

PLAY, EARLY LITERACY, AND HOME CULTURE: A CASE  
STUDY IN TWO CHINESE IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Through a qualitative case study design, the relationships among play, early literacy, and home culture were investigated in the lives of two young children from recent Chinese immigrant families in Canada. The purpose of this study was to describe how play and literacy learning converge in the children's home life and how the children's parents' views of play and literacy learning influence their children's perception of and behaviours in their play and literacy activities. To understand the children's play lives, I draw on the theories of emergent literacy, social constructivism, and critical theory. Descriptive field notes, transcripts of the children's conversations, and in-depth interviews with parents were collected over a period of six months.

This study provides evidence that play is an integrated way to early literacy learning at home from three perspectives: the literate potentials of play, play as a context for literacy learning in a specific culture, and play as a supportive medium for self construction in relation to literacy. The individual differences between the two children's play and literacy activities are explored from their family cultures and experiences. This study also reinforces the critical importance of parents' views of play and literacy learning in their interactions with their children and the effects on their children's play and literacy activities. It is hoped that the study will give parents, early childhood educators, and family literacy programme coordinators insights into how to promote young children's literacy learning and self construction through play in culturally diverse contexts. Further research directions are also suggested.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of the Research Problem.....	1
Research Questions .....	3
Significance of the Study .....	4
Organization of the Thesis .....	5
Presentation of the Transcripts.....	5
<b>CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Play and Early Literacy.....	7
Family Literacy .....	10
Play and Early Literacy in Family Context.....	13
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Framework, Key Concepts, and Methodology ....</b>	<b>16</b>
Theoretical Framework .....	16
Key Concepts .....	19
Defining Play.....	19
Defining Early Literacy .....	21
Defining Home Culture .....	22
Research Method and Techniques.....	22
Participant Observation .....	22
Ethnographic Interviewing .....	23
Collecting Artifacts.....	24
Data Analysis and Representation.....	24
The Researcher Role and Subjectivity.....	26
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: Kevin's Play Life.....</b>	<b>31</b>
Kevin and His Family .....	31
Kevin .....	31
Kevin's parents - Julie and William.....	32
Kevin's Play-Literacy Activities at Home and on the Playground .....	34
Play at Home .....	35
Play, book comprehension, and literacy practice .....	45



Literacy serving play scripts.....	49
Play, literacy, and identity .....	54
Play, literacy, and home culture .....	56
Conclusion: Characterizing Kevin's At-home Play.....	56
Play on the Playground.....	57
Sense of stories in play narratives .....	68
Collaboration of play script writing (composing) .....	72
Decontextualized and book-like language.....	74
Cultural content in play scripts.....	76
Literacy, culture, and identity in play.....	80
Conclusion: Characterizing Kevin's Playground Play .....	83
Drawing, Playing, and Writing .....	84
Drawing As Play.....	85
Drawing As Writing I: Genres .....	86
Drawing As Writing II: Pictographic Drawing / Scribble-like Writing.....	91
Kevin's Parents' Views of His Play and Literacy Practice at Home.....	94
Kevin's Parents' View of His Play.....	95
Kevin's Parents' View on His Literacy Learning .....	101
Early reading.....	102
Early writing.....	104
The effects on Kevin's literacy learning.....	104
Kevin's Parents' Views on the Connection between Play and Literacy Learning....	108
Conclusion: Highlighting Kevin's Parents' Influence on His Play and Literacy Activities .....	113
Summary .....	115
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Ivy's Play Life .....</b>	<b>117</b>
Ivy and Her Family .....	117
Ivy.....	117
Christine, Leo, and Nora.....	119
Ivy's Play and Literacy Activities at Home .....	120
Play Solitarily with the Presence of Adults .....	121
The Patternner: Play with shapes or forms.....	130
Personal developmental contexts: Play, home culture, and literacy.....	136
Gendered identity in play and literacy activities .....	140
Play with Peers at Home.....	142
Literate activities promoted by playing with peers .....	152
Social identity in peer culture through play and literacy activities .....	158
Ivy's Parents' Views of Her Play and Literacy Activities .....	160
Ivy's Parents' Views of Her Play Activities.....	161
Ivy's Parents' View of Her Literacy Learning.....	162

Ivy's Parents' Views of the Connection between Play and Literacy Learning .....	165
Summary .....	166
<b>CHAPTER SIX: Play as an Integrated Way to Early Literacy Learning.....</b>	<b>168</b>
Play: A Developmental Way to Early Literacy Learning .....	168
Play: A Cultural Way to Literacy Learning .....	171
Play: A Personal and Social Way to Literacy Learning .....	173
Implications.....	174
Implications for Parents .....	174
Implications for Early Childhood Educators .....	175
Implications for Family Literacy Program Providers.....	176
Recommendations for Future Research .....	177
Final Thoughts .....	179
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Appendix A-1.....</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>Appendix A-2.....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Appendix A-3.....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Appendix A-4.....</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>Appendix A-5.....</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>Appendix B-1.....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Appendix B-2.....</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Appendix B-3.....</b>	<b>202</b>

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

### ***Background of the Research Problem***

Largely as a result of changing immigration policies in Canada, the Asian immigrant population has increased substantially in the last twenty years. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) reported that one-half of the people who immigrated to Canada between 1980 and 1996 were born in Asia (1996). Among them, Chinese immigrants were the most numerous. The 2001 census reported that Chinese was the largest visible minority group, surpassing one million for the first time (Statistics Canada). In the past five years, immigrants from the People's Republic of China (PRC) have made Chinese one of Canada's fastest growing visible minority populations. In major urban cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, the Chinese-speaking population has become the third largest language group. Specifically, of the 1990s immigrants who spoke a non-official language, about one – third reported Chinese as the most common language spoken at home. In terms of the major source countries of the 1990s immigrants, those born in PRC were the most likely to report speaking a non-official language at home (88%) as well as being unable to conduct a conversation in an official language (29%). The rapidly increasing number of Chinese immigrants from PRC brings to the forefront of Canadian education urgent issues: (1) how do we effectively educate children whose home language is other than one of the country's official languages? (2) When Chinese immigrant children enter Canadian schools, how can their parents work together with the schools to help their children become

literate in a new country? (3) Can preschool teachers and elementary teachers bridge the gap between school literacy learning and home literacy learning?

