is also called brainstorming). An important rule here is that anyone involved in the process can veto an idea. Should all the ideas be vetoed, the process goes back to developing solutions again.
- (iii) Then, by collaborating with the learner, evaluate the solution you have. Identify what will work and what will not work as well.
- (iv) Decide on the solution that will work best. This should be a consensus decision. Everyone must be comfortable with the solution.
- (v) Plan and implement the decision. Reaching a decision is not the end of the process. Actions need to be taken and responsibilities assigned. There also needs to be an agreement on the time frame for taking action by responsible parties.
- (vi) Evaluate the outcome of the plan. After following the plan, it may be useful to reconvene the participants and find out if everyone is satisfied and make adjustments if necessary (McCown, Driscoll and Roop, 1996:338).

Learners can also be taught these steps for later use in other situations. The steps are common and constitute a good life skill to have in different situations.

From time to time, the ETD practitioner will observe behaviour which suggests the learner requires other help, not always directly related to the learning material, but related to their progress and well-being.

8.5 Dealing with learner's needs

will deal with his or her needs. The need for help is often related to other behavioural symptoms the learner may be displaying. This behaviour is then related to some difficulty being experienced. The identification of this distress will only be possible if the facilitator knows the learner well so as to be able to identify unusual behaviour.

Anxiety and stress is responsible for many learners having difficulty learning. Anxiety is often the result of poor self-management. You will remember that self-management is one of the critical outcomes of the NQF. It often relates to basic learning skills that are inadequately developed. As with learning in a structured situation, learning in an unstructured situation needs a measure of self-discipline. What follows are some ways learners can be advised to deal with their test anxiety.

8.5.1 Characteristics of anxiety

Learners who are anxious are likely to have difficulty sleeping, be agitated, nervous, have poor concentration, be startled easily and be restless. At times the learner needs only to be reassured to deal with the condition; at other times there may be a need for professional help (Mental Health Net, 2001:1).

Consider the simple questionnaire below. Each of the items also gives an indication of the range of behaviours that could represent stress.

Table 8.1 Stress questionnaire

- Read each statement, then mark you answers in the column that represents you best.
- At the end of the questionnaire, add up all your answers and compare the total on the scale below.

Symptom	Often	A few times a month	Rarely
I have difficulty digesting my food			
I do not have enough time to relax			
I smoke to relax			
People at work or school make me tense up			
I do not get enough sleep			
I worry a lot			
I find it difficult to concentrate on what I am doing			
I have headaches			
Events / people at home make me tense			
I have pains in my neck and shoulders			
I take pills to make me relax			

Symptom	Often	A few times a month	Rarely
I find it difficult not to think of work when I am able to relax			
I feel my heart beats fast for no reason			
I take tranquilizers to relax			
At times I feel faint			
I sweat for no reason			
I am impatient with others for no reason			
I rush about for no reason			
I worry about things over which I have no control			
I am restless			

(Adapted from Burns, 1988: viii-ix).

To score yourself, allocate a 2 for often, a 1 for a few times a month and a 0 for rarely. Then add up all your scores.

Scale

31 - 42 = You have a high level of stress

17 - 30 = You experience quite a lot of stress

6 - 16 = You encounter stress occasionally

0 - 5 = You have very little stress



There are also times when the advice provided below can deal with the learner's anxiety.

8.5.2 Dealing with test anxiety

Before the test establish the format of the examination. Examinations should be approached as challenges and as opportunities to show what has been learnt. As part of the preparation, develop some sample questions and answer them as a "dress rehearsal" for the more difficult questions that may be set in the examination. Check your style of doing examinations, and work on those areas where you know you have had difficulty in the past. From what has been said, preparation for an examination is not an event but a process of preparation. As part of this preparation, it is useful to get enough sleep and to eat nutritious foods.

Included in the preparation exercise, check what materials need to be taken to the examination and have them ready. Be organised.

On the day of the examination, arrive a bit before the time set for the examination, so that you can settle down as soon as possible in the examination centre. Once the examination starts, the examination instructions should be read carefully. Where the learner has been prepared for this examination, most of what has been said should be familiar. Depending on the format of the examination, time should be set out for the answering of the questions or the performance of the tasks. Especially in written examinations, use the time available; avoid leaving because others have left earlier. Check you have answered the questions as required (Arçm, 2001:1-3; Landsberger, 2001:1-2).

