

## Beyond Mother Education: Maternal Practices as Predictors of Early Literacy Development in Chilean Children from Low-SES Households

Susana Mendive<sup>a</sup>, María Rosa Lissi<sup>b</sup>, Roger Bakeman<sup>c</sup>, and Adriana Reyes<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Facultad de Educación, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile; <sup>b</sup>Escuela de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile; <sup>c</sup>Department of Psychology, Georgia State University; <sup>d</sup>Escuela de Psicología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

### ABSTRACT

*Research Findings:* To extend findings that are mainly based on North American studies with English speakers, we studied 989 Chilean mothers from households of low socioeconomic status and their prekindergarten children, posing 2 questions: (a) Do mothers' self-reported practices about literacy development predict early literacy outcomes over and above child characteristics and maternal education? (b) Do these maternal practices mediate the relation between maternal education and these child outcomes? Confirming previous studies, exposure to texts and non-present talk predicted vocabulary, and teaching practices predicted child code-related skills. Contrary to previous studies, exposure to texts also predicted child code-related skills. We also found that maternal practices partially mediated the relation between maternal education and early literacy skills. *Practice or Policy:* Findings suggest the need to target children before prekindergarten with interventions that increase the studied maternal practices and to do so in family, day care, and health care settings with special emphasis on families with incomplete elementary education. The broad effect of exposure to texts on early literacy outcomes and the low social value on reading in Chilean culture suggest that teacher preparation programs need to include ways to engage children in literature as a frequent experience.

Emergent literacy is an approach that views literacy acquisition as a continuous developmental process with roots in both toddlerhood (when vocabulary skills first develop) and the preschool years (when code-related skills such as letter knowledge and emergent writing develop; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). In addition, this approach suggests that instead of being exposed to formal instruction, children develop such skills by participating in interactions and activities in which literacy is embedded (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Unfortunately, vocabulary and early code-related skills are less developed in children living in low socioeconomic contexts than in children of higher socioeconomic status (SES), which results in cumulative and pervasive disadvantaging effects (Dickinson, 2011).

According to the bioecological theory of development, early literacy is the result of *proximal processes* (i.e., frequent interactions between children and their significant caregivers), which in turn are conditioned by genetic and other distal characteristics (e.g., characteristics of the socioeconomic context generally; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). A recent review of studies comparing children with and without shared genetic markers living in the same home revealed that environment explains a greater proportion of the variance in the reading ability of children living in disadvantaged homes than more affluent ones, for which genes explain a greater proportion of the variance. Thus,