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Tales from the Field: Teacher's Habitus, Capital, and Agency in the Enactment of a Literacy Program

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The success in the implementation of any educational innovation is influenced by teachers' social dispositions and ability to navigate through the complexities of enacting the program in their local contexts. This assumption is informed by the practice theory as formulated by Bourdieu (1977, 1981) who emphasized the importance of one's personal history in explaining human action. Bourdieu further posited that, while humans have the "ability to act upon and change the world," one's agency may be constrained by structures in a given social field.

This study attempts to explore how teachers change their world and how they are transformed as they implement an Effective Literacy Instruction (ELI) in an island in Southern Philippines. Corollary to this, the study aims to explore the dynamic interplay between teachers' habitus, their economic, social, and cultural capital and the structures that mediate the effective implementation of the ELI program. Data were collected through 30-to-40-minute telephone and personal interviews with eight participants, most of whom were in the training that I conducted as lead instructor of the program. The teachers' narratives focused on their development as literacy educators as well as their successes and challenges in implementing the program.

The narratives revealed that teachers' dispositions are impacted by their personal histories and deeply ingrained social, cultural, and spiritual capital. Employing these, they position themselves in stances of power within the social field to ensure that the ELI program becomes a potent vehicle for the advancement of their advocacy for literacy education.

> *A social field is a "locus of struggles" (Bourdieu, 1975, p. 19) that represents a network of positions (Bourdieu, 1972).... The position an agent occupies on a field creates self-evident rules that determine his potential cruising radius, i.e., the limits of social mobility within a social field (Bourdieu, 1972). ...Fields are places of power relations where practices of agents are not arbitrary.* **—Walther, 2014, p. 9**

The Philippines has been the recipient of several local and foreign funded initiatives aimed at improving literacy education, especially in the basic education sector. Among the most recent programs of the Department of Education is a literacy improvement program in the Mother tongue, Filipino, and English, which in this study, is called Project ELI (Effective Literacy Instruction). The estimated cost of the three-year program is $23.5M primarily sourced from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID website). Given the cost of the program, it is imperative that close monitoring on its implementation at the field level be conducted. Often, the evaluation of programs such as this is done quantitatively: the number of regions served, teachers trained, children with improved literacy skills, and as well as number of facilitators and local lead instructors trained. Qualitative approaches focusing on teachers' experiences as they implement the program in their local contexts are often not systematically conducted and reported. Such exploration would shed light on the mediating factors in the implementation of the program. This study attempts to do this using narrative inquiry to explore how teachers change their world and how they are transformed as they implement a mother tongue-based literacy instruction program [hereafter Project ELI] in an island in Southern Philippines. Corollary to this, the study aims to explore how teachers position themselves in the social field to exercise their agency when faced with structural constraints in order to achieve program goals.

This paper presents the findings of the investigation in three parts. First, it briefly discusses Bourdieu's Theory of practice by discussing the four interrelated elements that explain one's practice, i.e., habitus, capital, field, and practice (1972, 1977, 1981). Then, it describes the method of data collection, including my participation in the project. Finally, it describes the recurrent themes on how teachers transform their immediate contexts and how they are transformed as they engage in program implementation. These themes are then interpreted using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. The assumption of the study is that the success of educational programs in the field level is influenced, to a great extent, by teachers' history and social dispositions, as well as their ability to navigate through the complexities of enacting the program in their local contexts.

In Rex and Nelson's (2004) ethnographic study on How Teachers' Professional Identities Position High-Stakes Test Preparation in Their Classrooms, they observed that, contrary to the pervasive belief that teachers are resigned to use much of their resources to prepare their students for the high stakes tests, they did not always allow the system to dictate content and pedagogical decisions. In fact, they delegated testing to secondary status. Rex and Nelson therefore reiterated that

Teachers' definitions of professionalism did not answer to any national or institutional standard. They were a unique blend of personal values, beliefs, learnings, and dispositions, part of what Bourdieu (1977) terms a "habitus." The judgments teachers make about who their students are and what they need, as well as decisions about what and how to teach, are mediated by and expressions of their habitus, which continues to evolve and to accommodate new experiences…. (p. 1291).

The influence of one's habitus to literacy teachers' practices was also demonstrated in a study of two Moroccan Adult Literacy Educators as reported in the article Teaching as social practice. In this report, Erguig (2012) noted that, despite national and local structures that constrain the implementation of the literacy program, teachers strategically employ ways of prevailing since they "identify with their students" and share their history and aspirations. Drawing from their students' deep religious beliefs, the literacy teachers emphasized the importance of literacy acquisition among Muslim women as they explained to them that they live in "an increasingly textualized world and [that] as Muslims… literacy is important for a good understanding of the teachings of Islam and an effective performance of their religious duties."

Jones and Enriquez (2008) had a similar observation in their study on the four-year journeys of two literacy educators from their preparation in a teacher education institution to their classroom practice, where they found that "Bourdieu's constructs of habitus, field, and capital were useful to better understand when, where, and why teachers take up critical literacy practices across time and context." The authors further argued that "teacher education pedagogy is merely a point of contact and a point of departure for learners and that nuanced, long-term readings of teacher education students' improvisations of habitus reveal the interplay between their formal learning and their personal, social, political, and other formal educational experiences" (p. 145).

THEORETICAL TINKERING

The study of practice has become popular in anthropological and sociological studies in the last decades of the twentieth century. In fact, in her review of the theories in anthropology since the sixties, Ortner (1984) posited that "practice" is the central theme of anthropological theory in the 1980s and that the trend continues to this day. Investigations on the practice range from daily routines to more highly structured activities such as experiments (Pickering, 1995), disciplinary cultures (Knorr-Cetina, 1999), and pedagogical regimes (Warwick, 2003), among others (in Rouse, 2006, p. 499). Although there are variable constructions of practice in these studies, Ortner argued that

> "The modern versions of practice theory appear unique in accepting all three sides of the…triangle: that society is a system; that the system is powerfully constraining; and yet that the system can be made and unmade through human action and interaction" (Ortner, 1984, p. 159).

