10

Counselling Perspective for Skills Development in Teacher Education

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Introduction

Education is the greatest force that can be used to bring about change. It is the greatest investment that a nation can make for the quick development of its economic, political, sociological and human resources (Ijaiya 2008). Generally, education helps to shape the children of today into adults of tomorrow. In realization of this, the Nigerian policy makers emphasized all-round development of the child. The development of his affective, cognitive and psychomotor domain is stressed. Specifically, the fifth objective of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) states thus: 'ensuring the acquisition of appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for the life-long learning' (Federal Ministry of Education 2004).

Unfortunately, in practice, educators, teachers and parents are more concerned about the cognitive domain, that is, the mental aspect of development, which includes perception, sensation, imagination, memory and thinking. Sulaiman (2007) notes a wide gap between the policy of education and the practice in Lagos State primary schools, especially the private schools. While the National Policy on Education (2004) emphasizes learning through play for pre-primary schools, serious academic work is what was on ground in the schools. Instead of a five-year-old child being in pre-primary school, according to the policy, at age five, a child is already in Primary Two. By the age of nine, the child is in secondary school, while according to the policy, secondary school age is eleven. According to proprietors and teachers in Sulaiman's (2008) study, parents are the cause of

the discrepancy because they are in a hurry to get their wards out of school and into the labour market, reason being that their wards will get into the labour market early and collect returns for a longer time.

According to developmental psychologists, such as Santrock (2007), education should develop the whole child and instruction should be based on the process of learning and not what is learnt. The other aspects of development, the affective and the psychomotor are gradually being neglected. In most schools, one can significantly find nothing in the environment indicating the development of the psychomotor domain. Today's students have lost the right of playing games such as hockey, basketball, volleyball, lawn and table tennis, and even, ordinary playgrounds are missing in many schools. Teachers' emphasis is on their scheme of work, time-table and students' academic performance. Less attention is provided for the child who, in addition to cognitive development, requires affective and psychomotor development.

In addition, today's children are faced with unique and diverse challenges, with an increasingly diverse new technologies followed by varied opportunities. It has been asserted by several authors that between 10 and 20 per cent of school-age children exhibit emotional and behavioural problems (Kottler and Kottler 1993; Mental Health Foundation 1999 and Thompson and Rudolph 2000). In view of this fact and in order to help the young ones cope with the pressures of the changing society and ensure that they are adequately prepared to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders and citizens, counselling skills and strategies are needed in schools now more than before. Contemporary counsellors (Bryan Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines 2009) have ceased to see counselling as only a problem-solving process but also a preventive process. Since teachers are the only school personnel who have constant daily interaction with students and counselling is the skilled and principled use of a relationship to facilitate self-knowledge, emotional acceptance and growth, then teachers are expected to be able to use basic counselling skills and strategies to foster maximum development. Teachers are expected to coordinate instruction in such a way that a balanced individual who can think right with adequate foresight and sensitivity to human feeling and emotions develops.

Counselling is a process whereby the relationship and communication provided allows one to develop and understand one self, explore possibilities and initiate changes. Counselling is motivated by care and concern for the wellbeing of the counsellee and aims at bringing about behavioural change, problem-solving and development. Generally, counselling is perceived as a problem-solving process which is only required particularly in schools when there are problems to be solved. However, the changing world of information technology and the attendant effects on the society demand that counselling ceases to be a side attraction or something to be tolerated in schools and becomes the heart of the whole

educational system. The focus of this chapter is that counselling skills and techniques should not just form part of the training of teachers to optimize the help that could be provided to children and their parents, but should constantly be in use in the classroom. Those in charge of educational quality control are called upon to take cognizance of this aspect of the teaching and learning process. Teachers need to develop their knowledge and skills in the areas of counselling and consultation and also work more closely with parents and other professionals, more importantly counsellors and social workers, to enhance individualized instruction and improve the whole educational system. What then are the counselling skills and strategies that should be employed by teachers?

Counselling Skills and Techniques

Skill is the ability to do expertly well with artistry and fineness. Technique refers to a practical method or art applied to a particular task to attain proficiency in a practical or mechanical skill. Counselling skills and techniques entail those special abilities possessed by counsellors, which enable them to carry out the counselling relationship effectively. They are conditions that are necessary for effective counselling which should be imbibed into the classroom to enhance effective teaching and learning. The following are some of the counselling skills and techniques for teachers.

