Creative Techniques for Handling Pre-Schoolers Socio-Emotional Needs in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper examined creative techniques for handling pre-schoolers' socio-emotional needs in Nigeria. Pre-schoolers have basic needs to be met as they go through the developmental stages of life. Identifying and meeting physical and cognitive needs of children are easily done. However, there is need to also identify and meet social and emotional needs of young children for overall development, resilience and effective learning. The paper emphasized the need for teachers and care-givers to employ creative techniques in handling social and emotional needs of pre-school children. Such techniques include: active listening, positive comments, interactive sitting arrangement, open-ended questions, boosting child's self-esteem, self-directed children's play (for social needs) and demonstrating love in action, creative resolution of quarrels among children, practical assistance to help children overcome fears, use of drama skits and commendations (for emotional needs).

Introduction

Pre-schoolers are children that are below the official school starting age of 6 and enrolled in early childhood programs called pre-schools. Pre-schoolers are children who are no longer babies but are not yet old enough to go to school. Such children acquire learning through play and are guided by professionally trained adults (Advameg, 2018).

Pre-schoolers fall within a critical period of development, the formative or foundation years that shape their future development. Ige (2011) posited that events in the first years of life of a child inform his/her subsequent developmental competency. Children develop physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally, as they go through the developmental stages of life (Akintunde & Ojile, 2016).

At each stage of development, young children have basic needs that should be met. Often times, efforts are made at meeting the cognitive (intellectual), physical and physiological needs (e.g. oxygen in-take, food, shelter, and clothing) of children while neglecting social and emotional needs of children. However, meeting socio-emotional needs of pre-schoolers is vital in achieving success in school (Extension, 2015). Also, it helps pre-schoolers to acquire essential life-skills in terms of self-management, relating well to others, resolving conflicts and building self-concept (Kidmatter n.d.). A child that has not acquired the social skill of following directions will find it difficult to follow teacher's instruction in class.

Consequently, the onus lies on the teacher/care-giver to understand the basic social and emotional needs of pre-schoolers and explore and adopt creative techniques of addressing the needs to pave way for effective teaching and learning. It is against this backdrop that this paper focuses on pre-schoolers' socio-emotional needs and creative ways of handling these needs to pave way for good mental health, total development and effective learning of young children.

Conceptual Clarifications:
Pre-Schooler's Needs

A need is something required; a necessity. Pre-schoolers have developmental needs that should be met. These needs include social and emotional needs (Wallace, 2017; Thatcher, 2018). It is difficult to educate a child without meeting his/her essential needs (TedMersin, 2016). Consequently, children should be assisted to develop necessary skills towards addressing the needs at the pre-school years. In the light of this, Magliano (2017) submitted that early social-emotional skills acquired has correlation with social and emotional skills in later life.

Creative Techniques

Creativity is a vital concept in education. Creativity involves production of novel, original and qualitative ideas and products (Akintunde, 2015). According to Chavez-Fakle (2010), creativity entails generating new things, or/and transforming old things into new.

Creative techniques connote new, productive and qualitative ways. Techniques that lead to desired results are creative techniques. The teacher needs to utilize creative and imaginative approaches in handling pre-schoolers' social and emotional needs for effective teaching/learning and good classroom management.

Employing creative techniques requires the pre-schooler's teacher/care-giver to be creative as a person. He/she should exhibit creative attributes such as flexibility (in thought, perception and action); open to new ideas (readily tries new ideas); imaginative (think of new and interesting ways of addressing issues) and be an internet user (Akintunde & Selzing-Musa, 2017). The teacher or care-giver should use creative ways to meet each child's needs.

Social Needs of Pre-Schoolers

Social needs of pre-schoolers centre on inter-personal relationships among children and with others in the environment. A number of scholars (Child and Family Learning Network (CFLN), 2015; Tedmersin College, 2016 and Gottschalkscher, 2018) have proposed the underlisted as social needs of pre-schoolers:

- **Need to Play**
    - To interact and make friends with others
    - To enjoy the company of others

- **Need to take turns in activities**
    - To be considerate and allow others to participate
    - To be willing to share with others

- **Need to follow directions**
    - To follow guidance of teacher or care-giver
    - To follow safety rules

- **Need to work together in a group**
    - To cooperate with others in achieving set-goals
    - To value the contributions of others

- **Need to solve problems with words**
    - To solve problems through communication/expressions and not through aggressive behaviours

- **Need to develop self-esteem**
    - To feel significant (personally) and not feel inferior to others

Emotional Needs of Pre-Schoolers

Emotional needs of pre-schoolers centre on control of emotions while reacting to people or events. As the child develops emotionally, he/she needs to develop the ability to recognize, label, accept, and give acceptable responses to his feelings (Akintunde, 2015). Emotional needs of pre-schoolers include:

- **Need for love**
    - To be cared for and given attention

- **Need to be understood**
    - To understand what the child is trying to say or do