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, which may be considered as a Grand Theory in the sense that it has been used to "explain human nature and conduct" (Skinner, 1985, p. 1) and is "generic in nature and can be applied to different circumstances and areas of research" (Reckwitz, 2003, in Walther, 2014, p. 7), is anchored on four concepts, the interrelationships of which is illustrated in the equation:

[(habitus) (capital) + field] + practice

Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is composed of history-grounded "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures…" (1990, p. 53 in Rouse, 2014, pp. 506–507). As a product one's history, one's habitus "produces practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 82). The habitus is durable but evolving and is continually adjusted to the current context and reinforced by further experience (Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007).

Bourdieu posited that one's habitus is acquired through primary socialization, i.e., within the family during one's childhood, and through

secondary socialization, i.e., internalized through schooling and from other life experiences. He further argued that one's primary habitus is "rather stable" and is "linked to the parents' social position in the social space." Therefore, the primary habitus is about 'internalizing the external' as the parents' modes of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are linked to their position in the social space are internalized in the children's own habitus (Walther, 2014, p. 13). The primary habitus is "embodied history and internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history" (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 56), thus it continually impacts the development of the secondary habitus. Drawing on Bourdieu (1977), Walther (2014) emphasized that habitus is "the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" within a given social field (p. 13).

As a product of primary and secondary socialization processes, one's habitus is impacted by one's economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital. For example, one's access to "good" schools is predetermined by his/her parents' economic status (money), as well as the constellation of social relations, "the network of actual or potential resources that can be legitimized by the family, group, or class membership [social capital]" (Bourdieu, 1986). The cultural capital is a durable system of dispositions and represents one's entirety of intellectual qualifications or human capital (Bourdieu, 1986 citing Becker, 1964; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1985, in Walther, 2014, p. 10). Enduring access to economic, social, and cultural capital allows for both the tacit and explicit recognitions by others of one's power, transforming them into one's symbolic capital.

This is summed up by Walther (2014) when he said that the notion of symbolic capital is related to honor and recognition. It is not an independent type of capital within itself but rather consists in the acknowledgment of capital by the entirety of the peer competitors on a specific field (Bourdieu, 1997).

Thus, on a social field, economic, social, and cultural capital are converted to symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1972) that is "worthy of being pursued and preserved" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 182). The process of recognition of symbolic capital reflects the system's assumption about the usefulness of capital, thus depending on the rules of the field. Symbolic capital reflects the external and internal recognition, i.e., the value accorded by the system and its actors (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009). As Sartre (1948, p. 98 cited in Bourdieu, 1966, p. 873) argued: "There are certain qualities that emerge only through the judgment of somebody else" (p. 10). This is shown in the Figure 1.
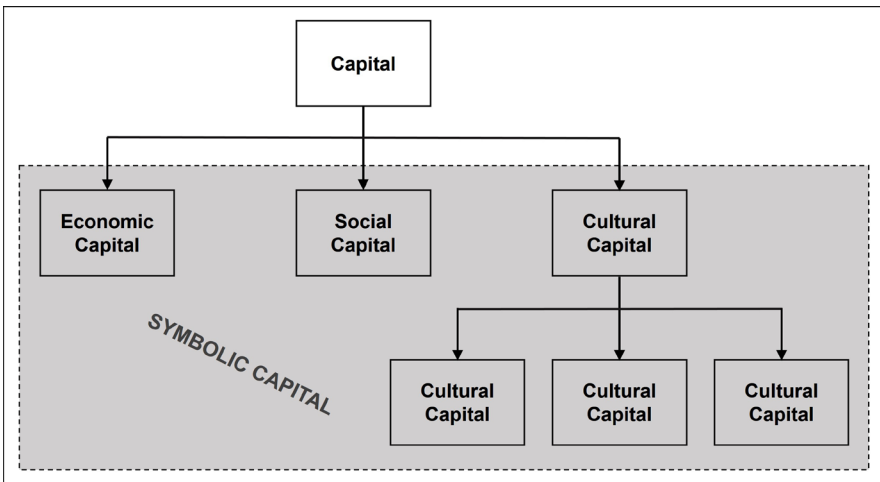
Figure 1. Bourdieu's types of capital (based on Bourdieu, 1972, Hermann, 2004)

Source: Walther, 2014, p. 11

This dynamic interplay between one's habitus and capital takes place in a social field. The social field is "based on a historically generated system of shared meaning" (Iellatchitch et al., 2003, p. 732). It is a "locus of struggles" (Bourdieu, 1972, p. 19) that represents a network of positions, and the position that an agent occupies on a field "creates self-evident rules that determine his/her potential cruising radius, i.e., the limits of social mobility within a social field" or what Bourdieu (1972) calls "doxa". Each field values particular capital, and one's ability to position himself/herself to gain access to or employ his/her economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capital determines the extent to which s/he can negotiate through the power struggle and meet his/her goals (Walther, 2014).

There are, however, limits or constraints to an agent's "potential cruising radius." For Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 108), agents are "bearers of capitals and, depending on their trajectory and on the position they occupy on the field, they have a propensity to orient themselves actively either toward the preservation of the distribution of capital or toward the subversion of this distribution." Bourdieu further posited that "human behavior is strategic rather than rule or norm conforming" (Rex & Nelson, 2004, p. 1320). Drawing from Bourdieu (1997), Jones and Enriquez emphasized that agents may "wield power over their actions in social situations, as well as influence various fields of practice." However, while "individuals make

choices, they do not choose the principles of these choices" and are therefore strongly influenced by structure (Özbilgin & Tatli, 2005, in Wacquant, 1989, p. 45) within a given social field. While "habitus brings into focus the agency end of the equation, field focuses on the structural part" (Grenfell & James, 1998).

