

ROLES OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN THE EARLY YEARS: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

ANTHONIA CHINONYELUM EGBO, PhD

Department of Guidance and Counseling

Faculty of Education

Enugu State University of Science and Technology,

Agbani, Enugu, Nigeria.

Email address: egbononye@yahoo.com

+2348035110677

&

CHINONYE EMMANUELLA EGBO

Department of Guidance and Counseling

Faculty of Education

Enugu State University of Science and Technology,

Agbani, Enugu, Nigeria.

Email address: chinoo.egbo@gmail.com

+2348162135931

Abstract

This paper discussed working with children in their early years from the perspectives of its trends and challenges; and role of the counsellor in this activity. This study began its preliminary considerations by way of introductory notes and definition of early years. It also highlighted what children learn during this arc of life. It went on to explain who an early year teacher is, the trend in early childhood education, available jobs in early Education like Nanny, child Minders and play leaders. Furthermore, the work discussed some of the Challenges involved in working with children in early years and the role of the counsellor. Due to these challenges, the government is advised by way of recommendation to make funds needed for the training at this level available while counselors should pay adequate attention to the needs of these children.

Keywords: Children, Early Years, Guidance Counsellor, Education, Trends, Challenges.

Introduction

Working as an early years practitioner is an interesting but difficulty task full of opportunities. It is a chance to help children to learn, develop and prepare for school. It is an educational endeavour which is also a self-employment opportunity; a lot of people enjoy working with children. They see it as a passion and also as a paid job. Early years teacher work with children aged 3-5 tasks include planning activities and creating learning resources.

Early years defined

Early years group according to Bonnie (1992) describes children from 0 – 5 years. It is important to note that the first few years of a child or children's life are very crucial and

therefore need care and attention. The children under early years used to be helped to get ready to start school, therefore, the need to help them in the development of their mental, social and emotional well beings.

Children need to gain confidence and develop their social skills within a safe environment, hence the need for early education and educators. These children need the right mental stimulation, and care so as to avoid having problems in later years. During the early years, the children, hear, taste, touch, see and smell the world around them as part of the learning process, thereby requiring experienced early years teachers or practitioners to help inform them to develop positively.

What do Children learn during their Early Years?

During early years, Children grasp things in their hands from the time they are born but not until around 4 months that they try to pick object from anywhere around them. As time goes on, they build, throw and even learn to scribble on papers. The child first attempts to grip the object placed before him, he tries to go, beyond the object in order to draw it to himself. He tries to use his palm to hold the object as he cannot coordinate the fingers, this action Nweke (2007) refers to as primitive **skills**. He grasps the objects between the thumb and the index fingers this is called **partnership**.

The child then holds the object between its fingers and thumbs, this is called **pioneer grasp**. At 7 or eight months a child can hold a large crayon but not a pencil as it is easier to hold bigger objects.

At the age of eight (8) months or more depending on the Child/Children, and the strength they start learning how to push themselves forward. The process of development of crawling can be difficult at this stage, though they will eventually overcome it, some early, while some late. Some children shuffles instead of crawling and some push ahead to trying to pull themselves up without ever crawling around. These children can be helped to learn to develop; they need attention, praises and opportunities to develop their skills in a safe environment. They used to be provided with games and fun activities for positive development.

Provision of these positive experiences in their early years can help children develop into successful adults. It is important here to note that, lack of care and development during a child early years can lead to serious problems. If a child does not have the right attention and care needed, the child may have behavioural or health problems.

At 18 months he can draw lines across or on papers with a crayon. Between the ages of 2 and 3 years, the child can manipulate pencils and draw on a paper and can even call its name. At 6 years he can control his fingers and can now write.

Who is an early years Teacher

An early years teacher or practitioner is someone who works with young children in any school, nursery, or childcare environment. They have a duty to encourage learning and development through play and teaching. The early years workforce works with Children

before the start of formal Schooling (ages 0-5) years. They can also look after Children older than five years outside School hours while parents are at work.

An early year's teacher or practitioner needs to meet up with a child's needs, help put activities and keep them engaged throughout the day. Help the children to learn to develop, learning skills and the ability to sit quietly, ready for classroom environment. He needs to monitor the progress of the children under his care so as to help them develop positively.

He needs to be someone who enjoys working with children and who would want to make a difference in the lives of the children. He needs to have passion for the job. He is seen a guidance of the learning activity. He creates the necessary conditions that will make learning meaningful and pleasurable. He is a mediator in learning for he assists the child to search for and utilize information to the benefit of both the learner and the parents. To work with young children, you need the patience to deal with tantrums and a willingness to get involved with messy activities like sticking and painting, characterized of an early child. He should have the ability to have ideas and creativity to make leaning interesting and also the ability to communicate your thoughts in a way that the children can understand.

He should also learn to build good relationship with parents. This relationship enables him/her to create happiness and support the children need from the practitioner and the home. Anyone with right mix of skills and personal qualities can work in early school setting but most workers in this area have been women.

