

EDUCATION:

BUILDING A SOUND MIND
AND SOUND BODY

A BOOK OF READINGS

IN HONOUR OF
DR. OLU AYODABO

Edited by:



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172

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SPECIAL DEVICES IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND THEIR APPLICATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	101
REBRANDING PRIMARY EDUCATION (A CASE FOR SCHOOL FACILITIES AND MATERIALS)	106
RE-THINKING TRANSFORMING THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM	112
KNOWLEDGE-PRACTICE DIALECTICS: TEACHERS' CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHING OF AREA AND PERIMETER OF PLANE SHAPES	125
EVALUATION PROCESS AND TECHNIQUES IN SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES	135
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: AN EFFECTIVE AGENT OF CLASSROOM TALK AND PUPILS' THINKING	141
MANAGEMENT OF STUDENTS SUPPORT SERVICES IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS	145
HEALTHY HUMAN RESOURCES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF A KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY	155
PARADIGM SHIFT AND CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION (ODE) IN NIGERIA	161
LABELLING IN SCHOOL: THE DICHOTOMIZATION OF LIFE CHANCES	172
SOME CHALLENGES FACING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE OF DISTANCE LEARNING SYSTEM IN DEVELOPING NATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA	176
LINKING CURRICULA, CO-CURRICULA AND EXTRA-CURRICULA ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR A BALANCED INDIVIDUAL	183
DEVELOPING A SOUND MIND THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION TECHNIQUES	189
THE ROLE OF ETHNIC BACKGROUND IN THE ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LAGOS	194
THE NATURE OF MANAGEMENT AND A SUCCESSFUL MANAGER	203

RELEVANCE OF TELEVISION INSTRUCTION FOR A CLASSROOM SITUATION	208
THE PLACE OF CENTRE FOR EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE CURRICULUM OF PRIMARY SCHOOL	212
ASSESSMENT OF TEACHERS USE OF COMPUTER FOR INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSES IN LAGOS STATE PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS	216
EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: A TOOL FOR ENHANCING SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE U.B.E. SCHEME	224
THE IMPACT AND AVAILABILITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES IN TEACHING FOR MEANINGFUL LEARNING OF PRIMARY SCIENCE	229
PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIETY: A CATALYST FOR QUALITY LIVING AND ACTIVE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES	238
COPING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF THE IMAGE OF AGRICULTURE IN SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS ON CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA	248
TOWARDS THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHERS OF ADULTS AND THEIR PREPARATION IN THE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION (UBE)	254
THE IMPERATIVES OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION: A CASE OF ARABIC AND ISLAMIC STUDIES TEACHER. 2	261

LABELLING IN SCHOOL: THE DICHOTOMIZATION OF LIFE CHANCES

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Abstract

This paper discusses the potency of labelling in polarising school participants. Labelling in schools has become the outward symbols of internalized oppression. It could configure and fix students and teachers into a stereotype. The paper advocates that paying attention to labelling in school by role players could perhaps make schools a place where people could feel at home, be their real selves and have the courage to live their lives as authentically as possible so that they may struggle together to live together to humanize the school and the world.

Introduction

The study of inequality is an intrinsic aspect of modern social science. Issues concerning the distribution of life chances, mobility and opportunity, poverty and social exclusion have had a prominent place in the social sciences since their inception. In all likelihood, these issues will remain on the social scientific. The study of inequality fuses normative, descriptive and explanatory aspects in a way that links the field both to policy and social theory.

Ever since people began to speculate about the nature of human society their attention has been drawn to the differences that can be readily observed between individuals and groups within any society. Schaefer and Lamm (1992) optioned that social inequality describes a condition in which members of a society have different amounts of wealth, prestige, or power. All societies are characterised by some degree of social inequality which is an inevitable result of stratification in that certain groups of people and receive special treatment one of the latent but potent means of stratification in school is labelling.

Labelling Theory

Just as there is no possibility of making an Omelette without breaking an egg, in the same vein, there can be no understanding and explanation of some social dynamics without employment of labelling perspective. theory is an interactive process between those who violate a norm (or who are believed to have done so) and others who interpret and react to the acts (Pemeđe, 1998). Ross (2000) explained labelling theory as an attempt to determine which people are not acting in accordance with the rules of a society. By this, Ross meant that labelling theory attempts to unravel the process of creating rules and judging the behaviour of others according to the rules. Labelling could simply be defined as stereotyping or everything else that is learnt in addition to the official curriculum. Gelles and Levine (1999) expounded that labelling is a means of identifying anything or anyone. It could be a natural name, a nickname or a given name. The ambivalence of a label is that it could be positive or negative. When labels are positive, they can be seen as stigma. The former is quite desirable

while the latter is distasteful having telling impacts in most cases.

