

LIBERATION TEACHING METHOD IN ENHANCING THE ACADEMIC WELL-BEING OF PUPILS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

The academic wellbeing of children shows that the teacher is concerned about all the categories of children in the class. The fast learners, the slow learners, the challenged pupils and so on. This implies that no matter the limitations, every pupils needs to be taken care of academically. Early childhood education being the foundational education requires adequate preparation physically, academically and psychologically. In imparting knowledge in early childhood, the teacher needs to be conscious of many factors and variables. Liberation teaching simply means the method of teaching that helps the teacher not to give up upon any child. To give up on any child can lead to stigmatisation and a stigma can hinder an individual from full participation in the class which can greatly diminish the self-esteem of the child. Liberation teaching is necessary for the creation of the encouraging classroom. This implies that the encouraging classroom environment is extended to every child. The method also enables the teacher to accept every child in the class as a person of worth. The fact is that children in the classroom are from different cultural backgrounds with different physical characteristics, behavioural styles, social attributes, learning capabilities, physical disabilities, level of attention span, level of self-esteem and self-concept. Any of these could impede or enhance the academic well-being of pupils in early childhood education. The liberation teaching method is developmentally appropriate, guidance oriented, child-centred, and culturally responsive. This paper makes use of liberation teaching method based on social psychology of Goffman and Maslow theories. The paper also discusses the factors responsible for stigmatization.

Introduction

In the past, the educational setting and teaching of children below the age of six was not really embraced in Nigeria as observed because most people then did not see the need for this. The early childhood teachers and expert now realised through various researches that children below the

age of six could also learn effectively like the grown-up ones. In Nigeria, before the introduction of nursery schools, the common trend was referred to as home lesson where children below the age of six are kept from 8am -12noon. Then; they were only taught alphabet, numbers and nursery rhymes and were only allowed to start proper schooling by age of six.

The national policy on Education (2004) defined early childhood education as the type of education given to children from ages 2 to 5 in an educational institution prior to their entering the primary schools. It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten. One of the objectives of early childhood education is to teach the children the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, and so on through play. The experts have observed that children have peculiar natures which make their teaching and learning different from the grown-up ones. Many teachers sometimes give up on some children because they may see them as duller and easily label them as not teachable. Liberation teaching means that the teacher does not give up on any child. They should not be seen as frailties as they seem to be. Liberation teaching has its foundation in social psychology of the 60s and 70s and also Maslow theory of needs. Maslow(1968) believes that individuals have two sets of needs, one for safety and one for growth.

Children too have needs to be met, the safety needs which involve security, belong, self-esteem if these needs are unmet; children are likely to feel stress up and can exhibit undesirable behaviour and this can affect personal development of children. So, when needs are unmet this can aggravated the attitude of children in the classroom. Liberation teaching therefore means extending the activities that are encouraging to all children in the class. To Santrock (2005), an infant will develop a sense of trust, if his/her needs for food and care are met with comforting regularity and responsiveness from caregivers. According to Dacey & Travers (2004), active pre-schoolers need a well-balanced diet-bread, cereal, fruit, vegetable meat, milk and they require several wholesome snacks and the likes. Children's psychological needs must be met to enhance their academic well-being.

The first year of life is very important to young ones because that is when they are learning to separate themselves from the world around them. This realisation makes trust so important to them and that is the more reason why they cry a lot when taken to the school for the first time. Until they are sure they are safe with the caregiver.

Stigmatization and Liberation Teaching.

Liberation teaching cannot be mentioned without talking about the issue of stigmatization. In classroom situation stigma occurs when a teacher fixates on a vulnerability of a child and separates the child from the group. When a child is separated from a group it has psychological undertone, this is because the mind of the child may be affected so also the mind of the other children. For such a child to participate adequately and meaningfully in classroom activity may be difficult. The child who are mostly at risk of stigma are those children who shown chronic misbehaviour such as slow learning and learning difficulties. According to Gartrell(2006),