Trends in Early Childhood Education

The idea of early childhood education is becoming an in-thing in Nigeria and beyond. On this Egbo(2013), noted that this is because parents want their children taken care of while they are away to work and do other businesses.

Vernon (2004) stated that competition can be high for early year's jobs. He also noted that getting a qualification will make an early year teacher stand out and look great on his *Curriculum vitae* (C.V). In the same vein, Anoyo (2001) stated

that parents want their children to learn, as well as play in a childcare setting, Nurseries and schools now look for teachers that are qualified to give their children more educational experiences. For Children and young people, life can be full of complexity, characterized by increasing change these, and develop integrated working brings the various professionals, practitioners and volunteers that make up the children's work force together placing the child at the centre of support.

An early year's teacher is expected to undergo training on how to take care of children with great qualification he can get job working with children in many different jobs. More and more parents and guardian are going back to work, rather than staying at home, so there is no unemployment for early year's teachers.

Because children are important, high quality early education help them to get the best start in life, promoting all round development in the crucial formative years. (Henning, 2005). Quality service for children help parents as well, allowing them to balance at work and family life, helps children to develop social and learning skills that will help them throughout their life. For children to get a good start in life, they need to be looked after and educated by people with the right blend of skills and personal qualities. Working with children especially young children is demanding, interesting and also difficult. It is also rewarding. Pursuing a career in early education can make a real difference to the quality of children's lives and the lives of their parent's. The demands for teachers of early years are increasing day by day as was in the past, and the demand will continue to increase (Widders, 2016).

Jobs in early Education/Childcare

People working in early education, Childcare have a number of jobs titles and work in different settings. Some of these settings will need specific qualifications while others may require no formal qualifications. Early child practitioner can work as a

Nanny: A Nanny cares for children in the home. As a nanny, one will be responsible for providing meals, planning activities and tables, like keeping toys, tidy. One can work in the day or live in their home or with the child's family depending on agreement. Working as a Nanny helps the practitioner to get close both to the child he works with and parents. It is rewarding at the end.

Child Minder: Child minders usually work in their own home. Child minding can be a varied job with flexible hours, which could involve looking after under 5s in the day and caring for older children when they are at home.

Key areas that child minders need to focus on are health and safety, preparing meals and providing activities to keep children engaged and occupied, creating a secure environment for children and communicating with parents.

Crèche Worker: They may work in a variety of settings that have attached crèches, for example, sports centres and supermarkets. Many crèches prefer workers who hold qualifications although there is no natural requirement presently.

Play Leader: Play leaders are employed in play groups, out of school childcare settings, community centres, hospital play groups, adventure play grounds, holding play schemes and other children's clubs. It is the job of the play leader to plan appropriate play opportunities for the children in the centres. The appropriate qualification is having suitable experience of working with children.

Play Assistant: He works in the same settings as play leaders but in a more junior role. There is no national requirement in terms of qualification for a play assistant.

Nursery Nurses

If you work in the Nursery, you have different titles, including nursery officers and early education and childcare settings for example local authority nursery schools or classes.

Private day nurseries: Voluntary sector nurseries child and family centres; community nurseries geulic-medium nurseries and hospital nurseries. Nursery Nurses may also work in primary schools to support the work of teachers.

Nursery Assistant: He works in the same settings as nursery nurses, but in a more junior role. Nursery assistant has the support of a nursery nurse or supervisor.

Room Leader: He is in charge of managing a group of nursery nurses. He is responsible to making sure that childcare is carried out to the high standard and that health and society requirements are met.

Deputy Nursery Manager: He supports the nursery manager who is in charge of the day-to-day running of a child care business. A manager's role is to manage staff, make sure those children and staffs have a safe working environment and monitor profits. A manager needs a nationally recognized qualification and experience in working in a daycare setting.

Challanges to Working with Children in the Early Years

The concern of early teacher working with a child is to assist the child to develop the appropriate personality; therefore, it is expedient that we must know the child and also the subject matter. The knowledge of the child includes how the child grows and develops.

The reasons for studying the growth and development of the child while working with the child are:-

- The knowledge of what happened to the child during the early stages of development will help the teacher to find solution to latter learning difficulties.
- The knowledge of the child as he is now will help the teacher to guide the pupil well.
- The knowledge will help a teacher to understand the present condition of the child. The teacher should have the knowledge of how children grow and develop in order to guide and shape their future development. It is at the early formative years that the child grows and develops.

The teachers should understand that the child is a product of both nature and nurture which means that the hereditary factors interplay with the environmental factors to determine how the child grows and develops.

Development means qualitative changes in an organism. It is a progressive series of orderly and coherent changes on human beings (Osokoya, 1989).

Working with children during the early year years, the teacher should pay attention to the followings:

Understanding how children develop

Understanding how the children at early years behave can be challenging but before anyone can work effectively with them such a person must have this understanding. Children behave

differently from the children in lower or upper primary and the teacher realizes that the handling of the children must depend on their developed mental levels.