Anderson's (1995) investigation into cross-cultural perceptions of learning to read and write reveals that Chinese immigrant parents have very distinctive perceptions of the ways in which children become literate and they are dissatisfied that the Canadian school system excludes their voices. The most often heard complaint is that preschools and schools let children play too much and study too little (Li, 2002). On the other hand, Canadian educators believe that they are offering the most valuable education to the children and argue for a "developmentally appropriate" curriculum. A resolution to the conflict requires an open and continuous dialogue, and most importantly, an understanding of how play, early literacy and home culture converge.

As a Chinese immigrant, I understand this research project because it parallels my personal experiences and reflects my academic interests. I studied early childhood education in China since 1986. My interest is in child language and literacy education, especially young children's reading. Since immigrating to Canada in 1999, I have been pursuing my interest in early literacy development in family contexts. Having experienced culture shock (e.g., the lack of direction, the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not speaking the language), I deeply understand the immigrants' situations and feelings when immersed in a country that has different official languages. Young children are particularly at a loss when entering the Canadian daycare and school systems because they have fewer ways to deal with changes and to express their

sadness and loneliness.

In addition, this research topic has emerged from my volunteer experience in the daycare center of the Immigration Service Society (ISS) in Vancouver. I was touched by the immigrants' anxiety and desire to support their young children's literacy development, and by their determination to further their own second language learning. In addition, both my exploratory study in immigrant families and my work as a coordinator in a family literacy program (Mother-Goose) and a parenting program (Nobody's Perfect) provide a solid foundation for undertaking this research.

### *Research Questions*

Many studies show that literacy is an integral part of daily family life (Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Young children experience reading and writing at home through activities such as talking, drawing, and playing. Research consistently shows that play, in particular, is an important context in which to develop literacy skills (e.g., Bodrova & Leong, 1998; Christie, 1991; Kelly-Byrne, 1989; Kendrick, 2003; Roskos & Christie, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Nevertheless, how play functions to influence early literacy development in diverse home cultures needs further exploration. The purpose of this study is to investigate play and literacy learning in two Chinese immigrant families. Drawing upon an emergent literacy perspective, a sociocultural perspective, and critical theory, this study aims to:

(1) describe the convergence of play and literacy in the home life of two young children growing up in Chinese immigrant families;

(2) explore the parents' perspectives of the role of play in their child's development of literacy.

### *Significance of the Study*

Recent immigration trends reflect a significant influx of immigrants from non-English speaking countries and non-Western European societies. These immigrants bring their skills, businesses, and families, as well as languages and cultures to Canada. Canadian society has a responsibility to help them settle, and assist their children to successfully become literate in their new country.

Nevertheless, researchers (Hull & Schultz, 2002; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Taylor, 1997) point out that literacy activities are not only a school phenomenon, but that complex literacy practices also exist in out-of-school contexts. Families and communities are important contexts for literacy learning. A successful school literacy program never separates young learners from their social and cultural lives. As a result, there is an urgent need to deepen our understanding of how people from culturally diverse backgrounds perceive and practice literacy activities outside of the school setting. However, there is a dearth of studies in this area, which prevents educators from understanding the diversity of families' play and literacy activities.

In this study, I explore the convergence of play and literacy learning in the home life of two young children growing up in two recent Chinese immigrant families, and the parents' perceptions of these activities. Although the results of the study cannot represent the play and literacy practice in other recent Chinese families, they can holistically depict how play, early literacy and home culture interact in a specific family context. This study provides a clearer

understanding of the many facets in the play and literacy practices of recent Chinese immigrant families in general. This study will have implications for school educators and community workers, and to some extent, will contribute to the bridging of family literacy practices with family literacy programs and school literacy programs.

### *Organization of the Thesis*

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter One includes the background of the research problem, the research questions, and the significance of the study. Chapter Two is a review of the literature on play, family literacy, and the connection between play, early literacy and home culture. Chapter Three presents the theoretical framework, key concepts, methodology and procedures. Emergent literacy, social constructivism, and critical theory are the interpretive tools used in this study; participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, and artifact collecting are the research techniques. Data analysis and representation and the researcher's role and subjectivity are also discussed. A holistic description of the play and literacy activities in the two participant families are presented and discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Six integrates the findings from the two case studies and provides implications of the current study for parents, educators and other professionals working with young Chinese immigrant children. Some suggestions and recommendations for future studies are also provided in light of the limitations of this study.

### *Presentation of the Transcripts*

The presentation of the transcripts is a combination of verbatim quotations



integrated with my interpretations and observations. The left column is the language (Chinese) in which observations were recorded on audiotapes and in fieldnotes. The right column is the direct English language translation. Chinese characters are occasionally used in the transcripts to highlight the features of the characters in relation to aspects of the children's literacy learning.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review**

Play, literacy, and family are three crucial areas in early childhood education, in society, and in human life. Since play is a dominant activity during a child's early years and many researchers are interested in play's functions in a child's development, numerous studies have been produced (Fromberg, 1999; Garvey, 1990; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Literacy, as a contentious social and educational issue and a continuing concern of parents and teachers, is also the focal point of a considerable number of studies (Street, 1984; Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Likewise, family, referred to as a cell of a society and accompanying the whole lives of most human beings, has received various researchers' attention (Eshleman & Wilson, 1997). Over the past two decades, the idea of the relationships between play and literacy as well as between family and literacy is very intriguing and has prompted a considerable amount of research.

### ***Play and Early Literacy***

Scholars from different disciplines have investigated the connections between children's knowledge and use of literacy and their play behaviour from a number of perspectives. The theoretical basis for this research can be traced back to the work of Piaget and Vygotsky. Piaget (1962) described play as being largely "assimilative," which supports the absorbing of new ideas into a child's existing knowledge structure. He also viewed play as a reflection of a child's cognitive development in that play is a realization of underlying cognitive developmental processes. Accordingly, play can serve as a context for children to

practice and express their acquired skills, including language skills.

