

ROLES OF INTER-DISCIPLINARY, MULTI DISCIPLINARY, MULTIPROFESSIONALS, AND TRANSDICIPLINARY APPROACHES IN EDUCATING PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.


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Abstract

In this paper, the authors critically examined the roles for inter-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and multiprofessional team approach in educating special needs children in schools. The need for transdisciplinary, inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary team approach and their specific function as collaborative professionals in educating special needs children is paramount to the success of special need learners in schools. The paper had systematically discuss the burning issues affecting inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary team and information gathering transmission. More so, the writers also focus on assessment using multidisciplinary team and the purpose of assessment using inter-disciplinary team in order to find a better way of educating special needs children in schools, as well as to design a road map for providing such services in line with Nigeria's vision 20:20:and beyond..

Introduction

Special Education services are meant for Persons with Special Needs. (Exceptional) and to ensure the adequacy of these services, Professionals must come together to collaborate. Successful delivery in special education relies on many people and professionals across the community working in collaboration for the benefit of children and young people with special needs. Professionals are experts in diverse fields of study. They are specialist in specific area of study(Olorode,2013).A successful and meaningful educational programming, vocational training and all round development of children and adults with special needs demand for professionals responsibilities, both for assessment ,diagnosis, program evaluation and placement and even for planning individual educational programme(IEP) . All these require the services of multi professionals. In essence IEP is a forum whereby experts, parents, specialist from different discipline come together, to deliberate on the needs of special needs child, both in his academic development, vocational ability and interests, health care delivery and other related problems and supports. This is concomitant to the needs and requirement of individuals to function effectively and be integrated effectively into the society. Infact, it

requires the attention of not just one expert for him or her to effectively learn or cope in the classroom; as well as for individual to function and adjust properly outside the school environment and to enhance his getting-along with peers at home, school and community. The development in practice to services for individuals with challenges has accelerated, to warrant quagmire of terminology to accommodate multi-professional, interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary terms. Although, these terms can be used interchangeably to refers to groups of professionals or a team of experts from various areas of specialization with specific aim of identifying, diagnosing, treating and providing possible remediation and services for individuals with manifold disorder. Multidisciplinary team is used sometimes instead of inter or multi-professional practice(Carrier and Kendalt,1998) It is usually used to describe different professionals backgrounds, 'who share common objectives but who make different but complimentary contribution to practice',(Leathered,1994).Although inter-professional is more conducive than working across boundaries to meet clients needs.

Multiprofessional

Mc Cray 2007, defines multi-professional practice as practice between different professional groups but not necessarily including collaboration. To provide the care agreed upon for a person or client, each profession make work with the person on an intervention separately, as to provide such a care to the patient ,client or even parents or the family in its entirety.

Interdisciplinary

This approach is a kind of collaboration where the various professional involved in a case work, operate together to establish priorities. The prefix inter denotes relationships both between and among the elements and further implies the notion of reciprocal operations. This approach ensures that services are coordinated and based on priorities of the child and those of his family. Interdisciplinary approach, although not denying the importance of specific skills, seek to blur the professional boundaries and require trust, tolerance, and a willingness to share responsibility,(Nwabueze and Ezeugwu,2014).

Multidisciplinary

This is the bringing of various profession together to understand a particular problem or experience, such as the case of person with special needs. Liman (2007),in his description stated that in a multidisciplinary team, various professional groups come together to work on different aspects of a particular case and that each member of the various professions may be informed of what the other is doing or he may work independently.

However, Elemukan and Abiodun (2007) viewed that multidisciplinary team combines different disciplines, who may visit schools on appointed date and months, to

assist teachers on inter-disciplinary basis, and on an interactive meetings, as well as regular education initiatives, where all resources are joined together.

The above writers reiterated that multidisciplinary team approach means that various professionals who evaluate, collaborate, and cooperate with each other in planning the provision of appropriate services for special need child. Although, Ozegya (undated) argues for a Trans-disciplinary team approach. He maintained that, the approach involves a joint team effort to meet the learner's needs through role release, two or more members of the team share general information regarding their individual expertise, duties and responsibilities. The team evaluation includes social, educational, psychological or psychometric, medical, speech and language rehabilitation, physical therapy, as well as audiological assessment. Obi(1995) observed that, all professionals work in social systems that have rules, boundaries and hierarchies, which govern the way individual behave and their tasks. Each profession also has its ethos, cultures and ethics governing the behavior of members. Importantly, the professional need to work together as well acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of the individual with special needs and work collaboratively to make their life meaningful.