In sum, Bourdieu's equation: [(habitus) (capital) + field] = practice illustrates the "dialectic relationship between structure and agency that is manifested in the habitus." Walther (2014) sums this up in his analysis of the equation. Drawing from Bourdieu and Passeron (2000), Walther reiterated that habitus is a system of structured structures that are predisposed to act as structuring structures. On the one hand, the habitus is the result of social structures, more precisely of the social class (doxa) and the rules of the game on the field that have been internalized. On the other hand, the habitus also structures practices and reproduces social fields (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000) since individual strategies and practices as products of positions and rules inevitably assure the economic and social conditions for reproduction (in Walther, 2014, pp. 13–14).

This study employs Bourdieu's theory of practice as it attempts to make sense of how teachers in a given social field are transformed and transform their world as they implement a literacy program.

REIFYING TEACHERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES THROUGH NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative inquiry may be traced back to the 18th century, but it was only in the early 20th century that it started to be taken seriously as a research method with the Russian formalists' study on myths and fairy tales. Today, narrative inquiry is viewed as a research methodology encompassing "a variety of research practices ranging from those that tell a story of how individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes" (Riessman, 1993) to research that "explore certain methodological aspects of storytelling" (Richardson, 1997). It is often associated with studies on the lives and lived experiences of the participants, a method called phenomenology. Narrative inquiry may take the form of "storytelling, snapshots of past events that are linked thematically," or as "the interconnectedness and meanings of seemingly random activities that social groups perform as part of their daily living" (p. 124).

In the chapter "Narrative Approaches" in the Handbook of Reading, Alvermann (2000) contended that narrative inquiry's merits lie in the fact that this methodology goes beyond the traditional positivist stance and explores the more interpretive posture enabling participants' voices to be heard in a way that is familiar to both participants and researchers as well as the readers of the research findings. However, this method of inquiry has been criticized in terms of what is called 1) the crisis of subjectivity and self-alienation; 2) the crisis of legitimation; and 3) crisis of representation.

To address the first issue, subjectivity and self-alienation (the potential for self-revelations as well as ethical concerns regarding the extent to which participants engage in decision-making about the telling of their stories), narrative researchers practice specific methodological strategies such as researcher's reflexivity, "acknowledging the politics of personal knowledge and potentially alienating aspects of the self-story," and enabling participants to advance their agency in the telling of their story.

The second issue, crisis of legitimation (truth claims), questions the trustworthiness of the research process and product. Any truth claim, however, is situated. Poststructuralists posit that "truth and validity claims reflect historically determined values and interests of different groups… and reality is mediated by conceptual schemes (Kant), ideologies (Marx), language games (Wittgenstein), and paradigms (Kuhn)." Truth claims are mediated by language, and language is not neutral. Since people tell their stories from their subjective realities, they may fabricate their stories but not with the intent to deceive but "with the desire to make their fictions realities" (Alvermann, 2000).

As for the third issue, crisis of representation, narrative researchers posit that, "because we can never suppress ourselves in the texts we write (or read), we in fact create the persons we write about." Writers bring their subjectivities into the text, and the readers interpret the text through their own lenses. Thus, "readers and writers conspire to create the lives they write and read about" (Denzin, 1989). To address the perceived inadequacy of written texts to depict lived experiences, some narrative researchers present their data through various modes of presentation, e.g., dramatic reading of interviews, sociological telling, film making, and other forms of performance. Drawing on Derrida (1979), Denzin, however, posited that, "by its very nature, performance relies on language to mediate experience." Language, by its nature, is unstable, so there is no such thing as "clear, unambiguous

statement of anything, including an intention or a meaning" (Denzin, 1979). Since all written output and performance are mediated by language, and language is always "inherently unstable, in flux, and made up of the traces of other signs and symbolic statements," the search and use for more means of representation must continue. Among them is a systematic exploration of practices through narrative inquiry.

THE "I" IN REFLEXIVE DYADIC INTERVIEWS

In this study, eight Grade 1 teachers in a three-day teacher training on effective literacy instruction in the mother tongue, Filipino, and English shared their experiences on their first year of implementing the program. The training was part of Project ELI, which aims to help one million children develop reading proficiency through technical and material support. The three-year program, which commenced in 2013 and ends in 2016, is launched in two regions in the country. I decided to join the program as consultant/lead instructor for one of these two regions, because 1) I felt that my engagement will further legitimize my position as a reading specialist and 2) I speak the mother tongue in the areas covered in the region. I sought the consent of the Project ELI chief consultant for me to conduct a study on the program through participant interviews and was granted permission to do so.

Upon receipt of letter of consent, I sent ten text messages to prospective participants, which I randomly selected from the attendance list of forty participants in the cluster that was assigned to me as lead instructor in a three-day training in October 2014. Of the ten, seven texted or called back, expressing their willingness to participate in the study, most of them saying that it was a gesture of gratitude for my participation in the program. The eighth participant, a Grade 1 master teacher who was also selected as DepEd lead instructor, was interviewed in person during one of the trainings in the region. All of the participants in this study are teaching in the various districts in an island province in southern Philippines and have been recipients of the program for about a year now. The training that I had with them was their second, the first being done in May, where I was also among the lead instructors. All of the participants are females, and their average teaching experience is 14 years, the longest being 22 years, and the shortest was 6 years.

All of the participants were asked to recall their experiences in three

areas: 1) their own literacy experiences when they were in their early grades, 2) highlights of their teacher education training, and 3) their experiences as implementers of Project ELI. The interview schedule used was composed of loosely framed questions. The questions I asked typically began with the phrases like Tell me about… Kumusta man ang imong… (How was your… experience?) What do you recall about your…? What comes to mind when you think about…? The purpose of using loosely framed prompts was to ensure that the interviewee was not led towards any particular direction or orientation during the dialogue. These unstructured interviews (Weiss, 1994) were conducted in a span of two weeks.