Vygotsky stated that during play, children's minds or thoughts are not restricted to the "here and now," but children freely use their imagination to transfer one thing to another. However, Vygotsky (1978) thought that Piaget had underestimated the importance of play in children's language learning. He proposed that play is the primary factor in fostering children's development, liberating their thoughts from specific contexts, from the conventional interpretation of actions, and from the normal uses of common objects (Goelman, Anderson, Anderson, Gouzouasis, Kendrick, Kindler, & Koh, 2003). Vygotsky regarded play as a "Zone of Proximal Development" because the range of skills which children develop and use in their play context exceeds what is practiced in a real-life situation. Vygotsky argued, "In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself" (1978, p. 552). Because play activities generate feedback under conditions of minimum risk, children may acquire the ability to adjust themselves to higher levels of performance (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976).

Inspired by these theoretical studies, researchers from the fields of psychology, linguistics, anthropology, sociology and education conducted a number of empirical studies on the relationship between play and literacy. Four lines of research investigating the connection between dramatic play and literacy have been identified in the literature (Rowe, 1998). The first line of research, using naturalistic observations, focuses on the ways that children pretend to read and write as part of their dramatic play (e.g., Hall, 1991;

Morrow & Rand, 1991; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; Vukelich, 1991). A second line of research, rooted in psychology, concentrates on the global relationship between the basic representational abilities used in play and in both reading and writing by correlating measures of representational ability in play settings with measures of child literacy behaviour (e.g., Pellegrini, 1980; Pellegrini & Galda, 1991). A third line of research has investigated the role of adult-directed, dramatic play training in influencing children's ability to read environmental print and in improving their comprehension of the texts they read or hear (e.g., Morrow, 1992; Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). Ethnographic research techniques are the fourth approach to studying the play-literacy connection; they are used to investigate the spontaneous connections made by children between play and meanings encountered in books (e.g., Rowe, 1998). The fifth line of research has been identified by Kendrick (2003) and focuses on the relationship between play narratives and literacy learning in diverse home and classroom contexts. These studies contribute to our understanding of the play-literacy connection; however, the mutual benefits of play for literacy acquisition and literacy for play activities are not well articulated. For example, we are not sure if there is causal connection between play and literacy achievement in the correlational studies or whether other variables may be responsible. In addition, adults' intervention in play may have both positive and negative influences on children's literacy acquisition.

Roskos and Christie also critically analyzed twenty recent investigations of the play-literacy interface (2001). They found that these studies provided strong evidence that

play can serve literacy by: providing settings that promote literacy activities, skills, and strategies; serving as a language experience that can build a connection between oral and written modes of expression; and providing opportunities to teach and learn literacy. Nevertheless, investigations of the interface of play and literacy were mainly concentrated on preschool and school settings (Clawson, 2002; Dyson, 1997; King, 1985; Widdowson, 2001). Many of these studies were closely wedded to "school literacy," focusing on a rather narrow spectrum of literacy promoted in educational settings. Moreover, Roskos and Christie's (2000) review of the literature on play and literacy focuses on studies framed within cognitive, ecological, and socio-cultural perspectives. Very few studies, however, utilize critical theory perspectives in examining the play-literacy interface (two exceptions are Solsken, 1993, and Kendrick, 2003).

### *Family Literacy*

Research on the relationship between literacy learning and family environments, which has been coined "family literacy," has been a focus of literacy research in the last two decades (e.g., Heath, 1982; Purcell-Gates, 1995; Taylor, 1983). Purcell-Gates (2000) provided a comprehensive review of the foundational research upon which family literacy is based.

In the 1960s, research on child development began to highlight the importance of childhood environment to later development and academic success. Building on this foundation, a number of studies began documenting the positive relationships between home environment and IQ, and language development (Bee et al., 1982; Bradley &

Caldwell, 1980). Correlational studies have repeatedly documented the significance of such factors as the educational levels of parents, the uses of print in the home, and the type and frequency of parent-child storybook reading events, in children's reading achievement in school (Bus, Van Ijzendoorn & Pelligrini, 1995; Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman & Hemphill, 1991). The cumulative data gathered by the above researchers enhanced educators' awareness of the importance of families as environments for literacy learning. Nonetheless, since the majority of the studies investigated the relationship between only one or two family environment factors and children's literacy achievement, it is difficult to gain a holistic picture of how all of the family environment factors combine to facilitate the literacy education of young children. The efforts of the researchers in looking for the most important predictor of "school success" may hinder school educators from understanding the complexities of literacy practice in diverse families. Some literacy experts have therefore conducted ethnographic studies in order to depict the literacy life in different families more fully.

Taylor (1983) spent three years doing fieldwork with six, Caucasian middle-class families. She examined the interplay of literacy activities of children, parents, and others. She concluded, "Literacy is a part of the very fabric of family life" for this group (p. 87). In 1988, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines conducted a follow-up ethnographic study of five families of low socioeconomic status whose children were successful in school. They described the ways in which the young children participated in story and Bible reading events. There were other studies conducted around the same time. Teale (1986), for example,

documented the many ways in which low-socioeconomic-status families use print. He claimed that his findings “should prompt a reconsideration of traditional wisdom which has it that children from low-SES backgrounds come to school with a dearth of literacy experience” (p. 192).

Following these classic research studies, other studies (Anderson, Fagan & Cronin, 1998; Auerbach, 1989; Hannon, 2000; Morrow, 1995; Purcell-Gates, 1995) have extended the term “family literacy” to a broad concept that combines early childhood education, literacy, and adult education. Family literacy can refer to a focus for research or to a kind of educational program. During the 1980s, family literacy became known as a type of instructional program aimed at teaching parents to incorporate academic oriented literacy and parenting practices into their homes so as to improve their children’s academic performance (e.g., National Center for Family Literacy in the United States). From these studies, corresponding evaluation studies emerged to assess the effectiveness of programs (Purcell-Gates, 2000). However, Taylor (1997) and Auerbach (1997) questioned these types of programs. They asserted that these programs put something alien into families with little effect. They called for responsive and inclusive family literacy programs which fully incorporate the voice of family members.