- **Need for security**
    - To feel secured or protected by others
    - To overcome being scared or afraid of darkness, height or strange events

- **Need for commendation**
    - To be commended or praised and rewarded for exhibiting good behaviours and achievements

- **Need for Acceptance**
    - To feel recognized
    - To have a sense of belonging

Creative Techniques for Handing Social Needs of Preschoolers

Some creative techniques to be employed by the teacher or care-giver in handling pre-schoolers' needs include:

1.   Encourage communication among children and with others: This can be creatively done through:

a)   Active Listening
- Listen attentively to children. Pay attention to the child e.g. by leaning forward, making eye-contact and asking questions about what the child is saying.

b)   Positive Comments
- Make positive comments on changes noticed in the child e.g. a new school uniform; new hair-cut/hair-do; new school bag.
- Do not use harsh or abusive comments in responding to a child's wrong answer to a question. Harsh comments hamper communication.

c)   Interactive sitting arrangement
- It is common to find desks/chairs arranged in rows in Nigerian schools. The teacher can creatively re-arrange the class by setting desks/chairs in groups. This helps children to interact with themselves and the teacher.

d)   Open-ended questions
- Often times, children are asked closed-ended questions, i.e. questions that require just 'Yes' or 'No' or nodding of head in responding. However, open-ended questions should

also be asked questions that ask "why" or "how" questions requiring explanations. As such, children learn to express themselves and improve on their language and communication skills.

(2)   Creative problem-solving skills
a)   Allow children to engage in creative ways of solving problems:
-    If a problem arises from playing with others, the teacher can sometimes involve the pre-schoolers' in making arrangement for sharing toys and other play materials.

b)   Allow children to engage in self-directed plays:
-    Provide adequate toys for children to play in groups
-    Allow children to engage in free-plays; pretend play; outdoor plays initiated by them. However, the teacher/care-giver should provide support (especially to ensure safety).

3)   Boost the child's self-esteem
-    Communicate with the child to know that he/she is significant or valued.
-    Engage the older children in free discussions in class on issues like "My best food"; "My pet".
-    Sometimes, allow children to 'choose' songs to sing or stories to listen to. This can help to boost their self-esteem.

Creative Techniques for Handling Emotional Needs of Pre-Schoolers
        Some creative techniques to be employed by the teacher or care-giver in handling pre-schoolers' needs include:
1)   *Demonstrate love in action*
-    Give attention and care to the child. Children that are loved are emotionally stable, confident, happy and share love with others.
-    Listen to the child to understand his/her fears or anger.
-    Speak kind words to the child.
-    Let the child know that he/she is cherished e.g. involve him/her in some class activities.
 -    Let children also show openly that they care for one another. They can help to calm a crying child.

2)   *Help resolve quarrels tactfully*
     Employ different methods or ways to settle quarrels e.g. Ask the feuding children to say "sorry" to each other; Hug each other etc.
-    Correct the erring child in love; explain why his behaviour is wrong, why he is to be disciplined and the need to exhibit good behaviour.
-    Do not over-criticize the child.

3)   *Give practical assistance to overcome children's fear*s
-    Show empathy for children's fears. For a child that is afraid of a dark room, the caregiver can accompany the child to enter the dark room for the first time to douse his/her fears.
-    For a child that has height phobia and is unable to climb a staircase, the caregiver can hold the child and climb up together step-by-step, for the first time, to allay his/her fears. The child may be able to pick up from there.

4) ***Make children dramatize appropriate ways of handling emotions***
- Children can dramatize how to handle emotion of emotion of *Anger*. For instance, two (2) children are seen quarrelling about ownership of certain pencils and eventually one reports to the care-giver who helps to identify the real-owner and the matter is settled amicably *without resorting to physical fighting.*
- Emotion of joy can also be dramatized.

5) ***Give commendations to pre-schoolers.***
- Generally, teachers are quick to notice a child's misbehaviour and give prompt discipline. However, children's good behaviours should be promptly identified and commended too.
- Teacher/caregiver can commend the child by saying "Good", "Excellent", "Clap for him/her". Show that you are happy with the child.
- Gifts can also be given to the child.
- Commendations are given to children when they exhibit desirable behaviours like:
  - Outstanding performance in test e.g. 8/10 very good
  - Good behaviour during play e.g. he/she shares his/her toys with other children
  - Creative drawings by the child
  - Carrying out assigned responsibilities well

6) ***Acknowledge the Child's Unique Abilities***
- The teacher can promote the child's unique qualities e.g. displaying his/her good drawings (Art-works) in class.
- Pictures of overall best-pupils in academic performance and good character can be displayed in class.

Conclusion
The social and emotional needs of pre-schoolers have been highlighted. Teachers and care-givers have vital roles to play in understanding and fostering children's socio-emotional skills for effective teaching and learning. Creative techniques to be utilized in handling the socio-emotional needs of pre-schoolers have been presented. Imbibing these techniques will pave way for overall development of the child and success in school.

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