8.5.3 Anxiety and assessment

Many learners do not perform at the levels that they are capable of due to test anxiety. For the most part being slightly anxious is useful for learners to motivate them to prepare for assessment. However, there are those learners who are so anxious that they do not perform as well as they could. Some of the ways that could help the situation include:

- Preparing well in advance. Learners need to prepare well in advance for assessments. An assessor should share the planning of the assessment with the learner. The planning and preparation need to be done from that point forward. The scope of the preparation will depend on the standards or qualification in question.
- Knowing the time and place. Learners need to ensure that they know the time and venue of the assessment.
- Confering with other learners. Where learners know that discussing the assessment with others increases their level of discomfort, this must be discouraged.
- Planning for the assessment. Learners need to know all the detail of what is to be assessed. This must include the outcome, range statement, assessment criteria and possible methods that are to be used. With this information they must plan for the assessment. The planning should be done so that all the competencies required can be performed as the standards or qualification require, taking the time arranged into consideration. Where there are any questions, the learners must ask for clarification to be sure as to what will be expected for the assessment.
- Preparing mentally. Learners should develop a realistic attitude for the assessment. Such preparation should be characterised by a positive, determined attitude. Learners should also remember that the assessment need not be done unless they are confident that they are ready for the assessment.
- Relaxing physically. During the assessment it is useful to take a few deep breaths and let the breath out slowly. This will help relax the learners, especially where the learner is worrying excessively.
- Paying attention to the assessment instructions. The learner must focus on the instructions given rather than on what others are doing. Do what is expected.

It is unlikely that the learner will be doing anything that has not been done before. So the assessment should not be a surprise. (<http://www.utexas.edu/student/lsc/handouts/1305.html>)

8.5.4 Dealing with stress

Burns (1988) suggests some strategies for dealing with stress. In the learning situation it is useful to be able to do relaxation exercises which can be used without bothering others. Have a healthy lifestyle by eating healthy foods, exercising regularly and getting enough sleep. Be positive and have an optimistic view of life. Build meaningful relationships with others and develop time management skills. Some stress management activities are:



8.5.4.1 Breathing exercises

Breathing is an exercise that may be practised anywhere without disturbing anyone. When in distress, one tends to breathe in a shallow manner. To counteract this, simply start to breathe deeply during an anxious moment or moment of stress. For some it may also help to close their eyes to get an enhanced effect. For maximum benefit, practise this exercise to make it part of normal behaviour.

8.5.4.2 Diet, exercise and sleep

For many learners, junk foods have become their staple diet. These learners lack the nutrition their bodies need which causes stress. A well-balanced diet, especially when preparing for a time of stress, and regular meals are necessary for the body and the brain to work optimally. When this cycle of eating is disturbed, the body is stressed which is felt all over (Burns, 1988:116-117).

Exercise has both physical and psychological benefits. By exercising you put the body under stress, which in turn helps to combat the ravages of distress. The activity helps to develop cardiovascular fitness and forces one to relax when the activity is over. Exercise also helps people feel better about themselves. Having a positive outlook goes a long way to relieve the effects of stress. Exercising for at least half an hour helps to release higher amounts of endorphins, a chemical that helps one feel exhilarated. This chemical is also ideal for those who have feelings of anxiety (Burns, 1988:119).

A lack of sleep is in itself a major cause of stress. Not having enough sleep before an examination is likely to distress the learners as much as not having done adequate preparation for the session. A pattern of little sleep is bound to

have a marked effect on the performance of the learner in the learning process (Burns, 1988:123).