misbehaviour implies wilful wrongdoing for which a child must be disciplined. This involves being stubborn, naughty and mischievous. The teacher needs to understand child's development in order to help such children. Horowitz (2005) emphasised that a teacher who has good understanding of child's development and learning is more likely to be effective in the classroom. The following are the key principles of child's development that a teacher in early childhood education needs to know: That a child develops holistically and all aspects of development are interrelated. Early childhood teachers should always remember that children are whole human beings whose learning is enhanced when all aspects of child development are addressed (Hendrick & Weissman 2010). Also child development follows an orderly sequence. Copple & Bredekamp (2009) affirm that individuation may occur in development yet development emerges in roughly the same order in children. This knowledge helps the teacher to understand the current development of children which is valuable to the teaching method. Children develop at varying rates, developmental progress is not uniform. According to Kostelnik and Grady (2009) children learn best when they feel safe and secure, when the classroom environment is encouraging, and hazard free and loving. This knowledge helps teachers to limit punishment on children's inappropriate behaviours, promote problem solving and address bullying or aggressive behaviour. In addition, children are active learners, they learn through physical experience, social interaction and reflection; they are motivated to learn through a continuous process of challenge and mastery. According to Medina (2008), discovery brings joy to children and it creates the need for more discovery and as children grow older they find that learning not only brings them joy but also brings them mastery.

Symbolic Development and Liberation Teaching Method

According to Gartrell (2007), Piaget's liberation teaching is teaching for autonomy. Liberation teaching empowers the child to move away from shame, doubt, and inferiority toward initiative, belonging and industry. It assists the child to rise from the social relations of survival and adjustment toward encountering. According to Santrock (2005), the Piaget's stage of intellectual development that coincides with the early childhood is referred to as preoperational stage. This stage lasts from 2 to 7 years and it involves symbolic thought characterised by the use of symbols to represent objects and relationship among them. Children are not yet ready to engage in mental operations, or manipulations that require logical thinking. At this stage, children begin to scribble and draw pictures in the early years. These drawings are symbols of, people and events in children's lives. According to Gopnik, A., Sobel, D.M., Schulz, .E., & Glymour, C (2001), children under 5 seem to understand how biological entities cause growth, inheritance, and illness, and how desires, emotions and beliefs cause human actions. For instance, children can reason the follow ways:

*My teacher will scold and spank me if I do not do my assignment –this shows social –conventional reasoning.

*I am walking slowly because my teacher hates noise makers –shows psychological reasoning.

Another significant aspect of this stage is symbolic play which may seem immature to busy adult. To

Medina (2008), children begin to symbolize objects in the second year of their lives. Play is the work of children, it is fun that they enjoy to engage in and it contributes to all the domains of development. These senses, muscles and sight are stimulated and coordinated to gain mastery over the body and to acquire new skills. As children grow older the type of play they engage in also changes. The simplest form of play begins during infancy and is referred to as functional play which involves repetitive muscular movements such as rolling or bouncing a ball. The second level of play is known as constructive play, this involves the use of object or material to make something such as a house of block or using a crayon to draw. The third level of play is called pretend play is also known as fantasy play, dramatic play, or imaginative play. According to Piaget, it rests on symbolic function which emerges during the last part of the second year, near the end of the sensori motor stage. The last form of play is the play in form of games that require rules. Dunn and Hughes (2001) observed that pre-schooler's that love to play violent pretend play are less empathetic, less likely to help other children and more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. The quality of pretend play is also connected with pre-schooler's creativity and their ability to relate to peers.

Child Guidance and Liberation Teaching.

Child guidance is the process of piloting, guiding, and directing the child to behave in a more appropriate way. Gartrell (2011) confirms that children do not intuitively know how to behave in all ways. Children need to grasp many skills to be successful in life (Evans & Rosenbaum, 2008). The unique task of the early childhood teacher is to help in improving the transition of the child from the caring and private relationship with their parents to more public relationship with the teacher and other pupils. Early childhood professional teachers not only correct children but teach them appropriate strategies. (Bronson, 2006). To Vos and Baumeister (2004), children who are properly taught may eventually adopt these more appropriate behaviours and carry them out on their own. Marion (2010) defines self-regulation as the voluntary, internal control of behaviour. It involves acting in socially acceptable ways based on reasoning, concern for others and an understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. According to Santrock (2005), children who enter school with an sense of mistrust may trust a particular teacher who has taken the time to make herself/himself trustworthy. Guidance approach that contribute to the encouraging classroom includes using words to solve problems, learning how to appreciate others, understanding that one can make mistake and to learn from it. Ajidahun (2018) confirmed that emotional needs of children in early childhood education were met when guidance regulation were employed in teaching.