It must also be noted the interviews were reflexive, dyadic (Ellis, 2004), which focuses on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself. Though the focus is on the participant and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher are also considered, e.g., personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, and emotional responses to the interview. Even though the researcher's experience is not the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants.

Despite the strategies in place to ensure that the interviews would have less of me and more of the participants, I often wondered how much of what the teachers said were framed by the fact that I was one of the lead instructors of the program. Although my contributions to the unstructured interviews were primarily back channeling, clarifying, or synthesizing their thoughts, I was aware that my contributions to the discourse may have influenced the coconstruction of their stories and tried as much as possible to restrain myself from expressing my opinions or thoughts on the subject of discussion.

The decision to conduct this study has not been easy. First, I was concerned about the extent to which my participation in Project ELI would color the voices of the teachers whose experiences of engagement and resistance I wanted to describe in the study. In fact, I thought of shifting to another topic or choosing another project even as I had already started conducting the interviews, after having realized that it was impossible for the participants to talk about the project without being aware that the other interlocutor on the line was one of the lead instructors that conducted the ELI trainings. Yet I was reminded of Alvermann's response to the criticisms related to the crisis of legitimation and the crisis of representation, where

she said that "any truth claim… is situated," and the validity of truth claims and that one's perception of reality is mediated by conceptual schemes (Kant), ideologies (Marx), language games (Wittgenstein), and paradigms (Kuhn). In fact, the writing of the research report is mediated by language, and language in itself is not neutral. What one can do is declare his/her positionality at the onset of the report writing, so the readers are informed of the subjectivities of the writer. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) advanced a similar position when they introduced the concept of sociological reflexivity, where the researcher "recognizes the historical and disciplinary context that shapes his/her thinking" (in Joy, Sherry, Troilo, & Deschenes, 2006, p. 345).

PROJECT ELI: THREE-PRONGED AIMS IN THREE YEARS

Teacher's professional development is influenced by their personal histories and the constellation of systems that constrain their possibilities for engagement and with whom they constantly negotiate their identities. As a professional development opportunity for Grades 1–3 teachers in two selected regions in the Philippines, Project ELI has at least three main features. First, it provides teacher training on effective literacy instruction. Second, it provides the teachers with a detailed revised teacher's guide (RTG) for all the units, based on the DepEd K-12 curriculum. Third, it provides the teachers with two main resources to implement the RTGs: colorful big (story) books of stories produced by a publishing house noted for publishing award-winning children's literature and small leveled readers (graded according to the child's reading level). The big books, which are selected by a team based on themes identified in the DepEd K-12 curriculum, are read by the teacher, using a protocol grounded on research in reading instruction. Teachers provide prereading activities where 1) unlocking of difficult words and phrases is done interactively; 2) motivation questions are asked to activate needed schema, and motive questions are raised to set a purpose for reading the text; 3) Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA) is facilitated during the reading of the story; and 4) engagement activities deepen children's understanding of the story. The Read Aloud activity usually happens within the first two days of instruction in a ten-day instructional sequence anchored on a theme. In the succeeding days, the lessons focus on word and language study; students' reading of the leveled readers designed based on the readability level of the intended readers; and

activities that demonstrate reading–writing connection, with emphasis on composing typically based on the preceding activities and on the unit theme. The strategies used in the ten-day instructional sequence is informed by the principle of Gradual Release of Responsibility, where teachers initially model effective and efficient reading practices through the read aloud activities to student engagement in interactive discussion with the teacher and peers, to pair reading, and eventually independent reading of the leveled readers and writing activities.

Since the teacher does the storytelling or reading, she is encouraged to read with gusto in order to develop positive attitude towards language; literacy; literature, vocabulary, listening, and reading comprehension skills; phonological awareness; and phonics. These are among the fourteen domains of literacy that are emphasized in the revised teacher's guides (RTGs). Within the context of Mother tongue-based Multilingual Education, teachers are also taught how to use bridging so that the child's first language is viewed as a resource rather than a constraint for children's literacy development in the mother, Filipino, and eventually in English language. The goal of the program is improved literacy instruction so that literacy development of one million children may be enhanced.

ON TEACHERS' HABITUS AND MODES OF PREVAILING[1]

In light of Bourdieu's position that one's predispositions and actions are impacted by one's personal and social history, I asked the participants to talk about their personal and professional lives, particularly their development as readers and literacy educators. Although a few of the teachers had little recollection of their own beginning reading or literacy experiences, the majority recalled having exciting classes, where teachers spent their lunch breaks or after school classes conducting remedial classes for struggling readers. In her retirement age now, Participant 1 recalled that her Grade 1 teacher "used a different strategy, but they were good; we learned to read." Similarly, Participant 4 recalled being taught how to read using phonics materials. "I was a leader in class. I remember my favorite book is Henny Penny. My experience in school was good and rewarding." Meanwhile, Participant 8 reiterated that it was her Grade 1 teacher who inspired her to become a teacher herself. She said:

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1   The term modes of prevailing were coined by Dr. Eufracio Abaya and mentioned in one of his lectures in EDFD 321, UP Diliman, Quezon City.

My Grade 1 teacher was my favorite teacher. She was so patient. She was so dedicated to her work. She would spend lunch break in school tutoring struggling readers. After lunch, we had storytelling time. Then, those who need help have reading practice with little teachers. I was a little teacher in her class.... My teacher had two things within reach: book and bunal [stick]. The choice was easy to make. My Grade teacher went home at 6 PM. In January, all of us were already readers. We could decode, and if the text was in the mother tongue, we could comprehend most of it.... I can't forget my Grade 1 teacher. She tells us stories; we had lots of fun activities....

Some participants also recalled having rich literacy experiences at home. Participant 7 said: When I was a child, my mother and grandmother used to buy Story Books for me. I grew up reading and being read to.

