

---

*International Forum*  
*Vol. 21, No. 2*  
*December 2018*  
*pp. 93-113*

**FEATURE**

## **Exploring the Early Literacy Practices and Experiences of Mothers**

**Maria G. Gaytos**

**Abstract.** *Mothers play a vital function in fostering the early learning opportunities of children, and early learning opportunities are considered to be strong and independent predictors of future academic success. Very few studies, however, have looked into the practices and experiences of mothers in early literacy instruction. Anchored in family literacy theory, emergent literacy theory, and early literacy theory, this qualitative study used transcendental phenomenological design to explore the early literacy practices and experiences of 8 mothers in the southernmost part of Eastern Samar as inputs for future educational intervention. Employing Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method of analysis, the in-depth interviews revealed 4 themes: mother's use of strategies, the desire to learn and the need for intervention, goal-setting during early literacy instruction, and outcomes of early literacy instruction. The study concluded that mothers see the significance of early literacy instruction so they struggle to improve the skill. However, since their expertise is so limited, there is a need for educational institutions to help them.*

**Keywords:** Early literacy instruction, mother's practices and experiences, education, Eastern Visayas, Philippines, transcendental phenomenology

### **Introduction**

The home has always been the first school, and the role of mothers in early literacy instruction cannot be overlooked. The literacy knowledge and skills children learn at home is a major factor in their school readiness and have been found to be strong independent predictors of their success in formal reading instruction (Lonigan, Burgess, & Anthony, 2000; Mendoza, Katz, Robertson, &

Rothenberg, 2003). The first 3 years of life begins the period where early language and literacy are developed, and this development is associated with the child's exposure to books and stories. The child's contact with adults, books, papers, and crayons constitutes the building blocks for the development of language reading and writing (Schickedanz, 1999).

The experiences of mothers while giving early literacy instruction and their early literacy practices are extremely important because mothers play a significant role in promoting the literacy abilities of young children (Sénéchal, 2006; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Literacy interactions between family members such as storybook reading and picture book reading with parents and other family literacy activities form the foundation of the literary experiences of young children. Parents' engagement in literacy-related activities with young children can support children's literacy development (De Jong & Leseman, 2001).

### **Review of Related Literature**

Literacy, as described by Frankel, Becker, Rowe, and Pearson (2016), refers to the different ways by which children attach meanings to the different literacy materials they come in contact with by using reading, writing, and oral language. Early literacy development begins at birth until the time the child is exposed to formal reading and writing instruction. Early literacy includes the literacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes that the child cultivates throughout this period (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006). Research indicates that early literacy instruction is essential because it is closely linked with learning experiences that leads to better educational accomplishment, grade school success, greater chances of finishing a degree, and a more productive adult life (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006).

Cultures differ in home literacy practices. In some cultures, there is regular exposure to books and other reading materials because of the availability of a home library. In others, there is a very limited exposure to books. Cultures also vary in the focus of literacy instruction as well as on what to prioritize (Owodally, 2014). Educators need to see the importance of knowing the home literacy practices children are exposed to because through it, educators can restructure their school practices with those at home and work cooperatively with parents to improve children's literacy development (Curry, Reeves, & McIntyre, 2016).

### **The Role of Family and Mothers**

There are several studies investigating the value of the family in early literacy. The findings of Curry et al. (2016), Dove, Neuharth-Pritchett, Wright, and Wallinga (2015), and Chen, Pisani, White, and Soroui (2012) stressed the significance of the family in promoting young children's literacy. Baker (2013) discovered that preschool children had better academic performance and had the

tendency to develop holistically when parents were regularly involved in home literacy undertakings.

Some studies particularly looked into the role of mothers in developing children's early literacy skills. The study of Mendive, Lissi, Bakeman, and Reyes (2017) found that mother's education and early literacy practices are closely related to the level of literacy skills children learn. Fletcher and Finch (2015) showed that the types of questions mothers ask and the kind of feedback mothers give while reading non-narrative texts affect 2-year-olds' degree of responsiveness. Aram, Meidan, and Deitcher (2016) discovered that maternal writing mediation predicted children's writing. Additionally, Neumann, Hood, and Ford (2013) found a positive relationship between maternal print referencing of environmental print and child environmental print referencing as well as name and letter writing. All these studies indicate that families, especially mothers, play a central part in the early literacy progress of a child.

