NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

COURSE CODE: ECE 223

COURSE TITLE: PLAY AND LEARNING

COURSE GUIDE

**ECE 223
PLAY AND LEARNING**

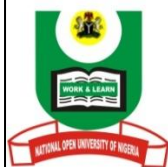|	
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INTRODUCTION

Children from birth to age eight learn rapidly, using all of their senses and their entire bodies to take in sensations and experience the world around them. During this period they actively engage in play, an activity on which they spend most of their waking time. In fact, it has been asserted that play is work to children and that work is play to them. Studies have confirmed that children learn through play activities and exploration across essential developmental dimensions, which include social and emotional, language, physical and motor development etc.

THE COURSE

In view of the unique importance of play in the overall development of the child and especially its role in facilitating learning in the childhood years, it becomes necessary to have a programme that will examine the concept of play, highlighting the various aspects of play and its relationship with learning process in the childhood years. This course seeks to highlight the importance of play in early childhood education in programme.

COURSE AIMS

The aims of this course are to provide a basic understanding of play and the unique importance of play as a tool of learning in early childhood education.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this course shall be to:

i)   Examine the basic notions regarding concept of play in the childhood years.
ii)   Highlight the various characteristics of play at various stages of childhood.
iii)   Explain the relationship between play and learning across the stages of a child's development.
iv)   Provide the necessary theoretical rationale for the use of play in the childhood years.
v)   Identify the various activities that promote incidental learning through play.
vi)   Offer suggestions on how to prepare a preschool play environment.

WORKING THROUGH THE COURSE

This is a course that requires you to match study with practical observations. The content has been painstakingly selected to offer you a sequential and easy to comprehend study package. Nevertheless you would be expected to alignment your study with practical observation of children playing in your environment. You are also advised to avail yourself the opportunity of attending tutorial sessions.

Finally, you would be expected to familiarize yourself with other texts and materials that will further enhance your knowledge in all the aspects related to this course.

THE COURSE MATERIAL

Basically, your course material shall consist of a course guide and the study units which you will be provided with.

In addition, the course offers you a list of recommended textbooks, journals, papers etc, which are necessary supplements to the course material.

STUDY UNITS

The following are the study units contained in this course:

MODULE 1

Unit 1   Play: Basic Concepts
Unit 2   Learning at Childhood
Unit 3   Kinds of Learning
Unit 4   The Interrelationship between Play and Learning
Unit 5   Growth and Development of the Preschool Child

MODULE 2

Unit 6   The Environment in Early Childhood Education
Unit 7   Planning the Environment
Unit 8   Play-based Learning and Teaching Models
Unit 9   Play Materials
Unit 10   Day Care Learning Activities

MODULE 3

Unit 11   Outdoor Facilities

Unit 12   Organising the Outdoor Learning Environment
Unit 13   Play: The Montessori Approach
Unit 14   Principles of Learning and Instruction: The Montessori Method

The first unit in the material examines the basic notions of play and its stages in the pre- school years. It further discusses some implications of play for Early Childhood Education.

The second unit focuses more on the concept of learning especially in relation to the child. The unit introduces you to the various findings on learning at the preschool level.

The third unit highlights the different kinds of learning. In this unit also, the various dynamics of preschool learning are discussed.

The fourth unit establishes the inter-relationship between play and learning activities at the pre-school level.

In the fifth unit, the concepts of growth and development of the preschool child are examined. The essence of the unit is to establish the link between play and the development of the child across many dimensions of development.

In unit six the various components of the preschool environment are identified and examined.

Unit seven takes a broad look at the term "environment" and discusses its implications for the planning of the learning environment of the child.

Unit eight presents play-based learning and teaching models that meet the prerequisites of age and developmental appropriateness in early childhood education.

Unit nine identifies the purpose of play and discusses the appropriateness of play materials that may be used in preschool institution.

Unit ten addresses the different components of the day care activities listing some activities appropriate for the different age levels in the day care setting and finally suggesting some developmentally appropriate learning materials.

Units eleven and twelve discuss play outside the classrooms. It delineates the possible outdoor activities that may be used to promote learning in preschools.

The next unit discusses the Montessori approach of play as veritable tool of learning in the preschool institutions.

The last unit of this course offers an in-depth review of the Montessori method of the principles of learning and instruction that have proved valuable in promotion of play-based learning in the preschools.

TEXTBOOKS

The following texts are recommended for further reading:

1)   Osanyin, F. A. (2002) Early Childhood Education in Nigeria Concept Publications Ltd. Lagos.
2)   Early Childhood Association of Nigeria (2004) Journal of Early Childhood Association of Nigeria, Deocraft Communications, Lagos, Nigeria. Vol. 2., Nos. 1 & 2.

ASSESSMENT

There are two components of assessment for this course:

The Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) and the end of course examination.

TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

The TMA is the continuous assessment component of your course. It accounts for 30% of the total course. You will be given 4 TMA's to answer. Three of these must be answered before you are allowed to sit for the end of course examination. The TMA's would be given to you by your facilitator and returned after you have done the assignment.

END OF COURSE EXAMINATION

This examination concludes the assessment for the course. It constitutes 70% of the whole course. You will be informed of the time for the examination. It may or not coincide with the University Semester Examination.

MAIN COURSE

CONTENT   **PAGES**

MODULE 1

UNIT 1   PLAY: BASIC CONCEPTS

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Have you ever observed children playing? What do you think children are doing when they play with blocks, stack them to create a building, dismantle and begin again? It may surprise you to know that in this playful situation, their flexibility, creative expression and emotions are challenged.

In the context of preschool education, the importance of play is generally accepted. Although theories of children's learning keep changing throughout history, in most of the theories however, play is viewed as an act of learning in children.

This unit examines the concept of play, the characteristics and essence of play as well as stages of play in the pre-school years.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

* define and examine characteristics of play
* discuss the significance of play in the childhood years
* examine the stages of play in pre-school years

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Definition of Play

You will notice that children tend to play a lot. In fact it has been found out that unless otherwise engaged, children spend most of their waking hours playing. Indeed, for many people and early childhood educators in particular, childhood is closely related to play. Children express play in many ways and adults sometimes interpret what play is in many different ways.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child for instance suggests that there is a collective agreement about the value of play for young children, stating that a child should not have to work but should have opportunities for play and leisure activities.

Briefly defined, play is a natural, spontaneous, creative activity, voluntary and intrinsically generated activity that brings fun to children. It is through which children learn a number of things. The beginning of playful activity can be observed from the period of infancy. For children, play is a learning process wherein they learn about the world around them, learn various concepts, learn to adjust to others, and to work out fears and master emotions. Contrary to the belief of many adults, childhood play is not mere pleasure; it is a serious business though enjoyable and creative. It is preparation for adult life.

3.2   Play: Infancy is day 1 to X years! X = ?

Can you do this simply exercise? What age is the end of infancy?
It is twelve month. By one year, a child has become a toddler.

It is essential that you recognize that play is as important to a baby as to an older child. The baby plays with his fingers and toes by moving them, feeling them and tasting them. He/she starts grasping rattles and other objects in his vicinity, holding them, throwing them, banging them, tasting them etc. He responds to playful tickling by the mother.

Through all these playful activities, the baby is learning:

(a)   About "me", his personal boundaries, that is, where he "stops" and others "start". In other words, he learns to differentiate himself from the world around him.

(b)   About different objects and their qualities and what he can do with them.

(c)   About relationships, about responding to others and about mutual enjoyment.

(d)   To develop communication. When you talk to him, the baby responds by cooing, gurgling, babbling. This is the first stage of language development.

3.3   Play: One to Five Years

As the child starts to walk, he gains greater control over the movement and thus is able to explore larger areas in his environment. He is less dependent on others, more mobile, more active, full of energy and curiosity and play is his most time – consuming occupation. By engaging in play, a pre-school learns:

a)   Various concepts such as colour, size, shape, volume, weight etc. He becomes familiar with and learns the names of different animals, birds, vegetables, fruits etc.

b)   To use and develop his motor skills. This not only improves his muscular coordination, but also gives him a sense of confidence, achievement and a feeling of power and mastery, which is the basis of a healthy self-concept.

c)   To express as well control emotions like love, sympathy, hostility, anger and jealousy, which are always in the foreground at this stage. Play provides an outlet for the release of pent-up emotions as much emotional energy is expended during the process.

d)   To appreciate and enjoy music, art and poetry. The child learns to observe and appreciate the beauty of the trees, birds, flowers, etc, in his natural surroundings thus, acquiring an aesthetic sense.

e)   To expand his imagination and increase his creativity. Through make-believe play, a child learns to use images, assemble events in his mind, imitate sounds and movements and discover new ways of using materials.

f)   The different roles of people in the society. Through play, he is given an opportunity to "try out" these roles by imitating his parents, teachers, the doctor, farmer, policeman etc.

Note   The word "he" used in this text does not restrict the sex to only male child, the child could be male or female. But for this purpose the "he" connotes both.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

i)   Examine the concept of play.
ii)   Explain the following terms:

        a)   Co-operative play
        b)   Parallel play

3.4   Stages of Play in the Pre-school Years

The child goes through changing patterns of play, which vary according to his interests and ability to interact with other children. Let us now examine five stages of play in the preschool years, this is:

i).   Solitary Play
ii).   Onlooker Behaviour
iii).   Parallel Play
iv).   Associate Play
v).   Cooperative Play

3.4.1 Solitary Play

During infancy, the child plays alone with his own hair, hands, toes and with toys or with objects around him such as rattles, mobiles and his feeding bottles. He is not interested in play with others. This type of play is termed 'Solitary play'.

3.4.2 Onlooker Behaviour

Children spend most of their time watching others. They make comments on the play of others but do not attempt to join.

3.4.3 Parallel Play

After infancy, the beginning of parallel play is observable when the child plays side by side with other children although each child is busy playing with his own toys, with no intentional sharing or interaction. Often they use the same toys in close proximity with others, yet in an

independent way. At this stage, the conversation is restricted to each child-talking to himself, vocalizing his actions.

Although there is little or no direct interaction, the children are aware of one another's presence and enjoy companionship.

3.4.4 Associated Play

Children can begin to interact with others. They can share, borrow and lend play toys, play may be unorganized but there is no assignment of activities or roles.

3.4.5 Cooperative Play

Parallel play may also lead to cooperative play, which involves direct interaction in the form of sharing play material, playing games together, holding conversations with each other. The child enjoys the companionship of his peers and he is at the stage where he is developing the capacity to accept, understand and respond to the ideas and actions of others. This pattern of play is seen among children between two to five years of age. They also engage in socio-dramatic play where they act out fantasies either individually or in groups. The play group is usually goal oriented. The beginning of a sense of competition can also be seen at this age but it is also the time when special friends are made and one-to-one relationships established.

3.5 Some Implications of Play for Early Childhood Education (E.C.E)

a)   The process of learning is facilitated by the child's own active participation in the process of manipulating and interacting with objects and socializing with others.
b)   Play materials should be adequate and well-designed to help children acquire important concepts of the world around them.
c)   Staff selected for a pre-school programme should be knowledgeable about the value of play and how to supervise play activities.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the implications of play for early childhood education.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Play is the most natural activity for a child to engage in, therefore, preschool programme which support play could facilitate the achievement of preschool learning goals.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

i)   Play is the natural, spontaneous, voluntary and intrinsically motivated and creative activity which a child engages in and learns something in the process.
ii)   Play is as important to a baby as to an older child.
iii)   There are different stages of play in the preschool years.
iv)   The process of learning is facilitated by the child's own active participation in the process.

