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**THE ROLE OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELLOR IN THE NIGERIAN
6-3-3-4 SYSTEM OF EDUCATION**

AMOS A. ALAO

ABSTRACT

Any system of education after its careful planning, needs to be carefully implemented to make it effective. The implementation of the new 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria should co-ordinate the resources of all the personnel connected with the education of the child. The Elementary School Counsellor is no doubt an important link between the child and the parent as well as other significant others connected with his growth.

Significance of Counselling in the Elementary School:

Child psychologists have recognized that all children are distressed occasionally by comparatively minor and common problems which can be resolved by understanding parents and teachers. However, other children are sometimes overwhelmed by real or imagined problems that need the immediate attention of a skilled professional. A competent elementary school counsellor can deal effectively with such children and their behaviours. The Elementary School Counsellors who understands the interaction between a pupil and his environment by training will be able to co-ordinate available resources within the school in such a way as to facilitate total pupil development. The elementary school counsellor can also help the pupils develop skill and awareness in dealing with his major life environment.

Guidance in the elementary school can help to identify those pupils whose lifestyles render them potential candidates for counselling and to muster the resources of the individual and his environment to overcome such obstacles; Keat (1974). Muro (1970), also asserted that the concept of elementary school guidance as a preventive force is especially important in the prevention of delinquency and student drop-out and in the curtailment of aberrant mental health. Furthermore, guidance in the elementary school can create within the school and among relevant adults (both teachers and parents) a sensitivity to the emerging individuality of each pupils.

Before pupils can be confidently separated into the technical or basic studies in the 6-3-3-4 system, prior information about pupils will be needed. This information will not be detailed, if its collection is delayed until the child reaches the second phases (in secondary school). The role of the Elementary School Counsellor becomes indispensable if we are to follow the trend and nature of development of the pupils.

Functions/Roles of the Elementary School Counsellor in the 6-3-3-4 System:

The Elementary School Counsellor with other personnel will shape the early ex-

periences of pupils who are to undergo the system. The information of the Elementary School Counsellor can serve as a spring board from which other personnel to be connected with pupils, take – off. The Elementary School Counsellor works in a helping relationship with children during the elementary school years, caring for them in special ways. It is also important to complement the efforts of the classroom teacher at this stage. Although there could be variations in the expectations of the Elementary School Counsellor his functions may be said to fulfill seven major roles, APGA (1969); Stamm and Nissman (1971); Keat (1974). These roles were identified as:

1. counselling;
2. collaboration or consultation;
3. co-ordination;
4. communication;
5. curriculum;
6. fostering child growth and development; and
7. teaching coping behaviours.

The counselling, consultation and co-ordination roles were proposed in a joint statement of the Association for Counsellor Education and Supervision and the American School Counsellor Association, APGA (1969). The curriculum and communication roles were suggested by Stamm and Nissman (1977), while Keat (1974) added the roles of a child development expert and the teacher of coping behaviour.

Counselling:

Notwithstanding the many roles the Elementary School Counsellor is expected to perform, counselling will be expected to be the primary function. The counselling could be with individual children, group of children or the significant others who interact with the pupils. It is essential to recognize the effects of significant others such as parents, teachers and peers and the various systematic characteristics of the school and the child.

Collaboration or Consultation:

The collaborative relationship may be defined as a working relationship between two or more people. Consultation may be regarded as a process of sharing with another person or group of persons information and ideas of combining knowledge into new patterns and of making mutually agreed upon decisions about the steps needed, Dinkmeyer (1968, p. 103). Consultation calls for a collaborative relationship in which the teachers, parents and the counsellor work together in understanding the child and his environment. Faust (1968 p. 24) remarked that the Counsellor-Consultant is one who collaborates with the teacher in both classroom activities and curriculum development. Muro, (1970 p. 96) views the job of the consultant as one of helping teachers and parents to restore or enhance their own confidence in working with children. Consultation proceeds best in an atmosphere of

mutual trust and confidence when the give and take of interaction is on somewhat informal basis, Muro (1970 p. 97).

The Elementary School Counsellor acting as consultant in this 6-3-3-4 system of education, by training recognizes the importance of confidentiality and trust in counselling. He thus possesses the skill to work in co-operative problem solving atmosphere with other workers so that the child can achieve his educational objectives. Also, in the 6-3-3-4 system, the Elementary School Counsellor can make use of his knowledge of individual behaviour to complement the teachers efforts in identifying student needs through the use of available objective and subjective information on the child. Through the consultative relationship, the Elementary School Counsellor can also help teachers, parents and possibly administrators come to grips with the influences that they collectively or individually exert on the pupils in the 6-3-3-4 system of education.

