

**THE ROLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY WOMEN IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.**

A PAPER PRESENTED

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THE ROLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY WOMEN.**

ABSTRACT

The place of women in the over-all development of a child and the entire society cannot be underestimated. Since the woman is the first figure and life moulder that appear to the child at birth, and the closest of all that shapes his life, this paper looks into the main roles that are expected to be played by the woman in the education of the child especially during the early-childhood period. Concepts like education, early-childhood and the major roles of women in the upbringing of children are highlighted.

Introduction

Women are indispensable if a home and a nation is to be properly raised and assisted to grow to an acceptable and enviable level. Women (child rearers) have a lot to do in ensuring that cool headed, loyal, patriotic and forward-looking citizens are produced for the families and for the nation.

The education of a child cannot be left until when he is matured enough to know what is expected of him. Mothers who are the first teachers of children, specially 'carved' out for this noble role have to impart into the child every necessary information needed for the child to fit into his immediate and remote environment.

When children are not living in conformity with norms and values of the family and the society, the mother is often blamed for lapses which have contributed to such unwarranted behaviours. This is the more reason why it is necessary to highlight some of the roles that are to be played by the 21st century women in order to build strong families and a sanitized society.

Concept of Education

Education has been defined in several ways. Osokoya, (1987) defined it as the leading out of the in-born powers and potentialities of an individual and the

acquisition of skills, aptitudes and competences necessary for self - actualization. It is the process of cultural transmission and renewal. Education is the process through which the acceptable norms, values and general ways of life of a people are imparted into the younger members of the society.

Early childhood Education

Early childhood refers to the period between 2-5 years of age. Piaget, a famous psychologist referred to the period as preoperational stage of cognitive development of a child. During this period, the child is not aware of himself, time and of the permanence of objects. Children are egocentric. They find it difficult to perceive from others point of view. They represent things with words and images but cannot reason with logic. The limits of children of this period are often not known by most mothers. They often thought that children willfully behave nastily. What should be the role of Mothers in Early childhood Education?

As it has been mentioned, if there is anybody that can raise up children in such a way that they will become what the society wants them to be it is the mother. For the proper development of the child, the 21st century mothers must wake up to their motherly responsibilities. These responsibilities are numerous but some of these will be considered here:

Mothers must love the child just as he is, Pauline Loh mentioned four general ways that women should show unconditional love to their children. They are through:

Physical contact

Verbal reassurance

Focused attention and,

Discipline

Ironically, mothers do over emphasize one or two areas and neglect the other. The most emphasized area today is discipline while the child lacks the curiosity and childish exuberance of a Love-nurtured experienced. It is also true that children that know nothing than discipline are likely to develop unacceptable behavioural patterns and lack a strong emotional attachment with their parents.

Hence, mothers ought to express love to their children by cuddling them. But most mothers cuddle children when they are dressing them or when necessary.

Verbal assurance like "I LOVE YOU" is often withdrawn when children misbehave. When such actions are taken by mothers, there is the likelihood for such children to think that they are loved only when they do good. Hence, mothers should give necessary verbal assurance, as means of expressing their unconditional love to their children.

Children are also shown love through Eye contact, by giving them appropriate hugs or touches and by creating acceptable atmosphere for them. By so doing, we will be helping the child to feel important. Such children are likely to readily respond to discipline and feel more secured in the company of others. Also, the child will likely continue to confide in her mother when he/she grow older.

Indiscipline is rampant today because working class mothers hardly have enough attention for their children. This eventually leads to compensatory gestures.

Emphases are more on the academic attainment of children while other aspects of the child's development are neglected. Also working class women are often exhausted as a result of their workload such that they could hardly pay adequate attention to their children when they return home

2. The development of the child's self esteem.

The development of the child will be enhanced if he is helped to develop good self-image. An example of a boy that came second in his class can be given here. He came home full of joy for coming second and for scoring 75% in Mathematics. Unfortunately the mother could not recognize with the success attained rather, she capitalized on her weak areas and was so furious and angry with the child. The child became confused, his happiness became dampened and he felt that he really did not worth anything.

During the early childhood and beyond women are to help their children to feel important. They must be convinced that their love for them does not depend on their academic performance. The mother should help him see what he has done wrong instead of given them blow by criticizing their errors.

Women are to look towards the development of the child's self concept, i.e. his own personal worth and social identity children who form a positive self concept tend to be more confident, independent, optimistic and sociable (Maccoby, 1980).

Mothers style of child management should not be the permissive or type rather, it should be authoritative. When we are permissive, we give in easily to the attitudes and demands of our children and use little or no punishment. An authoritarian mother will impose rules and expect perfect obedience. It is usually don't do this "or that" always. The authoritative woman controls the child by establishing rules and by explaining the reason for such rules in order in order for such rules to be kept. Studies carried out by Cooper Smith (1967) Diana Baurind (1983) shows that children with high self-esteem and very self-reliant often have warm and understanding parents.