6.0   TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Discuss the significance of play in preschool years.
2.   Examine the stages of play in childhood years.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Osanyin, F. A. (2002). Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. Concept Publication Ltd., Lagos.

Osanyin, F.A., Jegede. P. O., Ajayi, H. O.& Iroegbu, V.I.(2012). Early Childhood in the Twenty- First Century Obafemi Awolowo University Press, Ile – Ife.

Pramling Samuelson, Ingrid (1998). Why is play gaining an increased interest in our society? Paper presented at the 2nd International Toy Research Conference, Halmstad, Sweden.

Sandberg, Anethe (2001). Play memories from childhood to adulthood. Early Child   Development and Care, 167, 13-26.

UNIT 2   LEARNING AT CHILDHOOD

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        3.2   Factors Affecting Learning
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1.0   INTRODUCTION

In the first unit, you learnt that children engage in play activities almost from the moment they are born. You also learnt about the aspects of play both at the infancy and at the other stages of childhood as well as the implications of play for the preschool children. In the course of your study, you must also have observed that play at childhood was considered mostly in relation to learning. As a follow up therefore, this unit will afford you the opportunity to learn about the concept of 'learning' with the child in focus.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

-       define learning as a concept
-       discuss some theories of learning

- state and explain some preschool learning styles

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Concept of Learning

Learning is a word you must have been using frequently and no doubt; you must have heard other people using the word 'learning' even before you opened this book. You may know a friend, sister, or somebody who is learning sewing, trading, or computer. What other things have you learnt or are learning? The purpose for which you are in this programme is to make you learn. So what do you mean by the word "learning"?

For one, it is one word, which many have considered a close synonym to some concepts such as 'education'. Perhaps this is the view you also share.

But, let me quickly inform you that although there is a bit of one in the other, learning in its wider sense is one behavioural phenomenon that is not exclusive to human beings; some animals such as apes, dogs and seals have also been found quite capable of learning too.

So, if learning is a behavioural phenomenon that transcends human and animal species would you not consider it very worthwhile to look at the word especially in relation to early childhood education?

Learning has been defined as a relatively permanent change in behaviour of an organism arising from experience or practice. You will notice, in this definition of learning, that the word 'experience' plays a very key role in the learning process. If learning is a function of experience, then it goes without saying that the more stimulating the experience, the better the learning. The experience may be direct (involves doing) and it last much longer, or indirect (involves being told something or reading something).

3.2   Factors Affecting Learning

However, it is to be noted that the stimulating nature of person's experience depends on the strength or quality of certain factors operating within and outside him. These factors have been identified as organismic and (2) phenotypic traits.

Let us consider each of these two as we proceed in this study.

3.2.1 Organismic Inherited, Innate or Inborn Factors

'Organismic factors' refer to those factors that lie within an organism or a person. They include the individual's genotypic make-up and personality traits. They are inherited factors passed down at fertilization. Genotypic factors comprise mostly an organism intelligence and memory; while his personality factors include his self-concept, attitude, emotions.

3.2.2 Phenotypic Factors or Environmental Factors

Phenotypic factors refer to those factors that lie outside the child. These include his environment, cultural influence, school, peer and teacher influences, religion, mass media and the society in general.

If you still recall, we said earlier on that the more stimulating an experience is, the better the learning.

Therefore, the interaction between the individual's organismic and phenotypic traits determines the quantity and quality of what an individual can learn. The more stimulating these factors, especially the environmental ones, the better the interaction and learning that will occur.

We shall examine the detail when we get to Unit 5 where we will focus on Growth and Development.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Explain the following terms:

(a)   Organismic Factors
(b)   Phenotypic Factors

3.3   Pre-school Learning Theories

Learning begins at birth. It has been contended, that children are likely to do their best learning before they get to school. It has also been observed by that young children tend to learn better than grown ups (and better than they themselves will when they are older), because they use their minds in a special way.

Such observations as have been presented in the preceding paragraphs have led to a great deal of theorizing about how to facilitate a preschool child's learning.

This is because children learn differently from adults. If teaching an adult is a difficult task, teaching a pre-school child will be a greater problem – the preschool child may not understand the way adults understand.

So, how do we teach our young ones? What principles have been found effective in facilitating learning in the young ones? Questions such as these invariably lead us to the region of postulations, which may not be the major preoccupation in this second unit. Nevertheless, we cannot but employ the guidance of a few theories here if we are to gain some insights into the wonderful world of preschool teaching and learning.

Most of the theories of preschool teaching seem to have been derived from the observations and methods of teaching the preschool child as put forward by Freidrich Friebel and Maria Montessori. For example, Montersori's experience with the mentally retarded and children from poor background helped her in formulating some sub-theories of learning for the preschool child both normal and retarded. These sub-theories are based on two major theories of learning:

(a)   The S-R (Stimulus-Response) theory of learning and
(b)   The Cognitive theory of learning.

3.3.1 The Stimulus-Response Theory of Learning

Under the Stimulus-Response theory, we have a number of sub-theories, which are relevant to preschool learning and education:

a)   Sub-theory of Learning by doing.
b)   Sub-theory of Curiosity and Interest
c)   Sub-theory of Inquiry.
d)   Sub-theory of Learning through stories.

3.3.2 The Cognitive Theory of Learning

The following sub-theories have also been identified to emanate from the
Cognitive Theory of Learning:

a)   The sub-theory of Metamorphic change and Environment.
b)   The sub-theory of Movement.
c)   The sub-theory of Learning through perception.

Let us now consider these broad groups of sub-theories in detail.

Each of these sub theories are discussed below.

3.4   The Stimulus-Response Sub-Theories

3.4.1 Learning by Doing

This sub-theory believes that when a child is exposed to a certain experience (Stimulus) he will react to that experience with a response that is either negative or positive (Response). Therefore, learning is seen as a function of stimulus and response relationship. The bond or connection between this "Stimulus" and "Response" will increase the probability of the child repeating the response when confronted with similar experience.

In other words, learning comes from experience. When the preschool child is given the opportunity to do things by himself and is being reinforced by what he does, the child will develop special skills in responding the way he or she does. This special skill has been acquired through practice.

3.4.2 Curiosity and Interest

Curiosity brings interest, which in turn, aids learning. An interesting learning task can be regarded as a Stimulus (S) while the children's response to this interesting learning task can be regarded as response (R). Curiosity, novelty and interest can be created in the preschool learning situation by use of short and nice stories, various apparatus, coloured pictures and diagrams. Once lessons are interesting and curiosity-arousing, the preschoolers will respond favourably to the lessons and will learn such lessons much better than lessons that are uninteresting, dull and monotonous.

3.4.3 Inquiry

Children like to ask questions and make enquiry about the world around them. It is through such inquiry that they acquire a large body of facts.

They also like to be asked questions. Preschool teachers should be prepared to answer spontaneous questions emanating from children and to ask series of well-planned and relevant questions from preschool children and watch out for their answers. Here the questions we put before them can be regarded as stimuli (S) whole their answers to these questions can be regarded as response (R).

3.4.4 Learning through Stories

Children have been observed to enjoy listening to, and telling stories. Preschool staff should make the learning situation meaningful and

interesting by telling carefully selected didactic (teaching) stories. Stories should be made to contain some messages for the children, and such stories can thus be regarded as Stimuli (S) while the children's reaction to them will be regarded as response (R).

3.5   Cognitive Sub-Theories of Learning

3.5.1 Metamorphic Change and Environment

The postulation here is that the child is in a constant state of growth and change (metamorphosis) and so can interact more effectively with stimulating environment. This sub-theory emphasizes the role of facilitating cognitive enrichment for the preschool child.

Applying this sub-theory to the preschool learning situation we have to provide stimulating environment for the children and allow the children to interact with the environment. We need also, to assign the preschool child to see the relationship between one thing and the other in the learning situation.

3.5.2 Learning through Perception

Learning and experience come through perception. This sub-theory argues that the preschool child should be trained in arts and skills of perceiving things. They should be helped to observe details through games and plays involving observation of details.

3.5.3 Movement

This sub-theory argues that children learn by movement. This is one of the characteristics of an explorative child. As children move from place to place, on their own, with others or in or without vehicles they learn.

Therefore, since movement is associated with exploration and discovery, children learn through movement and this should be allowed in the classroom and school environment by the preschool teacher.

The Cognitive Theory of Learning has room for movement. It is through movement that the learning child will observe a given learning situation and have a perception of that situation. Such full view perception will aid cognition and understanding.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

i.   Discuss the importance of S-R sub theories in preschool teaching and learning.

ii.   Identify and explain briefly the cognitive sub-theories of learning.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Facilitation of learning implied in teaching is therefore an act which can be cultivated by training, experience and practice.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i)   Learning is a behavioural phenomenon that transcends animal and human species carry out
ii)   Learning comes from experience.
iii)   The more stimulating a person's experiences are, the better the learning.
iv)   Certain internal and external factors affect learning.
v)   There are a number of theories that explain the way young children learn.

6.0   TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Define the term 'Learning'.
2.   Explain the relevance of S-R theory to preschool learning.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Early Childhood Association of Nigeria (2004). Journal of Early Childhood Association of Nigeria. Deocraft Communications, Lagos, Nigeria. Vol. 2., No. 2.

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UNIT 3   KINDS OF LEARNING

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, you have already noted that learning is a very important aspect of development as the child experiences increasingly complex levels of functioning and behaviour at each successive stage of maturation. However, not all behavioural responses are the results of learning.

In this unit, we shall further examine the term "learning" from the perspective of development. In addition to defining the term "learning" as an essential aspect of development, the unit shall also highlight the various kinds of learning and their basic features.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

•   define the term "learning" as an essential aspect of development.
•   name and describe the various kinds of learning and their basic features.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Learning

a) The term "learning" refers to a relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience or practice. Two things are emphasized in this approach to learning: One, the behaviour should be observable and, secondly, the change in behaviour should be relatively permanent. However, there are obvious limitations to this approach because private thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc. cannot easily be studied but it is argued that these are usually translated into overt behavioural responses, which can be observed and thus studied.

b) Not all behavioural responses are the results of learning. Reflex actions such as, like blinking of eye when a bright light shines into the eyes, withdrawal of hand in response to a hot object, are wired into a person's nervous system and occur without any practice. Certain responses although influenced by experiences are more dependent on maturation. Thus, behaviour like crawling and walking are maturational rather than learned.

Learning is a very vital aspect of development as the child experiences increasingly complex levels of functioning and behaviour at each successive stage of maturation.

3.2 Kinds of Learning

There are different kinds of learning depending on the method used for learning and what is being learnt.

3.2.1 Classical Conditioning

Classical conditioning was first observed and demonstrated by the Russian psychologist Ivan Pavlov. The kind of learning is dependent on a stimulus-response association. An event in the environment, which can be called an unconditional stimulus (UCS), automatically produces a natural response which is called the unconditional response (UCR). The UCS when repeated with a specific neutral stimulus, termed conditioned stimulus (CS) produces the earlier response and the repeated occurrence of the CS with the UCS results in association of the CS with the response. Thus, finally, the CS alone would also result in the same response which is now termed Conditioned Response (CR).