Bourdieu talked about primary habitus being learned at home and being an "embodied history and internalized as second nature" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56) and therefore defines one's dispositions and the development of the secondary habitus. It appears that the teachers' primary habitus in terms of early literacy experiences at home and in school provided the proper impetus for their roles as reading/literacy educators. Moreover, most of the participants recalled having had excellent teacher training experiences. In fact, a few graduated from universities with strong teacher education component. Participant 8 said:

My training for teaching is quite good. I graduated from the Cebu Normal University. Our student teaching had 2 parts. For two months, we do it in the laboratory school.

Then, we went off campus.... This was in our extension site in Tagbilaran City. My favorite teacher there was my student teaching mentor.... She was very meticulous about our LP, so we learned a lot. She taught us the importance of discipline.

Those who did not undergo teacher education training in a normal university or in well-known colleges reiterated that, despite the limitations in terms of economic resources, their school trained them well. Participant 6 explained:

I finished BEEd in… a small community college in our town…. It is not a well-known school but we were well-trained…. They hired public school master teachers, and they were very good at teaching us how to make instructional materials. They shared practical tips on how to teach in the elementary school. My student teaching experience prepared me to teach in public schools. When we applied and did our teaching demonstration, I realized that we were not behind [compared to other applicants].

Indeed, it is not the reputation of the school that mattered to most of the participants but the level of commitment of their supervising teachers and what they take away from their student teaching experience. Participant 5 said:

Our program was good, even if we were not in a very good school because we had lecturers from Lyceo (Xavier). In student teaching, we taught in two public schools and then in the lab school in our college. My student teaching experience was in Pinyahan, in a very remote barangay of pineapple plantation workers. I was teaching kindergarten. It was a challenge and also rewarding because I was the very first to teach the children and the community is so grateful to me for what I was doing. The community gave us a warm welcome.

Teachers' professional identities are shaped by their habitus, which structures the interplay between their commitment to Project ELI and the constraints and challenges they need to address to affect the change they want to implement. The habitus of the teachers consists of the constellations of literacy experiences at home and in school as they were growing up, extends to their development as teachers in the teacher education institutions, and is continually reconstituted as they navigate through teaching as an enterprise. In fact, all of the participants emphasized their commitment to literacy education and to ensuring that the children learn to read before they move on to the next grade level. When asked what they believe is an effective teacher, all of the participants said that s/he would be one who is able to make her students read before the school year ends.

It is noteworthy that teachers' commitment to literacy education did not emanate from the participants' engagement in Project ELI. It is drawn from a personal advocacy, a sense of professional accountability, and a deep sense of spirituality. Participant 3 said:

> It is rewarding to be a Grade 1 teacher. In my experience, for some children, it is their first time to hold a pencil, because there was no kindergarten before. It makes you feel so happy inside knowing that they will carry that all their life — the ability to read and write.

This sense of mission was also demonstrated by Participant 4 when she said that "the kids are the rewards; when you can let your pupil read at the end of the year, that is something." This same participant reiterated that this level of commitment is grounded on her belief in God, who will keep an accounting of what she had done with the job that she was granted.

It appears that this spiritual capital, which is valorized in this strongly Catholic island province, is the primary force that impacts teachers' decisions and actions. In fact, it may be said that the teachers' habitus is deeply grounded on their spirituality, and most of the actions and decisions they make are influenced by this sense of spirituality. The teachers' spirituality is a potent symbolic power that transforms their being and frames the trajectories of their becoming. This is clearly illustrated by Participant 8 when she said: "Maybe, our inspiration to become better teachers stem from our values. Our island is deeply spiritual. Catholicism here is so deeply rooted. Most teachers are also active in church. I am the lector during the mass in our church every Sunday." This participant narrated that, when she had a disagreement with a colleague, it was impossible not to reconcile as soon as possible since teachers meet in church on Sundays. The church serves as an extension of the school as teachers often talk with some parents about their children after the mass.

I am wondering myself if I had subconsciously used this spiritual capital during the trainings to forge commitment among the participants. I was certainly aware that the island is staunchly Catholic, and part of the practice in every training was the opening and closing prayer as well as the prayer before meals. In this context, I caught myself telling the participants that, if we truly believe that all of us are created in the image of God, we cannot

look at a child and take him/her for granted. I believe I said this, knowing that the participants will take those lines seriously as it has symbolic power given their habitus. The participants' religiosity/spirituality is a structure that structures my actions. In turn, my actions structure the participants' dispositions.

In and through this dynamic interplay, we attempted to align each other's intentions and position ourselves in stances of power to realize our goals. As lead instructor, my goal is to ensure that teachers return to their stations not only with head knowledge of the domains of literacy and principles in effective literacy instruction but also with a resolution to deepen their commitment to realize program goals, and I knew that the most effective way to do this was to invoke our shared faith in God. Indeed, our habitus is a "structured structuring structure" that facilitates agentive moves so we could realize our goals and modify the social field to address our concerns.

Among the main concerns of the participants is the late arrival of the revised teachers' guide. In the midst of these constraints, teachers use their economic, social, and cultural capital to advance their advocacy. They exploit relevant resources that they have accumulated in previous trainings; they sought financial support from the schools' MOOE[2] fund or used their personal finances; and they sought support from their social networks including their administrators. Moreover, they use local knowledge and ways of knowing so that the lesson objectives are met despite structural constraints. The teachers know the rules of the social field and their roles in it and exploit their symbolic capital to address their concerns. This is demonstrated in Participant 2's actions:

It is supposed to be the big book on Higala nako ang Bulan (My Friend, the Moon). What I did was I asked the children if they saw the moon last night and the few nights before, because the timing was perfect as it was full moon. Then, we talked about the full moon, what they saw, what stories they heard about it, and what they think about the moon. I made a story about the moon based on the discussion guide questions in the revised TG. I did an impromptu dramatization, like a monologue so the children will

2   Maintenance and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) refers to the Allocations of Schools to the Respective Implementing Units based on the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001.