### **Factors Affecting Early Literacy Instruction**

Many studies in early literacy point to factors affecting early literacy instruction (Dydia et al., 2016; Sawyer, Cych, Sandilos, & Hammer, 2018; Schachter, Spear, Piasta, Justice, & Logan, 2016). The study of Aram et al. (2016) showed a difference in the literacy levels of children who were home-schooled and children who were formally schooled. It likewise showed that home-schooling mothers did not intervene much with children's writing, had lesser expectations from children, and did not understand much about learning. Kim (2016) found that children's literacy responses were positively related to their social relationship with peers. Fletcher and Finch (2015) discovered that children's responsiveness was affected by the type of books and reading strategies mothers used.

Relationships were found between parent's socio-economic background, education, and early literacy instruction. Children's achievements after first grade were associated with family socio-economic background and the kind of exposure to early reading and writing while in kindergarten (Aram, Korat, & Hassunah-Arafat, 2013). Compared to higher socio-economic status (SES) parents, lower SES parents rarely instructed their children about print resulting in lower SES children's poor performance on print skills (Neumann, 2016). On the other hand, low-SES mothers tended to focus more on teaching numeracy skills (del Rio, Susperreguy, Strasser, & Salinas, 2017).

Foster, Froyen, Skibbe, Bowles, and Decker (2016) indicated that father's early home literacy practices were not significantly related to children's academic performance when the mothers obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. The results indicated likewise that the level of education of the mothers was associated with their kind of early literacy practices. According to Duursma (2014), parental education was also found to affect home reading practices. Zevenbergen, Holmes,

Haman, Whiteford, and Thielges (2016) implied a need to strengthen the narrative abilities of young children since their study found that the development of literacy skills in later years largely depended on it. The study of del R  o et al., (2017) found that the numeracy performance of children could depend on the mother's numeracy practices at home, the level of numeracy expectations and the levels of math anxiety.

Baker (2013) showed that reading, math, and social and emotional development could be enhanced if parents engaged often in home literacy activities. Different social relationships with peers was also found to influence children's literary responses in the study of Kim (2016). Sakes, Isitan, Avci, and Justice (2016) showed that parents' home literacy practices depended on the way parents perceived their children's literacy motivation. Mothers' literacy beliefs also affect the way parents teach their children as revealed by N. Taylor (2016). The study of Son and Tineo (2016) indicated that children's oral engagement and optical responsiveness was affected by the way mothers stressed some significant words and pictures found in the books. These studies reveal that several factors can affect early literacy practices of mothers, and their experiences can vary depending on these factors.

### **Early Literacy Practices of Mothers**

Several studies focused on the early literacy practices of mothers. One study showed that the manner by which mothers taught reading and writing at home was influenced by their level of education which in turn affected the level of the early literacy skills development of their children (Mendive et al., 2017). Another study revealed that the nature and regularity in the mother's questioning style were adjusted based on children's ages and that children's participation in storytelling in later years was affected by the types of questions their mothers exposed them to (Kuchirko, Tamis-LeMonda, Luo, & Liang, 2016).

In improving toddler's responses, Fletcher and Finch (2015) found that mothers' positive comments, stimulating strategies, and interrogations were more effective than marking and reading texts. The book reading practices of Dutch mothers to their young children were examined in the study of Duursma (2014) who demonstrated that the daily reading time of children was directly influenced by the amount of reading time the mothers spent for them. The findings of Aram et al. (2016) indicated that literacy programs supplied mothers with useful strategies in early literacy instruction and these helped them improve the way they taught early reading and writing.

Neumann et al. (2013) found that when mothers constantly made children aware of letters and numbers they see in their immediate environment, letter recognition and writing were enhanced. Chang, Luo, and Wu (2016) revealed a positive effect of the use of verbal and nonverbal cues in introducing printed

symbols during adult-child shared storybook reading interactions. Baker (2013) found that the frequency of mother's attendance in home literacy activities resulted in an increase in preschooler's performance in reading, math, and emotional development. These studies suggest that maternal practices in early literacy instruction can affect early literacy development and skills. These practices vary based on the mothers' experiences and the needs and abilities of their children.

### **Early Literacy Studies in the Philippines**

The Philippines Early Childhood Care and Development conducted a series of repeated observations that began in October 2014, which were intended to be the bases for the implementation of the Philippines' Early Years Act of 2013 (Republic Act 10410; A. Taylor, 2016 ). The observations revealed that children who were exposed to preschool programs did better in mental and verbal language skills and were more emotionally mature. The study of Orillosa (2014), which explored the context of parents' teaching practices of whole numbers, supports the importance of home experiences in the acquisition of mathematics development. There is very limited literature available on early literacy studies in the Philippines. This dearth of literature in early literacy instruction indicates a need for more studies in the area.