Pavlov's Experiment:

i)   Neutral Stimulus (Sound) No Response
ii)   UCS CR
        (Food) (Saliva)
iii)   CS + UCS UCR
        (Buzzer) (Food) (Saliva)
iv)   CS CR
        (Buzzer) (Saliva)

3.2.2 Operant Conditioning or Instrumental Conditioning

The American Psychologist, B. F. Skinner, was the first to popularized operant conditioning. This is different from Classical Conditioning in that the initial response is reflexive and spontaneous. The result produced by this response is desirable thus the consequent reaction reinforces the response, which was initially random. Hence, the individual learns to perform a particular action to produce a particular result. Since the person's behaviour is instrumental in affecting the outcome, this kind of conditioning is called instrumental conditioning or learning.

If behaviour is followed by a pleasant stimulus, the reinforcement is positive and if the behaviour is followed by the removal of an unpleasant stimulus, the reinforcement is negative. In both cases, the behaviour is being reinforced because the result is desired.

Another aspect of this learning is that much behaviour may result in consequences, which are undesirable and unpleasant and thus decrease the chance of recurring.

The use of punishment, which leads to pain and unpleasantness, is one of such consequence which discourages a given behaviour. However, it would be realized that, showing the child more acceptable ways of behaviour and encouraging these by positive reinforcement is more effective and less harmful than using punishment in discipline. Generally, a response will be learned more quickly and will fade more slowly if the reinforcement is given immediately after the response rather than after the delay. This principle is very important when dealing with children. Behaviour modification of children with behavioural problems is one of the main uses of operant conditioning by psychologists.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Learning is a very vital aspect of development. Discuss this statement.

3.3   Imitation/Modeling

Imitation involves simple observation of a particular act and then the practice of that particular behaviour by the observer. It is also called "modeling". This form of learning is observed frequently in the childhood years. It can also be seen as a very economical way of learning as it is less time-consuming.

Some psychologists feel that people imitate others because the initiative responses are reinforced but it can be pointed out that direct reinforcement may account for some but not all imitated behaviour. For instance, the way we speak so our children copy; the language we use is the type they use too.

Albert Bandura has proposed that imitative learning can occur in the presence of reinforcement and that reinforcement merely serves as an incentive to produce the responses once they have been learned. Imitation is not limited to mere mimicking of responses but includes learning that is consistent with a pattern present in the actions of the model. A child also learns attitudes and moral judgments by imitation.

3.3.1 Concept Learning

Concept learning refers to the phenomenon where the same response is learned for an entire class of situations or events. For example, by learning the concept that hot things burn or scaled your hand causing pain and discomfort, one learns not to touch anything that is hot such as, the flame of the stove or a lantern, gas , the hot coil of an electric heater or the hot iron. The learning of a particular response set is not haphazard. The child gradually develops strategies for handling new problems and situations depending on the child's age and intelligence and the nature of the task.

3.4   Rule Learning

Rule learning is the term given to learning about the relationship between two or more concepts. It is obvious that the learning of a rule is directly dependent on the child having previously acquired or learnt the concepts in question. For example, if a child has to learn that grass is green he should know what "grass" and "green" are. To a large extent, much of the learning of basic skills can be seen as same sort of rule learning.

Rule learning is dependent on a number of things such as mastery of concepts that make up the rule, the number of concepts in the rule and the nature of the concepts, that is, the abstractness of concepts. It is more

difficult to learn a rule if the child is unfamiliar with the concepts in the rule and if the rule refers to abstracts rather than to concrete objects and events or if the number of concepts increases.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Distinguish between concept learning and imitation.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Learning is, therefore, a very vital aspect of development as the child experiences increasingly complex behavioural responses at successive stages of maturation.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

i)   Learning refers to a change in behaviour that results from experience.
ii)   Not all behavioural responses are the results of learning.
iii)   There are different kinds of learning depending on the method used for learning and what is being learnt.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Discuss the relationship between learning and development.
2.   Briefly explain the following terms:
3.   Imitation
4.   Concept learning

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Regional Pre-School Child Development Centre (1985).Learning and Development Manual for Early Childhood Education the Caribbean.

UNIT 4 THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAY AND LEARNING

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Objectives
3.0 Main Content
    3.1 Play and Learning
    3.2 Some Specific Gains of Play Based Learning
        3.2.1 Satisfaction of Curiosity
        3.2.2 Expression of Scientific Skills
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we examined the concept of learning as a behavioural phenomenon that comes from experience. We also highlighted the factors that can facilitate or inhibit experience and discussed some sub-theories of learning that have been found quite relevant in explaining how young preschoolers learn. You will also recall that the first unit in this material devotes itself to an explanation of the concept of play in relation to learning. In this unit, we shall be looking more closely at the relationship between play and learning. We shall also look at some of the preschool children's learning styles.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

• examine the meanings of play and learning within the childhood context
• explain the relationship between play and learning
• outline and discuss some preschool children's learning styles.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Play and Learning

By now you may have noticed that play and learning seem to be a couple of inseparable terms in the teaching of young children. It is indeed heartening to note that more preschool teachers today recognize the importance of play for children's development and learning and emphasize play in their classrooms. However, not many of them know how to appropriately use play in the teaching of the children.

In the context of preschool education, the importance of play is generally accepted. Although theories of children's learning seem to be changing throughout history, in most theories, play is still viewed as an act of learning or as an object of learning. In other words, it is believed that play means something by itself and therefore is of value for children's well being (Pramling Samuelsson and Asphind-Carlsson, 2003).

In the preschools, play has been called "free play" to emphasize that children's role-play is partly free from teachers' planning and involvement. However, freedom from external rules does not necessarily mean that play is completely free from adults or teacher's intervention and supervision.

3.2   Some Specific Gains of Play Based Learning

Although it may be argued that no single or universally acceptable definition of play exists, there are some specific characteristic behaviours of children's play which psychologists and early childhood educators have identified as beneficial to learning at the preschool level.

This section of the unit will attempt to present a few of the research-based and confirmed benefits of play-based learning at childhood.

3.2.1 Satisfaction of Curiosity

Children usually enter school with a lot of curiosity about the world. This is because of their inquisitive nature, they learn a lot about the world as they play with water, mud, insects and everything they can touch, taste, smell or hear (Ogunsanwo, 2004). When they play, children talk about things, ask questions and find out why certain things are the way they are.

The implication of this is that preschool teachers should be prepared at all times to ask and answer questions of children with all honesty.

Children are biologically prepared to learn about the world (Conenzio and French, 2002).

3.2.2 Expression of Scientific Skills

Science teaching at the preschool level does not require direct teaching, rather it requires a lot of practice and since children are naturally active, self-motivated, they learn best from personal experience.

For example, children love nature and make use of their natural and man-made environment in learning science. Therefore, when they play with sand, water and mud, a lot of scientific skills are revealed such as observation or well thought out theories (Ross 2000). Science teaching therefore, thrives in an environment where children are free to explore by moving around and using all their senses to find out and gain understanding of the world around them.

This implies that if the teaching of science is to be effective; teachers also need to adopt approaches that are developmentally appropriate for children. Such approaches should promote their development of skills in the classroom.

3.2.3 Construction of Rules

When children play, they construct their own rules; they learn at their own rates, they formulate their own hypotheses as individuals playing alone or in groups or with a playmate. Outdoor play promotes an environment where learners are not afraid of making mistakes. They also develop the skills of critical thinking and learn to solve diverse problems, which may not be possible inside the classroom area (Ogunsanwo, 2004). Hence the natural child is seen as being nourished by his or her own creativity in play (Brunner, 1996).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

i.   Examine the relationship between play and learning.
ii.   Discuss three of the benefits of play-based learning and their implications for the preschool teaching.

3.3   Preschool Children's Learning Styles

What do we mean by learning styles?

If you could still recall, in Unit Two of your material, we did establish that based on the observations about the preschool child learning, certain theories have been put forward as the key to facilitate preschool child's

learning. Those theories have been inferred from a wide range of informal activities which have been found to have worked and are working with the children at the preschool.

Learning style is therefore a term that describes these activities and strategies through which children learn. These shall be identified and highlighted in the next few sub-sections in this unit.

3.4 Learning through Exploration, Experimentation and Discovery

The preschool child's first-style of learning is usually through exploration, experimentation and discovery. In experimentation, exploration and discovery, the young child learns about his environment. In other words, he learns about what theories are and what they do.

The preschool child, therefore, needs to be provided with different types of materials and facilities, such as will encourage him to explore, experiment and discover things by himself. Toys and games come in handy at this stage. It is also important that the child be given freedom.

This implies that the teaching approach to these preschool children should not be rigid or restrictive. They should be allowed free observation, free play, free speech, free choice of toys and what to learn at a particular moment of time.

3.5 Learning through Rhymes, Songs, Questions and Anecdotes

This learning style could be helpful in making the preschool child's experiences more meaningful and more comprehensive enough to him.

Learning through rhymes, songs, questions and anecdotes is facilitated through what has been described as "referential association". This learning style requires that we make information items meaningful to the preschool child by means of some of the 'meaning-fostering' techniques like the Question Technique and the Anecdote Technique.

The Question technique is described as one by which questions are used in teaching to evoke thinking associated with problem-solving. The Anecdote technique on the other hand is described as one in which meaningful stories are woven round the learning task.

Rhymes and songs will help the preschool child add new perceptions and information items to his previous body of experience and this make new events and experiences more meaningful. This will in turn aid the preschool child's learning.

3.6   Children Learn through Playing

By now, you must have recognized that children learn best when they are playing. In play activities the preschool child should be allowed a free choice of play items and play materials. This is very crucial to the idea of developing confidence in self through play.

Preschool children should be allowed to play with water, with sand and with clay. This means that their programmes should include measuring water, floating pieces of wood and papers on dish water; provision of sand trays on which the pre-school child can play freely, trace freely and draw freely.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Identify and explain any two preschool children's learning styles.

4.0   CONCLUSION

The preschool children should therefore be made to learn in freedom and to regard the preschool institution as a second home.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

i)   Play and learning are inseparable concepts in early childhood education.
ii)   Play-based learning offers significant gains both for the preschool pupils and teachers.
iii)   Preschool children's learning styles consist of activities that facilitate learning informally among preschool pupils.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Highlight the relationship between play and learning.
2.   Briefly explain the following terms

    a)   Play-based learning
    b)   Preschool children's learning styles

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 5   GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRESCHOOL CHILD

CONTENTS

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
3.0   Main Content
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       3.2   Maturation and learning
       3.3   Trends in Growth and Development of the Preschool Child
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we examined the inter-relationship between the concept of play and learning as well as the implication for preschool teaching.

You may have observed that both concepts have a lot to do with the growth and development patterns of the child. Hence, before learning activities can be planned for children their pattern of growth and development must be examined.

This will be our primary focus in this unit.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

•   define the terms 'growth' and 'development'
•   distinguish between maturation and learning
•   identify the trends of preschool child's growth development

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Definition of Growth and Development

The terms 'growth' and 'development' are usually used interchangeably. This is largely due to the fact that both terms refer to changes. However, there are still some slight differences between the two terms. It is correct to say that development involves growth. However, it is more than

growth. So, how does one distinguish between the two related terms? Basically, growth implies increase in size, height, and weight of the child. Growth is usually along one dimension and is quantitative, visible and always measurable.

Development, on the other hand, refers to the holistic changes, which occur in the individual child over time such that he moves from immaturity and helplessness to a more mature and competent level of functioning. These changes may be quantitative or qualitative in nature, and may or may not be visible while the developmental process is going on. Three processes are involved in development. They are growth, maturation and learning (Soken & Akinade, 1995).

Generally, when we talk about the development of the child, it is possible to consider several areas - development according to age levels, physical growth, moral development, cognitive development, emotional development, social development and development of personality.

