



Towards a pedagogy of nursery education: The analytical role of perception

Odigie Veronica

Ph.D. Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education Faculty of Education University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

The apparent lack of foresight to establish a philosophical base nursery education in Nigeria had many implications both for the theory and practice of nursery education in Nigeria. The major thrust of this research was to critically examine these defects and suggest possible remedies. The National Policy on Education (2014) did not address the issues of the child and curriculum. As a result of which there was an absence of logic in the teaching subjects in the curriculum of the nursery school. The researcher proposed remedies for the above defects by trying to advance a pedagogy of nursery education. To this effect she postulated frame of reference in which the following issues were addressed.

- 1) The need to include environmental perception in the curriculum of nursery education.
- 2) The need to establish logic in the teaching of writing before reading.
- 3) The need for the organic method of teaching in nursery schools.

Keywords: pedagogy, nursery education, perception, teaching method, reflex

Introduction

Teaching by nature is a dynamic process. It involves a teacher in a conscious and deliberate act of teaching. It is however necessary to point out that any teaching method which denies the children the freedom of developing their potentialities or suppresses their reasoning ability is philosophically derelict and is indeed everything but teaching.

According to Montessori: "The organization of teaching would be in vain without freedom for the expansion of all those energies which spring from the satisfaction of the child's highest activities". (Odigie 2014) [5].

Philosophically, the emphasis on teaching methods in education places the role of the teacher as a source of resources mainly to guide rather than direct learning. The teacher helps the learner to organize, encourage discussion and concept formation. Iheoma in Ekwueme (2006) [2] observes that following Frankena's method, the dispositions which are regarded as desirable must be taken care of in so far as they are to some extent for the good of the recipients or learners (Y) themselves and not only for the agents (X). But the worthwhile disposition (D) is not determined by X and Y only but by society (environment) as there is a significant correlation between societal values and educational goals. Teaching therefore involves the teacher attempting to influence the children to learn something that the teacher thinks is valuable and worthwhile.

From the above exposition it is obvious that one of the important tasks of education is to assist children develop appropriate skills and dispositions to cope with the variety of choices they have to encounter.

Moreover, as a philosophical discourse, we will rely on the analysis of data collected from philosophical works. To this regard, philosophical methodology can be classified into three interwoven and extricable meshed categories. All these

methods in philosophy such as speculative, prescriptive and analytical will be adopted. Succinctly, to do justice to the topic, attention will be given to the analytical approach.

This analytical approach is the elucidation of the meaning of any concept, idea or unit of thought that we employ in seeking to understand ourselves and the world. We do this by reducing the concept or idea, breaking it down into more basic concepts that constitute it and thereby showing its relationship to a network of other concepts or discovering what the concepts denotes (Hirst and White in Nziadem 2015) [4].

The system used in the definition of terms of this study is the "connotation definition" method. It is a definition which assigns variables or terms within the context of this research.

Definition of Terms

PEDAGOGY- Is the holistic nature of childhood professed practice i.e building and nurturing children to grow which is also science of guiding tender foot to develop into the universal altruism of the mature self determined adult.

Nursery Education

Is the education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school. Educational theorists and philosophers have attested to the significance of this nursery school learning which was first prescribed by Plato in his model of educational structure (Akinpelu, 1981). The "Progressive educationists", championed by Rousseau, have stressed the importance of making the child a master in their own learning through child centered learning. In corroboration, the constructivist, led by Lev Vygotsky, Maintain that the child learns through the interaction of their cognitive potential and the socio- cultural activities taking place in the environment.

Perception

Is the organisation, identification and interpretation of sensory information in the environment. In other words it is the awareness of changes through the sensory organs.

Method

Is the way (orderliness, system) of doing things. Example teaching.

Reflex

An action that is performed without conscious thought as a response to a stimulus, a thing that is determined by and reproduces an essential features or qualities of something else. e.g A word formed by a development from an earlier stage of a language.

Relevance of Good Teaching Method in Nursery Education

Odigie 2010 quoting Evangelou and Sylva had affirmed that early childhood learning through nursery education impacts lasting social and cognitive development on them. From the foregoing, nursery education is second to education in the proper upbringing of the child for future educational and overall development.

For effectiveness, any good teaching must direct the child's activities. Children learn to do by doing. Bearing this principle in mind, the teacher should employ methods that should involve children in meaningful activities. The suggested method of instruction for the 3 – 6 years is emphasized with respect to the children's individual learning styles emanating this view. Plato postulated thus:

And the first step as you know is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark.