3. Moral development of the child

Some mothers (parents) believe that moral education should come only when the child understand language and verbal commands like "Wait" "be still" etc. Mothers along with other members of the family are expected to correct the child and live exemplary lives before the child to emulate since values are not only taught but caught.

Self control can be taught by depriving the child of eating incessantly and by disallowing him from using the major part of his time in watching the television or playing. As self - control a moral value is learnt, the child will improve in his attention span and listening and focusing skills thus, aiding his intellectual development.

Mothers should help the child to know that she both the mother and the father are in charge. He ought to be assisted to know his boundaries.

He is to be taught patience, self-control, gentleness, and respect for elders by asking him to greet every morning and when anybody enters the house. The mother along with the father should train him in the way of God based on the family's religion. The child should be taught to pray at meal time, attend religious programmes, taught him to hate evil and tolerate others he should learn some simple verses that points him to the creator early enough. If this is not done, he will eventually learn wrong ideas from his play mates. Prov.22:6 says "Train up the child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." We have to direct their attention to spiritual things. A boy whose grandmother forced to observe his prayer hours received the revelation of heaven at a very tender age. The society will become a better place if the way of God which sanitizes man and the society is made known to the child while he is very young

Mothers are also expected to teach their children to express gratitude to their parents; God, parent, friends, adults etc. when they are given anything. They should be taught to thank God for daddy, mummy, food, Toys, chairs, T.V. e.t.c. This can help in stamping out evils such as the spirit of envy, covetousness, stealing and the like.

Moreover, grumbling, murmuring and depression will not become part of them if mothers will inculcate the habit of gratitude into children.

Courteous listening habits should also be developed in children from the early childhood period. They should not always be interrupted and they should also be taught to listen to adult without interrupting them.

4 Give your children their childhood

The 21st century mothers are expected to bring up their children by using child - centred methods. The house should be modeled for the convenience of the child, T.J. Rousseau, a famous educational philosopher and a naturalist, emphasized that "parents and teachers should allow children to be children before they are men" they are to be allowed to enjoy their childhood period.

By nature, they love to play, they want affection and intimacy with people around them. By nature they want to do childish things and they ought to be given the opportunity for these Oliver Twist did not have the opportunity of enjoying his childhood, he could not play or do what a child should do. Rather, he was expected to work like an adult and to make adult choices. Women should not expose their children to such negative experiences. The childhood period should be given back to the children. Let them be children before they are men.

When a child is allowed to play during the early childhood period his personality will be developed. Through that process, he will be able to figure out how

things work, he learns how to solve problems, develop his senses, learn how to talk and how to share his experiences and also, how to build strength and control his body. He will also develop and express imaginations and creativity about himself, others and the world. It is a way by which he expresses his feelings. Hence, the need to make available to children assorted play objects such that will develop them positively. When toys and play objects are to be provided for the child the following factors must be considered:

Relevance of it to the development of the child.

Ask yourself if the play object will help to strengthen good relationship with people

Ask yourself if it will arouse the imagination and creative thinking of the child.

Will it build confidence in the child or instill fear.

Negative side of play objects

Children should not be allowed to play all through the day. If care is not taken play objects (Toys etc) can inhibit a child's ability to interact with others. Hence, they should never be allowed to become substitutes for the child's close interaction with the mother and others around him.

While children have the opportunity to learn from the Television, parents especially the mother has to control and monitor what they watch. They can imitate dangerous acts, and later experience symptoms of schizophrenia. Parents should therefore not be too busy with work such that necessary guidance of children's Television programmes will not be provided.

Parents should limit their viewing time and encourage them to read books, listen to music etc. Before they become teenagers, proper societal values ought to have been built into them.

5. Lay a solid background for children's education

In doing this, women are supposed to buy simple books with pictures for the child, tell them stories that will develop them mentally emotionally and socially. Let them count the objects at home, taste and discover things on their own, make his environment educative enough for a solid foundation to be made before he goes to school.

Women should also know their child's learning styles and develop them along that direction. Three types of learners identified by Roger Grace (1995) Tan are:

Visual Learner

Audio learner

Kinesthetic learner

Visual Learner catches concepts quickly and enjoys looking at pictures but he is not good with details.

The Audio Learner listens well and is good with details but has short-term memory.

While the Kinesthetic Learner is restless, walks about when reading, and can hardly sit still.

Since the learning styles of children differ, one cannot use the same yardstick to judge them. The woman should endeavour to guide their learning based on the identified learning style of each child.

Conclusion

The paper has looked into what the 21st century woman has to do in aiding the development of children during the early childhood period. Mothers who are the closest to children are to give their children, love, and security, be an embodiment of good character for the child to emulate, discipline when necessary, teach the societal

values and lay the foundation for the formal education which the child will eventually receive at school. If the points already discussed are imbibed by mothers, Nigerian children will be so nurtured such that our society will become a better place to live in.

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