3.2   Maturation and Learning

There are two basic concepts underlying human growth and development. They are (1) Maturation and (2) Learning. They are necessary for the growth and development of any child. We have already noted that growth and the development are related to each other. The body must develop to make possible the changes in behaviour that are characteristic of different ages; physical disturbances may also cause disturbances in the development of behaviour. Some degree of development emanates from within an individual regardless of his environment or experiences. The development of those innate potentialities of a child in a sequential order is referred to as maturation. For example, some activities of the child such as crawling, walking-even talking depend largely on maturation and not training. No amount of prodding or encouragement from parents or adult around will make a child to sit, crawl or walk if he has not developed the muscular control needed to accomplish such a task. Maturation is, therefore, the attainment of particular level of functional ability, which makes possible the achievement of a certain pattern of behaviour. It is not induced by learning or experience. It comes about as a result of mere passage of time (Sokan & Akinade, 1995)

Learning, on the other hand, has been defined as a relatively permanent change in behaviour arising from experience. Therefore, despite the internal maturational process that has to take place before a certain behaviour or experience is exhibited some degree of learning has to take place. For example, when a child has developed the capacity for walking, his parents and other siblings around him may need to

encourage him to take the steps. At the beginning of walking, there is bound to be some element of fear and uncertainty in the mind of the child but the outstretched hands and smiles from adult around him may be encouraging and reassuring. But the child needs to be encouraged only through practice and not by insistence.

Development, therefore, is a positive interaction between maturation and learning. The child must have developed the capacity to perform a certain task before he will learn, through practice, how to really carry out the task. The implication is that the abilities and habit of a child are not just as a result of maturation alone; they are the end-product of an interaction between maturation and what he learns from his observations of parents, teachers, and other important individuals in his life and the events he experiences.

It is important that teachers become very aware of the relationship between maturation and learning capacity. It is generally recognized that it may be fruitless to force a child to acquire a skill before the child has reached the appropriate stage of development. It is very important that teachers consider READINESS.

The preschool teacher may, through observations and guided activities, recognize "reading readiness" and 'writing readiness" in the individual child. Often times, parents and teachers who do not appreciate the importance of readiness on the part of the child usually get frustrated and give up trying to encourage the child. A child diagnosed to be a slow developer may be encouraged to increase his skills in school readiness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXECISE

i.   Describe the relationship between growth and development.
ii.   Briefly explain the following terms:

      a)   Maturation
      b)   Learning
      c)   Readiness

3.3   Trends in Growth and Development of the Preschool Child

We have already noted that maturation and learning are very fundamental ingredients in growth and development. It is also important for us to recognize that there are some general trends in the nature of a child's growth and development. This is of practical importance for preschool teachers, caregivers and all those who work with children.

These trends are discussed below:

i   The functioning of some motor skills will come after the maturation of the structures. For example, the structure muscles have to be developed before the ability to coordinate effectively. It is a fact that by the time a child is 5 years old 75% of an adult brain weight is developed but this does not imply that the child has the capability of certain kinds of abstract thinking. Rather, the rapid growth is due to the increase in size and complexities associated with the brain cell instead of supposed increase in the number of cells.

ii   The direction of a child's growth is from the general to the specific. Children move from general responses to more differentiated and specific responses. They learn ideas and skills which in time give way to more detailed specifics. For example, as from the age of 6 weeks an average child gives a smile to almost everyone around him but by the time he is about 6 months old, he develops differentiation. His smile now comes only in recognition of familiar adult faces especially those of the mother and father.

iii   A child's growth is sequential and this has universal application irrespective of culture, nationality or social class. For example, a child must sit and, crawl before he starts talking.

iv   The growth of a child is irregular yet orderly. Growth and development involves a much more complex interaction of many factors-physical, social, intellectual, emotional – such that any problem in one area will affect other areas. For example, disruption in mental development of a child will affect his physical and social behaviour. This may be responsible for great discrepancy between the mental age and chronological age of a child.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the general trends in growth and development of a child.

4.0   CONCLUSION

A thorough knowledge of the growth, development and maturation of the preschool child will contribute to the effective teaching and understanding of the child.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

i)   Growth refers to increase in size, weight and height.
ii)   Development refers to quantitative and qualitative changes occurring in the child over time.
iii)   Maturation (comes from inside) and learning (from outside faction) influence development of behaviour.
iv)   There are basic trends in the growth and developments of the child.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Explain the terms growth and development.
2.   Define the following terms:

    a)   Readiness
    b)   Maturation

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Institute of Education, University of Ibadan (1987). Nursery Education. Associateship Certificate in Education Series. Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Ltd., Ibadan.

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MODULE 2

CONTENTS

**UNIT 1   THE   ENVIRONMENT   IN   EARLY
                 CHILDHOODEDUCATION**

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
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           3.2   Material Provision
           3.3   Heredity and Environment
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1.0   INTRODUCTION

In the last unit we looked at the two words, 'Growth' and 'Development' in the light of their association with the changes that occur in the lives of the young preschool children. We also attempted to establish the links between maturation and learning at childhood. But we need to remember that children are a part of the environment in which they operate and which invariably influences them and is influenced by them. In this unit therefore, we shall examine the word environment from a broad perspective as a necessary prerequisite for our understanding of a follow-up topic in the next unit.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the term environment;
- examine the various aspects of the environment; and
- highlight the relevance of the study of the environment in early childhood education.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Definition of Environment

The word 'Environment' often describes the surrounding which affects growth and development of any living thing. It includes all the various influences and conditions that surround and invariably affect positively or negatively an individual. Some scholars such as Hezberg (1959) talk of environment in a dual sense: internal and external. What this means is that there is an external surrounding and an internal surrounding. For example, the intellectual component of a child may be seen as an internal surrounding or environment, whereas, his classroom is an external condition.

However, it is not uncommon to hear of physical environment, social environment, educational environment, and nutritional environment of an individual child. These terms only describe the specific nature of a particular child's surrounding. The environment provided by the pregnant or expectant mother to the foetus is crucial. A mother, who eats balance diet, avoids alcohol and cigarettes, prescribed drugs, X- rays and diseases, a likely to produce a healthy environment for her unborn baby to learn well.

Predictability in environmental events assists the child in developing stability and confidence in his own abilities. As the child begins to get consistent feed back from the environment he can be helped to learn to set realistic goals for his own behaviour. Skills such as predicting, coping and self-evaluation can be mastered as it provides "good beginning in life" for children from deprived homes and also enables them to associate with their peers in a stimulating environment.

Perhaps the best contributions have been exemplified by UNICEF's Facts of life 9 (years) as follows with the supporting information: Babies begin to learn rapidly from the moment they are born. For good mental growth, the child's greatest need is the love and attention of adults.

Their greatest need is to be touched, cuddled, hugged, talked to, see familiar faces and expressions, to hear familiar voices. Children need new and interesting things to look at, listen to, watch, hold and play with. This is the beginning of learning. If a child has plenty of love, and attention and babyish play, as well as good nutrition and health care then the child's mind will also grow well.

3.2   Material Provision

Sometimes, we assume that the knowledge a child acquires indoors is superior to that gained outside. This tends to make us shut our children indoors – away from the vast potentials that could be acquired through their interaction with the outside world. It is very useful to provide an educational stimulating home environment for the child. This could be by providing educational but safe toys and gadgets children education CDs and audio cassettes, as well as television programmes for children. It is important to note that the environment in which children develop and learn involves the people with whom the child interacts, the objects or material provision the child encounters and the places and events experienced. The way children are helped to develop skills in using the provision within his environment, the way they are helped to develop competence and mastery and dispositions and attitudes that aid learning, are of crucial importance. The environment is the mechanism by which the early childhood educator brings the child and different aspects of knowledge together.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Define the term 'Environment'.

3.3   Heredity and Environment

Heredity and environment are two very important factors in the growth and development of a child. Heredity is a term which describes those physical characteristics a child inherit from his parents, for example, the sex, colour of the eyes, shape of nose, fingers, skin, hair texture, colour and brain structure.

On the other hand, the environment, as noted earlier on, refers to those influences or forces that begin after fertilisation which help in shaping a child's behaviour. The environment, in this regard, includes circumstances of birth, varying influences from the society as a whole and more importantly, a child's family's socioeconomic status.

However, despite the distinct role each plays in the child growth and development, there is an interaction between the two. An understanding of this interplay between heredity and environment therefore becomes an essential ingredient in the study and practice of early childhood education.

But what is this interaction between heredity and environment? You may ask. Regardless of the traits and dispositions a child is born with, the environment the child grows determines to a great extent the child's

manifestation and enhancement of such traits. For instance, complex human attributes such as intelligence, temperament and personality are the end products of the interactions between heredity and environment (Plomin, 1990; Shaffer, 1993).

For instance, a child born by intelligent parents may not have appreciable traits of intelligence if he happens to grow up in an environment that is not stimulating. Conversely, a child born of averagely intelligent parents but who grows up in a stimulating environment will probably perform better than his contemporaries who are not exposed to some measure of environmental stimulation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

i.   Examine the role of heredity and environment in child development.
ii.   Explain the following terms:

       a.   Environment
       b.   Heredity

4.0   CONCLUSION

It is very important that an early childhood educator understands not only the word environment but also the relevance of its interplay with heredity in fostering development.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i.   Environment refers to all conditions and influences, which shape human growth and development.
ii.   There is the need for proper material provision for the child to benefit from his environment.
iii.   Child growth and development can be influenced quite significantly by interplay of heredity and environment.

6.0   TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Heredity and the environment exert a powerful influence on the child Discuss.

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Bruce, T. (1997). *Early childhood education*. England: Hodder and Stoughton.

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UNIT 2   PLANNING THE ENVIRONMENT

CONTENTS

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         3.2   Materials, Equipment and Furniture
         3.4   Outdoor Space
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5.0   Summary
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7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The role of the environment in fostering learning through children's play cannot be overstressed. For the preschool environment to be stimulating, conscious efforts must be made to organize the daily programme routines and transitions. The atmosphere of the early childhood programme must be conducive to learning and healthy overall development.

This unit shall be devoted to a discussion on planning the environment for the overall development of the preschool child. Accordingly, it shall highlight some aspects relating to the general atmosphere, arranging space, materials, equipment and furniture and outdoor space.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- design and arrange appropriate environments for the preschool setting;
- justify the choice of components in the physical environment.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   General Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the early childhood programme must be conducive to learning and healthy, overall development.

a.   The teacher must ensure that the centre provides a pleasant and relaxed surrounding where the children are comfortable and free to move around, explore and experiment.

b.   The staff member is a surrogate parent to the children for the period of time that they spend at the centre. Thus, she must show love, nurture and provide the warmth and care essential to building up a feeling of trust in children. Children will always learn more when they feel loved, wanted and secure.

c.   At this stage, children are very curious and are always asking the question "WHY"? The staff member must not show impatience, anger or irritability when faced with innumerable questions, but should listen carefully and with interest. She should answer questions as honest as possible simply, keeping in mind the developmental level of children and avoiding long-winded explanations, which could be confusing.

d.   The atmosphere at the centre should be encouraging. No child should be ridiculed or shamed. Constant emotional reinforcement must be provided, e.g. give praise, a pat on the head, a hug; commend an action.

e.   The centre should look bright and colourful. One of the best ways to achieve this effect is by displaying the children's art and craft work. This makes the children feel proud of their achievements. Posters, chats, blow-ups of pictures, of animals, etc.; mobiles, chimes, make the room look cheerful. All items mounted in display areas or on bulletin boards, should be hung at the child's eye level.