8.5.4.3 Positive self-esteem

Learners with a positive self-esteem feel good about themselves. The feeling of well-being has positive implications for feelings of competence and effective performance of learners. Furthermore, as soon as a learner has the feeling of positive expectation of others, the learner is likely to fulfil the positive expectation, resulting in positive feedback from others. The positive feelings will impact positively on stress as well as on the performance of the learner. The learner is also likely to perform beyond the expectations of most people. Treating learners with respect and dignity makes a major contribution to their self-esteem. When high expectations are expressed of learners and their performance is recognised, this contributes to their feeling of well-being (Burns, 1988:129; Field, 1995:4). Learners with high self-esteem tend to be happy, confident, think positively, have self-respect, feel valued and have a sense of security (Field, 1995:4) All these attributes contribute to successful learning.

8.5.4.4 Positive thinking

Positive thinking and positive self-talk has a positive effect on learner behaviour. When this is negative, the behaviour becomes self-defeating, generating stress. Where learners engage in negative self-talk, that is they speak negatively about themselves, they should be helped to rephrase what they have said so as to have a positive outcome. So a comment like "I cannot do anything right" can be rephrased as "This is a challenge at this time, and I will achieve success later" (Burns, 1998:141-142).

8.5.4.5 Building relationships

Having positive, supportive relationships is an effective way to deal with stress. Having someone who cares is important for mental health. Having someone with whom to share concerns is a good stress reliever. Learners should be encouraged to have close, warm, sharing relationships in which love, acceptance, support and advice are available (Burns, 1988:158).

8.5.4.6 Time management

For many learners, time is a problem since they have not structured their time to accommodate all that needs to be done. By managing time, the learner can plan for activities and commitments and prioritise activities where there is more than one activity that needs to occur at the same time. Time management is further facilitated by the setting of objectives, which impact on the priorities planning, and hence the sense of control the learner may have. This may be done by recording what is important, what needs to be done, by when it needs to be done. The learner then also has a means of deciding what else to do should another activity need to be done which may conflict with what is already planned.

8.6 Supporting learners with other resources or advice

The role of facilitator is often more than that of facilitator or ETD practitioner. Given the diversity of learners, it is often necessary to give advice to learners on subjects out of the normal area of expertise. In dealing with these situations, it is useful to know about the possibilities and options available to the learner by performing a resource audit.

Not all organisations have the same resources. Some organisations have library facilities while smaller organisations do not. Should the need for a library be critical for success in the programme you are facilitating, it would be useful to make contact with a library to which all the learners can have access and ensure the resources are available to support the activity that needs to be done. Alternatively, have a central place accessible to all that need the information.

Depending on the profile of your learners, you are likely to find a pattern of needs for learners with whom you have regular contact. With this in mind, you should make a list of people and the resources they may have or have access to, to whom you can refer learners when the need arises. Some of the resources that may be useful are:

Table 8.2 Resource list

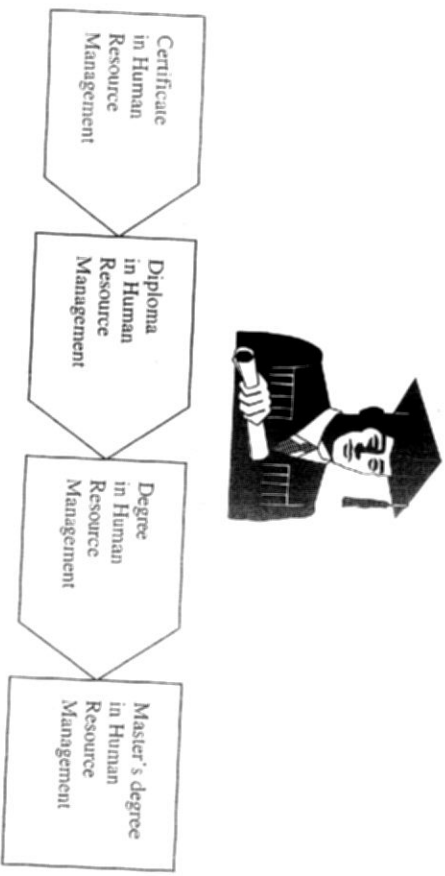
Resource	Useful for
Aids/HIV counsellors	Aids counselling
Social workers	Social problems. Their service often includes referral to drug/alcohol rehabilitation centres. They often manage other employee well-being programmes in the organisation.
Clinical/Industrial psychologists	Personal and work-related problems.
Human resource managers/staff	Company policies and procedures that affect the learner.

