

in a neurotypical world, simply getting through each day can be an act of creativity” (170).

I know I will reread *Reaching One Thousand*, and I recommend it for every mother’s bookshelf. I am grateful to Robertson for clarifying my own ongoing liminal experience with my son—the sense of being “separate from ordinary life; [of standing] on the sidelines watching other people live normally” (102). While this liminal space may feel isolated at times, it also offers unexpected possibilities for celebrating and interpreting the past, the present, and whatever the future holds—and isn’t that what all mothers hope for as they and their children grow and change, both together and separately?

## Mothering and Literacies

Amanda B. Richey and Linda Shuford Evans, eds.  
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REVIEWED BY HALLIE PALLADINO

The literate-illiterate binary has a stranglehold on the way we understand written communication. In *Mothering and Literacies*, editors Amanda B. Richey and Linda Shuford Evans shatter that binary, dispensing with literacy in the singular. Instead, their more inclusive notion of “literacies” sheds light on how mothers are impacted by social expectations surrounding literacy and demonstrates the ways mothers develop and wield their own literacies in response to specific mothering challenges. The unifying premise of this book is that public discourses about mothering powerfully influence literacy researchers, policy makers, and educators and we ignore them at our peril.

In her introduction, Linda Shuford Evans warns against “the malpractice of focusing on literacy as a subject or a skill rather than as part of a child and a way of life” (9). When Evans’s son was in second grade, a school initiative designed to encourage reading turned him from an enthusiastic reader into a reluctant one. Because he tested above his grade level, her son was obliged to read books written for much older children. This homework of tedious reading soon replaced their family’s treasured story time. Evans still regrets that she fell “into the complicity of allowing schools to define the value of our family literacy practices, *even when I knew better*” (9).

The drawbacks of institutionally imposed literacy curricula are enumerated throughout this book. One notable example is contributor Stacey Crooks’s critique of the strange paradox encapsulated by the motto “You Are Your Child’s First Teacher.” This not-so-gentle admonition demands that moth-

ers become thoroughly involved in their children's literacy education, while deferring to the curricular requirements of the school system. The book goes on to caution against the tendency of government-funded family literacy programs to treat mothers as mere conduits for literacy and children as the intended beneficiaries. Crooks elaborates, "This contradiction points to the persistent presence of a regulatory discourse in family literacy that blames mothers for their children's literacy problems while also denying that women have literacy needs and desires of their own" (99). Contributors Cinthya M. Saavedra and Cara L. Preuss further argue, "Though much research in literacy is about the empowerment (in terms of assimilation) of individuals through teaching literacy—a cultural capital skill deemed necessary in our society—we contend that much of this research actually further disempowers individuals" (185). Blaire Willson Toso gives us a detailed portrait of what this looks like in practice. She writes about Olivia, a Mexican immigrant mother who adopts the time-intensive style of mothering promoted by the family literacy program *Even Start*. The unintended consequence of participating in this program is that Olivia shifts her energy away from studying to prepare for college, indefinitely defers her own goals, which may have benefited her entire family, instead focusing entirely on her daughters' education.

Strengthening the connection between mothering discourses and literacies, the book also includes several excellent essays that take a nuanced look at the way women engage with dominant discourses about mothering. Elizabeth Howells examines the censure directed at mothers who profit by their mothering blogs. Teresa Winterhalter makes a fascinating argument that women in politics and the arts must use their motherhood as a justification for entering public life or risk being vilified as a bad mother. Masako Kato details the challenges facing Japanese immigrant mothers who try to ensure that their children become literate in Japanese. Suzanne Smythe historicizes literacy advice given to mothers, further reminding readers of the ways in which wildly changeable culturally constructed norms of childrearing are often presented as "natural."

Though the book's scope extends well beyond the debate over literacy education to explore the ways mothers develop alternative literacies, I found this connection to be somewhat tenuous. While I appreciate the book's primary aim—to expand the idea of literacies—some of what is included under the umbrella of literacies might more accurately be read as mothers building community, speaking up for themselves, and resisting marginalizing discourses.

That said, *Mothering and Literacies* is a well-compiled book that will be of particular interest to educators and those who develop and fund literacy programs. It will also serve as an engaging and comprehensive introduction to those who seek to familiarize themselves with this important subject.