Most studies in early literacy focus on the role of mothers in early literacy instruction and the factors affecting early literacy. While there are quantitative studies investigating the early literacy practices of mothers, very few studies answer such probing questions as: "What specific early literacy practices were practiced by mothers??" "How did they go about doing such practices?" "How did they look at the experience?" This qualitative study aimed to explore the practices and experiences of mothers while they were giving early literacy instructions to their children. The following questions guided data collection:

1. What were the experiences and practices of mothers as they were giving early literacy instruction to their children?
2. How did they go about these experiences and practices?
3. How do they look at these experiences?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on three theories of learning. First is Holdaway's 1979 theory of literacy development which explains that learning to read is inherent in a child and that it paves the way for the development of oral language skills. It further contends that reading and writing begins in the home and is based on meaningful experiences that the child is exposed to. There are four main parts in this theory: observation, collaboration, practice, and performance (Godwin, Herb, Ricketts, & Wymer, 2013). Next is Denny Taylor's 1983 family literacy theory

which explains the part the family plays in children's literacy development. In Taylor's view, family literacy refers to the different ways children are informally exposed to literacy activities in the home that familiarizes them with reading and writing which eventually develops their literacy skills (Godwin et al., 2013). Finally, this study also considers Marie Clay's 1996 emergent literacy theory, which posits that children acquire different levels of literacy behaviors at home before their introduction to formal reading and writing. The acquisition of these behaviors starts at birth and is continuous and on-going. This theory provides educators with instructional guidance in encouraging early literacy development for future literacy endeavors (Mkandawire, 2015).

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study made use of transcendental phenomenology, a philosophical approach that seeks to understand human experiences with the aim of looking at experiences with a newer stance (Moustakas, 1994). I used transcendental phenomenology because I, myself, am a mother who had the experience of teaching early literacy to my two children. I also teach early literacy as a subject which makes me more aware of the significance of the process. I have often wondered how mothers out there who did not have a background of early literacy instruction went through the process.

### **Research Design**

This is a study about experiences and their meanings; therefore, qualitative inquiry is suitable because describing an experience entails an exhaustive portrayal of how people become involved in an activity (Patton, 2002). This requires asking participants their experiences and the meanings they give to them (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002) which can be portrayed by means of direct quotes (Van Manen, 1990). Qualitative methodology is done with a small sample to allow depth and breadth in exploring the experiences (Barker, Elliott, & Pistrang, 2004) permitting a deeper understanding of each participant's unique and individual experience.

This study explores the deeper meaning of the lived experiences of mothers while teaching early literacy. "Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9). Phenomenology allows people to look back at their experiences which they may have initially considered ordinary, unremarkable, and meaningless and enables them to see these experiences in a new light (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological investigations must be obtained from persons who have lived the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).

### Research Setting

The respondents are from the southern municipalities of Eastern Samar where the major feeder schools of a certain university are located. These municipalities were chosen because they are the recipients of the extension program of the extension program of the university and the results of the study were intended as the basis for extension services.

Table 1

*The Respondents Demographic Profile* university and because the results of the

Respondents	Age	Level of education	Age range of children	Number of children
R1. Annie	25	High school graduate	0-4	2
R2. Barbie	28	First year college	2-5	2
R3. Coreen	30	Third year high school	1-9	3
R4. Dyna	33	First year college	2-8	4
R5. Edna	35	High school graduate	0-11	5
R6. Fely	38	Second year college	4-11	3
R7. Grace	41	Elementary graduate	3-10	2
R8. Helen	45	Second year college	12	1

study were intended to be the basis for extension services. Eastern Samar is part of Eastern Visayas which had been considered a hotspot for school dropouts (Palanca, 2015) and the country's poorest region (Fernandez, 2016).

### Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to choose the eight mothers who lived within the southern municipalities of Eastern Samar, who had children with ages between 0-12 years, who had no background in teaching, and who were and are still directly involved in the early literacy instruction of their children. Their ages ranged from 25-45 years. Out of the 14 prospective respondents, only eight were available.

**Data Collection**

Data were collected through lengthy (30 minutes to 1 hour or more) exhaustive, semi-structured, direct interviews. While only two sessions were planned for each respondent, I had to go back to the respondents' homes time and again for more questions until a saturation point was reached. These conversations were recorded via cellular phone for accuracy. While interviewing, I observed keenly the expressions of the respondents as well as the conditions of the surroundings which might help me gain more insight into the experiences as expressed by the mothers. Data collection was within 6 weeks.