*enjoy it. I also made a related leveled text for the children to read.
I just wrote it on a manila paper so everyone could read it. Is that
OK, ma'am? [Laughs].*

Another participant used a short text about the moon from an illustrated
science book and used it as springboard for the activities indicated in the
revised teachers' guide. The eight participants reported eight different ways of
"making do" and making sure that the essential objectives for the day's lessons
are met despite the absence of materials. Moreover, they texted or called other
teachers within their district to discuss what might be done to address the
concern. Some teachers called their DepEd master teachers citing that they
were, after all, paid to provide technical support to Grade 1 teachers within
the district. Others asked the master teacher when they could meet for the
Learner Action Cell (CELL), which is designed for teachers within particular
identified clusters to discuss concerns related to the implementation of the
revised teachers' guide and to help each other prepare their weekly plans and
instructional materials.

This was revealed by Participant 4, who is also a master teacher:

*Other teachers in the district asked me what to do. I am a master
teacher, so they refer to me. I told them that as long as the target skill
is addressed, it is OK to use another story. As master teacher, I am
expected to provide technical assistance to other teachers. So, when
other Grade 1 teachers texted me, I replied and told them how I do
it. It is part of my job; we have load for it, as Grade 1 teacher adviser.
As for the LAC, I already submitted a proposal to the district office.*

Participant 8, who is also a master teacher described how the teachers
organize to provide support for each other. She stated that, in their district,
they already started meeting as a LAC and decided that they pool their
resources and make similar or exactly the same instructional materials so
that there is uniformity or similarity in the implementation of the project. She
noted that the ELI-revised TGs are well conceptualized and "han-ay" (well-
organized), but its effective implementation requires the preparation of several
instructional materials, which some teachers had difficulty doing. The LAC
meets regularly where teachers brainstorm on what and how to prepare for the
succeeding weeks. She explained:

For example, for Week 23, we made a uniform weekly plan and we prepared the IMs [Instructional Materials] together during the LAC. We assigned people to make the materials for day 1, 2, and so on. …After we discussed and agreed what IMs to prepare for each day in week 23, we assign specific teachers to make the materials for a particular day. If your group is assigned to day 1, you should reproduce all the materials for all the teachers in the district. Naturally, you would do your best to prepare really good materials since it would be embarrassing to share haphazardly done materials with other teachers…. We choose to be proactive rather than keep on complaining that there are too many materials to prepare. Part of the expenses we get from the MOOE, but we add from our own pocket. We also have a separate log… which we could readily give to the supervisor or principal or the ELI monitoring team.

Clearly, the teachers were aware of the rules in the social field and their roles in it. Moreover, they strategically deploy the various forms of capital to meet their objectives as literacy educators, and given the symbolic capital that is accorded to their professional identities and the sociocultural and spiritual capital, they are able to transform constraints into resources that contribute to the advancement of their advocacies as literacy educators.

ON SYMBOLIC CAPITAL AND TEACHERS' AGENCY

Bourdieu (1972) posited that an agent's socioeconomic and cultural capital is converted to symbolic capital when it is seen as "worthy of being pursued and preserved." This may be observed in the teachers' narratives on the reasons why they prevail despite potentially constraining structures. When asked why they went to such length to ensure that the ELI program is implemented effectively and consistently in their local schools, the teachers mentioned at least four reasons.

First is the visibility, support, and recognition given by their administrators. Participant 8 said that their district has a supervisor, who models excellent work ethics and often told them that, once they are already a part of DepEd, "magpakitang-gilas na mo kay makon-sciensa ta ana dili tarungon tudlo mga bata, exacto tag sweldo" (they should flaunt what they got as teachers, as they will be stricken by their conscience if they do not do

their jobs well when they are well paid). In a similar manner, the teacher in an island about two hours by motorized outrigger boat from the mainland emphasized that they were driven to prepare for their classes because of her supportive principal and colleague. Participant 6 said:

> I work harder now. I am more inspired. Maybe because my principal is really good. Maybe because our preschool teacher is really good. We do interphasing all the time.
>
>   We share experiences about the children. We also share instructional materials. We work together, so I can follow up on her tasks/output. I feel good that we have strong administrative support.

Similarly, Participant 5 reiterated that the constant monitoring of the agency facilitating the program as well as the provincial supervisor tasked to coordinate Program ELI has inspired the teachers to ensure that the program goal for effective literacy instruction is met. She said:

> I like [ELI] because it does not end with the training. You have the materials, then you have DepEd support. Ma'am F, the division supervisor for Filipino and Mother Tongue, visits us. Also, some ELI staff came to visit. One of them also demonstrated how to read the big book and process the discussion. Dr. F went to visit a school where there were some concerns regarding the teacher that affected the implementation of the program….

The second source of motivation to prevail for the program despite several structural constraints is the teachers' personal and professional advocacy to help children imagine a future that is much better than what they have. This is exemplified by the following:

> I promised to give the child my heart. I had one who was so smart, but so poor. She was so poor. When I asked her what she wants to be, she said: Mauwaw ko mangandoy ma'am, kay pobre me kaayo. [When I asked her what she wants to be, she said, "I am ashamed to dream because we are so poor." I was so moved because she was teary-eyed as she said it. I told her if she studies hard, she can make it, because high school education is free, and she work her way

through, just like me. She said she wanted to be like me. I helped her with her basic needs…. I met her once because she won in an essay writing contest, and I was there. It was a wonderful feeling…. Our time here is limited, so if you give, you must give all (Participant 4).