Where these specialised services are not available within your organisation, the ETD practitioner should look at the local community resources for similar services provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

8.7 Learning pathways

Where a learner has the need to plan and manage his or her career, this information is available at a detailed level in the qualifications or unit standards that have been registered. These standards will be available on the SAQA website. It is useful to download this information from the website with all the standards qualification and the entry assumptions will also be available indicating what learning needs to be in place. The structure of the documents should be read as a whole so as to get a holistic view of the requirements of the qualification or standards in question.

In order for ETD practitioners to be in a position to provide learner support as far as learning pathways are concerned, they need thorough knowledge of the available learning pathways and career opportunities in the field that they are training in. This will help the ETD practitioner to be able to give the appropriate advice to learners when they request more information from the ETD practitioner. A learning pathway for a human resource management learner may look as follows:



8.8 Learnership and skills programmes

A number of organisations will offer learnerships and skills programmes related to their particular fields. Where learners want to follow a particular skills development programme in a particular field, the relevant organisations that provide such opportunities will have to be identified. This can be achieved by referring to the SETA for the field of interest. The Skills Development Act clearly states the functions of the SETA as including:

- implementing its sector skills plan by establishing learnerships
 - promoting learnerships by identifying workplaces for practical work experience
 - registering learnership agreements.
- The various SETAs will be valuable sources of reference for identifying career and employment opportunities and learning pathways.

8.9 Learners with special learning needs

Learners with special needs are a large group of learners who have specific needs not typically catered for in learning. These learners have largely been excluded from the mainstream of learning in the past. This group will now be accommodated within the mainstream of learning at all levels. The range of special needs is wide and includes learners with emotional problems, intellectual problems and physical disabilities. Dealing with these learners will depend on

the specific needs of the learners themselves and their particular circumstances (Ashman and Elkins, 1998).

8.9.1 Study skills

For many learners, there will be material that has to be learnt for the completion of the learning programme and the assessment that will take place. For many programmes to be effective, the learners will need to master some knowledge issues, which will be applied at a later stage. This is where study skills are useful in preparing for the assessment.

8.9.2 Motivation

Motivation is the key to success when learning. It is important that learners do not rely on others to motivate them. Learners cannot be motivated by someone else – learners need to understand what needs to be learnt and why the learners are embarking on the learning. This is a personal issue and the learner must take responsibility for that decision.

8.9.3 Problems for learners

Learners often experience problems in the learning environment. Major problems include:

- not studying enough
- wasting time while studying and not being able to remember what has been read
- being distracted by other non-learning events
- finding a place to study that facilitates
- using a good learning strategy.

In dealing with these problems, learners need to be encouraged to follow the guidelines below as a means of addressing the issues.

8.9.4 Strategies for dealing with common learning problems

The following general recommendations are of particular importance for learners engaged in learning, especially distance learning, where self-discipline is of great importance.

- Setting up a learning programme or schedule. The setting up of a schedule should take note of the more difficult learning as well as allow time for relaxation. Success is built on the goals people set themselves and the time allowed to accomplish the goals.
- Getting started with the learning. Initially, the learning may be in shorter periods, being increased to longer periods as the learner becomes more skilful.
- Taking breaks. The average attention span is in the region of twenty minutes. The learner needs to study portions of material, then take breaks at regular times.

- Rewarding self for results. Rewarding the accomplishment of learning results helps make the learning a fun process. The reward can be as simple as looking to see what the score is of favourite team, or visiting a friend by arrangement and as per the study schedule.

- Finding a good place to learn. Learning needs to be done in a place where concentration will be best. Ideally, the learning must be done at a desk rather than on a bed where the learner may be tempted to relax instead of learning. Use the same place for learning. Ideally, this place should be quiet and adequately lit. Distractions need to be managed so that friends and others do not visit when you want to study. It is useful to organise your study area so that items of other courses do not remind you of work that needs to be done there that you will be focussing on a some other time.

