

Language Learning Advising and Advisers: Establishing the Profile of an Emerging Profession

MARINA MOZZON-McPHERSON
University of Hull, The Language Institute

1. Introduction

The shift from a teacher-led to a more learner-centred approach has involved a repositioning of the teacher and a reappraisal of his/her skills. In some cases, it has meant the emergence of a new professional role distinct from the teacher; in others, it involved a repositioning of the teacher and the acquisition of new skills, with consequences for professional development programmes. New terms, such as 'facilitator', 'mentor', 'counsellor', 'adviser', 'helper', 'learner support officer' and 'consultant', have appeared to try to characterise this change and mark new skills and functions (Mozzon-McPherson, 2001).

The change in name makes both teachers and learners stop and think of what characterises the difference between the words.

'... The other advantage is that from a professional point of view it is important to have new professional functions officially recognised as this goes along with career paths, professional acceptance, promotion, training opportunities etc.' (Esch, 1994: 53).

This paper will analyse the skills of advising—and its differences with teaching— within the HE context in the discipline of second/foreign language learning. It will do so by

- examining the concepts underpinning the practice of advising and the skills attributed to advisers
- contrasting such new set of skills with those of teaching
- providing examples of advising practice
- characterising the professional training necessary to acquire such new set of skills

It will be observed that:

1. interpretations of autonomous learning have affected definitions of advising and the profile of advisers;

2. practices of advising are determined by the expectations of institutions towards self-access and autonomy;
3. through training programmes and research projects, advisers are gradually establishing a community of practice which is informing future professional roles.

The notion of practice and professional identity will be central in this paper's argument and provides the conceptual framework to describe how advisers operate at the University of Hull, how their practice is compatible with the notion of autonomous learning and how their specific training has contributed to the development of a professional qualification and an emerging community of practice.

2. Concepts underpinning the practice of advising

When describing the practice of advising five underpinning concepts come to the fore:

Firstly, independent learning is a capacity to reflect on the learning experience, determine objectives, define content, select the appropriate methods and techniques, monitor and evaluate progress. As such, it needs to be encouraged through reflection, interaction and active participation in the learning process (Dickinson, 1987). It is essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning (Little, 1991)

Secondly, learning is a dynamic process of negotiation, which involves an individual and a social component (Vygotsky, 1978)

Thirdly, in such dialogic process of negotiation language functions as a pedagogic tool to achieve self-awareness (Ferrara, 1994)

Fourthly, language learning is culture learning; it involves the whole person as it questions the learners' identity, values and beliefs (Riley, 1997)

Finally, for change to make sense and create an impact it is essential to reflect and research on our practices (Riley, 1996, Mozzon-McPherson, 2001).

Central to the role of the language adviser is the notion that the learning support given needs to be applicable to situations outside the immediate advising sessions. This means that advisers provide 'a frame', a set of conditions within which learners can have or hold the responsibility of some or all the decisions concerning aspects of their learning, from stating their aims to determining their objectives to defining the contents, selecting methods and techniques and finally evaluating the process and the knowledge. All these stages appear, to a lesser or greater extent, in an advising session with one or more aspects dominating a session. Through this dialogic process, advisers can promote, encourage and support the development of learner autonomy.

Different perspectives of autonomy, though, have impacted on theories of advising and affected the profile of advisers. For example, if autonomy is seen as

'the act of learning a language outside the educational framework of an institution and without the intervention of a teacher' (Benson's technical vision 1997:19), then the main concern becomes how to equip learners with skills and techniques to cope effectively with this individual and individualised context. Emphasis is therefore put on organisational and technical aspects of learning. Many of these elements will be pre-determined and shifted in a different space: the self-access centre or the online environment. Teachers become material developers and assessors. Advisers become resource managers. Both teachers and advisers continue to operate in the same learning paradigm just in a different environment. The type of staff training required will be focused on the use of IT and other equipment.

If, on the other hand, autonomy is defined as ability and a capacity (Holec, 1981), then such development is interpreted as a transformation within the individual. It can happen anywhere, at any stage of life and in different degrees, as it ultimately involves a psychological and social relation between the learner, what is to be learnt and other stakeholders (other learners, teachers, advisers, the institution, the wider language community, etc.). In this case, a different set of professional skills is required to trigger change and transformation. Emphasis is on the learner-teacher relationship with the teacher in an adviser's role. The space, within which such interaction takes place, can be the classroom, the self-access centre or online.