Elements of labelling

Goode (1984) identified six elements that pave way for labelling. These are:

- Exaggeration:* Conventional people tend to focus on an extreme form of deviant behaviour and then assume that this is typical of all individuals who fit into that category.
- Centrality:* The second element is centrality. People tend to assume that deviance plays a central part in the labelled individual's life consuming most of the person's working hours and dominating his or her thoughts.
- Persistence:* This is an assumption of perpetuity of character. Even when a person's character changes, the label may still stand.
- Dichotomising:* people tend to think of deviance in either-or terms. For example, people tend to think of a person as a drug addict or not. Popular stereotypes do not admit the possibility that a person may shift back and forth between conventional behaviour or occupy some middle ground in between.
- Homogeneity:* This is an assumption that people committing a type of infraction are alike
- Clustering:* People tend to assume that deviance is a package deal. For example, the Yoruba's assume that 'eniti o ba-un jale, a doko' one who is a bearer will definitely steal and whoseever is a thief will be promiscuous. A form of deviance is rarely seen as an isolated trait or activity but is linked with a number of lasted characteristics. Such assumptions have the effect of isolating or segregating the person who has been labelled deviant from 'respectable society'. They contribute to the process by which the individual himself or herself may develop a 'deviant identity'.

Labelling in School: The Dichotomising Impact

One of the earliest applications of labelling perspective to schooling is that made by Cicoure and Kituses (1980). They were keen about how definitions and procedures given to students were differentiated and labelled as: "college material", "academic problem" "trouble makers" and so on. Based on their research, they concluded that school counsellors' judgement of students on the basis of a student's biography, social class and social type arte even more important in predicting school achievement than the student's ability and performances. Rosenthal and Jacobson's classic studies revealed that students were classified into "bloomers" and "spurters". It was discovered that the teachers rated the "spurters" as more curious, more interesting, more appealing and generally better adjusted than the bloomers. In addition, the duo observed that teacher expectations played vital roles in the educational achievement of students. Teachers tend to respond more favourably to fast learners and negatively to slow learners.

The labelling system asserts that when one party in a relationship is disproportionately powerful, the group is able to label those in subordinate positions. This implies that when a learner is labelled 'slow learner', such a learner has no option but to continue as a slow learner, no matter what his/her performance. Teacher's expectation influences the academic achievement of the learners. Self-fulfilling prophecy is a concept which explains differentiated performance by learners in classroom- this is referred to as Pygmalion in the classroom (Dosunmu, 2004). Appearance, contrived test scores, sex, race, language pattern and school records. Examples of labelling in schools that dichotomise learners into good or bad; studious or non-challant, etc are:

Positive Labellings

Some positive labelling in school are:

- Baba Maths the Student is good at mathematics
- Effiko book worm
- Beбето good at playing football

Negative Labellings:

Some negative labelling in schools are:

- Mumu/Olodo a very dull student
- Margaret Thatcher Strict and wicked
- Olugbo A truant; always hibernating in a nearby bush to the School
- 911 or nine-eleven a truant who comes to school at 9:00am and goes away at 11:am

Dichotomising Effects of Labelling

Labelling as an ambivalent social dynamics could either positive or negative. It is a looking glass which mirrors the judgement of others about us. When labelling is positive, it reinforces the labelled but when it is negative, it demoralises the labelled. Label defines an individual as a particular person. A label is not neutral: it contains an evaluation of the person to whom it is applied (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Labelling could lead to a process of deviance because a student being labelled negatively will associate with those similarly labelled and the behaviour of such students will amplify instead of reducing. Allocating derogatory names to students might eventually lead to alienation, loneliness and hatred. It is pertinent therefore that teachers and students be mindful of labelling in schools.

Conclusively, teachers as porters and moulders of character should be apt at nipping negative labelling in the bud before their dichotomising impacts fester the air. Labelling in schools have become the outward symbols of internalized oppression. It could configure and fix students and teachers into a stereotype. The paper advocates that paying attention to labelling in school by role players could perhaps make schools a place where people could feel at home, be their real selves and have the courage to live their lives as authentically as possible so that they may struggle together to live together to humanize the school and the world.

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