At home, I kept a reflexive journal where I put regular entries during the research process. The entries were records of what I needed to do, the alternative measures that needed to be done and their rationale, a list of the expenses, and a record of what happened during the data gathering process. It also contained reflections on what was happening in terms of my own experiences as a mother doing early literacy instruction. Here, I also recorded detailed observations during the interviews and what they could have meant.

**Data Analysis**

I adopted the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis by Moustakas (1994) in making sense of the data gathered. This included the researchers' epoché, transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, synthesis of texture and structure, and deriving of essence (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Initially, I had to set aside all my preconceived notions about early literacy instruction to focus on what the phenomenon was like as expressed by the participants in a process termed epoché. Epoché was necessary for it allowed me to look at the phenomenon with a newer perspective, giving me a chance to look at it from participants' viewpoint and from the way they had lived or experienced it. It also required me to change my attitude in order to get rid of the prejudices and assumptions that I previously held (Moustakas, 1994).

In phenomenological reduction, I identified significant statements from the transcripts which were pertinent to the proposed phenomenon. I gave equal value to each statement making sure I kept an open mind in trying to understand what it meant and in trying to make sense of it. After reviewing the transcripts, I showed them individually to the respondents to make sure that I was being loyal to their own ideas. When everything was in place, I told them I was translating the transcripts to English for the purpose of my study. I removed statements that meant the same things and grouped the remaining statements into theme clusters which became the basis for the textual description of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). I checked the statements and the assigned themes and rechecked them again to see that they were properly grouped.

In the third step, imaginative variation, I started looking at how each participant looked at early literacy instruction, what their experiences meant to them, compared it with how I looked at their experiences as a mother, what other mothers think about them, what books and research say, or what early literacy theorists say about the experiences. Phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation is applied to come up with themes and subthemes that would give the experiences meaning and importance (Moustakas, 1994). It is in the expression of these meanings that a seemingly ordinary experience begins to take on a new meaning (Giorgi, 1997).

In the final step, I looked at the essence of these experiences. I tried to see the meanings and their implications on early literacy instruction (Giorgi, 1997). While the essence of an experience can never be fully sought (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004), hearing the mothers' experiences had somehow given me a comprehensive idea of what these experiences meant to the participants, how these could be used in improving early literacy practices, and how it may result in meaningful experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A permit to undertake the research was obtained from the college administrator of the university where I work even before the presentation of the research proposal. Prospective participants were notified both orally and in writing. They were given a letter telling them of the nature and target of the study and what was needed of them. They were assured that confidentiality would be done by using pseudonyms in order to conceal their identity and that the data gathered would be exclusively used for the study. Their permission was also asked in the recording of the conversations.

### **Researcher's Reflexivity**

To attain reflexivity, I had to make sure I put aside all my preconceptions about the phenomenon of early literacy instruction so that I would be able to view the phenomenon from the respondents' perspectives. My being a sole author did not stop me from asking what others, (mothers and other researchers) may have thought about a certain statement or a certain experience. I may not have necessarily taken in everything they said, but consulting others helped me have a wider perspective of the phenomenon. It was a form of triangulation.

I also had to go back to the respondents' time and again to make sure that my writing conformed to their original ideas. I kept a reflexive journal where I recorded the observations and the insights I had from the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The journal helped me recall instances, incidents, as well as expressions that were very helpful in giving meanings to the experiences.

## Results

The significant statements were assigned meanings and these were grouped based on their meanings. The clustered themes eventually resulted into the emergent themes. The four themes extracted were: mothers use strategies in teaching early literacy; mothers feel the desire to learn and the need for intervention; mothers set goals during early literacy instruction; and, mothers are aware of the outcomes of these instructions.

### Textual and Structural Themes

Table 2 in the following page shows the result of phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation after having set aside my own preconceptions of the experience. In phenomenological reduction, I deleted repetitive and irrelevant statements and considered only the significant ones. In the third step, imaginative variation, I grouped the significant statements into themes and subthemes and gave them meanings based on differing perspectives, roles, and functions (Moustakas, 1994).

### Combined Textual-Structural Account of All Participant Interviews

The themes that developed can roughly be categorized into experiences and practices because time and again, they overlap since one happened because of the other. That is, practice came about because of the experience, or the experience gave birth to the practice. From here, the mothers came up with their own ideas of what early literacy meant to them.

#### Theme 1. Mothers Use Strategies in Teaching Early Literacy

The mothers' use of strategies while teaching early literacy arose from experiences which made them see what needed to be done for learning to take place. The respondents understood the need to make early literacy instruction effective; so, they use strategies. They looked for means to make learning enjoyable for kids. For example, one mother noticed that children had the tendency to get bored, so she had to "present everything as play" like scrambling letters and the child picking out the letter named. For one mother, it was pretending they "were characters in a play" which the children found delightful. Aware of their inadequacies in teaching, they also employed another

Table 2.