Listening Skill

Listening skill is an important counselling skill that is adopted to encourage clients to express their feelings as much as they can. The teacher does little lecturing but listens carefully and attentively to the student. The teacher obviously needs listening skill to deal with certain issues in the classroom. Rather than shout at the girl who is disturbing the class, the teacher could listen to the girl's story on what is causing the disturbance. The teacher could also teach listening skill to students through role play; and when subjects have aspects relating to listening skill, it should be stressed. Through active listening, students are taught how to understand one another as well as the teacher and the teacher shows understanding of the students' fears, stresses and anxieties. As a result of the empathy shown, the student feels accepted, more relaxed and more comfortable in the teacher's presence.

The following are essential for effective listening to take place:

- *Attentiveness* – That is, physically focusing one's attention on the person being listened to.
- *Eye Contact* – This is the most important component of listening. It is the process of maintaining good eye contact, which involves looking directly at the other person's face and only shifting one's gaze to observe any gesture or body movement. If maintaining eye contact is a problem, the speaker's mouth or nose could be gazed upon.

- *Facing Squarely* – Face the client squarely without any divided attention.
- *Leaning Forward* – Leaning forward to the person being listened to communicates attentiveness while leaning backwards gives the impression of not being interested and not listening.
- *Open Posture* – Having one's legs and arms crossed may give the impression that one is not open. An open posture of both arms and legs sends a message of open communication.
- *Remaining Relaxed* – An essential component of listening is being relaxed while adopting an appropriate posture. If a posture is not comfortable, a more comfortable posture could be assumed, but one should be steady and should not change frequently. Changing frequently may send a message of 'I am tired of listening' or 'Please, cut the story short'.
- Take appropriate body motion; for example, avoid checking your watch frequently.
- Listening is enhanced in a non-distracting environment.
- Distance between the two should not be much; be as close as possible.

The following obstruct listening skill:

- *Reassurance* – For example the teacher saying, 'Don't worry! I am sure it will work out all right'.
- *Denial of feeling* – For example, saying, 'Cheer up do not feel bad' or asking the student not to cry.
- *False acknowledgement* – For example, when you say, 'I can understand how you feel', He who feels knows, you cannot feel but can only empathize.
- *Diverting* – Asking student to talk about other things. To avoid, prevent or change the subject of discussion. There should be free association. The student should be free to say anything as it comes and the teacher must be willing and ready to listen attentively.
- Labelling – When the teacher says, for example, 'You are angry, arrogant or aggressive'.
- *Moralizing* – Saying, for example, It is morally wrong for you to do that'.
- *Criticizing* – Saying, for example, 'You should not have done that'.

Notwithstanding, listening skills – if and when used appropriately – serve as percussion to implement other counselling skills in the classroom.

Questioning Skill

Questioning skill is used in counselling to probe into the clients' inner selves to enable them open up for discussion or reveal what they have either been hiding or unwilling to express. Questions in counselling could be open-ended or close-

ended. Open-ended questions are also called divergent questions. Teachers will use open-ended questions to make students open up and express their feelings. For example, 'You have just said this and that, what happens next?' or 'What do you want me to do?' Close-ended questions, on the other hand, are used for confirmation, and are good for speaking out. Close-ended questions are good for clarification, exploration, filling the missing gap and for proper understanding of the client. For example, saying, 'You said your father left your mother without providing for your upkeep' or 'You said you guess your husband is having an affair?' However, the teacher is expected to use questioning with caution so that the session will not turn out to be a question-and-answer session. In addition, the teacher is expected to consider the student's level of intelligence and his/her emotional state in questioning. For example, questions should start from known to unknown and from simple to complex.

Summary Skill

Summary skill simply means tying statements together. The teacher needs to summarize the feeling and communication expressed by both parties. The essence of summary is for clarification, confirmation and correction. It can come up at any point in the counselling session; it could be at the beginning of a new session, for example, 'the last time you came, you said so and so'. It could be at the end of a session, for example, 'we have said so and so and we have decided to meet on such and such date'. Summary and questioning skills are both useful in listening skill to ascertain that the listener is attentive; and it enhances the speaker's feeling of acceptance.

Solution-focused Skill

Solution-focused Skill is the overall aim of counselling. The purpose is to ensure realistic and effective solution to the client's problem. The teacher therefore focuses on solution rather than the problem by listening, probing, diagnosing and questioning, to ensure that the root cause of the problem is found and a solution is sought. The teacher's concern should be, 'How do I get the students back to the right track and not send them out of the class or school'?

