

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF COUNSELLORS FOR PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The importance of training and development of counsellors for pre-primary schools and the growing need for reformation in education in general formed the basis for this paper. The paper examined the concept of training and development and the importance of pre-primary education. Highlighted also is the rationale for training and development of counsellors for successful pre-primary education. Consequently, the paper discussed strategies for this training and development while stressing some bottlenecks which might be envisaged. As one major way forward, the paper advocated that the Federal and the state Governments train many more counsellors and have them posted to pre-primary schools for a more functional education.

Introduction

In recent times, the education of the young child has witnessed increased appreciation because childhood years refer to period of great learning. The emphasis accorded to early childhood education is in keeping with its potential to shape life long patterns of behaviour. The nature of education and care that the child receives in the first five years of life is crucial to his or her overall development and later life chances. Education and care of children is a basic human right and the best interests of the child must be an overriding issue therefore, the role of educators in the training and development of counsellors for these children especially those in pre-primary schools must be emphasized.

The pre-primary school, being the pivot on which other levels of schooling rotate, must therefore, be of good quality as it is to a large extent a determining factor for good performance at subsequent levels. Counsellors who, in the formalized educational service aim at helping the individual as a unique person to understand himself well enough to be able to make appropriate decisions for himself (Denga, 1983), need to be duly trained, developed, fully equipped and posted to these pre-primary schools to help prepare the children for the primary level of education. By x-raying the roles of counselling in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of behaviour modification and instruction, and the counsellors being endowed with innate and potent abilities make it imperative that the educators and policy makers have these counsellors trained, developed and incorporated into the pre-primary system of education.

The Concept of Training and Development

The keywords "training" and "development" will first be looked at separately by the author, but will later be merged for clearer understanding. The meaning of "training" varies. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined training as the process of learning the skills that you need to do a job or an activity. While Nadler (2003), defined training as those activities which are designed to improve human performance on the job which the employee is presently doing or is being hired to do. Nwachukwu (1988), saw training as an organizational effort aimed at helping an employee to acquire skills required for the efficient executing of the functions for which he is hired. Anaeke (2003), corroborated this by asserting that training is a way of helping an individual to learn how to carry out satisfactorily the work required of him in his present job. Counsellor training in this concept should involve the acquisition of skills or competence, which is to be used in relation to the specific functions expected to facilitate the laying of sound foundation of the early stage of the children's education (Pre-primary), education. Nadler (2003), posited that "training" involves.

- Planning what people need to know now and in the future to facilitate dynamic change;
- Emphasizing the ability to communicate and apply to ensure that what needs to be known is actually learned and used, and
- To be fully committed to the whole process of human development in helping people learn more about themselves.

Development on the other hand, is that which encompasses the development of the individual's knowledge and skill and at the same time further the goals of the school and the education system Okobiah

(1992), refers to programmes that attempt to improve not only technical but the human relations and the three phases of counselling that the counsellors go through which equip them to effectively handle behaviours in all situations. Development is therefore a gradual growth so that it becomes more advanced and stronger as time goes on. The idea is to help counsellors prepare these children for further leadership and advancement. Furthermore, it assists those having difficulties coping with their present world of work as well as to cope with changes in technology, new skills and improve performance. Therefore, training and development refer to "a planned effort by an organization to facilitate the learning of job-related behaviour" (Wexley and Lantham, 1981). The term "behaviour" is used in a broad sense to include any knowledge and skill acquired by an individual through practices. All the efforts towards the training and development of counsellors should be geared towards equipping them for the challenges of pre-primary education both for the good of the individual and for the wider society.

Rationale for Training and Development of Counsellors for Successful Pre-primary Education

The relevance of counsellor educational training and development for pre-primary education cannot be over-emphasized. Counsellors who have gone through formal/special training eventually develop confidence; inbuilt stability and strong personality that make them train these children to learn to adapt well in the society and become good citizens of the country. They are in a better position to understand the glaring need for a solid foundation for over all education of these children. Education helps them to eliminate ignorance, suspicion, fear and anxiety which are the most common of the vices. Trained counsellors show concern about these children's total development and performance and are able to coach them. This leads to the likelihood of their overall success. Therefore effective Training and Development of Counsellors in various skills and techniques will help in achieving the following benefits:-

- **Laying a Sound Basis for Scientific and Reflective Thinking:-** The Carnegie Task Force on meeting the need of young children (1994), found out that the influence of early environment to brain development is very long lasting. There is ample evidence to show that infants exposed to good nutrition, toys, photographs, illustrations, audio, video clips, texts, rhymes stored in computer playmates have measurably better brain function at twelve years of age than those raised in less stimulating environment. These computer, and other skills transmitted to the kids by their counsellors give them the opportunity to make learning a practical reality. This, in turn, encourages reflective thinking and discourages involvement in irrelevances. Children will learn to see and react to the world around them based on facts and not on distorted views.
- **Developing in the Child the Ability to Adapt to his Changing Environment:-** Exposing Nigerian children to the operations of video clips of rhymes and of information communications Technology (ICT) issues has become desirable for the development of education. It is desirable if the country is to achieve a broad based ICT industrial growth since the acquired knowledge will be transferred to creativity by the children in the future. Supporting this idea (Badru, 2003), stated that, I think it is a good idea to expose the children to the computer or to any other ICT system during their childhood rather than discouraging them therefore counsellors who have acquired the skill should teach them what to do on the PC.
- **The Moulding of Character and Moral Training:-** Most times, counsellors fulfill the need for a role model to shape the child's character. However, bringing the child into close contact with great personalities who have made one mark or the other in the history of the world can go a long way to reinforce a child's resolve to move in the right direction. Moral training is usually based on the scripture. The bible, for example, is now available in CD Rom in a manner that greatly simplifies reference to it. Counsellors who have also received moral training can help these children to guard against crime especially those committed on the net. Counsellors, after education will tend to appreciate the tenets of the culture, respect for the laws of the land, discriminate between the good aspects of the culture and the bad ones. These children will be trained from early childhood in the socio-personal relationship and the appreciation of the above qualities and virtues.