The method a teacher should employ in his teaching should also be that which is permanent to achieving the aim of the lesson being taught. Moreover, a good teaching method should not lose sight of the type of teaching aid to be used for the lesson with respect to the case of difficulty in obtaining it. A good teaching method which uses easily obtainable and inexpensive materials should be preferred to the one that uses costly and more often, difficult to obtain materials. The materials should be suitable to the age and ability of the children to learn with.

A good teaching method should also take into consideration the fact that the child is not an empty bowl into which fresh knowledge can be poured. Rather, the child should be seen as one who has acquired some knowledge at home before coming to school. Some of such knowledge were acquired through life experience and some through deliberate teaching by his educated parents. Thus, the child has already got some characteristics ways of viewing the world of people and things which in effect means that the teacher starts from the known to the unknown.

The particular subject or lesson being considered can influence a teacher's choice of the teaching method to use. A good lesson should constitute a call for attention. The teacher should present activities that urge the child to use the materials that are presented. In the case of teaching children to

achieve perfection, it is through the use of few words. Moreover, words should be of the simplest kind and should present the absolute reality. The teacher's focus should be on the object.

Suggested Teaching Methods

In nursery education, there are peculiar methods to be used. For example the method of educative silence awareness teaching, individual, group and play-way methods of teaching.

(a) Reflective awareness teaching method

Reflex means a word formed by development from an earlier stage of a language which is performed without conscious thought with an automatic response to a stimulus.

On the other hand, reflex may have a positive meaning. It may indicate a state or normal condition

STEP I

It is necessary to teach children the reflex action. To accomplish this, we need to perform various reflex exercises. "Reflex lesson" should be one of the most characteristic peculiarities of our schools. The process could include casual settings. For example, a little baby could be taken from her mother by the teacher into her arms and cuddled. As she enters the classroom, Children immediately rush the teacher to have a view.

The teacher sits solemnly in her own chair while the children sit in their places around her and gazing at the little baby with a mixture of tenderness and joy.

The teacher tells them that she has brought them a little teacher. The children are surprised and would laugh. She goes on to tell the children that no one can be as still as she does.

The children stiffen themselves in their places. And the teacher tells them that none of them can keep their legs as still as the "little teacher" does. In reaction the children carefully adjust their legs so as to keep them still. Their teacher tells them that they will never be as motionless as she is and that no one can be like her. The children suddenly become serious, they seem to have realized the superiority of the small teacher, some of them would smile. The teacher continues to tell them that none of them can be as quiet as she is.

There is a general silence. The teacher tells them that it is not possible to keep silent like her. She invites the children to come closer and hear how delicate the "little teacher's breathing is. She invites them to approach tip-toeing. Some of them rise up and some come very slowly on the tip of their toes. They stretch out their heads and turn their ears towards the little one. There is a deep silence. The teacher stands up and tells them that she is going. She goes out very quietly and gives the child back to the mother.

STEP II

The teacher asks the children if there can be silence. They answer in the affirmative. She makes children to know that loud breathing makes a noise too. All the children try to be silent.

STEP III

The teacher introduces the lesson on noise and sound. She begins by telling a rather long story to the children. Suddenly

someone working in agreement with her knocks noisily at the door.

The teacher breaks off her story to shouting, "Who is that"?. She tells the children that she has lost the trend of her ideas and that she cannot go on with her story because she can remember nothing. The teacher then asks the children if they know what they have just heard and if they also understood that is an example of noise.

She takes up a guitar. Wraps it like a baby and cuddles it. She tells the children that she would rather play with the baby. She goes on to speak to the "baby" and tells her how much she prefers playing with "her". Some of them call out that what she is holding is not a baby while others may say that it is a guitar. The teacher asks the children if they want proof that is a baby. She tells the children to be quiet and that "she" is crying out. The teacher touches one of the strings of the guitar underneath the covering. She asks the children if they heard the child weep and call out "mama".

Some of the children say that it is the guitar and that the teacher has just touched the strings. The teacher asks the children to listen carefully. She touches the string slightly and says that it is a guitar. She touches the strings again slightly and explains to the children that what may they have just heard is called "sound". She does some exercises on sound with the children explaining the differences between noise and sound. Children do exercises trying various sounds and noises. An education in perception of noises and sounds caused by movement begins from silence. The researcher have already explained the importance which this method attaches to silence which becomes the controlling factor in the voluntary inhibition of movements.

(b) Individual method

It is a teaching method which is most effective in the teaching of children at the tender age. This method is intended to lead each child to acquire skills one of the and knowledge through his own effort. The method requires that the teacher should remain with each child to help him overcome difficulties he may encounter. Through this method each child works as an individual in his own way and at his own pace. Moreover, the child is led to acquire the desired knowledge and skill by his own efforts. Pestalozzi postulated that education is primarily concerned with the individual child. The teacher is able to identify very quickly the needs and interest of each child under his care. It makes the child to be self- reliant. Both the bright and the slow learner participate actively in any work assigned to them. In support of this method, Lock cited that more knowledge can be transmitted when the child is dealt with as an individual.