Rapport Skill

Rapport Skill is the condition of mutual understanding, respect and sustained interest which is essential to a comfortable and unconditional relationship between the counsellor and the client. The teacher is expected to develop this skill through warm reception, friendliness and cheerful mood. It is usually established at the initial stage of counselling. Hence, teachers should be hospitable from their first day in school. For example, greeting students thus: 'Good morning? how are you?' or mentioning the first name, class, or post of the student, 'You are ......' or

expressing compliments about the student's appearance – 'You have such a lovely dress or perfume.' Even when the appearance is against the school's norm, it should be expressed in a warm manner; for example, 'Is the school colour not blue?' and not 'Why should you put on a green cardigan?'. This gives room for warm relationship, confidence, willingness to open up and respect for both parties.

Empathy Skill

Empathy Skill is the key ingredient in helping relationship. Empathy is described as a way of being with the client and entering his or her world. It is the ability to listen to and understand the voice, thought, feelings, attitudes and experiences of the client. The student's situation should be viewed from his/her point of view. The teacher must develop empathic understanding of student, which is assuming the internal frame of reference of the student or operating along the same frequency with the student. However, the teacher should be able to separate emotion (sympathy) from empathy. Sympathy emphasizes distressed feelings while empathy does not emphasize any particular type of feeling (Egan 1998). Sympathy reflects agreement with the student's feelings and belief while empathy reflects understanding with no agreement or disagreement. For example, shedding tears because the student's story is emotional or because the student is crying is not empathy. The following are key steps to effective empathy:

- Recognizing the presence of strong feeling in the counselling setting – for example, fear, disappointment, anger or grief;
- Pausing to imagine how the student/client is feeling;
- Stating one's perception of the client/student's feeling – for example saying, 'It sounds like you are upset about....' or 'I can imagine how or what....';
- Respecting the client/student's effort to cope with the predicament, situation or problem;
- Offering support or partnership – for example assuring the student of your readiness to work with him/her through the problem;

Role Playing

Role playing is usually used to teach appropriate behaviour, new skills or to correct maladaptive behaviour. Role playing is the process of acting through play or watching somebody's character in order to effect change in the observer or the actor. The teacher could watch the act on stage or video and students could be actors. For example, it is useful to teach assertive behaviour or to correct aggression. The teacher could use role play to teach students assertiveness. For example, the teacher could ask the students to role play 'Refusal Assertiveness – that is how to say 'No' at the right time and in the right way. This is an important skill that

should be learnt by both teachers and students: to imbibe the importance of saying 'No', to keep them from being taken advantage of or doing something harmful, and not to keep them away from engaging in daily responsibilities.

Shaping

Shaping is reinforcing small steps or approximations towards a terminal response rather than reinforcing the terminal response itself. It is a way of orienting the client to begin to respond in a way that he/she has not been responding before. The teacher can use it to teach new behaviour or correct weak behaviours such as shyness or stage fright in a student. Shaping involves three important principles which are:

- Generalization;
- Competition;
- Chaining.

For example, the teacher can use it to teach learning a disabled student letter writing. He/she starts with making strokes /////// then \ \ \ \ \ then — — — — — (generalizing) then /\ /\ /\ /\ /\ and lastly letter **A** is written. At each stage, the teacher needs to reinforce in order to increase performance. Then the student proceeds to learn letter **B** and so on. This is chaining.

The teacher can also use it along with role play to reduce shyness in a student, using the following steps:

- Teacher discusses with student alone;
- Teacher discusses with student while other students watch at a distance;
- Teacher asks others to move closer and listen to the discussion between the student and him/her;
- Teacher leaves client to talk alone with other students;
- Teacher encourages client to raise discussion with others.

The steps are taken with continuous reinforcement.

Chaining

Chaining is a process whereby behaviour is divided into a sequence of response and each response is reinforced. This is a very useful technique for learning in the classroom. It could be forward chaining or backward chaining. Forward chaining is a sequence of action, taught by reinforcing the first action in the chain and working forward, each time adding a behaviour segment to the chain. For example learning letters 'A to Z'; then learning two letters 'GO, AT, NO'; then learning three-letter words. Backward chaining is the opposite of forward chaining, that is from the rear to the top, from three-letter words to two and then one letter.