This strong personal commitment is also reflected in the participants' positive attitude towards the implementation of a DepEd program that is unique to the island, the Agak (support another by walking with him/her) initiative. In this island province, teachers are encouraged to choose at least one student and to "adopt" the child by providing his/her basic needs. This ensures continuous attendance in school and effective instruction for one child who needs the most help. I initially thought that this is an added burden to the teachers, but most of the participants expressed appreciation for this initiative. Participant 8 said:

I volunteered to 'Agak' eight children. Every teacher is encouraged to take care of at least one child. They are asked to choose the one needing the most help. They provide the child's basic needs, and support the child in terms of tutoring and emotional/psychological concerns.). I provide their breakfast and lunch; I buy them clothes and other basic needs. …I tell them that I will do everything within my capacity so they will not be absent or drop out of school.

The third reason why teachers mobilize their capital to ensure the effective and efficient ELI implementation is their deep gratitude for having been the recipients of a well-organized project that valued the crucial role of the teachers. In fact, all of the participants mentioned that Program ELI is the first of its kind where the trainings were held in resort hotels which are often only accessible to tourists and business people. Participant 3 reiterated what the other interviewees also mentioned. She felt that she was valued by Program ELI. She said: …teachers should do their best because we are provided everything. The trainings were good, and the venue was very, very good. This is the first time in my 25 years of teaching that I attended a training in a place like the Plaza, and The Tropics. We are given importance by the program. We feel that our contribution is valued. In the past, we only had our trainings in classrooms, and we were not even provided travel reimbursements. All of the teachers noted that they felt appreciated

and valued by ELI, and this was demonstrated not only by the comfortable accommodation but also by the fact that the program has kept its promise of providing the resources necessary to implement the program, regardless of how remote the location of their schools were. According to Participant 1 who has been attending trainings for 22 years now, ELI is "one of very few trainings where materials needed are really provided. In the past, they just train the teachers, promise them that materials will follow, but no such materials arrived."

The fourth and perhaps the most compelling source of their motivation to transform the world for the better is the teachers' spirituality and religiosity, which is a powerful component of the teachers' habitus, enabling them to negotiate with potentially constraining structures. Participant 5 said: "Some teachers say that they will only work commensurate to how much they are paid. That's not right. As for me, I had a covenant with God. I promised God that if I pass the LET, I will do my best as a teacher. It is difficult not to keep your promise to God." This study sets out to explore how teachers advance their agency to realize ELI program goals. What it discovered is that inasmuch as teachers understand the goals of the program, i.e., improved literacy skills for one million children, their commitment to effective literacy instruction is driven not by Program ELI but by their deep sense of spirituality, i.e., the recognition that God has gifted them their careers and bestowed upon them the responsibility to do the best that they can for the best interest of the children under their care. This is demonstrated in the strategic ways teachers employ to address several challenges and constraints during the first year of their engagement in the program.

HUSHED LINES: INSTANCES OF DEPARTURE FROM THE PROJECT ELI

All of the participants modified the revised teachers' guide and departed from the Program ELI ten-day instructional sequence in response to local needs and circumstances. They integrate pedagogical strategies learned in previous trainings, incorporate topic and used materials from the old DepEd teachers' guide, "skip" activities and competencies which they feel not appropriate for their children at this level of their literacy development, and employ local ways of knowing to facilitate literacy instruction in their classes. Participant 8 described what most of the teachers did:

> *After the training in May, I did not start implementing it in my classes*
> *right away. I told Dr. F [supervisor in charge of ELI implementation*
> *monitoring] that I cannot start with the program immediately*
> *because most of my children were nonreaders. The majority could*
> *not yet identify the letters of the alphabet. The revised TG for Grade*
> *1 has assumptions that are not true to my children. So, in the first*
> *8 weeks, I used the Early Childhood Development (ECD) program*
> *of DepEd, which focuses on Reading Readiness. …I cannot rush the*
> *children…*

As agents of transformative change in literacy instruction, teachers act strategically to facilitate learning among the children, even if this means departing from the ELI program instructional plan. Teachers enact these strategies almost instinctively, having taught reading for at least a decade. Indeed, "the social actor is the 'socialized agent' whose strategies are 'more or less automatic' and practical 'and not the projects or calculations of any conscious mind'" (Bourdieu, 1990:62). What is even more interesting is that they articulated their concerns to their "superiors" and were able to convince them that such departures were in fact contributing to the success of the program.

This is interesting to me as lead instructor since we were reminded during our trainings to maintain the fidelity of the program and ensure consistency and uniformity in presentation of the concepts, principles, and strategies that program ELI espouses. This has been the subject of discussion among several lead instructors, who made modifications on the power point presentations to make the discussion of the topics more explicit and more appropriate to our prospective applicants. We often joked that we were infidels. On the other hand, we also emphasized during the trainings that the revised teachers' guide is a guide and should not be viewed as the ultimate, absolute formula for literacy instruction since teachers know their children best and are better informed on how best to achieve the day's objectives given their local contexts. In fact, departures from the revised teachers' guide were reported by all the teachers. Participant 1 said:

> *I did not follow the revised TGs because I consider the readiness of*
> *the children. If they have a hard time grappling with the materials,*
> *I have to prepare them for it. But I am concerned if someone*

will observe. I hope they will understand when we explain the modifications we made. We often wonder if the consultants are acquainted with the realities in the barrio. We were happy that you shared your experiences with us. When you did that, we were assured that you knew what we go though as teachers in remote communities.

The participant was referring to my own narratives of teaching in the barrios which I shared with them during the closing program in the November 2014 training. Personally, I believe that the training we conducted would be futile unless teachers realize the importance of what they do to the lives of the children. So in addition to invoking their faith in God as a source of commitment and advocacy for effective literacy instruction, I told them about how my Grade 1 teacher contributed to my literacy development, etched in me the hunger to read, and opened for me endless possibilities for upward socioeconomic mobility. I told my story from my heart and it drove many of the participants, including me, to tears. In the same training, I also shared my experience of volunteer teaching in a barrio school, where I had 78 students, about 20 of whom had to stand behind the last row of seats, and how I employed my social capital, i.e., my network of acquaintances and relatives as well as my cultural capital, i.e., my position as volunteer teacher from the US and professor in a local university to seek audience with barangay officials and the municipal mayor and get desks for my students.