*Written Themes with Precise Excerpts from the Participants*

Formulated meanings	Theme clusters	Emergent themes
<p><i>Respondents understand the need to make early literacy instruction effective; they use strategies.</i></p> <p>“I notice that children do not get bored if I present everything as play, but I still need to learn how to make them learn more.”</p> <p>“Most often I introduce things like names of household utensils as a game.”</p> <p>“I say the name of the letter and they repeat after me. Later on, I scramble the letters and ask them to pick out the letter I name. My strategy works, but sometimes it doesn’t.”</p> <p>“Sometimes we pretend that we are the characters in the story I am reading. My kids just love it.”</p> <p>“I ask the elder child in grade 1 their assignment in reading and writing. I teach the same things when we are alone during the day.”</p> <p>“I look for an application in the cell phone that will teach them about letters and numbers.”</p> <p>“My children are interested with all kinds of animals, so I teach them about animals and plants and all the things they can see around and in picture books and in television.”</p> <p>“Sometimes, they are too lazy if I teach them at night, so I teach them during the day, especially when it is just the two of us. That way, they feel happy that I give them attention. However, I don’t often give what they want.”</p> <p>“Some of my children are excited when</p>	<p>There is that attentiveness on what to teach and how to do it</p> <p>Activities have to conform to children’s interests and attitudes.</p>	<p>1. Mothers use strategies in teaching early literacy</p>



<p>“I sometimes wonder how professionals handle children’s attitudes.”          “I need to learn why children behave the way they do.”</p>		
<p><i>Respondents think that early literacy is more than just reading and writing. It is also a time to set goals for themselves and for their children.</i>          “I want them to appreciate reading and writing. It is also an excuse for me to discipline my child properly.”          “I feel it is my obligation to educate my child. Even if he does not finish school, I will make sure that at least he knows how to read and write. It is a skill necessary in life. Everything comes in print. He needs to know this information so that he will not be fooled.”          “When I read to them stories, I tell them what they need to do in order to survive in this world.”          “I am also teaching them how to behave properly, how to be wise, and how to deal with problems in life. These are things they will have to face later in life.”          “Teaching him reading and writing are moments where he starts to form his dreams.”          “I see early literacy as my initial investment in my child. I need to prepare her well for her future and teaching her at home is where it all begins.”</p>	<p>The need to set goals for their children is evident.</p>	<p>1. Mothers set goals during early literacy instruction</p>
<p>Formulated meanings</p>	<p>Theme clusters</p>	<p>Emergent themes</p>
<p><i>Parents are able to see the effect of their early literacy instruction.</i>          “Teaching my kids early literacy resulted in good academic performance when he had his formal schooling.”          “I see that my child developed</p>	<p>Mothers are happy to share the results of their instruction</p>	<p>1. Mothers are aware of the outcomes of early literacy instruction</p>

<p>confidence when he entered first grade because he could already read.”</p> <p>“My child was not left behind in Grade 1 because he could read. He was in fact an honor student.”</p> <p>“My kid was excited to go to school and to experience reading and writing with kids her age.”</p> <p>“At the start, I found it difficult to teach them. Later, I learned something from the experience.”</p> <p>“My child who refused to be taught at home found it difficult when he entered first grade.”</p>		
---	--	--

strategy—to learn from teachers and technology. They patterned their approach from older children’s assignments or they used technology in teaching letters and numbers. One mother said, “I ask the elder child in grade 1 their assignment in reading and writing. I teach the same things when we are alone during the day.” Another said, “There are times when I do not know what to teach and how to teach them, so I watch TV. There I can find programs which tell me what to do.” Strategies were also applied in handling children’s attitudes as expressed here: “Sometimes, they are too lazy if I teach them at night, so I teach them during the day, especially when it is just the two of us. That way they feel happy that I give them attention.” One also recalled a strategic practice in this statement: “My children are interested with all kinds of animals, so I teach them about animals and plants and all the things they can see around, in picture books, and in television.”

### **Theme 2. Mothers Feel the Desire to Learn and the Need for Intervention**

The desire to learn and the need for intervention is a product of the mothers’ realization of a need to be effective in teaching early literacy. Practices like asking other mothers what they do, bringing their preschool children to school so that both mother and child can watch how children are being taught, and using technology like TV are indications of this desire and the need for intervention. This need is actually made clear when mothers mentioned attending seminars: “I feel the need for parents to have seminars on how to teach their children how to read and write.” “We are not highly educated. We need professional trainings to make us effective.”