Prompting

Prompting is the process of using instructions directions, examples and models to facilitate desired behaviour. They are actions that precede a response and help to initiate it. For example, at the bang of the table in the classroom, the students greet; or at the tap of the fingers, the student performs certain action(s) or counting of pebbles for addition in mathematics. Prompts could be verbal or non-verbal.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is any stimulus or event that increases the occurrence of behaviour. Reinforcement could be positive or negative. Positive reinforcement is an increase in the probability of a desired behaviour that is followed by a desirable stimulus. For example, 'If you do your assignment as expected, you will go out to play ball' or 'If you don't leave your seat for a lesson, you will earn a gift'. Negative reinforcement is an increase in the probability of a behaviour that is followed by the removal of an aversive stimulus. For example, the bell sounds because the cell phone is on in the examination hall, the sound stops when the cell phone is switched off; so, because of the embarrassment, the phone is always switched off at the examination premises.

Token Economy

Token economy is a sort of reinforcement to foster change in behaviour. The client is expected to enjoy certain privileges beyond the essential or basic necessities of life (food, clothing and water) in exchange for good behaviour. The privilege could be a trip to the beach or place of interest or gifts. The use of token economy is guided by the following rules:

- *Token* is used as a medium of exchange like money. It is the object that is given to the student each time a desired behaviour is exhibited. For example, each time a truant comes to school, he/she is given a token, which he/she would use later to purchase *a* gift.

- *Back up reinforcement* is the privilege that may be purchased by the student when he/she has earned enough or the required number of tokens. This may be a trip to London, an eatery or the beach.

- *Rate of Exchange*: this is the number of tokens that is required from the client to purchase a privilege. It may be six, four, five or more.

- *Bank Hour*: Is the (specific) time of picking up tokens or exchanging a token for a privilege – for example, lunch time or after school.

- *Response Cost*: This is the punitive measure that guides the process. It is the fine imposed on the student for violating the rules and regulations of the programme. For example, if a token is not picked at the right time, the

already acquired tokens are collected. The student has to start again to obtain the required number of tokens. The teacher should ensure that the gift is worth the student's trouble; otherwise, the process may not work.

Punishment

Punishment is any stimulus that decreases the strength or frequency of behaviour. Teachers must follow the following rules for punishment to be effective:

- *Reprimand* is an expression of disapproval. It could be administered verbally or through gesture. Reprimand could be used to correct disturbance in the classroom, for example saying 'No', by shaking the head or using facial expression. Reprimand should be used quietly rather than loudly. The teacher should reprimand in such a way that only the affected student knows. A loud reprimand is prone to increase the undesired behaviour, for example, shouting, 'Will you stop it?' will not do the magic like just eyeing the concerned student.

- *Time-out* is a period of time in a less reinforcing environment following certain behaviour, that is, removing the student from an environment where he/she would ordinarily expect reinforcement and placing him/her in a situation where he/she cannot be reinforced. For example, asking the student to stay behind at lunch time to do his/her assignment while other students are outside playing or watching their favourite game.

- *Response* is the loss of reinforcers. For example, when students are given tangible reinforcers like candy for better behaviour or performance but not given when they misbehave, the reinforcer is lost, just like losing the tokens to be used for exchange in token economy.

- *Over-correction* is the fourth type of punishment procedure, and it is of two types:

    a. *Restitution*, that is, restoring to original state: To make the offenders restore the environment or the spoilt object to its original state and now improve on it more than the original condition. For example, it can be used in a situation where the environment is damaged. When the classroom or school compound is littered with dirt or the toilet is wrongly used, the students are asked to clean it and make it even better than it was before.

    b. *Positive Practice*, that is, teaching to act correctly: This could be used when behaviours are performed incorrectly. The student would be asked to do it repeatedly until he/she can perform the task correctly.

Extinction

Extinction is the gradual disappearance of a response that is no longer followed by a reinforcer. It is the process of ignoring undesirable behaviour and reinforcing desirable ones such that the undesirable one will disappear overtime. The use of extinction by the teacher, however, requires patience and tolerance. In the process of ignoring, there is the probability for the undesirable behaviour to increase or become worse; if the teacher deviates, the process becomes faulty. The teacher therefore must be firm when employing the use of extinction. For example, a student is asked to use the lunch period to do his assignment but rather than sitting to do it, he is crying, insisting he has to go and play. The rule is that the teacher should ignore the behaviour until the student complies. Counsellors are sure the crying is for a while; if ignored, extinction will surely take place the desired behaviour will manifest.