(c) Group method

The group method of teaching is a system designed to reduce the characteristically large size of a class to small units of between two and five children for the purpose of more effective control and supervision of children. This method makes each member of a group conscious of the part he is expected to play to project the personality of his group. It promotes the spirit of co-operation among all members of the group.

(d) Playway method

The advocates of this method are Froebel and Montessori among others. Froebel recognized that the child is naturally creative although receptive and that self- activity is one of the most important ways in which he learns. Montessori saw the value of play for learning and used carefully designed "playthings" to help the feeble-minded child so well that they actually out class normal children in public examinations. She also designed the classroom in such a way that the children were free to move around and work at their own speed and in accordance with their preferences.

The value of this method lies in the fact that it gives the child the opportunities to choose the activity he likes best. The child learns to be independent and to work harmoniously with others.

The Logic of Teaching Language

Education through teaching is a profound moral activity because virtually all activities in schools involve values and value decision at every level of teaching since knowledge, skills and value are necessary for both personal fulfilment and the discharge of one's social responsibilities. Teachers in the school are in a special position to hand down to the young the cultural heritage of the society.

The socializing function of the individual families have become inadequate to provide the necessary skills required by a technological society and so becomes a moral responsibility for teachers to critically socialize the young children entrusted to their care through the process of enculturation. There should be emphasis on the language of the immediate environment and the logic in teaching it.

In the logic of language teaching, writing should precede reading. The children start by tracing geometric figures. For the drawing of this graphic signs, materials which consists of smooth cards in which are stock alphabetic letters in sand papers are provided.

The children trace the alphabets with their fingers following the direction taken in writing. This method help co-ordination of the hand and the muscles. Moreover, it helps the child to be able to reproduce any design of letter through sight and touch. This method establishes the motor and visual memory of the letters.

Materials for tracing the letters should consists of small cards bearing the letters of the alphabet. The consonant and vowel letters are written in different colours. The teacher begins with the teaching of the alphabet from the vowels and going on to the consonants which are pronounced according to their sound. The teacher presents each letter of the alphabet and shows the child how to trace the letter. She guides the index finger of the child's right hand over the sand papered letter in the direction followed in writing.

With the previous exercise on the tactile work the child is guided by texture of the fine sand papered alphabet without fear of making mistakes. If his finger wanders, the smooth surface outside the sand papered alphabet makes him aware of his error.

Children between 3 and 4 years of age repeat the act with eyes closed. In this way they let themselves be guided by the sandpaper in following the shape without seeing it. The child

sometimes does not recognize the letter when he looks, but does so.

The method of play introduced through this perceptual activity is a form of inter-personal influence which aims at effective teaching and learning. Plato in support of the method of play, sees it as “the best way to begin the children’s education on the ground that any other way at that stage would involve compulsion and that will be unbecoming for a free person” (Schofield. H 1980)

The Role of Perception

The extent to which ideas are formed through impression is measured through experiments in the philosophical view point of the empiricist in all stages of the child’s growth. The example of such test was the one conducted by Piaget

The information provided by our senses stays relatively constant through our development. The way we interpret it changes. A child under six allows the evidence of his senses to dominate his judgement. The child’s perceptual world, the source of all he knows, conditions and shapes the way he knows them.

The child should be able to compare and recognize the figures when he hears the sounds corresponding to them. For example: “O” and “I”.

If the child cannot recognise the signs when he looks at them, he is invited to trace them. But if he still does not recognise them, the lesson will be taken up another day. There is the need not to stress an error and or insist on the lesson when the child does not respond at once.

By this method of writing the teaching of reading goes on at the same time as that of writing. When a letter is presented to the child and pronounced, the child makes acquaintance with written language through association and tactile muscular senses. When the children sees the letter and recognises it, he is eventually in the process of reading when he touches the letter he is in the process of writing.

Thus, the acquaintance with these two actions develops into reading and writing. If this method is effectively applied, the 4 year old will write before he reads. In order to introduce the child to this exercise of writing, the teacher gives a demonstration by saying a particular word and analysing the sounds by pronouncing them separately. For example: She says the word “mano”. She takes the letter “M” and pronounces it. She take the next letter “a” and places it next to the letter “M”. She does same to letters “n” and “o”. She picks the letters again one by one pronouncing the sound, therefore composing the word with the alphabet characters. She places the four letters on the table: - M-a-n-o

Sometimes the child, having understood the procedure rushes in to finish the word himself instead of leaving the teacher to do so. After the mastery of the recognition of the letters, the child is taught how to pronounce the sound corresponding to the alphabetic signs. In teaching the consonants, the teacher pronounces only the sound and immediately links it up with a word and she goes on pronouncing several words with that letter, always emphasizing the sound of the consonants.