We should, though, not assume that all learners share our expectations and assumptions and that just because we believe in promoting autonomous learning, our teaching/advising will necessarily support it. That is why teachers/advisers need to keep checking that their attempts to promote learner autonomy are not undermined by their own pre-conceived ideas and assumptions.

The second key concept in advising is that learning involves an individual and social experience as our identities are partly decided by others. Our social identity is the sum of all the sub-groups of which we are members. For example, J. M-B. is Spanish, is from Barcelona, is Catalan, is Catholic, he has two brothers, he is a student in his year abroad, he speaks English well, he plays rugby, learns French and Dutch, he is taking a degree in Business and Economics etc. Obviously such a list can never be exhaustive and many of these categories will change with time. Many will be signalled linguistically and through the use of specific discourse strategies. When an adviser engages in a learning conversation with J.M-B., the adviser will need to be sensitive to these many markers and their manifestations (his beliefs, his attitudes, his assumptions of language learning, his expectations from the adviser, his motivation etc.) and raise the level of sensitivity of the student to such markers. This is why it is a key activity in an advising session to clarify roles and expectations to avoid letting each other down. (Pemberton & Toogood, 2001)

If independence is not a methodology but it is a capacity to reflect on the learning experience, then a good practitioner needs to reflect the same dynamism

and cannot reproduce repetitive sets of techniques, which do not change to mirror the evolving learning needs. Like learners, the teacher in the advising model is encouraged to observe, analyse, demonstrate, reflect and revise his/her practice. To this purpose this reflective practitioner needs to create a community of practice with whom to share, compare, evaluate, develop, adapt practices. To carry out the latter, a research-aware approach is paramount to establish mechanisms and criteria to measure and monitor the effective use of resources and strategies in relation to learning, to measure the impact of advising discourse onto learning outcomes, to form and inform the practice of advising.

To achieve the establishment of a community of practice amongst advisers an electronic network (PLAN-Professional Language Advisers' Network) has been set up, an interest group has been established to cater for the needs of advisers both at institutional, national (AULC-Association of University Language Centres, <http://www.aulc.org>) and European level (European Language Council TNP1&2, <http://www.taalnet.rug.ac.be/tnp/>). Finally a qualification, fully delivered online, has been developed and it is currently in its second year. So far over 40 practitioners from all over the world have taken this qualification (<http://www.hull.ac.uk/langinst/ma/pg-cert.htm>).

3. Key Principles of Advising

Identity awareness is at the core of the counselling theories, and in particular Carl Rogers' person-centred approach (1969), which emphasises the importance of respect for the whole person. This approach sees the counsellor as a facilitator of change by accepting and understanding the client and offering a genuine insight into his/her own person. Core conditions for a relationship between counsellor and client are empathy, respect and genuineness; if these conditions are present, the client becomes more self-aware and self-reliant. In a learner-centred approach the same conditions apply. Genuineness in the adviser-learner context means transparency so that strengths and weaknesses can be weighed. Unconditional positive regard means that the learner will feel accepted in his/her individuality and will not have to 'perform' to please the adviser. Finally, empathy can be used to create and reinforce an understanding between the adviser and the learner on a personal and factual level.

Listening to learners responses, rather than talking over their heads, has also been required in language teaching but counselling goes a step further in considering the messages contained in non-verbal clues such as body language, voice tones and pauses, etc. Reflective skills provide simple techniques to communicate understanding and empathy, and allow the learner to exploit his/her own needs, goals, plans etc.

To this purpose, the adviser will pay particular attention to the way he/she constructs knowledge and to the way he/she uses language as pedagogic tool

in this process. Language and discourse are at the heart of this counselling relationship whereby “*Discourse is more complex than the simple concatenation of monologues into conversation. People create meaning for each other. Reality is jointly created as bits and pieces of one’s own and other’s talk are interwoven [...].*” (Ferrara, 1994: 6)

It is a two way process where both adviser and learner influence are influencing each other. **The adviser** establishes a trusting and non-threatening relationship by showing respect; attending; showing empathy and listening. **The learner** determines the *content* and *direction* of the interview. **The adviser** responds through identification of feelings; self-expression of feelings; reflection (on content and feelings) and ensuring accurate understanding. **The adviser**, rather than the learner, *initiates* and *leads* through information and advice giving; support and encouragement; questioning and problem clarification; interpretation and summarising. **The adviser** assists learners in reaching *practical solutions* by suggesting directions, negotiating goals, gaining commitment, anticipating situations and assessing results.