All of the teachers commented that, although they saw that the activities were generally well-conceptualized and that the colorful big books for the read aloud were effective in drawing children's interest, they felt the need to modify, exclude, or substitute some of the activities outlined in some of the lessons. Participant 8 commented on the unrealistic illustrations on a big book and described how she addressed this concern:

We noticed that the illustrations in some of the big books are too creative, like abstract paintings. I was thinking, since these are for children, the pictures should be more realistic. …The children had a hard time with those abstract illustrations, and they need much visual support to understand the story… The big book about the market… I noticed that the illustrations of the public market showed that it was so clean and organized, which is not true in

our flea market. I think that was not very realistic. The illustrations did not match the crowded, hot market implied in the story. The TG says the market was "makipot [narrow]," but the illustrations show a neat, well-arranged market, so I downloaded from Youtube a video of a real market that is similar to what was described in the story. That evoked a lively discussion among the children.

Some districts modified the weekly plan introduced during the training. In fact, during the last day of the November training, some groups already proposed alternative weekly plan formats which they believe would serve its purpose more efficiently, i.e., as a quick guide that outlined the activities and the domains targeted during the week. As lead instructor, I proposed that they go by the ELI format. On the other hand, I took digital images of the format that the cluster agreed would serve their purposes and sent it to the Program ELI literacy consultant. I have not heard from her since then; however, what I discovered in the interviews is that participants in at least one district had already used their proposed format and another was planning to do the same. Participant 2 narrated:

We are currently using the weekly plan introduced by ELI, but we are seriously thinking of modifying it because [the ELI plan] has too many questions that need to be answered, and too many pages to refer to. We could use that time to prepare the IMs. As for the Weekly Planning Matrix, in our district, we are planning to come up with a format that works best for us. We will ask our principal and supervisor if we could use the same format as our log, where we have Objectives, References, and Materials.

The strategies teachers employed to address material constraints exemplified the teachers' agency over potentially constraining social structures. This is consistent with what Coldron and Smith (1999) said in discussing the relationship between agency and structure, where they emphasized "the importance of agency over social structure and argue that the choices that teachers make constitute their professional identities." What is apparent in the narratives is that the teachers have always been committed to ensuring that each pupil in her class learns to read. Moreover, since Project ELI has publicly recognized and generously supported its commitment

to making the Filipino child read, the teachers' symbolic capital has been strengthened, and what they used to do on a personal level, using personal funds, is now granted structural support.

CONCLUSIONS
On habitus, agency, and transformative change

Human agency enables transformation (Abaya, 2014, lecture notes). This is shown in this study that seeks to explore how teacher participants in a literacy instruction program transformed their world and how they are transformed through their practice. Indeed, the transformation of the teachers' social fields, their literacy classrooms, the school, their district, the island province, and Project ELI is impacted on teachers' personal histories, i.e., their primary habitus as beginning readers at home and in school; and their secondary habitus, which includes their development as literacy educators in the teacher education institutions and in their workplace.

All of the teachers share their students' struggles since they have personally experienced the complexities and difficulties of learning how to read and write in contexts where economic, social, and cultural capital are suppressed by powerful structures and opportunities for socioeconomic upward mobility are scarce. Thus, as literacy educators, their roles do not begin nor end with Project ELI's human and material resources or with the program's goal of improving the lives of one million children through the development of improved literacy skills. Their roles begin and end with the child and her/his imperative needs. All of the teachers emphatically talked about how the DepEd province's "Agak" program is closely intertwined with their role as literacy educators. If one wants a child to develop positive attitude towards language, literacy, and literature, they have to be afforded the privilege of coming to school. In the context where children are forced to be absent to take care of younger siblings or work in the farm, the teacher often takes it upon herself/himself to provide for the child's basic needs such as providing breakfast or snacks and other basic necessities. This is an element that is not articulated nor explicitly supported by Project ELI but is crucial in the effective implementation of the program.

In the social field, the teacher's economic, social, and cultural capital may only be converted to powerful symbolic capital when they are perceived as "worthy of being pursued and preserved" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 182).

Symbolic capital "reflects the external and internal recognition, i.e., the value accorded by the system and its actors" (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009). This is the case with Project ELI. The program is valued by teachers. In fact, it has been part of their enduring personal, professional, and spiritual advocacy, and they are only too happy to see how it is valued by the Department of Education and given the recognition and generous support given to it by external sources of funding. Thus, despite their concerns and thoughts on how the ubiquitous, strategic labeling of all the materials as "a gift from the American people" might influence their students' perception of the powers that continually influence their identities, they resolutely state that they do not and will not allow any hidden agenda to get in the way of their goal, which is to ensure that their students learn the basic literacy skills outlined in the K-12 program for Grade 1. Most of the teachers feel that literacy empowers their children and that, when they develop literacy skills, they shall also be empowered to position themselves in stances which serve their best interest, despite the dominant and domineering sociopolitical structures in the social field, including foreign powers that may influence their thoughts and actions through programs like Project ELI. If the classroom, the schools, and the district were to be the social field where Project ELI is enacted, the teachers' habitus and agency as actors for transformative teaching wielding the symbolic power to modify structural constraints, hold great promise for the goal of improved literacy education.

At the end of the day, teachers do not think about Project ELI or any national program or any external funding support for the program. They think about the children and their responsibility to help make them read. Their decisions and actions are deeply grounded by a constellation of personal and professional histories and advocacies, of personal values and learnings, and of a deep, enduring faith in God whom they believe will keep an accounting of what they have done with the tasks that they were set to do. These constitute the teachers' habitus, the system of dispositions that "produces practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 82), and enables social actors as agents to "cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). These tales from the field reflect how teachers' personal and professional identities and the structures that they confront everyday help weave their imagined communities for the children in their local contexts.

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BIONOTE

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