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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Harcombe's Cognitive Approach to Literacy Instruction in Improving Literacy Learning in a South African University Training Setting

By

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A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. (Educational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, December 2008.

I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

_____ _____

Signature Date

ABSTRACT

Along with various contextual factors, the method of literacy instruction is recognised as one of the main reasons for low levels of literacy learning both locally and internationally. Harcombe's CATLI process is offered as an alternative literacy methodology, firstly since its constructivist, ecosystemic underpinnings endeavour to address as many contextual issues as is possible, and secondly, because the CATLI process attempts to address some of the gaps in other literacy instructional programmes. The current study aimed to evaluate the CATLI process as a viable alternative to traditional methods of literacy instruction. In addition, the study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of using the constructivist approach to train university students in the CATLI process. The sample comprised trainee learning support specialists and one parent per learner receiving the CATLI intervention at the community centre at a Johannesburg university in 2007. Quantitative and qualitative data obtained by means of questionnaires and extant records provided evidence that all learners showed improvement in literacy skills as well as general development, ascribing the effectiveness of the process to being underpinned soundly by social constructivism and associated theories. For the same reason, trainees considered their training sufficient.

KEYWORDS

Cognitive; Collaboration; Constructivism; Ecosystemic; Learning Support; Literacy Learning; Methods of Literacy Instruction; Motivation; South African Context.

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