3.2   Arranging Space

There are various ways to plan and organize a centre depending on the space and resources available, but in all cases the following basic points should be considered:

a.   The planning of indoor space must be done in a manner that fully utilizes available space but does not overcrowd or restrict the children's movements. Local minimum standards for building and space usage should be observed.

b.   In infants' room, the cots, cradles or mats must be arranged near the wall, leaving the centre of the room available for play, and allowing the crawlers enough room to move around without obstructions. The rooms for the toddlers and older children

should be divided into areas for specific activities to ensure some kind of order to the room and limit chaos.

c.   The mains activity areas are: Housekeeping, Library, Art, Blocks, Puzzles and Table Games, Music. Additional areas are Science, and Carpentry.

d.   In addition to activity areas, a place should be created for sleep or nap time. The day is long and tiring and the children will require sleep after lunch. If there is not enough space for a separated area, then one of the activity corners can be used.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

'The atmosphere of the early childhood programme must be conducive to learning'. Discuss this statement.

3.3   Materials, Equipment and Furniture

The materials used should be simple and versatile. They should be sturdy enough to withstand the wear and tear of the children's handling. Materials for various learning centres can be kept in labelled boxes which can be transported easily outdoors.

a.   Expensive materials are unnecessary, because children are just as happy playing with simple "home made" objects or natural objects in their environment. It is the staff's responsibility to exploit the local resources available to prepare materials for the centre.

b.   The basic equipment needs of a centre will vary on the size of the place and number of children in attendance. Avoid equipment with sharp edges.

c.   Furniture should be sturdy but of a weight and size suitable for children.

d.   Each child should have a place for his/her own personal belongings, private treasures, etc., to develop a concept of self identity.

Cardboard boxes, shelves, tins, etc., can be used. Paste the child's name and a picture on the container so that he/she will gradually come to recognize the spelling of his/her name.

3.4   Outdoor Space

It is absolutely essential to have an outdoor play area on the grounds of the centre, so that the children can be out in the fresh air for some part of the day exercising their large muscles and in close contact with nature.

If there is no yard space, locate a play park or open space in close proximity to the centre.

Arranging Space

A part of the outdoor area must have shade. Trees are ideal, but if this is not possible, other kinds of covering can be used.

It should be enclosed by a fence or walls to prevent the children from wandering off into dangerous areas.
Grassy areas can be used for games (to roll on, etc.) The ground beneath all climbing equipment, swings, slides etc., should be protected by sand, grass or leaves.

Provision for outdoor sand play and water play is vital in any centre. A water pool could be built or a large wash tub full of water could be placed outside.

A small area should be utilized for gardening. Children could plant, water, weed the flowers and vegetables. If the area is large enough, small plots can be assigned to each child or group.

Small pets like guinea pigs, rabbits, birds, could be kept, to provide another valuable experience for the children. It is not advisable to keep turtles, rats or other animals that could pose health hazards.

SELF ASSESSMETN EXERCISE

Briefly discuss the factors that should guide selection of materials, equipment and furniture in a preschool environment.

4.0   CONCLUSION

It therefore becomes necessary for the teacher to plan and arrange the preschool environment in a way that enhances learning and healthy overall development.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

i.   The atmosphere of the early childhood programme must be conducive to learning.
ii.   The ways to plan and organize a centre depend basically on the space and resources available.
iii.   The materials used should be simple but sturdy.

iv.   It is absolutely essential to have an outdoor play area on the grounds of the centre.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What are the factors influencing selection of materials, equipment and furniture in preschool institution?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Osanyin, F. A. (2002). *Early childhood education in Nigeria*. Lagos, Nigeria: Concept   Publications.

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UNIT 3 PLAY-BASED LEARNING AND TEACHING MODEL

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In our introductory units, we have learnt that play and learning cannot be separated in the context of growth and development of the preschool child. While play describes the natural, spontaneous and creative activity that children engage in, learning describes the relatively permanent change in behaviour that results from experience. Thus, learning at childhood comes through opportunities afforded by play.

In this unit, we shall be examining a play-based Model of Learning and Teaching. This Model or framework, which reflects the cycle of human learning, is especially useful for determining the age-appropriateness of any curriculum content. The Model is adapted from NAEYC and NAECS/SDE.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the concept of developmental appropriateness
- examine the play-based Model of Learning and Teaching

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Developmental Appropriateness

The concept of developmental appropriateness basically has two essential dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness.

When we talk of age appropriateness in human development research, what we mean essentially is that there are universal, predictable sequences and patterns of growth and change that occur in children during the first nine years of life. These changes occur in all domains of development such as; physical, language, emotional, social, moral and cognitive. Knowing the typical development of children within the age span the programme serves will provide a framework from which teachers prepare the learning environment and plan appropriate experiences.

On the other hand 'individual appropriateness' reflects the consideration that each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style, and family background. Learning in young children often results from the interaction between the child's thoughts and experiences with materials, ideas and people. For learning to be enhanced, these experiences should match the child's developing abilities, while also challenging his interest and understanding.

3.2   Basic Features of Learning

There are various features of learning which are common and applicable to all kinds of learning.

Generalization

This refers to the fact that a response may occur in the presence of an event that is similar, but not necessarily identical to the one present when it is first learned. This feature is seen quite frequently but the degree of generalization depends on the similarity between the two stimuli. It should be noted that the more similar the stimuli, the more similar the response.

Generalization occurs in anti-social behaviour, such as aggression and pro-social behaviour. Let us consider the case of John who one day wanted a toy from Peter. He asked Peter but when Peter refused, John hit him and managed to get the toy he wanted. John observes that it was his aggressive act which got him what he wanted, so he tries it again and

if he is successful in achieving the same result, he generalizes this response. Thus, every time he wants something, he learns to use aggression as a means of getting what he desires.

Discrimination

This feature of learning is the inverse of generalization. Discrimination refers to the child's ability not to respond to a stimulus which is different from the one for which the response was originally learned. This phenomenon is witnessed when an infant suddenly starts crying when a stranger wants to pick him up and cuddle him. The baby has learnt to discriminate between family members and the stranger, thus he does not respond with joy and laughter as he would have done if someone in his family and had picked him up.

Shaping

A child faced with a new stimulus may not have the slightest inclination to respond in a particular way, but his behaviour is gradually shaped as to produce the appropriate and desired response. Shaping is a gradual process where successive approximations to the desired behaviour are rewarded until the final behaviour appears. This feature of learning is used to deal with children who exhibit behavioural problems such as timidity or shyness.

Extinction

This basically refers to the period taken for a learned response to disappear. In classical conditioning, extinction refers to the period after the conditioned response has been established. After a number of trials of presenting only the conditioned stimulus, the learned conditioned response is seen to disappear or is extinguished. In operant conditioning, extinction refers to the period in which the reinforcement is discontinued. Without reinforcement, the response will eventually disappear. The process of extinction is used to observe how well a particular response has been learned and it also shows that the learned behaviour can be unlearned. We can achieve this by ignoring some undesirable behaviour.

Competence Motivation

This term is used to describe the child's desire or need to master a skill. This concept of the joy of learning brings forth the question of the degree of need and the influence of external rewards to enhance the process of learning. There are probable individual differences in the degree to which children need external motivation to learn.

3.3   Learning and Teaching Model

To learn something new, children must become aware and be able to explore, inquire and apply. This is one process which occurs over time and reflects movement from learning that is informal, spontaneous and governed by the child's own rules to learning that is more formal, refined and more reflective of conventional rule systems. The Model of teaching and learning to be discussed has been adapted from NAEYC and NAECS/SDE "Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment for Programmes Serving Children Ages 3 Through 8", (1990)
.

3.3   Awareness

Awareness as used here is a broad recognition of the parameters of the learning. These parameters include events, objects, people or concepts.
Children's Activities

This model recognizes the need for children to experience, acquire an interest, perceive and recognize broad parameters among others.

Teacher's Role

The teacher is expected among other things to:

i.   create the environment
ii.   provide the opportunities by introducing new objects, events, people etc.
iii.   respond to child's interest.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Explain the concept of developmental appropriateness.

3.5   Exploration

Exploration is the process by which children figure out components or attributes of events, objects, people or concepts by whatever means available. It is also the process whereby children bring their own personal meaning to their experiences.

Children's Activities

In exploration, children are expected to observe, explore materials, collect information, discover, represent, figure out components,

construct own understanding, apply own rules, create personal meaning etc.

Teachers' Role

Teachers have the responsibility to:

i.   Facilitate and extend play
ii.   Support and enhance exploration
iii.   Ask open-ended questions, such as "what else could you do?"
iv.   Allow for constructive error.

3.6   Inquiry

Inquiry is the process of developing understanding of commonalties across events, objects, people or concept. Children at this point, begin to generalize their own concepts or ideas and adapt them to more adult ways of thinking and behaving.
Children's Activities

At inquiry stage, children tend to examine, investigate, propose explanations, compare own thinking with that of others, generalize, relate to prior learning and adjust to conventional rule systems.

Teachers' Role

Teachers are expected to:

i.   Help children refine understanding
ii.   Guide children, focus attention
iii.   Ask more focused questions, such as "what else works like this? What happens if?
iv.   Provide information when requested
v.   Help children make connections
vi.   Allow time for sustained inquiry

3.7   Utilization

Utilization is the functional level of learning, at which children can apply or make use of their understanding of events, objects, people or concepts.

Children's Activities

At this stage children are expected to use what they learn in many ways, represent learning in various ways, formulate new hypotheses and repeat cycle.

Teachers' Role

Teachers are expected to:

i.   Create opportunities for application in real world
ii.   Help children apply to new situations
iii.   Provide meaningful situations to use learning

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine teacher's role in fostering exploration and inquiry skills in the preschool children.

4.0 CONCLUSION

It therefore becomes important for the teacher to identify the necessary parameters to guide decisions about the appropriateness of learning programmes.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i.   The concept of developmental appropriateness comprises age and individual appropriateness.
ii.   Awareness is broad recognition of the parameters of the learning – events, objects, people or concepts.
iii.   At exploration stage, children bring their own personal meaning or interpretations to their experiences.
iv.   At inquiry point, children begin to generalize their personal concepts and adapt them to more adult ways of thinking and behaving.
v.   Children use learning in many ways; learning becomes functional.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Briefly discuss the relevance of the teaching and learning model to the development of the preschool child.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4   PLAY MATERIALS

CONTENTS

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
3.0   Main Content
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         3.2   The Play Environment
         3.3   Infant Materials
         3.4   Art Area
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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Children love to play. They are so engrossed in play activities that it is not always easy to dissuade them from it. In many cases, a child's play is spontaneous. Children do not need any adult or external prompting before they start to play. However, free play may not necessarily mean that play is completely free from adult intervention; rather it implies that when initiated by children, an adult may come in to guide them especially when play becomes purposeless or dangerous. Nevertheless, adults are not supposed to have a direct control over children's play while attention to process means that play gives more importance to the activities involved rather than goals (Ogunsanwo, 2004). In the light of the immense importance of play in the growth, development and learning of the preschool children, it is expected that children's play be facilitated with the provision of play materials designed to meet the requirements of developmental appropriateness in the preschoolers.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the purpose of play;
- Suggest ways of the use of play in the preschool;
- Suggest play materials appropriate for use in the preschool.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Purpose of Play

Adults are able to recognize play as practice, spontaneous and relaxing. To a child however, play is real work. Play gives the child a chance to:

a.   Develop a mind of enquiry;
b.   Explore and manipulate the environment;
c.   Arouse his curiosity;
d.   Create, imagine, experiment, express;
e.   Develop self-image.

