



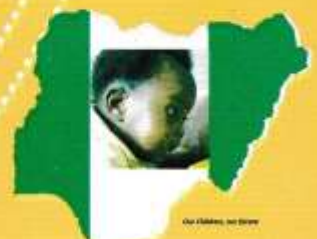
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Our Children, Our World

EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: CONNECTING THEORY TO PRACTICE

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Preamble

It gives me great pleasure to deliver this lead paper. I knew well about the inception and the constitution of this organization. It has always been my intention to associate and contribute my little quota to the building of this our organization. Please permit me to thank the organizers; Prof Julie Ibiam, Dr Jude Madu and the other friends and colleagues for giving me the opportunity to satisfy what I have always contemplated doing. Today, apart from giving the lead, I also have the opportunity to register as a member of this all important foundational organization.

Now, to the theme of the paper and the job at hand. An approach would mean making an attempt at solving a problem. It can also refer to the manner in which a problem is solved. The dictionary meaning of the word effective denotes "producing a decided or decisive effect". More to it, for something to be effective, the thing in question must be serviceable, operative and available for useful work. An effective approach therefore refers to a manner of solving a problem which is serviceable and available for useful work.

Let us turn our attention to childhood education. Education on its own denotes the training of especially the young in the area of skill and knowledge impartation. Childhood education then limits and clearly defines the training to the early stages of development with particular reference to the ages between infancy and puberty. The topic at hand would therefore be understood to mean the various serviceable and result oriented manners of imparting knowledge skills and other values to children between the ages of infancy and puberty.

Before delving into the topic as expatiated above, it would be appropriate to acknowledge the Nigerian statutes of the definition of the child. The child's Right Act (2008) and other conventions to which Nigeria is a signatory acknowledge the child to be a human between birth and the age of 18 years. In consideration of this topic therefore our limit is expected to be expanded to include children up to the age of 18 years while emphasis would be laid on what the National Policy on Education (2013) refer to as

- Early Child Care and Development (0-4yrs).
- Basic Education (5-15 yrs) which encompasses 1 year of Pre-primary, 6 years of Primary education and 3 years of Junior Secondary Education.
- Post-Basic education of 3 years in secondary schools and technical colleges.

It is also of interest that in conceiving the theme for this conference, the sub-themes have highlighted Teacher Education, Early Childhood Education, Primary Education and Information and Communication Technology. We shall therefore shade light on the above by discussing them under the following sub-heads;

- Childhood Education
- Theoretical Inputs
- Observed Practices
- Sieving the grain from the chaff
- Untouched theoretical offerings
- Recommendations and conclusions

Childhood Education

From the above definition of the child we can conceive childhood education to comprise

1. Education at home from birth up to when the child attends the crèche. It is worthy of note here that only a negligible percentage of children attend the crèche. For the education at home, all children pass through it with no streamlined curriculum. Some children are toilet trained early, bottle fed, dressed warmly, allowed to be infected at will, infant varied experiences.
2. Crèche: As already stated, the crèche experience is for a very negligible percentage of children. Many of the cases come up because the parents are too busy to provide the needed care. Here also, the operators of the crèche determine what they do with the children. Some only take care physically by changing diaper and feeding the child only. Others introduce some speech and toilet training to the children in addition.
3. Pre-nursery and Nursery Classes/ Kindergarten: This is the first time where a pre-scribed curriculum is given. This is said to be between the ages of 2-5. The aim include to;
 - a. Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school
 - b. Prepare the child for the primary level of education
 - c. Provide adequate care, supervision and security for the children while their parents are at work
 - d. Inculcate social, moral norms and values
 - e. Inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature , the environment, art, music and the use of toys
 - f. Develop a sense of co-operation and team-spirit
 - g. Stimulate in the child good habits, including good health habits and
 - h. Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms through play.
4. Primary Education 6-11⁺: Here the goal as prescribed by the National Policy on Education (2013) include