Trans-disciplinary Approach:

Trans-disciplinary approach is a framework for allowing members of an educational team to contribute knowledge and skills, collaborate with other members, and collectively determine the services that most would benefit a child. The approach integrates child developmental domains and involves a greater degree of collaboration and other service delivery model(Bruder1994,p61).It require the team members to share roles and systematically cross discipline boundaries. The primary purpose of this approach is to pool and integrate the expertise of team members, so that more efficient and comprehensive assessment and intervention services may be provided. The assessment is designed to identify the child's strengths and weaknesses. A child with visual impairment for instance may requires the interdisciplinary team intheir special needs education to involve the Classroom teacher, Itinerant teacher, Social worker, Mobility instructor, School Nurse, Ophthalmologist, Optician, Physiotherapist, Braillist, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Audiologist, Speech pathologist, Parents and others who are to offer remedial services to special needs learners. The communication style in this type of team involves continuous give and take, between all members, parents on a regular but planned basis. There is a move from institutional base to community based services for service users, hence it germinates a new working relationship between professionals; coupled with the events of technological change, which has improve communication among professionals in the form of medias and phones, which further promotes collaboration. More so, to overcome the causes of failure among inter professionals due to lack of accountability and communication require collaboration.

Needs for Inter-Disciplinary and Multidisciplinary Team Approach

Inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary team in special education ensures that careful consideration is given to the details of work arrangement among the professionals involved such as doctors, nurses, social workers, teacher, psychologists, speech therapists and others who are responsible for the care of children. "There is a saying that two good heads are better than one, couple with the fact that special needs education is complex ,diverse and complicated, it calls for the coming together of different experts in other to evaluate, diagnose, plan and provide solution to the problem of the atypical child. The children Act (DFES,2004)emphasized that every child matters ;while Obi (1995) stated that special needs children have different types of handicapping condition; need different services to enable them cope with their various disabilities. It is vitally important to realize that the education of the special children, if it is to attain a very high standard, there must be need of multidisciplinary team, and it must begin with a critical evaluation and assessment of the child's problems. In the words ofMba (1989) and Osinuga (1995), "not only the problem that is apparent, but also those problems that are often referred to as accompanying problems". These accompanying problem are what make a child to be unique and require special treatment. The most paramount need of inter-disciplinary and multi disciplinary team approach is to set concrete, realistic and attainable goals for the special needs children. Precisely, the main needs for inter-disciplinary team approach are for improved training, increased staffing and better developed patterns of working between different experts in other to eliminate duplication of effort and to ensure success and the best use of available limited resources.

Collaboration

Collaboration implies that two or more individuals with useful knowledge and experience work together, to device appropriate strategies for school level and classroom level interaction. They should share experience and expertise together. Collaboration implies respect for other professionals and service users and their skills. In fact, there is an agreed sharing of authority, responsibilities and resources. Elemukan (2005) stated that special educators should mobilize other professionals to cooperate and assist in the management of special needs individuals, since specialist should be an advocator for persons with special needs. The specialist should consult, collaborate, coordinate and evaluate their techniques, program and plans that have been implemented. He further argued that the experts should form a network and be a community sensitizer in order to meet the unique need of special needs learners in their custody.

Kaufman and O'Neil (1995) cited in Elemukan and Abiodun (2007) ,remarked that, "one area which remains contentious, is the feasibility of providing special services such as speech therapy, physiotherapy, orientation and mobility training, self-care training, and the teaching of alternative methods of communication successfully in the regular schools which can be reasonably provided in special schools at a lesser cost, but difficult

to address in the regular schools with the special skills of the regular teacher.” Therefore, all these call for cooperative effort of professionals.

Davis and Kemp (1996) further X-ray that collaboration of professionals will assist them to diagnose and solve the learning and behavior problems in the classrooms when they walk together. There is a need for good networking, community interaction, state interaction, pro-active and not reactive thinking, planning and responding to schools problems.