Such process emphasises self-help, as the key aim is to help learners take responsibility for their learning; it stresses choice, as it helps learners become better choosers; it focuses on the needs and problems of learning. To succeed in this task a number of skills, or interventions, are selectively used by the adviser. What follows are two short extracts from advising sessions at Hull. Extract one refers to a session between this adviser and a learner of German. Extract 2 regards a session with a learner of English as a Foreign Language. For confidentiality, the learners’ identities have been disguised. In [] are reported the skills used by the adviser.

Extract 1

L: *I need to improve my grammar.*

A: *What do you mean by improving your grammar? [Asking for clarification]*

L: *Well ... my last essay had lots of mistakes*

A: *What type of mistakes? [questioning]*

L: *Everything*

A: *Everything? PAUSE [repeating- mirroring]*

L: *Yes, well, mainly verbs and endings*

A: *That’s better. It must be very daunting to try to deal with everything [encouraging and empathising]*

L: *Yes it is [Smiles]. I do not know where to start.*

A: *Of which verbs are you talking about? Any particular tenses? PAUSE [eliciting information]*

L: *Not sure. I think it is the subjective*

A: *Does your tutor mark what type of error it is? [linking]*

L: *Yes!*

A: *Have you got a system to record errors? [confronting]*

L: No, not really. I just look through the essay

A: Let's have a look at this list of possible errors and see if you can recognise some of yours(L8) [attending and linking]

The adviser helped this learner to de-construct the initial generalisation into something more specific and therefore easier to deal with. She did this by using specific counselling skills such as paraphrasing and rephrasing, repeating, pausing, empathising and linking. At times, pauses can be rather daunting both for the advisers and for the learners and providing choices can help the flow of the conversation and gradually build a relationship of trust. She then proceeds by examining how to classify errors and proposes a grid (adaptable per language) which the student can use to track future work and monitor progress [Appendix].

One of the qualities of a good adviser is not to impose or prescribe the best recipe, but ask and trigger replies and solutions, which function best on the learner's own terms, however innovative or traditional they may be. Nevertheless, people's internal maps sometimes create problems and limitations on their learning and an adviser can use a range of techniques to help learners clarify the element of a pattern, or the sequencing of elements, or both, and to replace the pattern which created the limitation. The second extract is an example of the above.

L6 approached the adviser because he felt unable to take notes at lectures. He was convinced that taking notes in lectures was very important, and he was getting very frustrated at his inability to do so successfully.

Extract 2

A: Why do you take notes? [confronting]

L: Because otherwise I cannot remember what has been said

A: What happens when you take notes? [questioning]

L: I try to write as much as I can

A: Try? Does it mean that you write every single word? [repeating & interpreting]

L: Yes!

A: Does it work? [confronting]

L: No, because after a few lines I have lost what he said so I have half finished sentences

A: What happens at this stage? [questioning]

L: I switch off and panic because I feel I am wasting my time.

A: You must be feeling very frustrated by this stage? [empathising/reflecting feelings]

L: yes, I really do not like lectures

A: I can understand. What do you do next? [empathising & linking]

L: write what I can and then try to link what I have at the end

A: How do you do that? Do you re-write the piece in a sentence, do you

make bullet points; do you compare notes with a friend... [questioning & interpreting]

L: Yes!. I do it in a sentence.

After some negotiation, they agreed he should stop taking notes and ask a mate to pass his notes to him. Two weeks later he returned and informed the adviser that he had followed this advice and found that his mate had left out all sorts of points which he thought were important and that he had realised that for the first time he had actually listened to the content of the lecture and understood a lot more than he thought. He had instead written only a few key concepts and organised some abbreviations to help him in this task. Learning styles were discussed, he did a questionnaire and he appeared to have a high auditory preference. Other possible activities to continue practising this specific type of listening beyond the lectures were discussed. A list of four possible options was drawn: to watch documentary programmes (one speaker only at a time) and take notes, to read ahead of the lecture and prepare some notes, to share with a mate and fill any gaps, to practise summarising key concepts.

The above examples show that in language learning there are many other elements that intervene and may interfere with the actual learning of the linguistic content. Often it takes time and patience to discover what causes an unsuccessful learning experience. To develop a trusting relationship requires time and ability to listen, and the genuine disposition to continue such a learning conversation. Given the constraints and pressures under which teachers currently work, it can be very tempting to by-pass these stages and issue the learner with a 'solution pill'.

