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Individualized Learning in Universal Basic Education: Implications for the Librarian as Counselor

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Introduction

Effective learning in today's environment requires that children be able to select from the enormous amount of information available and use these resources for understanding what they are taught, including solving problems and creating new knowledge (Fertier 1998). Sambo (2002) asserts that effective learning involves the ability to purposefully access information. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) learner is no exception. For the UBE child to succeed, he or she needs to understand and use information resources. Individualized learning is the idea that individuals learn best when instruction is tailored to their needs. This puts the librarian in the position of a good counselor. The frustration for the learner must be abated.

Today's libraries must provide a learning environment that supports problem-solving, information seeking, problem development, and collecting data that will lead to dependable conclusions (Udoh 1998). The learner in the UBE era is faced with challenges and presented with information in unprecedented quantity. According to Fertier, et al. (1998), the UBE learner needs:

- The definition of the need for information
- The development of information seeking strategies
- Location and accessing of information sources
- Evaluation and selection of information from a variety of print non-print and electronic print.
- Recording and organizing information
- Interpreting and using information to solve his problem and answer his questions.
- Organizing and presenting the results accordingly
- Communicating the results of the research and enquiring in an appropriate format
- Evaluating his information product and process in relation to its enquiry.

The learner must find out how knowledge is organized, and how to find and use it. These call for the librarian to have information literacy skills in print, non-print, and electronic formats and to be able to impart those skills to information seekers. Amucheazi (1998) emphasizes that users of school libraries should play an active role in their own learning through information literacy skills, including:

- Defining the tasks for which information is needed.
- Localizing appropriate sources of information to meet needs.
- Selecting and recording relevant information from sources.
- Understanding and appreciating information from several sources, and being able to combine and organize it effectively for best application.

- Presenting the information learned in an appropriate way and evaluating the outcomes in terms of task requirements and increases in knowledge.

School Librarian as Counselor

The librarian as a counselor must adopt a variety of activities to counsel school library users. Some of these are discussed here. They are

- bibliotherapy for the emotionally and socially disturbed;
- giving the right book to the right user and the right time to ensure character building;
- using project work for individualized learning
- using biographies.

The librarian as counselor must have adequate knowledge of each child's emotional and psychological needs before these can be effective.

Bibliotherapy

Bibliotherapy denotes healing through books. A librarian selects reading materials to help users with mental, emotional, domestic, and social problems (Feather and Sturges 1997). For instance, the story of Cinderella could be a powerful tool for children from broken homes. Through the use of bibliotherapy, children develop a good self-concept, increase their understanding of human behaviour, foster self-appraisal, and relieve emotional and mental pressure.

The Right Book for the Right User at the Right Time

There are many titles and series that can help children with behavior problems and social difficulties, as well as those that match the child's nature or interest. Joy Berry is the author of a large number of books that help children learn good behavior so they can get along well and relate to others. Her books also deal with shyness, "snooping," stealing, and many other topics.

Non-Print Materials

Using non-print materials can help children with teamwork and peaceful co-existence. Stories on compact disc are not only enthralling and exciting to children but also help them appreciate the characters they see and are told about. The school media librarian is to set the stage by listening together with the children to one of the stories and discussing with the children the strengths and weaknesses of the characters. The children can then be divided into project groups and given selected titles to work on and present to the class. This way, children are counselled along these lines. Examples include films like *The Selfish Giant*.

Biographies

The librarian as a counselor can use the lives of notables, including photographs with short notes displayed in the library. Examples of inspiring biographies include Albert Einstein, Ray Charles, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Jesse Owens, and Martin Luther King, among many others.

The Digital Age

Electronic communication is a way of life, especially for young people (Flowers 2008). Librarians must understand how children perceive the world of today. The government of Nigeria has developed nine Information and Communication Technology (ICT) education initiatives, including:

- The Nigerian Universities Network (NUNet)
- The Polytechnic Networks (Polynet)
- The Nigerian Education, Academic and Research Network (NEARnet)
- National Open University Network
- The School Network and
- National Virtual (Digital) Library.

School librarians must help reach the objectives of these initiatives, understanding what Flower (2008) describes as “digital natives.” To do this, the school librarian must (Udoh 1998):

- prepare guidelines for providing rigorous content, relevant materials and scholarship for the utilization of the new technologies.
- review and establish access to specialised materials and instructional resources to cater for better the gifted and the disabled with the school community.
- provide guidelines for pupils and/or students on the most effective use of their independent study periods/library periods and others.

Besides the above, the children need to be taught information technology literacy skills to enable them to:

- define their need
- select their key terms
- employ in-person as well as on-line methods
- access the needed websites
- use online reference service where necessary

The school librarian must first possess literacy (Maduabuchi and Agwu 2008). Literacy includes competencies that give students access to a broad array of information resources. It also requires librarians to monitor what children are accessing. That requires information literacy.

Conclusion

A new paradigm of library services is needed for children to become effective citizens. New strategies tailored to the child's needs are required. Librarians can assume a counseling role and use techniques such as bibliotherapy to help bring out confidence and self-sufficiency.

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