In essence, collaborative professional should work in partnership to provide educational and other services. Professionals from all different disciplines must work together to implement and develop student’s education, as well as establish realistic goals for individuals with special needs. Further still, in order to ensure quality services for the special needs individuals, require collaboration of personnel, which are called multi-disciplinary, multi-professional, trans-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary team.

Functions of Interdisciplinary/ Multi-professionals/ Multidisciplinary and Transitional Professionals

Hardman, (1987) cited in Ezeani, (2006) argued that each team member must clearly understand the role and responsibilities involved in the team. This is necessary for individual member to play his/her role effectively. There is an abundant of literature and anecdotal information extolling the virtues of different styles and approaches of teaming(ASHA,(1991); Garlind and Linda,(1988);Hoffman,(1990).An effective team members must, first and foremost, be committed to the concept, that the most effective way of providing intervention is through a service delivery model conducted by a team,(Durbin and Doldson,1990).However, the legislative and practical considerations remain that, families and their children with disability are best served through a well coordinated team approaches. In the same vein, McLaughlin and Lewis (1990) Cited in Ihenacho 2004 noted five main purposes of inter-disciplinary assessment as: screening to determine eligibility, planning a programme, monitoring student progress, and evaluating a programme. Therefore the specific function of the Experts includes the following:

Special Education Teacher

Special education teachers are directly involved with the child on daily basis, and are essential members of the inter-disciplinary team, Teachers provide information on all aspects of a learner’s development, strength and weakness, especially academic performance, social interaction with peers in and outside the classroom and promote emotional status. For instance, writing which maybe usually very poor and illegible are enhance by specialist to be occasionally good, only good teacher can feed students with adequate information.

Medical Experts

These services are provided by physicians, such as pediatrics, psychiatrists, neurologists and other allied professionals such as nurses, laboratory technologists and so on. The services rendered informed one about the physical and mental health of the child. Furthermore, other professionals are ophthalmologist, physiotherapist and others, observed the child and offers his/her assistance if the condition calls for such; and are beneficial to the interdisciplinary team and school administration.

The Parent

The function of parents in the inter-disciplinary team is to present the family history and the child's problem. These include the socio-economic status of the family, medical history of the family and particularly that of the child, time of onset of the child's problem, position of the child in the family, and other information that would assist the professionals to adequately plan for the child, because only the parents know the child better since they live and grow together.

Clinical Psychologist

The experts come in with his/her battery of diagnostic tests. The child is interviewed to obtain more information in order to know the specific area whereto assist the child. In case of underage child the professionals rely solely on the parent's information, the services could also be in classroom, or individualized setting. Thereby consulting the teachers or observing the children in small groups either for group testing, (intelligence testing), group counseling and other inter-disciplinary team meeting (for sharing assessment results or setting up behavior management systems as events demands) Psychological function of Clinical psychologists includes test administration, interpretation of information about children's behavior, mental ability and their learning condition.

Mobility Instructor

The professional duties include giving the child orientation of his/her immediate environment and training the child to travel independently. The child needs to be trained to acquire these skills so as to be self dependant particularly as regards mobility. Independent travel is also an important skill that equips the child for further life adjustment.

Audiologist

The audiologist bring in programmes and services that are essential for meeting the child's special needs particularly in relation to the hearing impaired children. Audiological services can provide amplification techniques as well as the delivery of facilitative and treatment services, designed to maximize a child's use of residual hearing. These services include auditory training, speech reading, speech conversation,

for the hearing impaired learners as well as evaluating communication skills of students, evaluating the educational environment and the on-going services. Their functions include referring children to other specialist that are providing services, counseling others working with the children. As professionals they are responsible for evaluating the auditory function of the learners, they often seek input from teachers on student's classroom speech and language problem as well as inter-relate with the school speech and language therapist, during the planning of the children educational programs.(Ihenacho2006, , and Estersunand Bluth,1987).

Itinerant Teacher:

The itinerant teacher on regular basis visits the school where the special needs children are located and render supportive services to the children on individual basis. The itinerant teacher visits the school once or twice or more in a week as the situation demands. The professional move from one school to another, in order to assist the special needs children.