Learners also appreciate the opportunity to talk to an expert who is not their tutor because it allows them to relax and express their views without fear of being judged, and with the freedom to take or leave the advice provided.

The next section will address in more depth the tools and skills used by advisers at Hull.

4. The tools and skills of language learning advisers

We define roles on many grounds; one of them is the space within which we operate. Teachers are in school and classrooms, secretaries and managers are in offices, technicians in workshops, and advisers in self-access centres. The shift of operative space has been significant in describing the professional development of a new role complementary to the traditional teacher (Mozzon-McPherson, 1996). This, possibly oversimplified, definition of advisers based on where they interact, has, in some cases, meant a physical non-negotiated displacement of the traditional teacher—from the classroom into the self-access centre—and has caused confusion and scepticism amongst some teachers who

felt 'used' and 'de-skilled'. Some aspects of this shift may also give the impression of disempowerment within the institutional structure. Where a continuum is maintained between the classroom, the self-access centre and the online environment, the focus moves from the role to the skills of advising necessary to promote, encourage and support learners in a wide range of contexts, beyond set schemes and fixed institutional agendas, set types of users and learning practices.

At Hull, the learner who comes to the centre is somebody who, for personal or external reasons, has identified a series of needs to practise or expand his/her knowledge of a particular language or to start a new language. It could be a member of staff, an undergraduate who needs to go for a field trip in a particular country and has to improve/ learn a language, a student who wants to keep up a language already learnt but no longer part of his curriculum, a member of the local/business community who wants to follow a self-study plan at his/her own pace and doesn't want to join a class, a student who has to use the resources because they are part of his course etc.

S/he contacts the adviser to start an individual, personalised programme in which s/he will decide the pace, sequence and mode of learning as well as the content and assessment criteria. Such a learner may need either a preliminary orientation, and subsequent monitoring and discussion with the adviser, or may use the adviser as a source of information (e.g. advice on resources, selection of web pages, access to native speakers, Internet discussion lists, organisations, language societies s/he could join etc.).

The Hull's Open Learning Centre currently hosts resources for 60 languages, with over 20,000 pieces of material in the form of books, audio and videotapes, CDROMs, networked CALL packages. The space sits 110 students and it is an open space with round café-style tables and two rooms dedicated to specific tasks (Room 1 for audio and pronunciation, Room 2 for speaking activities). Resources are easy to browse, all accessible on the shelves; their organisation is simple, with a computerised catalogued to search for specific material and a colour-coded system to identify specific language skills. The opening times are long, flexible and easy to memorise (9:00-9:00 p.m during the semester time). A bookmark has been devised to advertise the centre's facilities and the advisory service throughout the campus. Each student receives a bookmark at an induction session or when he/she visits the centre. Learning guides on effective use of the resources, learning tips and general suggestions for self-study are available in clearly labelled pigeon holes outside the centre, a web page has also been created to further advertise the centre's activities and provide online advice.

The advice is not language-specific, but process-related. Three key elements are repeatedly highlighted:

- 1) the voluntary approach – the initial contact is made by the learner;
- 2) the focus on 'learning by doing' followed by reflection and reinterpretation;

- 3) the engagement in social interaction – the negotiation of roles, attitudes and beliefs which frame knowledge.

Whilst there are collective sessions (learner-training courses), the focus is on small group or individual advising. There are other forms of learning support present at Hull: 'on the spot' learning support, which permits immediate intervention and happens in the self-access centre, and the 'help-desk', developed specifically for an online environment.

One of the crucial pre-requisites for fostering the development of an independent learning approach is to know the learners: who is the self-access centre's learner? Why does he/she come? What does he/she do? How does he/she use the centre? What expectations does he/she have? What assumptions about language learning does he/she have?

These questions are asked in any introductory advising session through the use of a needs analysis [Appendix]. Some other essential steps for acquiring this knowledge can be:

- the use of learner profiling;
- analysis of learning patterns;
- development of study plans and learner diaries/portfolios;
- resource audits;
- provision of learner training workshops (listening strategies, reading, mnemonic skills, time management, goal setting, understanding grammar, analysing needs, etc.).

The advisers at Hull are involved in all these activities at different stages of their practice, including auditing self-access use. For example, we are in the process of re-assessing our self-access facilities in relation to disability issues. We have already conducted an initial survey of the environment with regard to learners with dyslexia and this resulted in the publication of guidelines for learners and for teachers [<http://www.hull.ac.uk/langinst/olc/dyslexia.htm>] to facilitate independent learning.