- Creating conditions best for your memory. Learning under conditions similar to where you need to demonstrate your learning facilitates the recall of information that you need to apply in the assessment. Also manage emotions to be similar to the assessment situation – being too relaxed while learning would not match the emotions and level of activity during the assessment. Care needs to be taken in situations where knowledge recall type exercises are to be used. Here the learner must not be too tense (Sam Houston State University Counseling Center 2000:1).

8.9.5 Reading skills

In some learning programmes, such as those offered by distance learning institutions, there is more emphasis on the ability of the learner to acquire information from print materials. Below are some methods that are useful in advising learners to be more effective readers. When reading, the reader should have the purpose in mind of focussing on the acquisition of knowledge.

8.9.5.1 SQ4R method

This method requires the reader to:

- Survey the material. The survey is done with a particular purpose in mind. The survey allows the reader to develop an overall view of the material as well as to obtain a general understanding of the material.
- Question. To maintain your involvement in the material, it is useful to ask questions. The questions could be related to the sort of questions that a learner may encounter in the assessment.
- Read. Read the content of the material in an active manner, using the questions developed earlier. The purpose of this step is to concentrate and remember what has been read. The reading step should be done silently as this will aid retention and go much faster.
- Write. As soon as an answer has been found to a question, the answer should be written down. Make a summary of the information in the learner's own words. Furthermore, it may be useful to restructure the information to make more sense to the learner.

- **Recite.** The learner needs to recite what has been read, to him or herself. This should include main headings and ideas. Check if the response is correct. This process allows the learner to make the information his or her "own" and aids the retention of information.
- **Review.** The last step is the key to working out what is known and where the learner should focus more learning effort. Ideally the reviewing should be done after reading material and summarising the main points (Sam Houston State University Counseling Center 2000:4-5).

8.9.5.2 PQ4R method

In this method the following is done:

- **Preview.** The chapter is surveyed to establish the general topics dealt with. The next steps apply to each section or chapter.
- **Questions.** Develop questions about each section. Transform section headings into questions each time.
- **Read.** Read each section or chapter while attempting to answer the questions you have developed about it.
- **Reflect.** As you read the material, attempt to think of examples and applications of the knowledge as well as relating it to previous knowledge and experiences.
- **Recite.** After working through the information try to recall the information read. Answer the questions you made up for the section. Where there was difficulty answering the questions, that is where the learner needs to focus more attention.
- **Review.** After completing the section or chapter, go through the chapter mentally recalling the main points and then answer the questions developed earlier (Sam Houston State University Counseling Center 2000:6).

8.9.5.3 Memory skills

The recall of principles and procedures is often a problem for learners. Some memorisation approaches may be helpful. Some of the more common are given below:

- Acrostics are phrases used where the first letter of each word is a cue to remember the words that the learner is trying to remember. For example, remembering a music scale would be "Every good boy does fine".
- Acronyms are words formed out of the first letters of a series of words the learner is trying to remember.
- Narrative can be used making up a story with list of words, where the narrative helps the learner to remember.
- Rhymes help remembering. For example, "i comes before e except after c" (Sam Houston State University Counseling Center 2000:6).

8.10 General hints that promote learning that can be passed to learners

There are some general hints that help the learning process. Some may appear obvious and basic; it is these issues that are often forgotten when learners have problems:

- attend the class where new competencies will be learnt
- participate in the class
- pay attention to the demonstrations held in the class
- get involved in a study group; engage in the learning materials by doing the exercises
- keep up and organise all the learning materials.

8.11 Mentoring

One of the principles of the NQF indicates that learners need to be counselled (HSRC, 1995:11; Mothata, 1998:20; Joubert 1999:17). Mentoring within the learning situation is an important aspect in the provision of quality training and development in complying with this principle. Furthermore, the process of counseling of learners supports the learning process in that learners are provided with feedback and ways of improving their overall performance. A mentor may be defined as someone available for the performer to learn from (MacLennan, 1995:5). In the learning situation, the mentor could also fulfil the role of a facilitator and assessor of a particular learning programme.

In this role the mentor may also provide information; act as a role model; guide the learner through a phase or a whole learning programme leading to qualification; and provide feedback and appraisal and other facts that will enable the learners to complete the learning programme effectively (MacLennan, 1995:6).