- **Issue of individual differences.** The teacher should pay attention to the issue of individual differences, the teacher should know that children are different from one another, some came to school rather young, and others matured, some develop fast others are not.

The issue of exceptional children

The teacher should know that there are physically handicapped and mentally retarded children in our schools and there are also gifted children. These children are special in some ways that make them different from the majority of children in the class. The deaf or hard of hearing the blind or partial blind, those who have suffered loss of limbs or any form of structural damage are physically handicapped children. There are others who are very slow in learning although they may look normal physically but their intelligence is low. Some children are also superior in intelligence.

Use of variety of techniques

The teacher should have knowledge of and the use of variety of techniques. It should be known that the teacher should devise strategies to get the learner to be very active as well as use of rewards and incentives to help the learner at the early stages. The teacher should use the teaching methods that can be related to the needs and levels of the learner.

Self-Understanding

The teachers' understanding of self is very paramount. Teachers are models for learners, therefore some of the things they do mirror back out qualities. For a teacher who is working with children in the early years he should try and improve on certain skills e.g. Social and adjustment.

Making referrals

The teacher is expected to know his limits in the course of teaching these children, therefore be ready to make consultations and refer them to others as need arise.

Individual learning

The issue of individualized learning becomes imperative and challenging since the teacher has to make out time to educate the child who may find it difficult to cope with others. The teacher conducts private child study within the classroom from time to time and keeps records of behaviours of children.

Poor function.

Working with children at this stage is financially involving. The issue of funding has for long been in the front burner of Educational discourse in every sector of education and so the early education. It will be difficult to work with these children without adequate funding.

Poor Remuneration

Some employers of these teachers do not see the challenges involved in caring for these children thereby the payment given to them most often are not commensurate with the job they do.

Lack of awareness of the need for early education

This is a big problem facing the early education. Some parents who employ early education teachers are not aware of the importance it plays in their children's life and as a result do not give these teachers the needed respect and gratification.

Security

Working with these children can be challenging as far as security of these children and even the care givers is concerned. Often times you hear unknown gun men have kidnapped some children under the care of these care givers.

The Client's Development Level

Understanding the client's development level is key to the overall success of one's representation as well as to have the ability to effectively counsel the client. It is important to bear in mind that chronological age is a poor predictor of a child's abilities. Instead the client's developmental level a dynamic composite including the client level of physical cognitive social, emotional and academic growth is more insightful. Once you understand your client's limits and capabilities based on developmental level you can diverse appropriate, informed strategies for effective communication and counselling. A good grasp of client's developmental level also facilitate a collaborative working relationship and can keep clients from becoming frustrated, discouraged, oppositional and/or uncooperative.

Provision of Information

To gauge client's developmental level, you can begin by gathering information about where an individual client stands with regard to the following factors that contribute to developmental level. These factors together provide a more complete picture of the client's abilities.

The Role of the Counsellor

The task of dealing with early Education in Nigeria is quite enormous. So the Counsellor therefore needs to influence parents and the children to bring about the desired change needed for improvement for effective running of the programme through:

- **Maintenance of rapport:** The counsellor should be able to demonstrate an ability to communicate and interact effectively and cordially with everybody associated with early years learning, such as parents, practitioners, etc.
- **Passion for the Children:** A counselor should show interest, love and care for these children. He should know them by their names and have greater influence of the attitude of these children.

- **Empathic Understanding:** He should show empathic understanding of the problems associated with the training of the early learner. He should show understanding by communicating same to parents.
- **Listening Role:** The counselor should have listening ears to be able to understand the children and their parents. He should be attentive to the needs of both the learners and their parents
- **Unconditional Positive regards:** A counselor should exhibit unconditional positive regards in handling these children. By this, it means handling every child with love and care regardless of the child's family background.
- **Provision of information:** It is the duty of the Counsellor to make information needed for early education available to everybody involved in the education of the children. He should educate the teachers and parents of the early learners on the positive impact of such education.
- **Confidentiality:** The counselor should work with the parents of these children with utmost confidentiality, he should keep secrets with parents secret and should not reveal information unless in advise of parents.
- **Referral Role:** The counselor should refer parents and their children at the appropriate quarters where they can be helped. He should help to refer these children to experts wherever necessary and according to the needs and demands at every moment.

Conclusion

The job of early education is not a small and easy one especially for those who have no passion for the job without education, the quality of education in any education sector is a function of the caliber of teachers that are involved; therefore, they should go about their duties with every sense of responsibility. As professionals and role models practitioners should in their interactions with these children, Parents, guardians and the public exercise self-restraint and empathic understanding.

Recommendations

From the above discussion, it becomes imperative to make the following recommendations:

- Government should create awareness on the importance of this level of education by providing needed funds.
- Counsellors are to be posted to this level of education to help discover some of the children with behavioural problems as early as possible.
- Parents should be made to understand the progress of their children, therefore they have to be given the updates as and when due.
- Parents should be involved in their children's education.

- Employment of people who have the interest and passion for the job should be paramount.
- Paper qualification should also be considered in the recruitment of teachers of the early education.

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