Observing and actively listening what is happening in a busy self-access centre is one of the first activities a new adviser is recommended to carry out. The purpose of this training task is to refine the ethnographic skills of the adviser-to-be and to learn to refrain from pre-emptive judgements.

Good knowledge of cognitive, meta-cognitive and affective strategies is another key component in the portfolio of a good language learning adviser. According to Dickinson (1994), a successful language learner:

- is able to identify his/her objectives and complement or supplement them with the teacher's ones (or resources if in complete open learning mode);
- can select and deploy appropriate strategies to accomplish tasks;

- can monitor his/her development and switch to other strategies when necessary;
- he/she seeks for assistance when appropriate and
- creates his/her network of 'dependencies' interpreting them as useful resources for learning.

An adviser can help create the right conditions for this to happen. One possible context is a learner development programme. At the University of Hull, advisers organise a series of learner development workshops aimed at specific language abilities (listening, reading, writing, grammar, memory, etc.) or resources. In each session some new strategies are introduced, practised, evaluated. Alongside strategies specific to language learning, other more generic strategies are introduced: time management, communication strategies, goal setting, strategies to identify the appropriate resources, repair strategies to mention some.

Cohen (1990: 5) defines learning strategies as '*processes, which are consciously selected by the learner*' The element of choice is important here, because this is what gives a strategy its special character. The notion of strategies is associated to an element of consciousness and part of the work carried out in learner training is consciousness raising to empower the learner of his/her own learning process. Strategies are not good or bad in themselves but they are only as good or bad as the use that is made of them. They can be used effectively. Strategies can be observed, analysed, rehearsed, learnt. There are a variety of strategies. Strategies to select the appropriate resources, to group them for easier learning, to retrieve learnt materials, to storage information: is that piece of material useful for my vocabulary, for my grammar? How do I retrieve it? How do I store it? Where? How further can I manipulate it? In what other contexts can I use it?

For example, one advisee used to learn by heart every time she could not understand concepts in business French. This particular strategy — a cover strategy— had worked for her for a long time. She was aware it was not helping her (as she was forgetting everything soon after a test, making her see the whole exercise as a waste of time) but the positive outcomes (good marks) made her continue to use it. However, she reached a point in her second year at university where the complexity of the texts and the sheer amount of work in all her subjects did not allow her brain to cope with the level of memorisation task she had to accomplish regularly to be able to cope in class. She approached this adviser and started a learning strategy programme aimed at analysing the reading task and applying a new set of strategies to deal with its complexity. She was introduced to note-taking and mind-mapping, gradually learnt to analyse text, simplify complex concepts in words and re-elaborate these concepts into sentences, link it to similar concepts in her native culture. The training was intensive, but, with the guidance of the adviser and her motivation to find a more efficient and effective way to learn, she managed to overcome her difficulties

and appreciate her second year courses more. What was, at first, a gigantic and insoluble problem, had solutions that she could find for herself through dialogue with an adviser. She attended 7 advising sessions and then kept in touch via email. She reported higher marks, increased self-confidence and enjoyment of her course. She also mentioned transferring some of the newly acquired strategies to her other subjects.

Although the work on strategies has made autonomy more practical -and therefore accessible to the practitioner- at times, it may have created the impression that it is a set of skills acquired by learners and taught by teachers and/or advisers. This approach supports the traditional teacher-learner model and a notion of knowledge that can be either transmitted or discovered. Due to lack of appropriate training in counselling skills and discourse analysis, teachers/advisers may limit themselves to providing practical strategic training. This lends itself to the acquisition of surface features of a radical innovation (autonomy) into a conservative paradigm.

The positive feedback received by students attending informal workshops (open to anyone learning a language) has made us formalise the process, so that alongside the organisation of regular workshops we also created two credit-bearing programmes (Managing Language Learning at University) targeting language degree students. Such programmes are delivered by the language advisers and are assessed through a set of reflective accounts and classroom tests. A research project was conducted in 2001 to evaluate the impact of these modules on learning outcomes (i.e. motivation, self-confidence, better language performance, etc.).

Another component that intervenes in strategy training is awareness of learning styles and their impact on resource selection and use. It is important for an adviser to explore the style preferences of a learner when seeking for advice, as these could interfere with the learning process if there is no conscious awareness of what is happening while performing a language task. This may hinder the evaluation of the performance, as the result may not always be immediately brilliant. De-motivation and a sense of frustration may follow as the learner falls back to old habits as a 'comfort zone'.