- a. Inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and ability to communicate effectively
 - b. Lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking
 - c. Promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity
 - d. Instil social, moral norms and values in the child;
 - e. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment; and
 - f. Provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability.
5. Junior secondary education 12-14 years:
- a. Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skill for entrepreneurship and educational advancement;
 - b. Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and the performance of their civic responsibilities.
 - c. Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking and who appreciate the dignity of labour; and inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, ethnic and socio-economic background.
6. Senior secondary education 14-17
- a. Provide holders of the Basic Education Certificate and junior Arabic and Islamic studies certificate with opportunities for education of a higher level, irrespective of gender, social status, religious or ethnic background;
 - b. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, disposition, opportunities and future roles;
 - c. Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades
 - d. Provide entrepreneurial, technical and vocational job specific skills for self-reliance and for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
 - e. Develop and promote Nigeria languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
 - f. Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
 - g. Foster patriotism, national unity and security education with an emphasis on the common ties in spite of our diversity; and
 - h. Raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who can think independently and rationally, respect the views and feelings of others and appreciate the dignity of labour.

(FRN, 2013)

On all these, there are basic theoretical inputs which have laid the foundations to the approaches at the different levels.

Theoretical Inputs

S/N	Theorist	Theory	Major Input	Implication
1	John Locke	Tabula Rasa	At birth, the human mind is born blank. Whatever knowledge one has is acquired through his experience with the environment	The child is by nature neither good nor evil. The input of the environment makes him who he is.
2	Jean Jacque Rousseau	Readiness	There should be physical and psychological readiness before introduction of the learning material. The child has some innate knowledge to guide the emergence of behaviour however he must be guided in his interaction with the society. His interaction must also depend on his interest. Child rearing approach should promote mutual interaction rather than dictation.	There are critical period for learning certain skills. The curriculum should be child centered. There should be no excessive discipline in child upbringing.
3	Rene Decartes	Unity of mind and body	Mind and body are two separate entities but only interact one with the other.	Proper interaction between the mind and the body produces happiness which reflects on the body as good health.
4	B. F. Skinner	Instrumental conditioning	All human beings can be conditioned to produce the desired behaviour	Teachers should know what stimuli to provide for children to produce the desired behaviour.

5	Ivan Pavlov	Classical conditioning	Schedules of reinforcement.	According to the application of reinforcement, behaviours can be enhanced or extinguished. Teachers should learn the reinforcement schedules and manage them appropriately.
6	Jean Piaget	Intellectual development theory/ Cognitive theory	Achievement has developmental time table	Critical time should be watched for critical inputs to be enhanced.
7	Albert Bandura	Social Learning Theory	Learning takes place through observation and imitation. Imitation can be enhanced by positive reinforcement.	All stake holders should be careful of the models provided for children. Parents as well as other stake holders should be careful of what is given positive reinforcement in the society.
8	Sigmund Freud	Psycho-sexual theory	Sexual factors are normal factors in development. Libidinal energy controls behaviour. Fixation at a psychosexual stage is the source of misbehaviour.	Teachers should ensure resolution of complexes in children to avoid fixation.
9	Erik Erikson	Psychosocial theory	A stage dependent resolution of Ego conflicts in order to arrive at a wholesome personality.	Care must be taken by care givers to ensure that the child resolves all ego conflicts positively if not the negative consequences are

				always not socially approved.
10	Joanne Pestalozzi	Happy schools	There should be A natural progressive development of human capacities And Elimination of harsh/ cruel discipline.	This theory promotes use of concrete experiences and object teaching. Removal of corporal punishment.
11	Fredrick Frobel	Learning must start early	He is considered to be the father of the "Kindergarten"	Do not waste the early years. Self-expression and creativity can be initiated early in children; in fact from the pre-school years.
12	Maria Montessori	Play way method	She advocates providing rich environment for children to learn from.	- Use of Toys - Teaching children through play-the natural way.

Observed practice

Apart from admitting children into the various levels of schools, the following practices are observed;

1. Admission of under aged children and demanding of them the achievement that is clearly above their age limit.
2. There is parental anxiety- parents dictate to school what they would want to see in their children.
3. Substandard infrastructure.
4. Overcrowded classrooms
5. Unqualified teachers in practice.
6. Inadequate teacher preparation.
7. Unhealthy competition in fashion and other non-essentials.
8. Lack of synergy on the vertical and horizontal axes.

Sieving the grain from the chaff

We all know that in the past and even in the present to the uninformed, the emphasis is on the grain. The chaff can be discarded. In this section, we would rely

on the theories and highlight the practices which we have got right and which level has got it right so that it can be showcased for emulation.