Research on family literacy justifies family as a literacy learning and teaching environment in which every member interacts with each other in extensive and diverse activities. The studies, however, focus primarily on a specific activity such as storybook reading. If we investigate the daily life of a family, we see that storybook reading time is

much shorter than the time young children spend on play. Hence, paying more attention on the interface of play, literacy, and family is necessary.

### *Play and Early Literacy in Family Context*

There are a limited number of research studies on family literacy that focus on the convergence of play, literacy and home culture. In Taylor's (1983) ethnographic study, play was one way children often involved themselves in literacy learning with their parents, with their peers, or on their own. When answering the question of how their children learned reading and writing, the parents in the study emphasized their children's motivation and playful experiences. Gregory (2001) conducted a study which traces ways in which "synergy" took place between siblings through play activities in the home and the community. In Pahl's (2002) study, three 5-8 year-old boys played Pokemon card games; they also played by folding paper into shapes and making bead maps. All of these games illustrate the play-literacy texts and practices of a low-income family in Britain. Play provides a forum for young children to learn both cultural and cognitive knowledge. On the other hand, Heath (1983) suggested that children from poor environments do not have as many occasions to use play as a means of exploring and advancing their emerging literacy skills. Goldenberg (1987), for example, in his study of Hispanic at-risk children, found that mothers did not encourage pretend forms of literacy activities, and instead viewed such activities as foolish. Anderson, Fagan and Cronin (1998) revealed that within their family literacy study, some families' view of play differs from that of school educators. For example, even though the parents participating in the study valued the introduction of play



activities into their home, they were concerned about the untidiness caused by play. They complained about how “dirty” play dough was and about “what a mess” chalk made. One mother even gave up singing to her son because her friends thought it was a “sissy activity.”

In order to intervene in “disadvantaged” families who were able to provide only a few print-based playful experiences for their children at home, a number of family literacy programs have attempted to introduce activities connecting play and literacy to families participating in the programs. Neuman and Gallagher (1994) discovered that their family literacy program, with its emphasis on parental play mediation strategies, resulted in gains in Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test scores. In their study on the implementation of PRINTS (Parents’ Roles Interacting with Teachers Support), Anderson, Fagan and Cronin (1998) provided insights into how play and literacy are valued differently. They also reported an overall benefit for the parents and their children from PRINTS. Another family literacy project, Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), sent home visitors to teach parents how to use HIPPY materials to play with their children; the parents viewed the program quite positively (LeMare, 2002). At the first National Conference of the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, Barry (2001) indicated that the relaxed fun experienced by mothers and young children in Mother-Goose Programs encourages and increases play-literacy related interactions between parents and children.

Notwithstanding the evidence for the effectiveness of family literacy programs, questions are raised about their longitudinal influence on the continued practice of play and

literacy at home. Given that few studies record and examine the convergence of play, early literacy, and home culture directly and comprehensively, most of the play-literacy activities and materials in these family literacy programs are prepared by educators instead of being prepared collaboratively by family members and school educators. The exception is Kendrick's (2003) ethnographic study, which portrays how a young Chinese girl explored reading and writing through her home play activities during the year following her mother's participation in a family literacy program. In addition, a limited number of studies explore the socially and culturally diverse values of the connection between play and literacy. This proposed study aims to fill this gap by providing educators with valuable information for building meaningful connections between home literacy practices and family literacy programs, as well as between home literacy learning and school literacy learning.

## **CHAPTER THREE: Theoretical Framework, Key Concepts, and Methodology**

### ***Theoretical Framework***

This study is informed by emergent literacy, social constructivism, and critical theory. An emergent literacy perspective proposes the idea that literacy development is a continuous process occurring in a variety of places. According to emergent literacy theory, this process starts long before formal school education begins and occurs both in and out of institutional settings (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). Through this lens, literacy knowledge and skills of young children in literate societies are seen as developing from their early experiences with environmental prints and daily reading and writing activities. Play in particular provides opportunities for children to use language in literate ways and to use literacy as they see it practiced (Roskos & Christie, 2001).

Developing the concept that a symbol is functional and represents meaning is essential to both emergent literacy (Clay, 1991; Gibson, 1989) and play. Simply defined, a symbol is a signifier that represents a signified, such as a pillow representing a baby, a picture representing an object, or a word representing a meaning. Symbols are functional when they provide needed information that is not otherwise readily available to a person's immediate experience (Stratton & Wright, 1991). Through observation, play, and interactions, young children recognize the functions of symbols and develop their abilities to represent meaning. The notion of "symbol" in emergent literacy is derived from Piaget's

and other cognitive theorists' work. Piaget (1967) argued that a child's mind is structured in such a way that he or she can construct rules of oral and written language based on his or her interactions with people and phenomena in the world. In Gunning's (2000) words, "children are active constructors of literacy" (p. 26). Play represents an interaction with the world in which children engage most. Piaget (1962) addressed the developmental function of play, or the ways in which play affects literacy. Cognitive theorists generally perceive play as a psychological phenomenon, and compare the use of symbols in play and in written language.