### **Theme 3. Mothers Set Goals during Early Literacy Instruction**

Mothers set goals during early literacy instruction because from their experiences, they saw that early literacy instruction were moments when children

started forming their dreams and saw it as an appropriate time they could tell the kids what to dream. These were evident in expressions like “teaching him reading and writing are moments where he starts to form his dreams” and “when I read to them stories, I tell them what they need to do in order to survive in this world.” From here, the respondents realized that early literacy was more than just reading and writing. It was also a time to set goals for their children. This was also manifested in such expressions as “I see early literacy as my initial investment in my child. I need to prepare her well for her future and teaching her at home is where it all begins” and “I am also teaching them how to behave properly, how to be wise, and how to deal with problems in life. These are things they will have to face later in life.” The goals set were not just for their children. These were goals for the mothers as well.

#### **Theme 4. Mothers Are Aware of the Outcomes of Instruction**

Mothers also talked about the positive outcomes of their early literacy practices. There was pride in their voices when they pointed out that their efforts paid off such as “teaching my kids early literacy resulted in good academic performance when he had his formal schooling.” They saw that it also built some confidence in their children as expressed in “I see that my child developed confidence when he entered first grade because he could already read” and “My child was not left behind in Grade 1 because he could read. He was in fact an honor student.” However, there were also some lessons learned from the experience: “At the start, I found it difficult to teach them. Later, I learned something from the experience.” “My child who refused to be taught at home found it difficult when he entered first grade.”

#### **The Essence**

In exploring their practices and experiences, the respondents had demonstrated that early literacy instruction is vital to both child and mother. It is important to children because during early literacy instruction, they start to learn not only about reading and writing but also about things in life and how to prepare themselves for the future. It is a time where they start discipline both from themselves and those around them, especially their mothers. For the mothers, early literacy instruction is a time to discipline their children and to make their children see the importance of education. Moreover, early literacy instruction is also a time when mothers can hear their children’s dreams and help their children shape those dreams.

My experiences as a mother giving early literacy instruction were focused on teaching my children reading and writing and in making these skills meaningful by relating the reading and writing to their everyday activities and the environment. Initially, I was expecting that the respondents’ focus would be only on the same

line; however, they viewed early literacy beyond what I saw. They perceived early literacy instruction as not just learning to read and write but something more essential—a time when children shaped their dreams and a time when mothers can help shape them. I also realized that as a teacher, I did not need any help with teaching. However, with the respondents who had no background in teaching, intervention was needed to make instruction more effective.

### **Conclusion**

This research utilized transcendental phenomenology to explore the practices and experiences of mothers while giving early literacy instruction. The study revealed that mothers use strategies in teaching early literacy, there is a desire to learn and a need for intervention, they set goals during early literacy instruction, and they are aware of the outcomes of their instruction. The findings conformed to several studies like the studies of Aram et al. (2016); Kuchirko et al. (2016); Fletcher and Finch (2015); Chang et al. (2016); and Orillosa (2014) which showed that mothers use strategies in teaching. The result of the present study also proved that just like the studies of Aram et al. (2013), Neumann (2016), and Duursma (2014), some factors such as parents' socio-economic background and maternal education can affect literacy instruction.

From these findings, one can conclude that mothers see early literacy instruction as a very important responsibility. One can also say that by nature, mothers are teachers. However crude their approaches may be, their practices somehow conform to the theories of teaching and learning which were manifested in their use of strategies in teaching as well as their ways of handling children's attitudes. Furthermore, it was instinctive of them to strive to improve the skill so that outcomes would be better. There is therefore a need for institutions to help them. The home as the first school should be strengthened as a learning institution. Likewise, mothers as children's first teachers need to be trained in order to make them effective partners of schools in ensuring children's future academic success thereby fully developing their potentials.

The results of the study support the theory of literacy development by Donald Holdaway because based on the mother's stories, mothers exposed their toddlers and older children at home to meaningful literacy experiences that eventually led to literacy development. The study also strengthens the family literacy theory because mothers have expressed that the family involvement in early literacy can have remarkable effects on children's academic accomplishment. The results of the present study likewise strengthened the emergent literacy theory because from the outcomes of literacy instruction verbalized by mothers, they confirmed that there is a need for early literacy instruction because without it, children can be left behind in their literacy development during formal schooling.