It is not necessary to teach all the vowels before passing on to the consonants and as soon as one consonant is known it is made up into words. There is no definite order in teaching the consonant sounds. Very often the child curiosity about a

symbol leads to the teaching of the consonant which he desires, the sound of a name may awaken in the child a wish to know that consonant is necessary to build it up. When the child pronounces the sounds of the consonants he evidently experiences pleasure. He regards the series of sounds as novelty.

After a few lessons, the children request for words to be composed. Thus, a kind of dictation takes place. A child of four years of age finds himself still in the formative period of language. Children translate phonetical sounds after having heard them only once. As soon as they had been pronounced clearly they are translated into alphabetical signs on their tables. It is interesting to watch children in word formation. The child stands looking at the letters while repeating the words to himself with his lips moving slightly. Then he takes the required letters one by one without errors writing down the exact spelling (if they are phonetical)

Drawn words are placed before the children and they are asked to attach words to them.

Children practise this exercise at home on a copy book and show such to the teacher. It is only when the child has begun to write on his own accord that the teacher intervenes to guide the progress of the writing.

1. She rules the chalkboard so that the child may be guided in keeping to the right direction and the dimension of the writing.
2. Teacher urges the child to repeat the tracing of the sandpaper letters without correcting him directly over the writing which he has done. The child improves in writing by repeating the preparatory acts to writing.

Many of the defects which remain permanently in adults are due to functional errors in the development of speech in early childhood. Besides, there are many defects due to dialects which could easily be eradicated if education directs itself especially to improving the speech of the child.

Logic of Reading Language: Philosophical Implications of Organic (Cognitive) Approach

Writing should precede reading. The child makes attempt to translate signs into sounds. This process of translating signs into sounds produces phonetics sounds and not actually normal reading language.

Reading is the interpretation of an idea presented in graphic signs. The child who has not heard the word spoken, but who recognize it on seeing it put together on the table in moveable letters, that child reads.

Writing prepares the child for interpreting mechanically the union of the letter-sounds which are the components of the word which he sees written. A child who can write when he is confronted with words to be interpreted in reading is silent for some time and generally reads the component sound as slowly as if he was writing them. There is the need to present drawn objects present in the word to be read in order to make the meaning of the words easier to understand. Reading serves to help in the development of language. But writing serves to direct and perfect the mechanism of spoken language in the child. The child is allowed to translate slowly the written words into sounds and if this interpretations is exact, the teacher starts saying “much faster”.

Reading Sentences

The teacher writes sentences of the language of the immediate environment on the blackboard and asks the pupils to repeat. For example: “Ka na so na?”. ie “Do you like me?”. The children read it out slowly and would be silent for a moment and then would shout “ee” ie “yes”

The teacher goes on further, instructing them to keep silent and be quite still. They read it almost in a shout and deep silence falls in the room. Written language does not need speech, its full power is realized only when it is completely isolated from spoken language.

In support of this view, Montessori cited, “Experience has shown us that composition must precede logical reading as writing precedes the reading of words and that reading which conveys meaning must be mental and not local”.

It is now evident that children in the early childhood stage are rational beings. Children are intelligent and also make use of the environmental perception which helps in spontaneous reasoning. For such children, there is the need for nursery schools to guide them on the path of life using the general principles of respect for freedom and perceptual activities.

Conclusion

Education is a key instrument to realizing the value expectation of any society. It gives to its citizens what is worthwhile and valuable.

The argument we have tried to sustain thus far is that the values of education will be through when is philosophically based on the pedagogical scientific teaching using the perception of the new environment of silence which affects the universality of the child’s knowledge and ideas.

References

1. Ekere SE. Silent Issues in Classroom management. Education for today, 2006.
2. Ekwueme. The teacher as a moral agent: Moral and Religious Education for Colleges and Universities, 2006.
3. Federal Republic of Nigeria National policy on Education, Lagos. NERDC Press, 2004.
4. Nziadem. Discipline in Nigerian Education: Philosophical perspective in Honour of Prof. J.D Okoh (Eds) Aminigo I.M, Osaat S.D. ISBN, 2015.
5. Odigie VO. Philosophical Perspectives of Nursery and Primary School Education (Revised) Edition. Pearl Publishers. Port Harcourt, 2014.
6. Schofield H. The Philosophy of Education: An introduction. London: Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1980.