A cognitive perspective on the relationship between play and literacy focuses on mental processes that link play with reading and writing. In examining the play-literacy connection, social constructivists consider the influences of culture and social understandings on children's play, and the incorporation of literacy activity into this context (Roskos, & Christie, 2000). Vygotsky (1978) and other social-constructivist researchers assume that written language takes on meaning for children in the context of culturally relevant social situations. For example, when reading a story about caterpillars, a Chinese child may comprehend caterpillars as pests that eat vegetables in his garden, while a Canadian child may consider caterpillars to be magic insects that can change themselves into beautiful butterflies. Vygotsky argued that all thought, including language and literacy learning, occurs first in social interaction and then gradually becomes internal. Bakhtin (1981) extended this notion of social thought. Bakhtin believed, for example, that as individuals, we learn language on the basis of communication with those around us and not

as conventional wisdom would have it, on the basis of dictionaries and grammars. He also suggested that no individual can be considered the "sole author" of what they say or write "except in the physiological sense," since language is infused with socially and culturally-constructed meanings and values. Researchers who adopt a socio-cultural perspective regard play as a form of social communication that reflects children's knowledge of cultural norms and values. They note that one of the primary purposes of children's play is for children to develop an awareness of, and a need to be part of, their culture. They maintain that children's drawings, writing, and make-believe play are parts of an essential, unified process of development that move children into their culture's ways of using language.

Like social constructivism, critical theory holds that knowledge is socially-constructed, contextual, and dependent on interpretation. In contrast to social constructivists, critical theorists are specifically concerned with the ways in which hierarchical relationships of power and status are sustained. Solsken (1993) examines literacy as it relates to social status and identity. She defines literacy as "an orientation toward the knowledge and use of written language that position individuals and groups within hierarchies of social relations" (p. 6). Children also construct their understandings of the hierarchical relationship of power and status within literacy during play. For example, children give a peer more power during play if the peer acts like a person who can read and write. This peer may attempt to sustain his or her high status by focusing on what he or she knows even though other children have equal knowledge and skills of reading

and writing.

Within critical theory, the issue of gendered identity is also regarded as socially constituted and context dependent, for example, how we are raised to be girls, boys, women, and men (Blackburn, 2003). There is a general agreement that children aged five confront and begin to work through intense feelings about the opposite-sex parent, generally leading to identification with the same-sex parent (Freud, 2000). The child's identity from this point forward is a gendered identity. Having a gendered identity means, in general, that children's images and evaluations of themselves are integrally bound to their perceptions of themselves as male or female. For example, in dramatic play, children may take roles according to what they read from storybooks, assigning a girl the role of a princess who is identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional, or assigning a boy the role of a king who is identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, and creative (Ferne, Davies, Kantor & McMurray, 1993).

### ***Key Concepts***

Play, early literacy and home culture are three key concepts in this study. Since definitions of these concepts vary throughout the literature (Roskos & Christie, 2001), it is necessary to provide precise definitions of what counts as play, early literacy and home culture in this study.

### ***Defining Play***

Definitions of play abound in the developmental and educational literature (Fromberg, 1999; Garvey, 1990; Rowe, 1998). Feature-based descriptions appear to be one

of the primary definitional mechanisms. For example, the developmental psychologist Fromberg (1999) defines play by suggesting an inventory of necessary and sufficient features:

Symbolic, representing reality with “as if” attitudes,

Meaningful, using language in “real” life situations,

Active, doing things,

Voluntary and intrinsically motivated, motivated by curiosity, mastery, or affiliation,

Rule-governed, observing patterns implicitly or explicitly expressed,

Episodic, shifting goals that children develop spontaneously (p. 31).

Other researchers argue that play cannot be defined in terms of characteristic features or specific activities. Cook (2000), for example, emphasizes the significance of attitude in identifying instances of play: “In fact it is very often [...] attitude which makes something play rather than anything intrinsic to the behaviour per se. People are playing when they say and believe they are playing” (p. 101). For Cook (1997), play “has something to do with enjoyment and relaxation” (p. 227). Cook’s notion of play is congruent with that of *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (Barber, 1998), which defines play (noun) as “(what is done for) amusement” or play (verb) as “(contrasted with work) have fun.” Considering Fromberg and Cook’s opinions, I think that indicating a set of criteria assists in identifying play behaviour; nonetheless, some vital play episodes may be dismissed. Moreover, a set of clear criteria can facilitate the understanding of play, but does

not explain why children play. From closely playing with the participants in this study, I found that the children generally label as play all the activities which are voluntary, enjoyable, and pleasurable to them; and the parents categorize the child-initiated spontaneous activities as play. I therefore define play as "freely chosen by players and enjoyable activities" in this paper.

### ***Defining Early Literacy***

Traditionally, literacy refers to the ability to read and write conventional print. However, emergent literacy and socio-cultural perspectives consider literacy more broadly. Since researchers such as Clay (1991) and Sulzby (1991) found that young children came to school with considerable knowledge about reading and writing, the term "emergent literacy" has been used to indicate that learning to read and write involves growth along a continuum. Sulzby and Teale (1996) state, "Emergent literacy is concerned with the earliest phases of literacy development, the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally" (p. 728). From a socio-cultural perspective, literacy is culturally defined. It is a socially and cognitively construed set of practices that does not just belong to the child but is constructed and embedded within the social life of groups and is reproduced by children (Miller, Fernie, & Kantor, 1992).

In this project, my participants demonstrate a broad concept of literacy in their play, including their awareness and knowledge of print (e.g., the functions, forms and features of written language). Therefore, early literacy in this study refers to all areas of print experiences the children encounter in their environments and areas of print knowledge



children engage in and attend to, as well as other communication forms (such as oral language and drawing) which is interrelated to written language.

### ***Defining Home Culture***

If we were to look up the word “culture” in a dictionary, we would be confronted by such terms as customary beliefs, social norms, shared attitudes, values, goals and practices: the commonalities by which societies live and function. The term "home culture" within this study refers to the family members' beliefs, shared attitudes, values, goals and practices. Because the families in my study are Chinese immigrant families, their culture neither copies the traditional Chinese customs nor the host, Canadian, ways; rather, they are an integration of both cultures and their individual personalities.

### ***Research Method and Techniques***

This case study was conducted using ethnographic techniques, including participant observation, interviewing, and artifact analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Yin, 1994). The combination of these techniques in a research process is known as triangulation. Using triangulation is the most effective way to avoid the influence of my personal biases in this study. Triangulation also allows me to confirm data collected using one method (e.g., observation) by comparing it to data collected using an alternate method (e.g., interviewing).