### **Recommendations**

As expressed by the mothers, the following recommendations are made. (a) The Parents-Teacher's Associations in schools could be reinforced so partnership and consultation with parents about early literacy will be enhanced. (b) The extension program of the university could extend help to mothers through trainings and seminars about early literacy instruction. (c) As part of their practicum, selected early literacy students could visit homes and help teach mothers what needs to be done in teaching their children about early literacy through demonstrations. (d.) Mothers could be invited to schools time and again, especially to kindergarten, in order to give them ideas on what to teach and how to actually teach their children.

### **References**

- Aram, D., Korat, O., & Hassunah-Arafat, S. (2013). The contribution of early home literacy activities to first grade reading and writing achievements in Arabic. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 26(9), 1517-1536. doi:10.1007/s11145-013-9430
- Aram, D., Meidan, I. C., & Deitcher, D. B. (2016). A comparison between homeschooled and formally schooled kindergartners: Children's early literacy, mothers' beliefs, and writing mediation. *Reading Psychology*, 37(7). doi:10.1080/02702711.2016.1157537
- Baker, C. E. (2013). Fathers' and mothers' home literacy involvement and children's cognitive and social emotional development: Implications for family literacy programs. *Applied Developmental Science*, 17(4), 184-197.
- Barker, C., Elliott, R., & Pistrang, N. (2004). *PSY7640: Methods of clinical requirements*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Chang, C., Luo, Y., & Wu, R. (2016). Origins of print concepts at home: Print referencing during jointbook-reading interactions in Taiwanese mothers and children. *Early Education and Development*, 27(1), 54-73.
- Chen, J., Pisani, L., White, S., & Soroui, J. (2012). Parental engagement in early childhood at home. *Reading Psychology*, 33, 497-524.

- Curry, D. L., Reeves, E., & McIntyre, C. J. (2016). Connecting schools and families: Understanding the influence of home literacy practices. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 4(2), 69-77. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1118481.pdf>
- De Jong, P. F., & Leseman, P. P. M. (2001). Lasting effects of home literacy on reading achievement in school. *Journal of School Psychology*, 39(5), 389-414.
- del Rio, M. F., Susperreguy, M. I., Strasser, K., & Salinas, V. (2017). Distinct influences of mothers and fathers on kindergartners' numeracy performance: The role of math anxiety, home numeracy practices, and numeracy expectations. *Early Education and Development*, 28(8), 939-955.
- Dove, M., Neuhaarth-Pritchett, S., Wright, D., & Wallinga, C. (2015). Parental involvement routines and former head start children's literacy outcomes. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 29(2), 173-186.
- Duursma, E. (2014). Parental book reading practices among families in the Netherlands. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 14(4), 435-573.
- Dynia, J. M., Schachter, R. E., Piasta, S. B., Justice, L. M., O'Connell, A. A., & Pelatti, C. Y. (2018). An empirical investigation of the dimensionality of the physical literacy environment in early childhood classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 18(2), 239-263. Retrieved from doi:10.1177/1468798416652448
- Fernandez, R. (2016, April 8). Eastern Visayas is Philippines' poorest region. *The Philippine Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.philstar.com/nation/2016/04/07/1570460/eastern-visayas-philippines-poorest-region>.
- Fletcher, K., & Finch, W. H. (2015). The role of book familiarity and book type on mothers' reading strategies and toddlers' responsiveness. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 15(1), 128-144.
- Foster, T. D., Froyen, L. C., Skibbe, L. E., Bowles, R. P., & Decker, K. B. (2016). Fathers' and mothers' home learning environments and children's early academic outcomes. *Reading and Writing: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 29(9), 1845-1863.
- Frankel, K., Becker, B., Rowe, M., & Pearson, D. (2016). From "what is reading?" to what is literacy? *Journal of Education*, 196(3), 7-18.
- Giorgi, A. (1997). The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 28(2), 235-260.
- Godwin, E., Herb, B., Ricketts, A., & Wymer, S. (2013). *Theories of literacy development 1930s: Present day*. Retrieved from [http://hillerspires.wikispaces.com/file/view/Theories%](http://hillerspires.wikispaces.com/file/view/Theories%20of%20Literacy%20Development%201930s%20Present%20Day)