The Social Worker

The expert functions as a link between the home and the school. He/she works with both the parents and the teacher for the progress of the special needs child. He/she keeps the social records and developments of the child; the expert also renders social services to the child and links the child with other social facilities and benefit that would be of advantage to the child in his day to day activities and personal development.

The Occupational Therapist

The experts train the client on various trades on which the client has aptitude and interest. The occupational therapist also assists the counselor and the social , in job placement of the client after the training as well as see to his work adjustment and welfares.

Guidance and Counseling Services

Counselor is one of the important experts needed in inter-disciplinary team approach to educating special needs persons. The counselor work with special needs persons on self-understanding, career planning and development, and career education, educational and social adjustment and may further develop behavior management plans for children. The counselor assists the special needs learner to benefit from special education. The counselor helps to improve a child's behavioral adjustment problems and control skills to make the child available for participation in educational programs. Therefore, professional collaboration is a radical transformation of professional practice in order to maximise beneficial impact, it can be minimal model fully or integrative model of team work. in fact there is pessimistic and optimistic model but optimal model offers the best gain.. This implies that successful application of these technology, is highly depending

upon a sophisticated multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary team approach, in order to address the varied needs of special needs children. (Elemukan&Abiodun, 2007).

Key Issues Affecting Inter-disciplinary and Multi-disciplinary Team

To achieve the success required by multidisciplinary team, all experts must work in the social system with rules, boundaries and hierarchies. Some rules govern the way individual behave as well as in discharging their duties and tasks. Each Profession also has its ethos and culture and/or rules governing the behavior of her members. In working together for the development and growth of special education, it would be necessary to look at issue of inter-disciplinary or multidisciplinary because they need to collaborate and cooperate

Among the issues affecting inter-disciplinary team approach when the professionals bring two or more separate reports on each child, its interpretation is vital, which without it, makes difficult to plan appropriate individualized educational programs and to determine whether the children needs special class placement, special tutoring, special equipment, and or psychotherapy. To interpret ophthalmological and neurological reports may be nearly impossible without calling each specialist and asking for an interpretation. On the other hand, Marian and Diane (1979) maintains that interpretation alone would still not tell us how the problem might affect learning or if special education provision would be necessary. Sometimes, too, psychological and educational reports are written in such technical jargon, and such information will be of little benefit to the teacher who educates the child without appropriate interpretation by the experts concerned

In line with the forgoing discussion, Olukotun (1995) stated that theoretically, it could be said that various professions working together to provide services to special needs children must have an equal voice and influence. Although in practice, this is far from the case. Each one of the professional will want to dominate where his own services are needed. For instance in a medical situation involving an emotional disturbed child or a physically impaired child, the doctor will in most cases want to influence and outweighs the decision of other professionals, no matter how democratic he/she may want to because he believes it is the area of her expertise. In the same vein, the teacher's authority, power and responsibility outweigh that of other experts, when it come to school and educational matters as it affects special needs learners. Inter disciplinary team therefore make possible for both the doctor and the teacher coming together to collaborate on how they can help the child, with doctor leading on the medical issue while the teacher make plans on educational issue, based on the outcome of the doctor's medical examination. Other issues include:

(a) Information Gathering and transmission:

In inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary team approach, each professional has its rules and regulations particularly about the confidentiality of information gathered about their clients, either directly or indirectly. Such information aid in the provision of

services needed by the special needs children. The needs to work together with other experts, therefore calls for the sharing of information. There is usually a tendency for one expert to want to conceal certain information about a particular child from other as dictated by his professional ethics. Sometimes they may make decisions as to the type of information to share and with whom. This is because of the differences in value and perception of each profession. Obi (1995) maintain that, inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary team transmitting information to any professional at any given time, depends partly on satisfactory records kept; Experts should further ensure that the information transmitted is tenderable, factual and reliable and the source of such information should be passed on also. The source of any information received should be critically scrutinized by the recipient and where there is doubt, the recipient could decide to investigate the authenticity of such information. Recipients of information about special needs child need to be objective and evaluate its reliability and authenticity.