### ***Participant Observation***

One of my primary data collection techniques is participant observation. I attempt to balance the insider and outsider roles by observing and participating in some but not all

of the activities (see e.g., Kelly-Byrne, 1989; Kendrick, 2003). According to Palys (1997),

To the extent that the researcher's status as an observer is honestly presented, ethical concerns about deception or lack of informed consent are minimized. And to the extent that the researcher acts as a participant in the setting, reactivity is often reduced because, as a participant, he or she more quickly fades into the group (p. 202).

In my study, I visited each family every two weeks from Fall 2002 to Spring 2003. Using notebooks and audiotapes, I recorded the play episodes and literacy activities in their home environment.

### ***Ethnographic Interviewing***

Ethnographic interviewing and participant observation go hand in hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001). A lot of the data gathered in participant observation comes from informal interviewing in the field. During my study, I used informal interviewing to learn what the parents think of the role of play in their children's literacy development, their assumptions about how children learn to read and write, and their expectations for their children's literacy learning. In addition, I learned about the concepts of play, reading, and writing from the children's perspectives, as well as their parents' role in their play and literacy learning by talking, playing, and drawing with them. Even though I had the prepared questions in my mind, I did not use structured questions to guide our conversations. My interviewing with the parents was conducted as a casual conversation during my visits. Here I obey the essence of ethnographic interviewing—"the establishment of a

human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001, p. 654). Given that I understand the language and culture of the respondents, and have experienced adjusting to a new language and new culture, and moreover, have extensive experience interacting with young children and parents, I was able to build an intimate and understanding relationship with the families.

### ***Collecting Artifacts***

The third major data sources in my field research are artifacts. Many researchers recommend seeking out private sources of historical documents when researching the lives of ordinary people. Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) note that as researchers enter the field, they need to train themselves to attend to material objects. Because the content and function of written materials used by the families in the context of their literacy activities are important resources for understanding their family literacy context, and consequently the children’s play-literacy activities, I photocopied the children’s drawings and writings, and collected the reading and writing materials which the parents used to interact with their children (for a similar example see Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1983).

### ***Data Analysis and Representation***

I used inductive data analysis in this research project (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Palys, 1997). The following points guided the process of my analysis.

1. The analysis of the collected data occurred throughout the research. This allowed additional questions or themes to emerge, so I could adjust my research direction and process according to new findings, even though I had some guiding research

questions at the onset of the study.

2. The analysis process began with reviewing my field notes and transcripts of the audiotapes. I read and converged the multiple data sources in a comprehensive way. First, through coding and clustering, I reduced the data to four codes (i.e., play-literacy interface, identity and power, parental attitudes, and individual differences). I then used the coded data to identify patterns in each case study, and considered the wider matter of cross-case analysis or case comparison. After that, I looked for “local themes” (Hall, 1999) or categories of meaning in my data. However, the categories were flexible and were modified as further data analyses occurred.

3. To represent this study, I selected particular play sessions and episodes according to the principles of representation, holism, and triangulation (Hall, 1999). First, the selected play sessions contain all the patterns identified in the original data and are most representative of the data. Second, the play sessions render the children’s play scenes as lifelike so that the reader is presented with a realistic picture. Third, the selected play episodes provide evidence from various play sessions and different forms of data I have gathered, such as excerpts from fieldnotes and transcripts and information from the children’s artifacts.

There are no strict conventional modes of presenting data in qualitative research as there are in quantitative research. The reporting of quantitative research has a strictly expository format, but a fixed mode may betray the nature of qualitative research which

reflects “the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context” (Davis, 1997, p. 30). This study is narrative, descriptive, and analytical; it combines the perspectives of the children and their parents, the stories of the families, with my reflections and discussions on their interactions in the literacy-related play activities.

### ***The Researcher Role and Subjectivity***

Because a researcher is a specific individual who lives in a particular circumstance at a certain time, no one can be free from his or her point of view (i.e., bias). Researchers always bring their personal and professional experiences or subjectivities into their research. Qualitative methodology (Ratner, 2002) recognizes that the subjectivity of the researcher is intimately involved in scientific research. In fact, subjectivity guides everything from the choice of topic that one studies, to formulating hypotheses, to selecting methodologies, and interpreting data. Qualitative researchers tend to deal with their subjectivity by engaging with it in a reflexive way (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Reflexivity in this study not only means a self-critical method that acknowledged and attempted to go beyond the experience and knowledge of the researcher, but also to adopt an approach which would engage openly with a broad range of genres, styles and stories. By this I mean my personal history, cultural background, and epistemological stance, and how they may influence the whole process of my research. I also discuss the roles I assume in the interaction with the participants and how these roles constrain and strengthen the research.

First of all, the choosing of my research topic - play, early literacy, and home culture - reflects my interests, my identity, and my cultural background. I enjoy teaching.

When I was a child, I used the door of my room as a blackboard and gave lectures to imaginary students or younger peers. This interest in teaching inspired me to pursue the field of early childhood education. Moreover, I have already studied and worked with young children for almost ten years. This is why I focus on early childhood education in my research. Another reason why I chose this research topic is because of my immigrant status. As a Chinese immigrant, I realize that my Chinese background should become not a limitation, but a challenge and an advantage. Therefore, I have consciously set my research in multicultural contexts. My interest in family literacy originated from Chinese culture where “family” has long been a ruling concept. The Chinese value the function of family in their lives and emphasize the parents’ role in educating their children. Rooted by these values and troubled by my second language, I chose to work on parent-child interaction in family literacy.

When considering an appropriate research method for this project, I found that my particular epistemological stance was also involved. I readily accept the main assumptions of qualitative research methodology, such as contexts, closeness, process emphasis, and the inductive approach; I assume that the social sciences, different from the natural sciences, are more complicated, more dynamic, and more human-centered areas. We cannot deprive a human being of his or her national, regional, and personal histories. I therefore prefer observation as the way of knowing (epistemology) in this study. In my opinion, an observation happens in a certain setting, or specific context; an observation involves watching, listening, and touching, which is close to the real world. However, many things,

such as opinion, cannot be determined from observation alone. Moreover, there is a risk of generalizing from the limited act of observation.