8.11.1 Characteristics of performance and achievement

Successful performers have a few basic characteristics: they tend to choose an objective; focus on that objective; take personal responsibility for the management of their own thoughts, feelings, behaviours and skills towards the achievement of the goal and are persistent until they see results (Covey, 1989:145-182; Dent, Macgregor and Willis, 1994: 131-148; MacLennan, 1995:10). From these characteristics, it may be deduced that for the mentoring to work, there needs to be a plan that would give direction to the developmental effort of the learner(s).

The contents of the plan would support the development initiatives of the learners to ensure that the learner complies with the requirements of a qualification.

8.11.2 Characteristics of effective mentors

Cilliers (1995:13) identifies the following characteristics of an effective mentor. Mentors:

- have the time, commitment and energy to put into the initiative
- have coaching, counselling, facilitating and networking skills
- are willing to help others
- are action and results orientated
- respond to the individual differences of learners
- have good communication skills
- are able to encourage and motivate
- create a continuous learning environment.

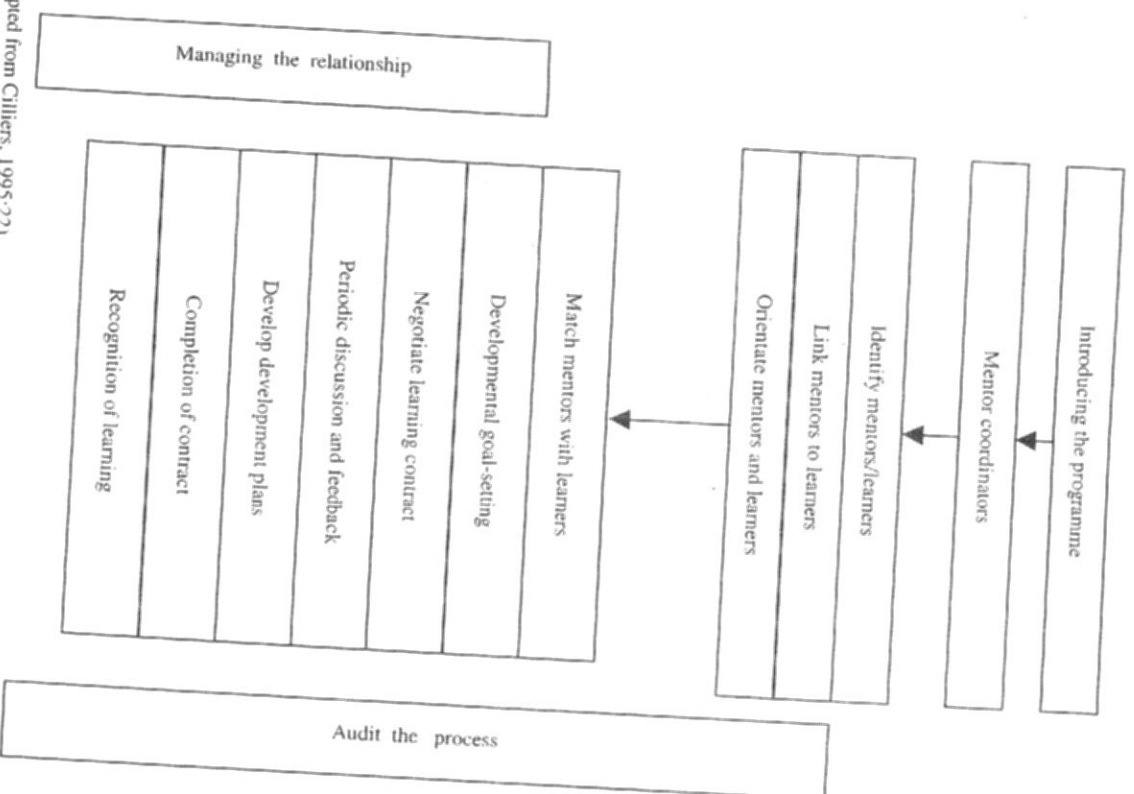
In the context of the mentoring relationship, learners also require particular characteristics. Learners need to be:

- open to feedback
- goal directed
- active in developing their competencies
- receptive to coaching and feedback
- active at working at their developmental plan.

