Techno-Literacy Practices of Emergent Readers

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Abstract – *This research explored the techno-literacy practices of emergent readers. The study found that young children experienced a multi-literate practices in their homes that comprised not only print and paper-based literacies but also techno-literacies. That television, games on tablets and phones are the sources of textual pleasure of young children.Families reported that children watched television and play games on tablets/phones regularly. This is due to the limited options of leisure activities available to younger children. Emergent readers are highly focused to televisual text as they demonstrate meaning-making practices when they constantly ask questions and talk about what they are watching,hence they are active meaning-makers. The learning opportunities which include hand eye coordination, parallel processing, and problem solving skills young children acquired through playing computer games and games on tablet/iPad . Aside from these, they also developed a number of literacy skills as well as how to behave as players.It can be concluded thatexposure to imagery in electronic technologies contributed to the children's literacy development. The literate identities of emergent readers can be further enhanced as they begin formal schooling. Data indicated that young children are developing techno-literacy practices and this concurs to the findings of Marsh (2010). Therefore, technology serves as a tool for the literacy development of young children. That techno-literacy practices of young children should be valued in school. Future research should also consider attitude, behavior and practices of parents towards the use of technology by children.*

Keywords: *emergent readers, literacy, emergent literacy, techno-literacy, early childhood, televisual text*

INTRODUCTION

Emergent literacy, a term introduced by Clay [1] is defined it as children's engagement in print literacies from birth. Children who are in this stage of literacy are considered emergent readers.

Technology is present in almost all activities of children. In fact, a survey conducted by Rideout, Vandewater and Wartella [2] revealed that young children are increasingly engaging with new media and digital technologies. In fact, the uses of different kinds of technologies are becoming regular features in Filipino homes. Filipino families are enthusiastic users of technology. Today's generation of young Filipino children are exposed to different kinds of technology. Internet and other information and communication technologies have become tool nowadays that affects how young children live, communicate, and think.

The central role of television in pre-school children's home literacy experiences has been noted by Kenner [3] in his study. Meanwhile, Downes [4] found that students showed higher level of motivational engagement when using technologies. The increasing demands on technology has led to the immersion of young children in electronic technologies. With this, information and communication technologies affect and contribute to the literacy development of young children.

Young children's developing competencies with technology are noted and seen as necessary to families nowadays.Their diverse technology-based activities is what Palmer [5] referred as technology-driven culture. Moreover, Plowman, McPake and Stephen [6] reported that technologies to which children have access and/or exposure suggest that there has been a "technologization" of childhood and theyare called as toddler netizens according to Luke [7]. As such many young children today are already competent in a range of techno-literacy practices.

Jewitt [8] coined the term "techno-literacy" to pertain to literacy activities that employ the use

technology such as tablets/iPad, television, computers, and mobile phones.This was premised on Jewitt's belief that children's literacy experiences in the home are greater than paper-based literacy materials which include techno-literacies. In the present study, all home literacy events mediated by technology are referred to as techno-literacy practices.

Parents and early childhood teachershave different views about the role that techno-literacies played in learning to read and learning to write as well.Print and paper-based skills werehighly valuedfor emergent learners. In fact, according to Marsh, [9] there have been fewer studies which have indicated how younger children engage with a range of technologies such as television, computer games, mobile phones and film. Furthermore, report of NCES [10]revealed a greater percentage of preschool children in 2003 who actively interacted with computers and computer-related technologies, 66 percent further emphasizes the presence of technology in the lives of individuals at a very young age.

Families' home activities in relation to techno-literacyis not popular to researchers.There is dearth on research on techno-literacy practices of young children; hence this study is conducted to explore the techno-literacy practices of preschool-age children hence this study was conducted.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design using phenomenology to explore the techno-literacy practices of nineemergent readers and how they engaged with technologies and digital devices or with screens. Purposive sampling was done. In the study, nine families with children aged two to four years were the participants. It aimed to explore and identify the techno-literacy practices of emergent readers.

Interview questions focused on children's techno-literacy practices were used. The questions explored children's techno-literacy practices and the utilization of these technologies by families. Parents were also asked about patterns of children's use of each technology. Interview transcripts were analyzed for emerging patterns and themes.The patterns and themes were identified in the interview data using the inductive coding strategies [11].Themes common to the data were used and analyzed.

Field notes were completed during home visits. Observational data were examined and analyzed in-depth. The children were observed using participant observation methods in the children's home environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are four technologies used by children: television, computer including tablets/iPads, and mobile phones. Findings from the interview indicate that watching television is the primary source of televisual texts for the pre- school age children in the study. Playing games on tablets/computers and mobile phones is secondary. Families reported that children watched television and play games on tablets/phones regularly. This is due to the limited options of leisure activities available to younger children. Through these techno-literacy practices, children demonstrated meaning-making practice as they constantly ask questions and talk about what they are watching. Children in this stage are active meaning-makers.

