

ROLE OF COGNITION IN DEVELOPING YOUNG CHILDREN'S LITERACY AGED 3 TO 8: THE KENYAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that literacy in early childhood could play a significant role in empowering the young children to develop reflection, critique, empathy, a sense of identity and full participation in society. This however is only possible if teachers go beyond the dominant behavioural, cognitive and socio cultural views that have constrained early childhood teacher education in Kenya and perhaps other countries in the world. We argue that if teacher educators embrace the view of producing teachers who are sensitive to skills and strategies that are essential to effective literacy teaching [phonics, phonological awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and composition], then, children will learn that literacy is a tool to harness the fulfillment of personal goals both within and outside the school. We have also suggested that in supporting teachers to develop critical literacy, children will be empowered to understand how texts may influence and change them as members of society. It is also argued that research into acquisition of literacy with specific reference to key components like word recognition, vocabulary development, fluency, comprehension, the development of writing and spelling directly relate to the processing of print and digital texts. In this paper, we use the Kenyan context to state that cognition emphasizes that children develop problem solving skills in literacy-related activities through the assistance of a more knowledgeable other. However, it is our feeling that Kenya shares a considerable similarity with other nations in terms of approaches to initial teacher education and professional development. Hence many issues raised may be relevant to other countries.