Co-ordination:

Co-ordination may be perceived as working together as a team. The Elementary School Counsellor can co-ordinate with other staff members, school headmasters and liaise with other resources beneficial to the pupils within the school community. The writer recognizes the shortage of counsellors even at the secondary school level, however, those executing the scheme could invite the counsellors in the secondary schools once in a while or invite specialists from the universities. The Elementary School Counsellor in the 6-3-3-4 system can be effective as a co-ordinator, when he is involved in the evaluation of the cumulative record, the adequacy of course offerings especially in the extra-curricular activities.

Communication:

The Elementary School Counsellor can serve as important link between the child and the teacher, parent, administrator because of his (Counsellor's) ability to understand and communicate with the child. The communication may be in the areas of difficulties encountered in the educative process or emotional adjustment. The Elementary School Counsellor can also act as a source of occupational information or reports to parents.

Curriculum:

It is assumed that the curriculum designed for the 6-3-3-4 system of education will expose the pupils not only to cognitive skills but to affective skills. One major role the Elementary School Counsellor can play in this new system of education is working co-operatively with other members of the school staff to implement or plan a curriculum that allows the child to grow in cognitive knowledge as well as in personal values. The Elementary Counsellor's primary area of concern is the emotional life of the child, which can have serious consequences on the cognitive skill, in case of any disorder Brown (1971) called on the counsellor to assist in development of a "confluent education," which is the integration of the affective and the cognitive elements in learning Dinkmeyer (1970) further asserted that by integrating an effective curri-

culum with the already overemphasized cognitive one the counsellor can have a day to day impact on the lives of the children.

Fostering Child Growth and Developments:

In the elementary school system, the counsellor can act as an expert in child growth and development. The counsellor can be helpful to the child during his development and can also assist in supplying information about the development of the child to the significant others in the child's life environment. Such informations could be the developmental expectations at various age levels or the developmental needs of the children at various dimensions.

Teaching Coping Behaviours:

The Elementary School Counsellor can teach coping behaviours in the school by:

1. serving as a role model for pupils and demonstrating how one copes with a situation effectively;
2. letting the pupils learn coping behaviour in a counselling session;
3. introducing coping skills through individual or group counselling; and
4. by helping children development affective means of coping.

Other Roles of the Elementary School Counsellor:

The Elementary School Counsellor can help the pupils in the elementary phase, of the 6-3-3-4 system, meet other developmental needs which Hill and Luckey (1969); Dinkmeyer (1970); Bessell (1970); and Brown (1971); called guidance learnings. These learnings include:

1. understanding and accepting oneself;
2. becoming aware of and understanding feelings and emotions;
3. understanding human behaviour;
4. developing responsibility for oneself;
5. establishing interpersonal relationships;
6. understanding choices, making decision and solving problems;
7. demonstrating adjustment capacities;
8. developing appreciation of the world of education and some understanding of the world of work; and
9. developing a sense of values and ideals.

Career Orientation and the Elementary School Counsellor:

Elementary School pupils need to increase their self awareness in relation to the educational and vocational options that will be available to them in future. Whereas in some Western countries there has been accelerated concern and commitment in the last two decades, to aid pupils in acquiring knowledge about the world of work, the same cannot be asserted for Nigeria. However, the 6-3-3-4 system of education has its implication on Career Orientation. Career decisions should be based on thorough knowledge of the world of work and effective-choice making strategies. The Elementary School Counsellor can assist in career development in the school so that the pupils and parent can become aware of their career.

The need for early career orientation was supported by Lyon (1966) when he observed that:

The lack of material and deferring concern until a more "appropriate age" have produced a situation in which it is easier to learn about the historical, geographical and natural world in the elementary school than it is to understand the economic sociological and psychological aspects in the world of work.

One of the antecedents to the growth of career education in the elementary schools, according to Herr & Cramer (1972), is the rising awareness that styles of choice behaviour in adolescence and adulthood are presaged by the types of developmental experiences that occur in childhood. The Elementary School Counsellor can assist the pupils in acquisition of self-knowledge, knowledge of their future educational and occupational alternatives and the rudiments of effective choice making.

The concern should be what kind of individuals will the 6-3-3-4 system produce and not what kind of education, the system will provide. Perhaps one can propose the type of individuals recommended in the report to the White House Conference on Children (1970 p. 75) which says:

"... We would have him be a man with a strong sense of himself and his own humaness, with awareness of his thoughts and feelings, with the capacity to feel and express love and joy and to recognize tragedy and feel grief. We would have him be a man, who with a strong realistic sense of his own worth, is able to relate openly with others, to co-operate effectively with them toward common ends, and to view mankind as one while respecting diversity and differences. We would want him to be a being who, even while very young, somehow senses that he has it within himself to become more than he is now, that he has a capacity for life-long spiritual and intellectual growth. We would want him to cherish that vision of the man he is capable of becoming and to cherish the development of the same for others."

Eventhough counselling is still relatively new in Nigeria and there is insufficiency of counsellors at the secondary level, any attempt to overlook the roles of the counsellor in the elementary tier of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, is to relegate to the background those forces that have shaped the secondary school pupils and we may not fully trace the direction of their "psychological growth."

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