Learners contact an adviser with all sorts of myths about language learning and it is one of the adviser's tasks to actively listen to such pre-conceptions and help, if necessary, to modify some and relate them to information about factors which contribute to successful language learning.

'Mainly it's that I've lost my confidence and consequently my coherence in spoken German, as I only have one hour of German Oral each week in which we discuss v. esoteric things in a classroom situation I find it inhibiting and a little bit intimidating'

His concern is oral German. He also needs to deal with his current de-motivation and anxiety. He has lost it when, how, why? How was he when he had confidence? Observe how are other more confident fellow students? What types

of activities are carried out? Can you describe them? He subsequently may need strategies to prepare and make the most of that only hour.

Below are briefly reported some other examples of assumptions collected from Hull advisees

'you need more grammar when you write than when you speak'
'you need to start from the beginning of a book and follow it through'
'to learn a language means to be able to speak it like a native'
'to learn a language means to memorise list of vocabulary'

These representations constitute the learners' reality (Riley, 1994) and they affect the way they manage the learning task, the way they set themselves targets and they select and evaluate their progress.

Continuity of concern is another key feature of language advising. The adviser at Hull has a first meeting/interview with the learner during which she listens to his/her needs, discusses previous learning background and assumptions, negotiates and draws a preliminary action plan, organises further sessions and feedback, as appropriate. The preliminary session usually takes between 30-45 minutes depending on the level of information provided in advance to the adviser (now possible via a pre-interview arranged via e-mail). If the approach of fostering a better understanding of language learning and a more effective use of study skills is to be implemented, then time needs to be allocated for this important learning dialogue. Patience, tolerance and flexibility are three main characteristics of a good language adviser.

Regular e-mail or written correspondence from the adviser are very welcome by the self-access learner, who feels considered as an individual, receiving special attention. Email is also for some the first channel of communication where they test the other's expertise before actually booking a face-to-face session. For others, email is like keeping a diary/log and it helps them stay on track. At Hull the use of e-mail has successfully helped learners to keep in regular contact with the adviser. The majority of learners readily are happy to be contacted by email, and once the adviser has a contact address, it is easier to rekindle the motivation in a student who, for various reasons, is drifting away.

At Hull we currently assist over 2,000 students of which on average 250 attend advising sessions at least twice and about 100 see an adviser more than twice. We also have 40 students a year who follow the accredited strategy-based programme.

5. Contrasting advising skills with those of teaching

As we have observed in the previous examples, some of the stages in the development of a good advising session are:

- Establishing a relationship
- Responding
- Leading
- Changing behaviour

During the whole process, both parties will be in learning and teaching roles. This form of two-way interaction, which considers the learner as a whole person, constitutes an essential part of the training for advisers. The adviser's expertise depends on his/her knowledge about the learner and the trusting relationship they manage to build. There is no shift of responsibilities and boundaries of responsibilities. The adviser is in a helping role, but the learner is, in effect, helping him/herself and when he/she arrives at a certain negotiated target, the fulfilment is very personal and lasting because of the involvement in the learning process and the sense of empowerment and ownership reached by succeeding.

A fundamental difference between teaching and advising practices exists at the level of discourse. Riley (1985,1997) and Kelly (1996) examine the nature of the interaction between advisers and learners as a distinctive feature of advising in relation to teaching. Kelly (1996:94) extends this notion of learning conversation and defines it as a *'form of therapeutic dialogue that enables an individual to manage a problem.'* She describes the transformation, which anyone—students or staff—involved in self-directed learning, has to undergo as one that challenges beliefs about language and perceptions of their roles as learners/teachers. She continues by stating that, although learner-training programmes may directly or indirectly lead to this transformation, counselling provides the framework to develop new ways of interacting with learners. Kelly distinguishes between two sets of skills -macro and micro. Whilst many good teachers may recognise themselves in using some of the macro skills (guiding, modelling, giving feedback, supporting, evaluating, etc.), it is the second set of skills (attending, restating, paraphrasing, questioning, confronting, reflecting feelings, empathising) which contributes to distinguishing advising from teaching and associates it with counselling therapy.

6. Development of the professional skills

To exercise this advising function effectively, the adviser has to be aware of him/herself as a learner and has to become very conscious of the way in which he/she uses language as a tool to negotiate meanings and reflect on the process. To support this process, new advisers are asked to learn a new language and to try to do so in self-study. We also ask advisers-to-be to act as supporting agents during this process and log their reflections on themselves as learners and their gradual changes in roles and skills.