Signs of Stigmatization from Teachers

According to Gartrell (2007) the following are the stigmatizing behaviours of a teacher which can be intentional or unintentional:

*Fixate on vulnerability as a limiting factor in the child's development: When a teacher focuses too much on a child's wrong behaviour, such a child can be labelled and the child academic wellbeing can be hindered too. It is true that a child can be vulnerable to some problems but the teacher's

responsibility is to ensure such is not concentrated on but instead guide the child to better path for him to achieve academic success.

* Establish psychological distance between the teacher and the child: Some children can be so troublesome that some teachers may be tempted to maintain psychology distance from such children by tactically avoiding them in the class. When a child experienced psychological distance from the teacher he or she feels it.

*Tolerate or tacitly encourage stigmatizing responses by other children or adults: A teacher must be careful not to label a child or encourage other children to call him or her any funny names like 'lazy thing' 'tiny rat' and the likes. Using liberation teaching method, it helps the teacher to even discourage other children from having groups in the classroom.

*Fail to alter the physical or social environment to include the child: The teacher should understand the uniqueness of every child, in terms of height, stature, disability. Classroom should be arranged in such a way that everyone is comfortable. The shorter people should be allowed to sit in the front.

*show preference for some in the class over others on the basis of social, cultural academic, or behavioural criteria: Even if the mother of a child in a teacher's class are friends, he /she does not need to show it. All the children in the class should be the friend of the teacher for effective teaching and learning to take place.

*Use of offensive languages or scolding the child too often: If a child is scolded too often in the class or been abused by the teacher often it might lead to stigma.

*Punish the child without explaining to the reason for the punishment: The teacher needs to give simple explanation to a child before being punished so that the child can be cleared that is not being hated by the teacher.

Liberation responses that discourage stigmatization involve the following:

- Show clear acceptance of the child as a worthwhile individual and member of the group: Accepting all children in the class regardless of their shortcoming by the teacher encouraging effective academic wellbeing of the child.
- Empower the child's abilities: When a child is empowered by given him or her the opportunity to showcase their worth in the class. It encourages belongingness.
- Show empathetic responses to every child: The teacher should be involved in whatever the child is passing through..
- Arrange the physical and social environment to include every child. Encourage cooperative and individual activities so that each child can experience success. Appreciate the child's family background. Facilitate the uniqueness of every child.

Reasons for stigmatizing children in classroomsituation.

The following factors were identified as the likely reasons for stigmatising children in classroom situation (Gartrell, 2004):

Personality Factors

-Children with unique temperaments, learning capacities, learning styles, verbalization abilities experience backgrounds or developmental characteristic.

-Children with high need for attention or for independence may prove difficult

Children with physical vulnerabilities, hearing loss, cerebral palsy, hyperactive disorder, attention deficit, unusual facial appearance and underweight or overweight may also be abandoned by teacher.

Social factors

-Children from low income or high income families, children from single parenting families and children from polygamous family.

According to Gartrell (2006) the practice of liberation teaching means that the teacher accepts the fundamental connection between the life of the child and the family. The teacher works with and seeks to understand the family to benefit the child. In liberation teaching the teacher encourages the maximum involvement of the parents in the education of the child. Woolfolk (2005) confirms that parents must ensure that they give their wards through supervision without interference, when children are not allowed to do things on their own; sense of guilt may develop; they may be seeing what they are doing as wrong if they are always hindered. The home environment seemed to have the most marked effect in childhood. Parent –child interactions during early childhood focus on such matter as modesty, bedtime, regularities, control of temper, fighting with siblings and peers, eating behaviour and manners.

Conclusion

Liberation teaching method if well managed helps children to learn human relation skills. Adjusting effectively to the trauma of leaving home for preschool and kindergarten and adjusting to new adult and peers is important to liberation teaching method. The teacher should ensure that pupils are helped to see the world from someone else's point of view. The teacher should understand individual differences in the each child and do such to enhance their academic wellbeing. Punishment in liberation teaching method should be accompanied with short explanation for effect result. Discipline involves teaching children good character, self-control and moral values and behaviour. The teacher can encourage initiation in class by using liberation teaching method. Making instruction relatively short, using actions as well as words. Teacher should give children a great deal of hands-on practice with the skills that serve as foundation for more complex skills.

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