8.11.3 The mentoring process

The mentoring process focuses on the learner. The individuality of the learner needs to be recognised. The learner brings specific strengths to the learning situation (Cilliers, 1995:21). The approach of the learner could be different from that of the mentor or facilitator or assessor; what is important to remember is that it is the outcome of the learning as it is demonstrated by the learner (Olivier, 1998:72). Mentoring could also be part of a larger initiative to support learning in an organisation. This does not stop the facilitator from fulfilling this role. Below are some of the major steps in initiating mentoring programme in an organisation on a large scale.

Figure 8.1 The Mentoring Process



(Adapted from Cilliers, 1995:22)

8.11.3.1 Introducing the programme

The programme needs to be introduced as a way of supporting the learning process. For learning to be effective, the support of management for the process is required. Much of the learning occurs in the actual workplace. This is especially true for learnerships, where learners would be following a particular learning programme on the job.

Much of the learning will need to be demonstrated in the workplace. So it may be expected the managers and supervisors could fulfil the mentor role to ensure the development of competence and the transfer of learning in the workplace.

The mentorship process can also be seen as a mechanism to ensure the transfer of training in the workplace. Here there would be a partnership between the facilitator, learners and manager or supervisor. Cooperation from those who manage the workplace is essential for the support of learning that has taken place. Furthermore, it is in the workplace where applied competence needs to be demonstrated (Broad and Newstrom, 1992:122-123).

8.11.3.2 Mentor coordinators

Where large-scale mentoring programmes are launched, mentor coordinators need to be appointed to ensure that the process is implemented and maintained to the advantage of the learners as well as the organisation. Typically these individuals would also audit the process to ensure its continued effectiveness.

8.11.3.3 Identifying and orientating mentors and learners

Mentors and learners are identified and orientated as to their roles and responsibilities as per the learning that needs to occur. They are also orientated as per their role and responsibilities in the mentoring relationship.

8.11.3.4 Matching mentors and learners

Ideally, the linkages between the mentor and learners should be a natural process. There are times where it is necessary to ensure that all learners are linked to a mentor and have a mentoring relationship at a formal level.

8.11.3.5 Developmental goal-setting

The mentor and learners have a dialogue where the developmental goals are set. It is the standards or qualification that serves as basis for this discussion. Part of this discussion includes the quality of evidence required to comply with the standards or qualification.

8.11.3.6 Negotiating learning contracts

To ensure that there is clarity as to what is to be achieved, a learning contract serves as a mechanism to ensure effective communication and understanding. Knowles (1990:212-217) provides guidelines for the use of learning contracts. These suggestions are useful in the documenting of what needs to be achieved and how the achievements will be evaluated.

Learning contract			
Learner	_____		
Mentor	_____		
Learning programme _____			
Learning outcomes	Learning resources and strategies	Evidence of performance	Criteria and means to validate evidence

(Adapted from Knowles, 1990:214).

8.11.3.7 Developing developmental plans

Developmental plans document the development required as well as the feedback and progress made. Cilliers (1995:32) provides a format for this document.

Individual development plan			
Learner details			
Name	Date of birth		
Goal			
Action plans	Target dates	Resources needed/ arranged	Progress evaluation

Mentor signature	Learner signature
Date	Date

8.11.3.8 Setting goals

For the above process to work, goals need to be set. Such goals need to be specific. A helpful acronym is SMART where S = specific or stretched, the goal must be written in language that relates to "specific" and that would "stretch" the learners to perform; M = measurable, there needs to be a ways to ensure that the goal has been achieved or progress has been made; A = achievable, the question being can the result be expected within this time frame?; R = relevant, the task or activity needs to be relevant to the learner (where what needs to be done is not relevant to the learner, the learner will have difficulty in completing what needs to be completed); and T = time frame, where there is a point in time when the result must be available (Parsloe, 1992:141-142).

8.11.3.9 Periodic discussion and feedback

Periodic feedback and discussion are essential to ensure the continued development and support of the learner. This also gives an opportunity to establish progress and provide resources and other aid. All the progress must be recorded so as to provide an indication of what needs to be done in the next review period.