The professional qualification of Language Advising, set up by the University of Hull, considers this aspect very closely in its training through extensive discourse analysis of advising and teaching sessions, in order to bring to the fore the underpinning elements which drive learners-advisers/learners-teachers interactions and the impact such encounters have on learning. Below is a comment from an adviser who is taking the course.

'I am definitely becoming a 'broker' and do transfer elements from the course to my professional environment for example by introducing advising skills into my teaching. Like [name]., I find counselling skills and elements of discourse analysis particularly useful. Being on the course has enriched my understanding of learning, made me more confident and strengthened my position within the department.

(PG2002/2003)

Riley (1985,1997) examines the adviser-learner interaction from a sociolinguistic perspective, and claims that this type of analysis is fundamental to understand the discursive world of advising and to prepare advisers. Voller, Martyn and Pickard (1999) provide another example of analysis of advising interactions that offers useful suggestions for the preparation of advisers and highlights the sensitivity to diversity of educational contexts and national cultures. Esch (1997:171) contends that the learning conversation is paramount in the promotion of learner autonomy. The learning discourse in the counsellor-learner interaction is also the focus of recent work by Crabbe, Hoffmann, and Cotterall (2001), which addresses the impact of counselling interviews on language learners' strategic thinking and behaviour. Gardner and Miller (1999:180) devote a chapter to 'counselling' and provide a comparative table listing salient features of teaching and advising. They conclude that counselling requires a significant shift in attitude on the part of both the adviser and the learner, and a specific competence to deal with the complexity of the task.

7. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that a complex set of skills, which cannot be acquired overnight, or by the simple transfer of rooms or adoption of different tools, is required to perform the task of advising. Esch (1997: 171) maintains that the knowledge of second language acquisition, teaching and learning theories and methodologies are fundamental pre-requisites of a good language adviser and should be part of a professional development programme, but they are not enough. Advising required skilled judgment and this calls for skilled personnel. We cannot therefore expect that all teachers suddenly acquire the expertise that language counselling requires. Also all teachers cannot be expected to show an open attitude towards this change of approach to their job.

It can be argued that using counselling skills is not a role in itself but something important to enhance the performance of another role. They play a defining part in shaping a professional role. Whatever side of the argument one wants to take, to be a successful adviser or to apply advising skills successfully, an appropriate staff development programme is necessary.

Different approaches to advising have either called for a new way of teaching, for a separate professional role, or for a combination of collaborative work between two roles but with some integrated functions. Each may be valuable in its own right provided an appropriate staff development programme is available to ensure a reorientation of the teacher and his/her discourse which can in fact be 'compatible with' and supportive of the radical notion of learner autonomy. The paper presented the advising practice adopted by Hull, which has both professional advisers and teachers with advising skills.

Changes in technological, social and economic systems appear to be causing a widespread softening of the demarcations between professionals, so that the boundaries may eventually not be as distinct. In this increasingly fluid environment, it is apparent that both old and new professions have to confront change and indeed initiate it on occasion. Where a new profession appears on the scene, a place in the existing hierarchy needs to be found. The role of the language adviser is currently undergoing this process of establishing its identity and status. It has done so by establishing a name and attaching to it a set of skills and tools to define it and distinguish it from others. Through its current professional qualification, they are developing shared practices, establishing a shared code of practice, a meta-language to describe what they do and create a sense of belonging and membership.

Bibliographical references

- BENSON, P. 'The philosophy and politics of learner autonomy', in BENSON P. & VOLLER P. (eds.). *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. pp.18-34 (Longman, 1997)
- COHEN, A.D. (1998) *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. New York: Longman
- CRABBE, D.; HOFFMAN, A.; COTTERALL, S. (2001) 'Examining the discourse of learner advisory sessions', in DAM. L. (ed.) *AILA Review* 15. pp. 2-15
- DICKINSON, L. *Self-instruction in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, 1987
- DICKINSON, L. 'Preparing learners: toolkit requirement for preparing/orienting learners', in ESCH, E. (ed.). *Self-Access and the Adult Language Learner*. pp. 39-49. CILT, 1994
- ESCH, E. (ed.) 'Learner support: interacting with learners' in ESCH, E. (ed.) *Self-Access and the Adult Language Learner*. CILT, 1994
- ESCH, E. 'Learner training for autonomous language learning', in BENSON, P. & VOLLER P. (eds.). *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. pp. 164-176. Longman, 1997