Field notes showed Children are highly attentive to the print which appeared on the screen.This study resonates the study of Marsh, 2004[9] who studies the techno-literacy and media literacy practices of a group of children aged two to four years. The study found that television is the primary source of textual pleasure for young children.

Watching television was highly observed in all the participants. All parents reported that children watched television on a regular basis in an average of five hours a day. Watching television programs is an important means for English language acquisition and comprehension as well. Most common in the children studied is watching cartoons in the morning, noontime variety shows, and *teleserye* at night. In the interview, parents were asked about what their children do as they watched television. Two parents responded that their children sat quietly and did not engage in other activities. These children tend to be passive viewers. The role of television in young children's meaning-making was noted to all families. Using *videoke* that displayed the lyrics of songs in Filipino and English. Televisual texts are the primary source of print in using technology. Environmental prints which are linked to media texts include labels, stickers, CD/DVD labels and mobile phone boxes.

Data indicated that young children (aged 2-4) are developing technoliteracy practices and this concurs to the findings of Marsh [9]. Children's early home experiences with technologies contribute to their literacy development. Furthermore,data from the other three parents suggested that children sat quietly at

times but took part in other activities. While watching television, three children took part in a whole range of actions like talking about the TV program/show, talking about other things, talking to the characters, playing, singing, dancing, writing, coloring, acting out narratives from the televisual stories, and eating. These children then are active viewers and active meaning makers.Watching television becomes the unifying ambient activity of families but sometimes the content is inappropriate for children. It was observed however, that parents regulate the content by guiding the child and do scaffolding. Furthermore, data from interviews and field notes indicate that young children acted out characters' actions and imitate screen behavior. Parents were supportive of their children's playful responses to television and computer games.

The usage of computers and tablets is highly encouraged by families to develop a variety of skills such as reading and communication. In this study, it was the older sibling who modeled game playing for the pre-school age children and scaffolded them in navigating computer games. Engagements to games in tablets/iPads and computer motivate children to read. They read pictures, icons, labels, and signs. Data collected further indicated that young children were developing skills which would help them navigate the computer/tablet while playing games like the start button, play again icon, scores, and other icons and symbols on the screen.

Data collected in this study generated the following themes: means of pleasure and self-expression, children's interaction to digital text, parental intervention and parental modeling.The study found that young children's encounter with mobile phones and text messaging influence their literacy practices. In fact, all the children in the study owned artifacts such as toy computers, toy laptop, and toy mobile phones from an early age. Children are acculturated into the world of electronic print mediated by mobile phones. They are aware of text messaging and knew when a message had arrived for their parents. Text messaging includes iconography/emoticons, ring tones, communicate practices related to mobile phones. None of these children are engaged in text messaging but they are aware of it. They know how to give a call but only to a limited phone number.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Technology prevails in preschool-age children's daily literacy activities but the form, the frequency, and the usage of each differs. Children utilize and respond to technology in different ways. On the other hand, parents utilize technology to further regulate child's exposure to media. The present study concurs the study of Synder [12] who found out that technology appears to motivate children and to increase the time they are willing to spend practicing important academic skills and this study further resonates.

It can be concluded that there are benefits in using technology as a tool for home literacy development of young children aged two to four years. The learning opportunities which include hand eye coordination, parallel processing, and problem solving skills young children acquired through playing computer games and games on tablet/iPad . Aside from these, they also developed a number of literacy skills as well as how to behave as players.

Downes [4] suggests that children as young as three can utilize computer technology to represent their ideas in symbols, words, sounds, and images and be creative.Adults support and scaffold children's learning as they engage in.

Literacy is strongly evident throughout children's engagement with television, computer games, and mobile phones moreover it is embedded within children's techno-literacy practices. Therefore, there is a strong link between language, literacy, and technology and communicative practices related to the use of mobile phones are embedded in the technoliteracy practices. Parents believe that children benefit from techno-literacy and that television played a central role in the development of children's social and cognitive skills.This concurs to Hutinger, Bell, Daytner and Johanson's [13] study when they found a strong linkage between emerging literacy and technology when they examined the emerging literacy behaviors beyond simple print awareness and interaction with text. There is literacy-technology connection. Cairney and Ruge [14]identified four purposes for the use of literacy at home and technoliteracy practices are embedded in each of the four areas. Thus, literacy skill development of young children is always embedded in the techno-literacy practices.

Technoliteracy practices of young children should be valued. Exposure to imagery in electronic

technologies contributed to the children's literacy development. The literate identities of these preschool age children can be further enhanced as they begin formal schooling. Future research studies must also consider attitude, behavior and practices of parents and other members of the family towards the use of technology by children.

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