- Kim, S. J. (2016). The role of peer relationships and interactions in preschool bilingual children's responses to picture books. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 16*(3), 311-337.
- Kuchirko, Y., Tamis-LeMonda, C., Luo, R., & Liang, E. (2016). "What happened next?" Developmental changes in mothers' questions to children. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 16*(4), 498-521.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1065-1122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lonigan, C. J., Burgess, S. R., & Anthony, J. L. (2000). Development of emergent literacy and early reading skills in preschool children: Evidence from a latent-variable longitudinal study. *Development Psychology, 36*(5), 596-613. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.36.5.596
- Mendive, S., Lissi, M. R., Bakeman, R., & Reyes, A. (2017). Beyond mother education: Maternal practices as predictors of early literacy development in Chilean children from low-SES households. *Early Education and Development, 28*(2), 167-181.
- Mendoza, J., Katz, L., Robertson, A., & Rothenberg, D. (2003). *Connecting with parents in the early years: Executive summary*. Retrieved from <http://ecap.crc.illinois.edu/pubs/connecting/summary.pdf>
- Mkandawire, S. B. (2015). *LTC 1000 theories of literacy and theories of literacy development: The University of Zambia lecture notes for week 9*. Retrieved from <https://sitwe.wordpress.com/2015/12/14/306/>
- Moerer-Urdahl, T., & Creswell, J. (2004). Using transcendental phenomenology to explore the "ripple effect" in a leadership mentoring program. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3*(2), 1-28. Retrieved from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3\\_2/html/moerercreswell.html](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_2/html/moerercreswell.html)
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. London, England: Sage.
- Neumann, M. M. (2016). A socioeconomic comparison of emergent literacy and home literacy in Australian pre-schoolers. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 24*(4), 555-566.
- Neumann, M. M., Hood, M., & Ford, R. (2013). Mother-child referencing of environmental print and its relationship with emergent literacy skills. *Early Education and Development, 24*(8), 1175-1193.
- Orillosa, F. (2014). *Home experiences that foster readiness for learning whole numbers: An exploratory study*. Paper presented at the DLSU Research Congress, Manila, Philippines, March 6-8, 2014. Retrieved from

- [http://xsite.dlsu.edu.ph/conferences/dlsu\\_research\\_congress/2014/\\_pdf/proceedings/LLI-II-018-FT.pdf](http://xsite.dlsu.edu.ph/conferences/dlsu_research_congress/2014/_pdf/proceedings/LLI-II-018-FT.pdf)
- Owodally, A. M. (2014). Maternal reports of home literacy experiences in multilingual Mauritius: A case study of pre-schoolers. *Early Child Development & Care*, 184(11), 1615-1635.
- Palanca, T. J. (2015, September 14). A look at drop-out rates in the Philippines. *GMA News Online*, Retrieved from <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/scitech/science/534610/a-look-at-dropout-rates-in-the-philippines/story/>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Saçkes, M., Isitan, S., Avci, K., & Justice, L. M. (2016). Parents' perceptions of children's literacy motivation and their home-literacy practices: What's the connection? *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(6), 857-87.
- Sawyer, B. E., Cycyk, L. M., Sandilos, L. E., & Hammer, C. S. (2018). 'So many books they don't even all fit on the bookshelf': An examination of low-income mothers' home literacy practices, beliefs and influencing factors. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 18(3), 338-372. Retrieved from doi:10.1177/1468798416667542
- Schachter, R., Spear, C., Piasta, S., Justice, L., & Logan, J. (2016). Early childhood educators' knowledge, beliefs, education, experiences and children's language and literacy-learning opportunities: What is the connection? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 36, 281-294.
- Schickedanz, J. A. (1999). *Much more than the abc's: The early stages of reading and writing*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Sénéchal, M. (2006). Testing the home literacy model: Parent involvement in kindergarten is differentially related to grade 4 reading comprehension, fluency, spelling, and reading for pleasure. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10, 59-87.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Son, S., & Tineo, M. (2016). Mothers' attention-getting utterances during shared book reading: Links to low-income preschoolers' verbal engagement, visual attention, and early literacy. *Infant and Child Development*, 25(4), 259-282.
- Strickland, D., & Riley-Ayers, S. (2006). *Early literacy: Policy and practice in the preschool years*. Retrieved from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/early-literacy-policy-and-practice-preschool-year>.

- Taylor, A. (2016). *The Philippines Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) longitudinal study*. Retrieved from <https://rd.acer.org/article/studying-earlychildhood-education-in-the-Philippines>.
- Taylor, N. (2016). Exploring the literacy beliefs of refugee mothers: Implications for research and practice. *Journal of Research in Education*, 26(1), 31-53.
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Zevenbergen, A. A., Holmes, A., Haman, E., Whiteford, N., & Thielges, S. (2016). Variability in mothers' support for pre-schoolers' contributions to co-constructed narratives as a function of child age. *First Language*, 36(6), 601-616.

*Maria G. Gaytos, Ed. D*  
*Associate Professor, Eastern Samar State University, Salcedo Campus*  
*6807 Salcedo, Eastern Samar, Philippines*  
*mggaytos@gmail.com*