Assertive Therapy

Assertive therapy is a form of social skill training that teaches clients to express their needs, feelings and wants confidently without hurting themselves or others. Assertive therapy is a very useful skill that should be used in the classroom, especially for adolescents. It teaches students how to say 'NO' at the right time in the right way and with a much higher possibility of achieving the right outcome (Nwamuo 2005). The essence of learning to say 'NO' is to keep students from being taken advantage of or doing something harmful, or influencing them to keep away from engaging in daily responsibilities. Assertive therapy involves:

- Active listening to what is being said – giving the other person the opportunity to express him/herself;
- Confidently saying what you think or feel – 'No, I can't go, I'm sorry I don't attend night parties';
- Stating emphatically what you want to happen with much consideration for others' feelings – 'I hope to attend some other time if it's during the day, kindly bear with me.'

Self-control Therapy

Self-control therapy is the process of teaching an individual to re-arrange powerful contingencies that influence behaviour in such a way that the student experiences long range benefits, even though he/she may have to give up some satisfaction or tolerate some discomfort at first. It involves the following process for the client:

- *Self-monitoring or self-observation*: Involves deliberate or careful attendance to one's behaviour. Teacher asks student to make a list of things he/she is doing that people are not comfortable with;

- *Self-evaluation* – comparison of what one is doing and what one should be doing. Student is asked to make a list of what he/she should be doing and he/she is not doing and then the teacher scores him/her to determine how far or close he/she is to the appropriate behaviour;
- *Self-reinforcement* – motivating self to do what one should be doing that is not maladaptive. The teacher uses reinforcement to motivate the student to see reason why he/she should behave appropriately.

The following is expected of the teacher in the relationship:

- *Motivation* – help client to establish a desirable self-control programme with adequate reinforcers that will enhance sustainability;
- *Training* – help client acquire specific behaviour change technique that will ease the process of change; for example, encouraging student to dissociate self from the group or gang;
- *Support and maintenance* – constant reinforcement of student's efforts to ensure the success of the programme. Teacher should use response cost too for violating the rules; for example, anytime a student is seen with the gang, reinforcer or token is withdrawn.

Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive Restructuring is the process of teaching clients to think more logically and rationally, to learn rational beliefs thereby breaking maladaptive irrational beliefs. The following are some of the irrational thoughts, as outlined by Albert Ellis:

- The idea that it is extremely necessary for adults to be loved by others;
- The idea that one should be competent, adequate and achieving in all possible respects;
- The idea that human unhappiness is externally caused and that people have little or no ability to control their sorrows or disturbance;
- The idea that it is easier to avoid than to face certain difficulties and self-responsibilities;
- The idea that one should be dependent on others and someone stronger than oneself;
- The idea that one should become quite upset over other people's problems and disturbance.

The following steps are to be used by the teacher in order to assist students to begin to think rationally and not get themselves worked up unnecessarily:

- Ask student to describe a typical sequence when feeling upset. The client will outline all the irrational thoughts sequentially, stating all the 'I should', 'should have' and 'should not have' or 'musts.

- Teach the student through the use of role play and assignment to replace the irrational self-statement with more realistic ones. Inform the student about the probability of the therapy being tedious at first but subsequently, with practice, it becomes easier.

- Observe changes in the expression of client; 'I am worthless' should have changed to 'I can still make it if I try' or 'Mine is better than so and so'.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter is that teachers are more disposed to employ the use of counselling skills and techniques to assist students to acquire appropriate developmental skills and walk through developmental challenges because they are closer to the students in the school setting than counsellors. More important is the fact that counsellors are not yet available in all schools to promptly attend to the students' problems and other developmental/environmental challenges. Though teachers are not as professionally trained as counsellors and cannot assume the role of counsellors, they could inculcate the skills and techniques of counselling into classroom teaching as well as individual assistance in order to ensure all-round development of the child, particularly in this digital era. Teachers need these skills and techniques to ensure that all types of learning, not just cognitive but also emotional, socio-personal and physical are taking place in the classroom. The overall aim is that the task of preventing and remedying emotional and behavioural problems in schools should not be left in the hands of the counsellors alone, but digital or globalization-compliant teachers should also be actively involved to ensure all-round development.

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