Play is self-learning and it is a source of information about the environment of the child.

3.2   The Play Environment

An interesting challenge in the field of early education is the use of play in teaching the children. If the child's environment permits it, the child can learn whatever is available to learn, and if the child permits it, the environment will teach him everything it has to teach. The child learns to move when he can move around, handle and manipulate objects.

Teaching through play therefore means providing play activities that will engage the child activity. The play method infuses activities with learning (VLNET, 1999). In order to do this effectively, the children need materials to interact with as they play.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Identity and explain the purposes of play in the preschool.

3.3   Infant Materials

The following play materials are specially recommended for use in the day care institutions:

Rocking chairs cribs Rattles soft terry/space toys, Meeting toys Yarn balls, Hand mirrors Plastic bracelets, Bounce chairs Household items, Small bathtubs Pacifiers, Green plants, Music boxes
Record players, Mobiles etc.

3.4   Art Area

For the Art Area in a children's classroom to be enriched, the underlisted items can be useful:

Erasers, drawing paper paint, Crayons   brushes Tablets, Clay Construction paper Paste Marketing pens, Scissors, Aprons, or smocks Yarn Junk box

3.5   Large Muscle Activity Area

The following items can be quite useful in fostering healthy physical development in preschool children: Balance, boards Sandbox Wagons Ladders Tricycles Blocks Traffic signs Platforms Wheel barrow, Jungle gyms.

3.6   Dramatic Play Area

The Dramatic Play Area may be stocked with the following materials: Furniture Puppet stage Variety of dress-clothes Dolls Props etc.

3.7   Manipulative Area

The Manipulative Area may feature such materials as the under listed: Tinkertoys Blocks Beads Puzzles Pegboards and pegs Blocks Table game etc.

3.8   Library Area

Children's Library Area should feature some of the underlisted materials:

Books Story books Chairs Tape recorder Carpet Flannel boards Catalogs Pictures Homemade books?

3.9   Water and Sand Play Area

Children often enjoy playing with nature. The following materials will enhance their play in the Water and Sand Play Area: Plastic wading pool.

Water table with dishpan Squirt, bottles, Funnels, Sponges, Food colouring, Detergent, Coffee pots Doll clothes Straws construction equipment.

3.10   Science Corner

Children's interest in nature can be used as a basis to foster scientific skills of exploration and inquiry. Thus, the Science Corner need to be equipped with materials that include:

Balancing scales Compasses

Magnets,Magnifying glasses, Seeds Various materials to dismantle e.g. Gardening tools clocks, pencil sharpeners, old toys. Plants Simple machines, Aquarium Tarrarium, Animals, Rocks and Sea shells

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What play materials would you provide in the Large Muscle Activity Area Art Area and Science Corner?

4.0   CONCLUSION

Teaching through play therefore requires providing play materials and activities that will engage the child actively.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt that:

1.   Play serves many purposes in the growth and development of children.
2.   Play is a source of information about the environment of the child.
3.   Play method infuses activities with learning.
4.   There are many materials that could be used to foster learning in many areas.
5.   The materials could be grouped as infant materials, materials for Art Area, Large Muscle Activity Area etc.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Briefly highlight the purposes of play in the preschools.
2.   What materials would you recommend for learning in the science corner, manipulative, Library and Art areas?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Van Leer Nigerian Education Trust (1999). *Care-giver training manual*. Ogunsanwo, R. (2004). Developing children's scientific skills through play based outdoor environment. *Journal of Early Childhood Association of Nigeria,* Vol. 1, No. 2.

UNIT 5   DAY CARE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
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    3.1   Visual Experiences
    3.2   Auditory Experiences
    3.3   Physical Exercise
    3.4   Language Experiences
    3.5   Manipulative and Tactile Experiences
    3.6   Social Experiences
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The preschool programme is expected to cover a wide range of experiences and activities, such as looking after the physical needs such as, feeding, toileting and rest; satisfying the emotional need for warmth, love, affection and meeting the need for exposure to stimulating experiences. In such a setting, most of the teaching is done indirectly and through non-formal methods. The resourceful caregiver or teacher creates a place for learning by providing as many instructional materials and actual experiences as possible.

In this unit therefore, we shall be discussing the activities that can be considered vital to the child's total development, bearing in mind that no activity promotes only one kind of development. For proper development preschool activities should focus on enriching all aspects of children's experiences.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different components of the daycare activities;
- list some activities appropriate for the different age levels in theday care setting;
- suggest some learning materials.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Visual Experiences

A child absorbs knowledge through the use of the senses. Visual experiences refer to the knowledge or observation of facts gained by means of the eye senses. Colourful mobiles of cardboard and glass paper, small tins or reels or small, stuffed cloth figures can be hung. The child should be propped up so that he can see around him instead of continuously gazing at the ceiling. Let his eyes follow objectives such as rattle, toy or even the care-giver's hand. A four or five months old child should be given big, colourful, picture and toys.

3.2 Auditory Experiences

The child also learns and gains knowledge about the world around him through the use of his ears i.e. organs for hearing or the auditory senses. The care-giver should talk to the child as he is fed, changed or played with; play soft music – most normal children respond to music. The caregiver should sing and provide him with rattles, bells and squeaky toys etc., which will expose him to different sounds. As the baby grows older, recite simple nursery rhymes with actions, name familiar object and body parts, read aloud simple stories from picture books.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Explain how you can foster visual experience in a daycare centre.

3.3 Physical Exercise

The caregiver must bear in mind that the child needs so much to exercise the whole of his body. Therefore, it is essential that the child be allowed to kick freely; do not bundle or tie up his arm and legs in a sheet, as this will restrict his movement. Exercise his arms and legs by raising them and bending them while making it an enjoyable experience by talking to him and smiling at him. As the child begins to crawl, provide him with sufficient space. Remove sharp and dangerous objects around. Tape any plug point which may be reachable. Remove breakable objects and put a railing along the verandah to make sure that the child does not stray outside or fall down the stairs. Provide him with plastic balls that he can play with. As the child learns to walk, provide him with pull-along toys.

3.4   Language Experiences

Although, at this stage the child is unable to use language in the real sense, it is important that he be exposed to as many language experiences as possible. The infant should be spoken to, read to, even though he cannot respond.

3.5   Manipulative and Tactile Experiences

A wide variety of toys and objects should be provided to encourage the child to hold, grasp and bang. Rattles, old plastic spoons, small pans which do not have sharp edges, squeaky toys, and toys with moveable parts and blocks should be provided. The toys should not be too large or small; they should be big enough for the child to grasp. Old newspapers are a popular item which children gleefully pull, tear and thrash around. Playing with water is also a joyful experience and the children become familiar with the feel of water. Big crayons can also be given for scribbling on paper.

3.6   Social Experiences

The essence of early childhood education is to give children a loving and responsive environment with adults encouraging and supporting them. The absence of strong, affectionate and caring relationships may retard children's curiosity and consequently lead to intellectual, social and emotional problems (Osanyin, 2002).

This is a crucial stage for forming relationships. The caregiver should be ready to regularly hold the child, tickle him, talk to him and play simple games. The child should be called by his name and exposed with care to others in the environment. The child should be encouraged to interact with adults and peers in his environment.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

In what ways can you foster manipulative and tactile experience in an infant?

4.0   CONCLUSION

The task of providing developmentally appropriate environment for the infant requires careful recognition on the part of the teacher, of the various aspects of experience that the child can be exposed to.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

i.   In Day Care Centres, teaching is mostly done indirectly and through non-formal methods.
ii.   Activities that promote development may be classified into social, emotional, physical and cognitive.
iii.   Each activity promotes more than one kind of development.
iv.   For proper development to take place, preschool activities should focus on enriching all aspects of children's experiences.
v.   A child absorbs knowledge through the use of his or her senses of touch, eyes and ears.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   In what ways can you foster visual experiences in a day care centre?
2.   Explain the following terms:

   a.   Manipulative and Tactile Experiences
   b.   Language experiences

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Osanyin, F. A. (2002). *Early childhood education in Nigeria.* Lagos, Nigeria: Concept   Publications.

VLNET (1999). Caregiver training manual.

MODULE 3

UNIT 1   OUTDOOR FACILITIES

CONTENTS

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6.0   Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0   References/Further Readings

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The rate of development of any individual is fastest during the preschool years. Development feats are rapid. This explains why the preschool child is always very active and curious at this time. He wants to know the why and how of everything in his environment, for a normal pre-school child, there is never a dull moment. In consequence of the child's need for activity, and the concerned orientation for all-round development, good pre-schools should therefore try to provide varied activities that can aid the child's developmental needs.

In this unit, we shall examine some components of the pre-school physical environment that promote the child's physical, cognitive, social and psycho-social development.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the various activities that aid developmental needs;
- explain the relationship between activities and the child's development.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Physical Development

The physical aspect of the child's development is important because this aspect is a focal point on which the other aspects hinge. For example, a fragile child may not be able to explore and manipulate his environment as much as his energetic counterpart would. This, in turn, may affect his intellectual and social development as he may become withdrawn (Osanyin, 2002). His participation in vigorous activities and manipulatory skills may be reduced. Therefore, his senses may be adequately challenged and stimulated. The resultant effect of these is the lack of the desired all-round development of the child. Generally, physical development is in form of gross motor development.

3.2   Gross Motor Activities

Gross Motor development is also referred to as the large muscle development. It involves the ability of a child to throw and catch such things as balls, bags, dusters, sticks and many other objects during his play activities. It also relates to the child's ability to jump, climb, run, walk, push, pull, row and do all other activities that require the movement of the body. Opportunity to practice these skills on regular basis ensures mastery, competence and strength of body muscles. Some of these activities are treated below:

3.2.1 Climbing

Stationary equipment securely installed must be provided for children to climb. Climbing helps children in managing different heights and body control. The muscles of the body are also strengthened when climbing up, down, over, under, back, front, sideways and through a variety of climbing units. In these climbing activities, children make and integrate decisions on the direction in which they move up, down, front, back, below, in-between, above or sideways.

These help in cognitive development. Usually, purchased climbing units may be expensive, so a resourceful head teacher or proprietor may

create his/her own to especially suit the needs of the pupils. For the outdoor, rust-proof pipes are recommended, while for the indoor of a hall, wooden gymnastics items recommended. Old tyres may be collected and arranged for children to climb. However, the tyres should be secured, and fastened together for security. Telephone poles, edges and stumps of trees with ladders may be quite useful for climbing. When trees are growing on the playground, they provide suitable anchor points for platforms. Finally, moveable wooden steps and natural mountains in the school, if available, are good for climbing.

Pushing and overcrowding on the climbing unit should be prevented. Ideally, it is best to climb bare-footed as shoes and slippers tend to be slippery.

3.2.2 Swinging

Swings are stationary equipment which can be securely installed for development of large muscles. They also help muscle coordination.

Children play the sheer thrill of whizzing through space, as they learn to jump, go higher or stop and coordinate their decisions with the movement of their bodies. Spatial concepts are also developed as children change directions and as they see things around them from different perspectives. Sets of swings are available commercially. However, it may be exciting and worthwhile to construct your own. You can make a swing by suspending ropes to a large tree with heavy and sturdy branches. The seats are made from tyre cut in halves. Punch holes in the tyres to make them drain water. Three strong ropes may also be firmly attached horizontally to a single tyre. Ropes may also be hung with knots at the end to serve as swings.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the importance of outdoor facilities in the overall development of the preschool child.