(b) Inter-Disciplinary and Multi-disciplinary Team Approach to Assessment

The inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary team approach in assessment brings together individuals from different profession, background and disciplines who would bring in their expertise and make complex professional decision. The team equally consists of special education teachers, psychology, speech therapy, parents, and medical doctor and so on. Each team member from his/her professional perspective and view-points gathers and interprets information about the learner. The writer's view that assessments are designed to identify the child's strengths and weakness, so that educational and other services can be planed that will lead to his/her personal achievement. This obtained data is shared with the team; the team in turn analysis the data and uses them to render the most appropriate and relevant decisions.

Inter-disciplinary team assessment approach is expected to make and take decisions, regarding the special needs children in such area as:

- Evaluation of students for placement in special education and other related services;
- Formulation of individualized education programme(IEPs);
- Evaluation of IEPs programme;
- Re – evaluation of special education placement. (Ihenacho2006).

The numbers of professionals constituting or making up the inter-disciplinary team for the evaluation of each case varies, since each team is made up for a particular purpose. In fact the team for identification may have more members than for IEP or *Vise Versa*; while multiple disability will attract large numbers of inter-disciplinary team members from disciplines, than a student with minor disorder.

(c) Purpose of Assessment Using Multidisciplinary Team:

Assessment using inter-disciplinary team is a systematic process of data/information gathering that helps experts to provide special services. The focus of assessment is mainly on the many areas of learning in school as well as other factors that affect school

achievement. Ihenacho (2006) maintained that assessment are basically important because it help to establish the need for better services and answers questions related to eligibility for special education and other related services..

Similarly among the importance of inter-disciplinary assessment include the use in determining the extent of the conditions and the period of its onset. It reveals the degree of the problem, when all experts bring in their report such that, audiology would determine whether the problem of hearing loss is conductive or sensorineural, profound or severe. The ability and disability of the child is known as well as the strength and weakness revealed. However, it is necessary for appropriate examination of exceptional condition, in order to ensure that adequate provision are made for the special learning needs of individual concerned. Thus it prevents arbitrary labeling of the children as non-productive. Furthermore, it is important because it provides statistical analysis for planning the special education programme and other related areas of services for the learners. It also aids how to plan for the child early intervention programme that will assist the child to gain adequate educational or vocational programme and adjustment to society .In addition the report/information obtained from multidisciplinary team can be used to determine the nature of the remediation and it prevents hopelessness and non productivity among the disadvantage individuals. Cooperation is needed among stake holders involved in providing interprofessional practice (IPP) and therefore the need for interpersonal education(IPE) to prepare the future workforce (Odegard,2006).More so, Nwabueze and Ezugwu,(2014) remarked that, many benefits accrue for team work for all participants including parents and children, but that a well-functioning team require attention ,time and supports. Team members need time to know each other and learn about each other work styles ,philosophy ,attitude about change and innovation and approaches to conflict and conflict resolution .they must learn to improve team work. Liman(2007),itemized the barrier to effective collaboration to include poor information dissemination among professional groups serving the child with special needs and their parents

Mutual distrust and suspicion due to differences in perceive status among the professionals and with the parents. It may lead to accusation and counter accusations causing eventual collapse of collaborative efforts.

Strict codes of confidentiality which make it difficult for some professionals to share information and skills required by the child with special needs.

Parent's ignorance of the roles of the various professionals could lead to poor cooperation with these professionals

Conclusion

To effectively achieve the use of inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary team approach in educating person with special needs, each profession needs to accept and recognize the other profession. Professionals need to understand that their profession is as useful and important as any other profession. Recognition must be given to the work

of other contributors towards educating special needs children. The inter-disciplinary team approach is needed in assessment, decision making, placement and evaluation which are necessary ingredients in planning and meeting the children's learning needs. However, care must be taken to put in place the machineries to help achieve the goals of special needs children. For a better understanding of all the experts involved. The writers critically observed that it is necessary to hold a round table meeting to discuss the information/report obtained. This will enable people to ask questions and get clarification to prevent misinformation. There is also need for experts or professionals to come together to organize workshop, seminars, conferences and special courses for all the stakeholders involved in inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary team, as to provide better solution to certain problems affecting the education of special needs learner as well as to accustom members to the needs for networking and cooperation. The superiority complex of one profession over the other should be discarded, while team work, cooperation, experience sharing, understanding and appreciation of each other should be encouraged, in order to achieve the needed success in the use of inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary team approach in educating special needs children in Nigeria.

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