Strategies for Training and Development of Counsellors

Many successful pre-primary education experiments should address certain programmes which are necessary for counsellor training and development. Some of these strategies that can be used for attending to the care and education of the young and which need to be integrated into counsellor education are:-

- **Children's Early Stimulation:-** Early stimulation implies exposure of the child to a rich environment which will provide opportunities for intellectual, social and moral development (Anagbogu, 2002). Thus, the quality of interaction, care and nutrition could go a long way in promoting early intellectual stimulation of the child. This strategy should be directed specifically towards counsellors in pre-primary schools with children between the ages of three to five years. What the training and development programme should focus on is how counsellors should attend to these children, meet their physical needs, give care and attention to ensure their healthy emotional development and play with the children in a way that facilitates their physical and intellectual development. Acquisition of such knowledge should help to focus the children's attention early on the right part to solid educational foundation.

Scientific and Technological Literacy

Computer education should be an integral part of counsellor education. This will help to ensure effective counsellor training and development in information and communication technology. Skills and techniques learnt should be transferred to children's early life both in school and in the family. Training in computer technology will help in the computerization of each child's development, and use of various toys and equipment, use of growth, health and adjustment charts and information about other needs of the child.

This will go a long way to help expose the child to richer environment and richer world of science and technology that will provide opportunities for intellectual, physical, social, psychological and moral development.

Counsellor-Child Programme:- This should aim at teaching counsellors how to play the role of educating and stimulating the children through the use of educational toys which can be provided in the learning environment (Ivowi, 2003). In any event, they are used to help children learn the concept, which schools value such as distinguishing colours, shapes and sizes, in other words, helping children to learn and adapt. The counsellor training programme should incorporate aspects of child development such as physical health, psychological and social development. This will also help children receive the benefits that a group situation offers such as sharing, establishing relationships and following rules. In addition to their activities in music, poems and rhymes, counsellors should therefore be trained to help the young children right from this tender age to begin to inculcate adjustment strategies to life.

Envisaged Bottlenecks to the Training and Development of Counsellors

The above relevance and success of counsellor training and development notwithstanding, there are still fears about some bottlenecks. These include the following:-

- **Lack of funding:-** Lack of funds has always posed a lot of problems to education and its activities. Education at any level is cost intensive (in terms of finance, human material/resources). The need therefore arises for the government to help with the provision of fund for the training and development of counsellors into informed and effective professionals who will ultimately gear these children towards increased and productive achievements. This funding will go a long way into ensuring the provision of conducive school climate for the healthful growth of each child emotionally, mentally and physically.
- **Lack of Motivation:-** Discussing about counsellors and expectations from them will not be enough without mentioning how they can be motivated. An important goal in personnel management in any organization is to have satisfied workers who will remain happily on the job to give their best in order to achieve organizational goals at minimum discomfort. The school heads and educators should try to understand the needs of their subordinates who are whole

human personalities. They can motivate these counsellors along the line of their needs. They should be regularly sent on workshops and trainings to widen their horizon,

- **Certain Beliefs that Counsellors are Non-Functional:** School counsellors have to perform their duties and certain tasks before they can be fully recognized and accepted as being useful to these children and the society. They should be recognized by the unique and necessary services they give. Due to the society's belief that some counsellors are non functional, the education planners decided to create teaching loads and other school responsibilities other than counsellor responsibilities for these counsellors. This has seriously impinged on the counsellors' being autonomous in their practice.

Recommendations

For the effective educational training and development of counsellors for pre-primary education, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. Government should organize all incorporating training programmes for counsellors especially pertaining to pre-primary education and have them sent to these pre-primary schools.
2. Fully equipped counselling departments should be established in every government owned or public pre-primary schools in every state.
3. There is need for the society to change its attitude and notion about counselling. Counsellors with the necessary aptitude must be encouraged to benefit from the fruits of these trainings (education) not only for their own self improvement but particularly for the development of these children in future in order to face the challenges of the global nature of the society.
4. Government should from time to time send these counsellors for in-service trainings and workshops as this will go a long way in keeping them abreast of all the latest developments in the education industry and the society.
5. Incentives must be given to these counsellors by way of promotion and allowances to encourage them.
6. Counsellor training and development should incorporate ICT-based education to help the children survive in a computer dominated world.
7. For school counsellors to be autonomous in their practice, they must refuse other non counsellor responsibilities which pressurize them. They must demand counsellor's rooms, facilities, and tools for functioning. They must define and redefine their roles and bold enough to change functions not appropriate for them.

Conclusion

The main focus of this discussion was on training and development of counsellors for pre-primary education. Education, which is the most important instrument of change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society, must be made accessible to the masses at an early stage in their lives. This education (pre-primary), starts at the age of three outside the home. Children at this age need to be frequently cared for as psychologists conclude that the period between birth and the age of six is of vital importance to the individual's cognitive development.

For these and other objectives to be achieved, the counsellors need to be fully trained and provided all round development for this level of education. Discussions showed that counsellors are not fully equipped with modern communication gadgets and early stimulation of the child. It is for this reason that the counsellors' educational development need to be encouraged to ensure early child care education.

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