Feedback needs to be done in a manner that would support learning. The mentor must ensure that the feedback session is a dialogue where the learners also have the opportunity to voice ideas and opinions relating to the issues at hand (Naupe, Gericke, Ankamp, Kruger and Van Vuuren, 2000:140). Joubert (1999:107) indicated that a "sandwich" approach is useful in providing feedback using this method. Feedback would first be given on positive issues, for example something the learner has done well, then move to the areas where development is still required, ending off with issues on an area where the learners has performed well again.

De Jongh (1997:122-123) indicates that feedback should be descriptive, specific, in the candidate's interests, useful, given at the right time, clearly formulated and correct. The mentor should be socially minded; refrain from giving demoralising and subjective interpretations; not confuse feedback with value judgements; be open and honest. Finally, the feedback should relate to the learning and how the performance may be improved.

8.11.3.10 Completion of contract

The learning contract is completed when the learners have evidence that all the learning included in the contract has been acquired. The completion would depend on the learners being able to apply what has been learnt.

8.11.3.11 Recognition of learning

Where the programme has focused on a specific qualification or unit standards, arrangement must be made for assessment to have the learning certified and recognised.

8.11.4 Mentor roles

The mentor is likely to act in a number of roles as the relationship develops and is maintained. Cilliers (1995:34) identifies the roles as: teaching, coaching, counselling, sponsoring, facilitating, intervening and networking. These roles would be dependent on the objectives set at that time in the mentoring process.

8.11.4.1 Scope and depth of interventions of mentors

Intervention by the mentors will require varying degrees of effort and resources. These will depend on what needs to be accomplished to achieve a specific outcome. For example, where a learner needs resources, the mentor would sponsor the learner, whereas where specific skills are required, time would be spent to ensure that learners acquire that skill.

Intervention			
Depth of intervention	Intervention type	Focus	Outcome
Low	Sponsoring	Learning	Achievement of learning outcomes
	Organisation intervention	Intercedes on behalf of learner	Protection
	Counselling	Psychological support	Higher self-esteem, confidence, solutions to specific problems related to achievement of outcomes
	Coaching	Guidance, support and encouragement	New skills and knowledge
High	Teaching	Sharing information and knowledge	Awareness, understanding and knowledge

(Adapted from Cilliers, 1995:37; Parslow, 1992:52).

8.11.4.2 Developmental intervention based on knowledge

As part of the support, the intervention would include specific training, the sharing of experience, role-modelling and the sharing of wisdom (Cilliers, 1995:37-38).

8.11.4.3 Development intervention based on skills

As part of the support, the intervention would include providing practice of skill required, coaching the learners as to how the skill must be performed and allowing and creating opportunity to exercise the skill in the context (Cilliers, 1995:38).

8.11.4.4 Development intervention based on value or attitudes

As part of the support, the intervention would include the promotion of a positive mental attitude and determining the reason for an attitude or value in the context (Cilliers, 1995:38).

8.12 Conclusion

Learner support includes most of the issues not always directly related to the learning programme, but that are often critical to the success of learners. Learner support takes care of the issues that are often diffuse and difficult to define for the ETD practitioner. It is in this area that the learner often achieves success because of the diligence and care of the ETD practitioner.

Learner support is essential if the learning gained is to impact positively on the business when the learning is transferred to the workplace.

8.13 Case study

Supafast Technologies is a technology-based organisation that provides equipment to the mining industry. Business has been done in the Gauteng area up till now. There are possibilities of diversifying its business to accommodate changes in the mining area in which the company has been doing business for the past 5 years. Initially it was staffed with people who entered the organisation already trained in the various disciplines. Due to the expansion of the organisation as well as recent legislation, less qualified staff have been recruited to make the workforce more representative of the population.

The recruitment of the staff has focused more on representation issues than on technical skills. It has now come to the attention of the training manager that staff are not ready to do more technically orientated work because training is taking longer that had been planned for. Furthermore, it has come to the manager's attention that some of the learners have had difficulty in finding suitable accommodation, and others have started to look for additional work to support their families in the country areas.

continued