- GARDNER, D.; MILLER, L. *Establishing Self-Access: from theory to practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1999
- HOLEC, H. *Autonomy in Foreign Language Learning*. Pergamon, 1981
- KELLY, R. 'Language counselling for learner autonomy', in PEMBERTON R. *et al.* (eds.), *Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning*. pp. 93-113. Hong Kong University Press, 1996
- LITTLE, D. *Learner Autonomy 1: definitions, issues and problems*. Dublin: Authentik, 1991
- MOZZON-MCPHERSON, M. 'The Language Adviser: a new type of teacher', in LITTLE D. & VOSS B. (eds.). *Language Centres: Planning for the New Millenium*, pp. 97-109. CercleS, 1996
- MOZZON-MCPHERSON, M.; VISMANS, R. (2001) *Beyond Language Teaching Towards Language Advising*. London: CILT
- OXFORD, R. *Language Learning Strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1990
- PEMBERTON, R.; TOOGOOD, S.; HO, S.; LAM J. 'Learner and adviser expectations in a self-directed language-learning programme: a case study of four learners and four advisers' (unpublished paper, presented at 5th Cercles Conference, Bergamo, 1998)
- RILEY, P. *Discourse and learning: papers in applied linguistics and language learning from the Centre de Recherchers et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues*. Longman, 1985
- RILEY, P. (1994) Aspects of learner discourse: why listening to learners is so important, in ESCH E. (ed.). *Self-Access and the Adult Language Learner*. pp 7-18. London: CILT
- RILEY, P. 'The blind man and the bubble': researching self-access, in PEMBERTON, R.; LI E.S.L.; OR W.W.F.; PIERSON, H.D. (eds.). *Taking Control: Autonomy in Language Learning*. pp. 251-264. Hong Kong University Press, 1996
- RILEY, P. 'The guru and the conjurer: aspects of counselling for self-access', in BENSON P.; VOLLER, P. (eds.), *Autonomy and Independence in Language Learning*. pp.114-131. Longman, 1997
- ROGERS, C. (1969) *Freedom to learn for the 80's*. Columbus, OH: Merrill
- VYGOTSKY, L. (1978) *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- VOLLER, P.; MARTYN, E.; PICKARD, V. 'One-to-one counselling for autonomous learning in self-access centre: final report on an action learning project', in COTTERALL, S.; CRABBE, D. *Learner Autonomy in Language Learning: Defining the field and effecting change*. pp. 111-126. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999
- WARDEN FERRARA, K. (1994) *Therapeutic ways with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

m.mozzon-mcpherson@hull.ac.uk

<http://www.hull.ac.uk/longinst/ma/pg-cert.htm>

Appendix

Language Learning Needs Analysis

Please complete as much of this form as you can before meeting an Open Learning Adviser. The advisers will be happy to offer guidance on completing any sections you are uncertain about.

Background-general

Surname / family name:

First name:

Tel.

Address in Hull:

Email:

Department

Please, circle the correct description

Undergraduate Postgraduate Exchange Bridge Staff Other
1, 2, 3, 4

Linguistic Background

1. Native Language:
2. If you have knowledge of any other languages, which one(s)?
3. Which language(s) do you want to learn / improve?
4. What is your current language level? Please circle as appropriate:
Beginner Post-beginner Upper intermediate Advanced Intermediate?
5. What is your motivation for learning / improving the language(s)?

Time available for studying the language(s)

Time per week (in addition to any taught classes):

Particular times you may be able to set aside:

Strengths and weaknesses

1. How would you estimate your language skills? E.g. weak, adequate, good, etc...

Listening:

Writing:

Speaking:

Reading:

2. Please indicate any particular problem(s) you are aware of.

Past learning experience

Please tick (as often as you like):

A. How you were taught language(s) in the past

B. The approach(es) you think suit you best

	A	B		A	B		A	B
Reading			Repeating			Translating		
Writing			Doing role play			Learning rules		
Listening			Viewing			Working out rules		
Speaking			Grammar exercises			Playing lang. games		

3. Tick the areas you **most** need to pay particular attention and improve at the moment.

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Discriminating between sounds				
Pronunciation				
Understanding the gist				
Understanding details				
Range of vocabulary				
Variety of structures				
Spelling				
Grammar				
Accuracy				
Fluency				
Responding to the unexpected				
Cultural awareness				

What next (goals, activities, self-assessment...)?

Open Learning Advisory Service. Language Institute, Room 128, Ferens Building.
langadvising@hull.ac.uk