3.2.3 Rocking Boat

The rocking boat is a popular piece of equipment in most schools. It provides a soothing effect. Rocking horses are also used. The rocking equipment requires a child to sit on one spot, holding on with both hands.

For the rocking boat, there are some rules that must be observed:

i.   No one outside the boat should touch it while it is moving.

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ii.   If a child wants to get out from the boat, the boat should be stopped to let him get out.
iii.   Children must hold on with both hands.
iv.   The seats must be shared.

Wooden see - saw with rockers take about two children at a time; they are usually very safe, since children's feet are close to the ground. This also provides a sense of security and confidence.

3.2.4 Sliding Equipment

This provides children with an opportunity to experience balancing and body control. Like the swing, children enjoy the excitement of moving through space. In using or installing a slide, it is necessary to ensure that the height from the ground is not higher than five feet. To control the speed, the sliding area should be of reasonable length. The handrail should also be sturdy for safety.

A crawl through space, in addition to the platform slide, also provides a variety. Standard slides are usually made of rust-proof metals.

3.2.5 Sand Play

Sand is pleasant to play with. Like water, it runs easily through the fingers when dry. It can also be poured from one container into another.

Sand responds to children's action upon it, such as mixing with water, building, moulding, shaping and imaginative plays. Sand, for play, should be clean, dustless, dry and soft as obtained from the beach or creek. Sand may be contained in shallow pots with cemented sides. It may also be put in large wooden crates or in sand boxes. Whatever container is used, the type of materials available in the sand play area will influence the kind of play activities the children engage in. To facilitate a variety of play opportunities, the school should provide shovels, diggers, bowls, spoons, cans, funnels, sewers, pails, wheel-toys and many other objects that may be used. Generally, for sand play, the following safety precautions should be kept:

i.   Children should never throw sand at people.
ii.   Children should not throw sand into the air.
iii.   Children should not eat or taste sand.
iv.   Children should clean sand clinging to shoes or body before going indoors.
v.   Sand toys should be put away neatly.
vi.   Any other play materials, besides sand material, should not be put into sand.

3.2.6 Wheel-Toy Movements

Movable objects such as wagons, trucks, wheel barrows, bicycles, tractors and all equipment that can be pulled, pushed and used are quite interesting for children. They help in developing their physical abilities. The wheel-toys to be used by children should have solid wheels instead of spokes, and it is important that children should use wheel-toys only in designated areas. They should also not be allowed to bump into people and or things. It is the duty of the teacher to supervise and discourage excessive speeds.

3.2.7 Water Play

As children splash and pour water, their muscle coordination develops. As they fill water into different containers, they are able to develop mathematical concepts. They discover objects that float, or sink. They also note what happens when water is mixed with things like sand, salt, paint, etc. Water offers surprises to children as it moves, runs, bubbles and spills. Water play can be provided in many ways. Ordinary plastic containers, baby bathtubs or low taps, water table, old sink or bath are quite suitable for water plays. Whichever container used, it is essential to provide adequate water toys to facilitate a variety of plays. Plastic dolls can be immersed in water and scrubbed. Other inexpensive water toys that used to be provided are measuring cups, jars, straws, sieves, funnels, sponges, bottles, soap, aprons, and pails. The water should be safe to drink just in case the children get thirsty.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine the importance of the following activities in preschool learning:

i.   Climbing
ii.   Water-play

4.0   CONCLUSION

It is therefore important that schools recognize the need to build on the child's desire for active participation and provide adequately for active life.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i.   The preschool child is generally always very active and inquisitive.
ii.   Pre-schools should endeavour to provide varied activities that aid the child's developmental needs.
iii.   Activities such as climbing, swinging and rocking foster physical development in the preschool child.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Briefly explain the following terms:

a.   Physical development
b.   Gross motor development

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2   ORGANISING THE OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

The outdoor environment allows a lot of freedom to explore and encourage a great deal of social interactions among children. Here, there is plenty of talking, group play and also free individual play that allow children to manipulate and experiment with natural and man-made materials around them. For outdoor environment to promote high level thinking and the development of observational, exploratory, inquiry and other skills, it must be carefully prepared and organized so that children do not just move around the playground without acquiring any cognitive skills (Osanyin, 2002; Ogunsanwo, 2004).

In the last unit, we examined the various types of activities and facilities that could promote play-based learning in the preschools. As a follow-up, this unit shall discuss aspects involved in the planning and organizing a play based outdoor learning environment.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

• design and arrange physically appropriate environment for the pre-school setting;
• plan and organize play-based outdoor environment.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Outdoor Environment

Outdoor environment is one that is outside the classroom. This includes the field, the play area and dining hall. It is essential that children's play take place in an environment that is so prepared as to offer adequate opportunity for, interaction, exploration and a whole lot of activity. A child's play environment whether indoors or outdoors should be designed to teach children. However, the outdoor environment can accommodate higher levels of different kinds of noise than the indoor (Ogunsanwo, 2004). There is more space for a lot of vigorous activity; children will have greater freedom to experiment with the play materials.

Children learn at their own rates and, when they play, they construct their own rules, formulate and test their own hypotheses. Outdoor play thus offers an atmosphere of relatively greater freedom, under which learners are not afraid of making mistakes. Outdoor play also enhances the development of inquiry, exploratory and critical thinking skills required to solve diverse problems. This may not be possible inside the classroom area which invariably offers relatively smaller space for children activity.

3.2   Planning the Outdoor Learning Environment

An effective outdoor learning environment is planned with consideration given to the different aspects of child development. Such planning should pay attention to issues relating to the adequacy of use, safety measures and prompt supervision of the activities in each of the areas

(Osanyin, 2002). It is therefore necessary to organize the outdoor environment in terms of activities that are expected in the areas. Such learning centres or activity areas may be:

a.   Vigorous physical activity (In this area, equipment for climbing, swinging, jumping, sliding, may be arranged).
b.   Wheel-toy areas for riding, pulling and pushing.

c.   Sand and water play areas.
d.   Open space for running, throwing, rolling and movement.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine the importance of outdoor environment in the overall development of the preschool child.

3.3   Learning Centres in Outdoor Learning Environment

The importance of learning centres in the promotion of all-round development of the preschool child cannot be overstressed. These centres, which are designated outdoor areas in a school, help children to develop an appreciation for nature, exercise their bodies and form social ties (Ogunsanwo 2002, Osanyin 2002, Rivkin 2002).

3.3.1 The Water Table

This could be a large plastic bowl that is mounted on a stand. The water table should not be so high as to be out of reach for the child. It should come in attractive colours with toys placed in and around the water for children to explore. To ensure safety, the edges of the stand and water bowl should be curved and smooth. Provision should also be made for water-proof aprons which children should put on when playing with water.

3.3.2 Sand Box

The sand box may come in form of a wooden box mounted on an attractively coloured stand. Like the water table, the sand box should be at a child's level and with edges that are curved. Only clear dry sand should be put in the box for children to play with. The box should also contain toys for pouring sand. Sand box promotes dramatic play among children.

3.3.3 The Mud Area

The mud area offers the children access to mud and water. Activities such as digging, planting, moulding, cooking and other types of creative play can take place when children explore with mud and water. However, provision should be made for plenty of water for cleaning up after activities in the mud area.

3.3.4 Garden Area

This section affords children the opportunity to do some gardening. Spade should be made available for digging, planting, weeding and harvesting. Here, children can explore the soil for the components and their properties, insects and other animals in the soil. The garden should be fenced so that the plants are well-protected.

3.3.5 Science Area

The science area should be equipped with materials that promote the development of scientific skills of exploration, curiosity and inquiry in the preschool child. The materials for this area may include magnifying materials, prisms, natural materials to examine and classify, plants to study, care for animals such as rabbits, snails, aquarium for fishes etc.

3.3.6 Other Learning Centres

Apart from the ones considered in the preceding sub-sections, there are other learning centres that may be designated and prepared in the outdoor learning environment. These include the kitchen area, where children can stretch their imaginations on the art of cooking, and the Mathematics centre where there could be measuring materials, balance scales, rulers, graded and ungraded cups for liquids and geometric materials.

3.3 Outdoor Space

When organizing the outdoor learning environment, it is essential to take some factors into consideration. One of these factors is the government safety requirement for space. The Federal Government guideline states –

a.   That an outdoor playground should be well-fenced, varying in size according to the enrolment of the schools, for security purposes. Where possible, provision should be made for further growth.
b.   That the playground should be grassed and installed with facilities for climbing, jumping, pulling, handling, singing, balancing, rocking, etc.
c.   That track of hard surface for pushing along wheel-toys should be provided. Facilities provided should ensure safety of children.

Therefore, to meet government registration and approval, the available space should be satisfactory, adequately protected from hazards of traffic and of children wandering away.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Highlight the importance of safety in the planning of outdoor learning environment.

4.0   CONCLUSION

It is therefore important that children's play take place in prepared environment that provides enough opportunity for learning through exploration and a lot of activity.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i.)   The outdoor environment allows a lot of freedom for exploration and social interaction.

ii)   The environment must be carefully prepared so that children do not just move around the playground without acquiring any cognitive skill.

iii)   The child's play environment should be designed to teach children.

iv)   Outdoor play enhances the development of inquiry, exploratory and such other skills as may not be possible inside the classroom area.

v)   The outdoor learning environment may be designed to feature such centres as the water table, sand box, mud area, garden area, science area etc.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Discuss the importance of the outdoor learning environment.
2.   Briefly discuss the following:

        a.   Sand box
        b.   Science area

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Ogunsanwo, T. (2004). Developing children's scientific skills through play based outdoor environment. *Journal of Early Childhood Education of Nigeria*, Vol 1, No 2, pp. 118 –   124.

Osanyin, F. A. (2002). *Early childhood education in Nigeria.* Lagos, Nigeria: Concept   Publications Ltd.

UNIT 3   PLAY: THE MONTESSORI APPROACH

CONTENTS

1.0   INTRODUCTION

In the earlier units, we noted that facilitation of learning is an act which can be cultivated by training, experience and practice. If teaching adults is a difficult task, one should expect that teaching a pre-school child will pose a greater problem since he may not understand the way adults understand. On the basis of various observations about the pre-school child's learning, certain theories, some of which have been discussed in the earlier units of this material have been propounded.

Most of these theories of teaching the pre-school children appear to have been inferred from the observations and method put forward by Froebel and Montessori.

In this unit, we shall examine what has come to be widely known today as the Montessori Approach.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the antecedents of the montessori approach.
- discuss the components of the Montessori method.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Antecedents

Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) was a medical doctor who became interested in mentally retarded children. Montessori was convinced that education, rather than physical or mental treatment was the remedy for their retardation.

In 1906, she began working with children living in a slum area in Rome.

Inspired by the work of Itard and Seguin, (both French physicians who had worked with retarded children), Montessori developed her own didactic materials. She used the materials with the retards and achieved remarkable results.

Montessori reckoned that if her methods could achieve so much with retarded children, they should yield more spectacular results with normal children and, the results should be better than those achieved by standard methods of instruction. She gave up her medical practice for traveling, lecturing, establishing schools and teacher training colleges, and conducting training courses. Montessori was convinced that children did not learn because of bad teaching methods. She felt that methods should arouse and sustain the interest of children, give them the opportunity to work alone and to experiment, and to practice whatever they learn in school in their activities at home.

