Traditions in ECD Facilities: The Nigerian Experience

by Margaret Akinware

Definition:

Tradition refers to the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way. A tradition is a belief or behavior passed down within a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past (www.dictionary.com). The handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice: a story that has come down to us by popular tradition (https://www.reference.com).

A. What traditions do you observe in your classrooms?

To start with, we do not call our ECD facilities/centres classrooms, so as to distinguish them from formal primary school classrooms. Use of classroom connotes formal teaching and learning that we try to disassociate from ECD programmes. The following are the traditions we observe:

1. **Use of the language of the immediate environment.** This practice enhances the tradition of storytelling, folklores, proverbs, lyrics, singing, and dancing. Parents and grandparents are able to blend into the programme and simulate ‘tales by moonlight’ sessions. Through this medium, moral lessons are taught, positive values are reinforced, and respected norms are transmitted. Stories concerning the wisdom of the tortoise still prevail. In Nigeria, for purposes of example and for identification, different modes of dressing, behaviours, and events are introduced to children through drama and storytelling.

2. **Respect for elders** is of paramount importance in Nigeria. In our ECD facilities, stories are told around this issue and children are shown and made to demonstrate evidences of respect all the time. Nigerians expect children to be polite at all times or they are punished. To emphasize this fact, we teach children the importance of saying “I am sorry or please forgive me” if they offend, and “Please, thank you, excuse me,” and illustrate these along ethnic practices. This principle helps to teach and demonstrate the rights and responsibilities of the child.

3. **Religiosity** is a tradition passed on from one generation to another. Nigeria’s tradition is known for its religious diversity. The recent acts of religious intolerance have led us to
introduce and promote religious tolerance in our bid to rebrand Nigeria through ECD programmes. In the ECD facilities, children are taught about God and how to pray simple prayers. The concept of God as the creator of the world is taught and observed. Songs from different ethnic groups reflecting the greatness of God in His sovereignty are taught and sung regularly. Whether Christians or Muslims, children receive briefs on whom God is and relevant verses from the holy books are used to teach morals and principles of life.

4. **Hygiene** is observed in Nigeria from both the health and religious perspectives. Caregivers/teachers tend to write on the board/wall: “Cleanliness is next to Godliness.” Children are taught the importance/essence of cleanliness through traditional songs, lyrics, folklores, and stories. Sweeping the floor in the morning time, use of chewing stick for brushing/cleaning the mouth, cutting of fingernails are demonstrated in the facilities and observed daily as a routine.

5. **Birthday celebrations:** Traditionally, parents observe milestones more noticeably during the first five years and particularly during the first year. Developmental milestones are of interest to parents who observe and remark on when children first smile, sit alone, babble, start crawling, take a first step, attempt to walk, run, talk. That does not mean that they are written down as records, but parents announce to others with pride that the child is developing! In our ECD facilities, birthdays are observed with singing, clapping, dancing, and snacking if affordable.

6. **Hospitality:** Traditionally, Nigerians are hospitable and children are taught the principles of sharing and giving through drama, play, stories.

7. **Collectivism:** Traditionally, Nigerians in different communities and villages are their brothers’ keepers, sharing belongings so that no one goes without having the necessities of life. These concepts and practices are being inculcated into children: to be caring, loving, and kind. Team spirit is promoted through group activities in the centres/facilities.

B. What traditions have you created in your organization?

I am a member of the Board of Trustees of both the Early Child Care, Development & Training Initiative (ECDTI), and a new umbrella ECD NGO called Foundation for the Promotion of Childhood Care and Development (FPCD) in Nigeria.

We have created the following traditions within our organizations:

1. **Use of anthology:** Traditional songs, stories, lyrics, folklores especially in learning corners (see item #8 below). Caregivers are taught to create learning corners to promote culturally appropriate practices/traditions. They are taught to make improvisation
materials for learning/teaching and playing. Emphasis is on Learning through meaningful Play.

2. **Adherence to the Rights of the Child:** In our bid to inculcate in children respect for elders, we teach the rights of children and their own responsibilities as well. With this concept in mind, caregivers are also taught the rights of children and adherence to them.

3. **Peace Education:** We have brought on board emphasis on peace education in our bid to empower children to serve as agents of peace keeping and conflict resolution in order to rebrand Nigeria and redeem lost tolerance among different ethnic groups.

4. **Assessment of Developmental Milestones:** This is taught to caregivers and promoted across the ECD facilities. It is linked to growth charts so that parents and caregivers will appreciate true meaning of care and development in children 0–5 years.

5. **Parental Education** to enhance the roles of parents as prime teachers and caregivers and upgrade their knowledge and skills.

6. **Team Building, Spirit, and Work:** Community cooperation and development with the aim of promoting community participation, ownership of developmental projects, as well as tradition of **Collectivism**.

7. **Antenatal Care** (pregnant mother and unborn babies): Traditionally, Nigerians love to take extra care of pregnant mothers to ensure safety of both mother and child. We incorporate this care in our parental education and teach the nine danger signs of pregnancy/delivery, as well as care of neonates up to age 5 using a holistic approach. My organization is embarking on writing simple illustrative booklets on **Mothercraft**.

8. **Voice of the Child:** We serve as the voice of the child locally and internationally on advocacy, awareness creation, and implementation of the integrated ECD policy and observance of the rights of the child in Nigeria.

Margaret Akinware, WF National Rep, Nigeria

Member, WFF International Advisory Group