While analyzing data and generalizing to theory, my educational and cultural background inevitably affected the process. To illustrate this, I have spent several years studying educational science. Among them, I favour the ideas of interactionists. For this reason, I expect positive results from the child's play and literacy practices, encouraging interactions between the children and their parents. This expectation may affect the analysis of my research data, and hence, the "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Cuba, 1984) of the results.

Even though I attempt to be objective in this study, there are several concerns that lead me to play an unavoidable role (or to conduct subjective acts) in the families I observed. First of all, to accept my research study in their families, the parents expect me to enhance their child's literacy learning. The premise to allow me to study the play and literacy activities in their home is that I should promote their children's reading and writing skills. Regarding ethical concerns, I think the parents' expectations are quite reasonable, and I should not only take something I want from them but also bring something beneficial to them.

Second, the parents' expectations that I improve the child's literacy skills led to their different (favourable or unfavourable) reactions to my different interactions with the child. They paid close attention to what I was doing with their children. For example, when I played or talked with Kevin, his father William was listening and occasionally looking at

us. William's watching tended to annoy Kevin who questioned his father, "Why [do you] watch me? I will use this book to cover your face." If I solely followed Kevin's play, I noticed that his parents would wonder about what I was doing and why I did what I did. They sometimes asked the child to demonstrate his reading and writing skills for me. However, if I did something more related to visible or accountable literacy activities or skills, such as storybook reading and drawing, they would show great interest in that and seemed to be satisfied.

Third, on one hand, the influence I bring in may limit the objectivity of the study; on the other hand, the parents' reactions to my different interactions with the child broaden my understanding of their beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards play and literacy. For example, their indifference to play activities and their attempt to suggest a more meaningful activity such as reading books reflect their views of play as a frivolous activity, and conventional reading and writing behaviors as serious, so that their child should engage in more serious work with the researcher. Otherwise, it appeared to them that too much play would waste the "expert" and their child's precious time. To perceive the parents' beliefs or views of play and literacy learning is one of the research questions that I pursued. Through the process of the research, I discovered that my different interactions with the child (such as following his play ideas or suggesting to him to draw something) served as an excellent strategy to explore (reveal) the underlying beliefs of the parents,

Based on the above concerns, I came into the study as the child's playmate, and sometimes I invited the child to do some activities more obviously related to literacy such



as drawing or writing. In doing so, I not only met the parents' expectation, but also was allowed to understand the parents and their child's reactions to literacy activities. One of the advantages of recognizing subjectivity is to reflect on whether it facilitates or impedes objective comprehension (Ratner, 2002). Distorting values can then be replaced by values that enhance objectivity.

From the above reflection, I realize that complete objectivity is impossible and I might bring in numerous biases into my research. On the one hand, while continuing to identify the potential bias in this research process, I paid attention to minimizing bias and ensuring the reliability and validity of my research measures. On the other hand, I agree that a researcher's personal experience and empathic insight are relevant data. Social scientists, facing a task of exploring the inner state of human beings particularly need to use subjective judgment to bring the inner worlds to light (Palys, 1997). I can use my personal and professional experience to understand the participants fully and to take a neutral non-judgmental stance toward whatever may emerge. I also recorded my thoughts in an introspective journal to keep track of my analysis.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Kevin's Play Life

### *Kevin and His Family*

Having decided to undertake a study of two children's play lives in Chinese immigrant families and their neighborhood environments, I started to pay attention to the children in the community program I coordinated and the children playing on the playgrounds. On a playground in this community, Kevin was swinging with his father's help when I purposefully approached them. I thought this was the first time I had met them; however, Kevin's father, William, pointed out that they had been in my program once before. His description enabled me to remember vaguely the first time I met them. It was almost at the end of a finger painting session; Kevin and William came in. I brought them a paint box and some crayons and then I was busy with other parents and their children. The reason they made an impression on me was because most of the participants in my programs are mother-child, or grandparent-child dyads, and only Kevin was accompanied by his father. I talked briefly with William and decided that Kevin was an appropriate candidate (regarding the factors of age, gender, ethnicity, and immigrant status) for my project.

### *Kevin*

Kevin, the focal child, was four years and ten months at the time (September, 2002) I first met him. When I started this study with him in November, he had just turned five. He has bright eyes, is of medium height for his age, with a healthy complexion. On the first

occasion he was quite shy, but when I started to play with him, he soon demonstrated that he was easy-going, active, and highly verbal.

Kevin was told I would play with him often and that I would record what we played so that I could write a book about his play. Although Kevin knew that I was “interviewing” (his term) him, he soon regarded me as one of his contemporary playmates. He was always eager for me to play with him and he consistently reminded me of running the tape recorder for our conversation.

Kevin was a child for whom scientific books and play assumed important roles in his life. He brought several of his favorite Chinese books to Canada, such as *Dong Wu Shi Jie* (My First Science book: The World of Animals) and *Xing Xing* (Stars); he also borrowed many English books, which were full of vivid pictures and photographs, from his local community library. These books included *Raptors, Fossils, Fins & Fangs: A Prehistoric Creature Feature*; *Dinosaur*; *Dinosaurs Walked Here and Other Stories Fossils Tell*; and *Bugs Before Time*. He played with his miniature action figures, building blocks, small rocks, and anything he could use as props. His play themes typically involved highly dramatic male conflicts.

In his play world, Kevin always initiated and controlled how his play developed. He was a leader in his core peer group; and in addition, the adults who entered into his play world (namely, his parents and I) were also subordinates in his play schemes.

#### ***Kevin's parents - Julie and William***

It was easy to establish a relationship with Kevin's parents, Julie and William.

Julie is a small woman who is full of energy and speaks sonorously and with cadence. She often laughs when telling me anecdotes about her son. On the contrary, William speaks in a low voice and keeps silent while his son or wife is talking. But he always smiles and listens to us. When Kevin needs something in his play or literacy activities, his father is quick to find it.