The next section gives a brief description of her teaching method.

3.2   The Montessori Method

3.2.1 The Prepared Environment

The prepared environment is an organized and coordinated set of materials and equipments, the use of which will promote significant learning in the child. The arrangement of the prepared environment reflects the child's needs to order and attach meaning to his world. By this, Montessori implies that the environment must be sealed both physically and conceptually to children's needs and not the adults. For example, child-sized furniture and utensils are viewed as prerequisites for meaningful learning.

3.2.2 The Montessori House

The Montessori house has a set of rooms, and the central room is the place where children spend two hours a day for intellectual work. There

is room for individual play or sleep, a "club-room" and a garden. The houses develop children's skill for the care of self and property. These skills are instrumental to three primary components of the Montessori

Method

1.   Motor Education
2.   Sensory Education
3.   Education for Language

3.3   Motor Education

Maria Montessori regarded freedom of movement as the corner stone for motor education. All motor activities such as running, jumping and the like are functional for the child in managing his environment.

Therefore, basic motor acts such as walking; sitting and carrying objects are given precise attention. Scissors work, buttoning, lacing, pouring water from pitcher to basin etc are taught. Also, occupational skills such as sweeping, brushing, taking care of teeth are taught. But while play activities pervade a Montessorian classroom, Montessori herself, did not consider fantasy play to have a place in children's education. All activities have their specific purposes and are geared towards building of self-discipline and a work-orientation. Gymnastic exercises and rhythmic movement exercises are provided to promote a sense of equilibrium.

Montessori believed that all learning have a sensory-motor base; the acquisition of knowledge rests upon the development and refinement of motor and perceptual skills. Motor activities are taught by précis demonstration. Isolated verbal instructions are rare. A Montessori classroom depends heavily upon the learning that children engage in through observation and interaction with one another.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Briefly describe the following:

a)   The prepared environment
b)   The Montessori house

3.4   Sensory Education

Once a child has mastered the practical life exercises, he is considered ready for the sensorial education. Sensory education is taught with materials designed to foster sensory discrimination skills and concept of

form, size, colour, weight, temperature and texture. An example of the material is the cylinder block.

This material is designed to provide practice in sensory-motor coordination and establish control over the small finger muscles necessary for cursive writing.

Other materials, such as pink tower and colour tablets, promote the child's ability to discriminate form and colour and aesthetic appreciation. Touch boards are used to educate the tactile sense; thermic and aural education is provided by asking the children to feel various textured articles, and listening to sounds of cylinders.

Montessori had the lesson of silence which was to teach children silence and sharpen their sound perceptions. Other senses educated by means of didactic materials are the basic senses: the Olfactory and the sense of taste.

3.5   Language Education

Montessori believed firmly in the use of precise pronunciation by the children's principal model: the teacher. She put forward the three-period sequence, applied to vocabulary development:

Period One – Naming – "This is a ball"
Period Two – Recognition – "(Give me) the ball"
Period Three – Pronunciation – "What is this? Ball"

3.6   Academic Learning

All the pre-academic skills discussed above are supposed to be acquired by the child by the time he or she is four years old, ready to begin activities of the "essential culture", writing, reading and arithmetic.

3.7   Writing and Reading

Activities such as form tracing, management of instruments of writing and using sand paper letters are engaged in by the children. By using Montessorian alphabetical signs children learn and see the sand paper letters, feel their shape and hear their sound-words are constructed with letters and the child tries to sound the letters while reading them together. In effect, this represents a simple method of reading and word construction as opposed to word methods found in many conventional schools. The Montessorian method teaches writing and reading together.

3.8   Arithmetic

Interest in many of the sensorial materials is concerned with concept basic to Mathematics learning: quantity, identity and difference. Formal introduction to numbers comes with the presentation of red and blue rods, a set based on the decimal system. Greater level of complexity follows the rod-exercise, including exercises which teach the meaning of zero, odd-even numbers and the decimal system. The counting-tray, cards and counters, number-boards and an ingenious device known as the Golden Bead material are used for teaching counting, sorting and seriation. The Golden Beads are used for teaching numbers, fractions, and the processes of squaring and cubing. Once the child has mastered all these, he goes on to exercises in Botany and Geography. The child has now completed his preparatory programme, and is ready to encounter higher levels of cultural experience.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Briefly examine the components of the Montessori Method.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Although her methods and techniques were formulated many decades ago, Maria Montessori still remains today the single best source for practical ways in which to stimulate the mental development of preschool children.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i).   Montessori method is based on the conviction that children's learning could be enhanced by activity-based teaching methods.
ii)   The prepared environment is an organized and co-ordinated set of materials and equipment.
iii)   The primary components of Montessori Method are: Motor Education, Sensory Education and Education for language.
iv)   Activities of the "essential culture" begin for the child after he has acquired all the pre academic skills.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1.   Discuss the components of Montessori Method.
2.   Briefly explain the following terms:

    a)   The Prepared Environment

b)   The Montessori House

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTRHER READING

Institute of Education, University of Ibadan (1985). The Montessori Approach. Associateship Certificate in Education Series. Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd., pp 29-32.

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UNIT 4   PRINCIPLES   OF   LEARNING   AND INSTRUCTION: THE MONTESSORI METHOD

CONTENTS

1.0   Introduction
2.0   Objectives
3.0   Main Content
        3.1   Principles of Learning and Instruction
                3.1.1 Heterogenous Grouping by Age
                3.1.2 Active Involvement
                3.1.3 Self-Selection and Pacing
                3.1.4 Self-Correctional Materials
                3.1.5 Graduated Sequence
                3.1.6 Isolation of Sensory Attributes
        3.2   Role of a Montessori Teacher
        3.3   Critique of the Montessori Method
4.0   Conclusion
5.0   Summary
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7.0   References/Further Reading

1.0   INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we examined the Montessori approach, which is today, one of the widely acclaimed play-based instructional approaches. We learnt that Montessori Method reflects the conviction that children's learning could be enhanced by activity-based methods of teaching. We also highlighted the components of Montessori Method.

This unit, which is in fact a continuation of the preceding unit, shall further examine the learning principles peculiar to Montessori Method; discuss the role of a Montessori teacher and present a critique of the Montessori Method.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

•   discuss the montessori learning principles.
•   discuss the role of a montessori teacher.
•   make a critique of the montessori method.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Principles of Learning and Instruction

The principles of learning peculiar to Montessori are discussed in the following sub-sections.

3.1.1 Heterogenous Grouping by Age

A Montessori class consists of children numbering sometimes, up to thirty varying in age from three to six. This practice is different from the Nigerian public school education, which, traditionally, has been age-graded. Heterogeneous grouping is a sound pre-condition for social development. Since children will be working at different levels, they will neither want nor need the same materials at the same time. It also provides variety in companionship: older children can teach younger ones, and this act of teaching is among the most effective learning experiences possible. The excitement by older children to read and write may be contagious to younger ones.

3.1.2 Active Involvement

Montessori was committed to action and movement as the basis for learning. All of Montessori didactic materials are based upon Montessori's concept of the relationship between physical and mental development and require the performance of some responses by the child in order that an effect might be observed.

3.1.3 Self-Selection and Pacing

Children are free to select designed alternatives, the didactic materials which suit them at the moment. Technically, a child may spend as long as he wishes with any set of materials. The child proceeds through sequence of materials at his self-determined rate. Montessori education is individualized; her class was the first non-graded learning environment.

3.1.4 Self-Correctional Materials

Montessori an didactic materials are carefully designed so that errors (and successes) are for the most part self-evident. Children do not depend on the teacher for evaluative feed-back. The auto-educative materials are used either correctly or incorrectly. For example, the cylinder blocks fit only one way, and the Golden Beads work only one way.

3.1.5 Graduated Sequence

The major components of the Montessori programme are sequenced from simple to complex. Sensory motor movement is perfected first, followed by discrimination skill and vocabulary training. A coordinated matrix of stimulus elements characterizes the method. Montessori strove for complete consistency in her approach to pedagogy.

3.1.6 Isolation of Sensory Attributes

To promote concentration and sharpen discriminations, Montessori arranged for children to deal with one sensory modality at a time. Thus, children are blind-folded when working with auditory and tactile materials.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

State and discuss any four of the learning principles peculiar to Montessori.

3.2   Role of a Montessori Teacher

A Montessori teacher must establish a climate of emotional support, helpfulness and consideration. The teacher must relinquish a pediatric role and serve more as a resource person. In a Montessori class deductive teaching is rare, inductive learning prevails.

Evaluative tactics is abandoned, and children are not compared with their peers. A Montessori teacher must be a keen observer, capable of determining when the child is ready to encounter advanced exercises.

Scientific techniques of child-study are stressed in Montessori teacher training which, incidentally is controlled entirely by organizations such as the Association Montessori International (AMI). A Montessori teacher must arrange her learning materials well, and must not be authoritative.

A Montessori teacher must be a sound model for her children, temperamentally, linguistically, and organizationally. A Montessori teacher must be clean, she must not interfere with the child (by praise or motivation) once concentration has been established; self-discipline is very important for the teacher who must refrain from creating dependency relationships with her children. This is one of the most basic differences between conventional nursery-kindergarten practices and the Montessori Method.

The former stresses the creation of an emotional bond between teacher and child; a strong teacher-pupil relationship is frequently viewed as the key to the child's successful learning. For Montessori, the critical relationship is that between the child and his learning materials.

3.3   Critique of the Montessori Method

Many comments have been made on the Montessori Method but the most relevant are directed against her philosophy and contentions about learning.

1)   Montessori placed too much emphasis upon the child's mastery of the physical environment. The social aspect of education has been neglected. Her rigid materials and classroom layout somewhat restricts the children's individuality.

2)   Montessori is not consistent in her proposals regarding liberty and discipline. Self-expression finds little encouragement from her didactic materials and the children are too dependent on them.

3)   Teachers should be cautious with the Montessori materials. They should not be considered so sacred that scrupulous evaluation and modification are restrained. Flexibility should prevail in the use of materials. A greater variety of experiences, particularly those aesthetic in nature, are necessary in order to provide a more balanced programme.

Some have also raised issue of whether the Montessori Method truly accommodates individual differences among children.

For Example

a)   Is the same sequence of activities ideal for all children?
b)   Does the prescribed format permit blunt individual differences in creative expression?

The answers to these questions should have been easy to find except that the Montessori Method lacks heuristic power. However, one does not have to accept Montessori philosophy in order to make constructive use of her teaching methods.
Also, teachers could choose which of her concepts, materials and procedures will best serve the children in the context of "today's individual and cultural needs".

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Examine the role of the Montessori teacher. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the Montessori Method?

4.0   CONCLUSION

Montessori Method, in spite of its short-comings, remains a single most popular method of facilitating sensory motor education in the preschools.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

i)   The Montessori method reflects the conviction that children's learning could be enhanced by the appropriate methods.
ii)   There are principles of learning and instruction peculiar to Montessori.
iii)   A Montessori teacher must establish a climate of emotional support, helpfulness and consideration.
iv)   A Montessori teacher must be a sound model for children especially in the areas of temperament, language, and organization.
v)   Criticism of Montessori Method centres around her philosophy and contentious about learning.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

State three major criticisms of the Montessori teaching and learning principles.

7.0   REFERENCES/FUTHER READING

Institute of Education, University of Ibadan (1985). The Montessori Approach. Associateship Certificate in Education Series. Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) Ltd. pp. 32-35.

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