Rene Decartes conceived the human body and the mind as two separate entities. These two only interact one with the other. This can be so conceived because the body is physical, observable from the outside while the mind cannot be immediately observable. When there is peace, happiness and contentment in the mind, it obviously reflects on the body as there would be improved health. Let us translate this to the classroom situation. If a child learns with ease, he has a sense of achievement. He is happy with himself and this translates to peace, happiness and contentment which Decartes conceives as reflecting on the body as improved health.

Being able to solve the given Arithmetic/Mathematical problems will obviously result in happiness. What therefore should be the goal of the teacher and other stake holders in Education? I believe it should be “making the child happy”. What will make the child happy? –Succeeding in his studies, of course. How can the teacher help the child to succeed in his studies? We all know ...

- Proper lesson preparation
- Proper lesson delivery
- Proper feedback process
- Proper monitoring of pupils’ activities etc

Another sensitive area is a combination of Maria Montessori, Joanne Pestalozzi and J. J. Rousseau’s ideas. Learning should be fun. Pestalozzi calls it “happy schools”, Montessori refers to it as “Play-way method” while Rousseau goes against excessive discipline in child upbringing. Please permit me to ask- What is the relationship between the teacher and the stick he holds on his hand?

- Can a teacher ever do without the cane?
- Can happiness, play way method and relaxed discipline be achieved with the cane on hand?

When parental anxiety takes over such that they dictate to schools that they would want to see their children write, spell and read before the children are 3years old and the schools succumb to the pressure and exert enormous pressure on the children to recite some spellings and try to write at all cost. Are they conscious of Rousseau’s readiness theory or Piagetian stage dependent theory of intellectual development? Quite often it is observed that schools are operated as business enterprises. Children are admitted into classes where the demands are higher than chronological age and the capability of the child. The theory which would demand attention here is the critical period principle of Sigmund Freud and J. J. Rousseau.

Emphasis on childhood education has always been on the child learning without being conscious that he is learning. Even where he is conscious that he is

learning, the scenario should be pleasurable. When this conception is behind the scene, it is always a worry when schools are operated in sub-standard infrastructure where safety cannot be guaranteed. Overcrowded classrooms which are familiar scenes in public schools also are sources of worry. The health of the children surely cannot be guaranteed in these overcrowded classrooms.

There should be hope as faculties in Universities and Colleges of education admit students for special training on education delivery. It is hoped and rightly too that the training of these professionals are started by acquainting them with the underlying theories of education. But if the admission process is plagued with poor quality, uninterested / under-motivated candidates, are we expecting translation of the learnt theories to practice?

There are several to talk about as illustrations to the disconnect between theory and practice in the education of Nigerian children. It is my belief that if we highlight as done above and recommend interventions, it would serve the system better than endless catalogue and analysis of disconnect situations.

Untouched theoretical offerings

By my assessment, most of the theoretical offerings have been put into use while educating Nigeria children. The only remark one may make would concern the sincerity of purpose while those known theories are being put to use. By play-way method, many teachers play away children's hours with no essential lessons embedded in the play. By relaxed discipline, many teachers become nonchalant. Several still do not pay attention to the stage dependent stages of cognitive development. These in my opinion originate from teacher formation processes. It would do our children more good if interested candidates are admitted to study Education and more care is taken at the teacher formation stage to ensure acquisition of the needed competencies.

Recommendations

There is only one valid recommendation to make. If there must be application of effective approaches to childhood education, proper knowledge and application of theories, there is no place for untrained teachers in practice. Trained teachers would know the tenets of theories, know when and how to apply them and harvest and use the benefits for the good of the children. Where there is a derail, the trained teacher would understand best how to apply behaviour modification processes. Education is about life. There should be no mistakes.

Conclusion

In this discussion, we have been able to understand what we mean by effective approaches to childhood education. The different levels of childhood education have been highlighted. Theories underlying childhood educational

practice have been espoused. Some disconnects in operation have also been identified. One solution to correct observed anomalies in practice has been identified as the use of only adequately trained teachers. It is my belief that when the offerings of this presentation are adopted, that practice in childhood education would be given a boost.

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