Julie and William both grew up in an intellectual (Zhi Shi Fen Zi) family in a small city of northern China. They are both college educated, highly independent individuals. Julie has three sisters and she is in the middle. After she completed her bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics at a Chinese normal university, Julie worked as an instructor at another university until she got permission for graduate study in a Canadian postsecondary institution. William is the oldest child; he has four younger siblings. He went to study civil engineering in a Chinese university that was in a different city than Julie was in. After graduating, he stayed on at this university, working as a staff member in the department of logistics. This family has had long periods of separation; they were finally reunited in Canada.

Julie claimed that their family was good at science. At the time I met her, she was a doctoral candidate in applied mathematics. William wanted to give up his original major so he could learn the same major as his wife did since it was easier to find a job in this field. Julie thought that she could deal with the English related to her study; however, at home English was absolutely not a tool of entertainment. According to Julie, William had an opportunity to memorize a lot of English vocabulary and he is a "living dictionary" in their

family. Nevertheless, William had difficulty with his TOEFL test. At the time I met William, he had already taken the TOEFL test three times; unfortunately, he could not be accepted at his wife's Canadian university because of his scores, so he went to a community college to study college English in order to transfer to a university in the future.

Although Julie and William considered Kevin's well-being as the first priority of their family and tried their best to share time with their son, their extremely busy lives of studying and earning a living in a new country led them to leave their son in his aunt's care in China and with a babysitter in Canada. Julie and William were a constant and strong support for me during this study. As I mentioned previously, even though they could not often take part in Kevin's play activities, they were a very significant part of Kevin's life and inevitably influenced his play content and materials, as well as his practice in reading and writing.

### ***Kevin's Play-Literacy Activities at Home and on the Playground***

Play researchers (Piaget 1962; VanHoorn, Scales, Nourot, & Alward, 1999) have observed that children's play behaviours become more complex and abstract as they progress through early childhood. Piaget (1962) drew close links between types of play and stages of development: exploratory play (ages 0-2), symbolic play (ages 3-5), and games with rules (ages 6-8). Even though some researchers argued that any child at any age may be able to play at any of the levels Piaget described (VanHoorn, Scales, Nourot, & Alward), there tends to be a predominant form of play at any one stage of development or in an individual child's activities. For example, Hanna (in Wilkinson, 1993), from her repeated

observations of children, summarized the characteristics of five major developmental stages of play with the approximate ages of occurrence of these in normal healthy children. There include: exploration or manipulation (birth -15 months); representational and symbolic (1-2 years); dramatic play (3 - 4 years); socio-dramatic play (5 years) and games with rules (6 years).

Kevin engaged in a lot of typical forms of play for his age (5 years), namely, dramatic play (including socio-dramatic play) or make-believe play. Like Hanna's description of the play characteristics of five-year-olds, Kevin used props in a sophisticated manner; acted out stories with a plot, climax, sequence, and resolution; and acted out roles of a story with peers. His play happened principally at home, but also occurred several hours each day on the playground. Since environmental factors (social and physical) very much shaped Kevin's play activities, I will present and discuss his play at home and on the playground respectively.

### ***Play at Home***

Kevin's home is a rented two-bedroom suite in a university family housing area. However, his parents, Julie and William have sublet their two bedrooms to two single students who share the kitchen and bathroom with them. Thus, the living room is the only private domain for this family of three. This living room is almost 18 square meters. A king-size bed occupies one-fourth of the room. Around the inside wall of the room, there are several pieces of simple furniture: a small used refrigerator, a used 20" TV and a DVD player on a chest, an old dinner table in a corner of the room with three chairs around it, and

a wooden book shelf in another corner of the room. There are also several pictures on the wall. In fact, this room serves not only as a living room, but also as a bedroom, a dining room, a study room, and a playroom.

Kevin's play area spreads over the whole living room. Usually, his play things are piled on the ground, or sometimes they occupy the bed or the dining table. Kevin's toys are mixed together. There are different kinds of building blocks, Lego materials, miniature animal or human figures, and plastic toy tools such as a hammer, a spanner, and a screwdriver, most of which were bought from community yard sales. Other play things include small stones and shells in a glass bottle, which Kevin collected, and home-made props such as cardboard dinosaur figures that William made and a lantern that Julie made. Several big toys such as a ship, a gun, a birdcage, and a cardboard box are always stored under the chairs or behind the door. In addition, Kevin could transform other objects in his home into play things. For example, he pretended that a comb was the skeleton of a dinosaur, that a hair-grip was a crocodile, that a massage tool was a jeep, and that a butterfly clamp was a bag. On one occasion, he clicked a ball-point pen, pretending he was spraying pesticide out of it.

Because of the limited space and the lack of playmates at home (Kevin is an only child), Kevin's play activities mostly focused on manipulating toys to illustrate his play scripts. In this home setting, Kevin frequently shifted between talking about books and playing out the content of the book. While many of these shifts were brief, his play themes were repeated over a long period, which demonstrated his focal interests at that time. The

following play session represents one of Kevin's favorite themes during this study:

dinosaurs.

### 恐龙世界

今天是一个雨天。我打电话给凯文家。威廉告诉我凯文正在家里玩并问我是否有时间过去。凯文接过了电话，“阿姨，你快过来‘采访’我。我做了一个房子。你来看看。”威廉也希望我能陪陪凯文因为他正在学英语没有时间和凯文玩。我说马上过来然后挂上电话。出门时我看了看手表，大约是1:15左右。

当我刚进凯文家门，等在门口的凯文拉着我的手领我到客厅里。除了凯文那一堆玩具外，另有一个大纸箱倒放在地板上。纸箱的一个侧面开了两个小方块和一个长方形的口。在纸箱的顶部有淡红色的交错线条像屋顶上的瓦块。（这就是凯文说的房子）。凯文说那些开口分别是两个窗户和一扇门。然后他把一个圆珠笔帽插进纸箱顶部的一个小孔并说道，“这是一个烟囱。”然后他从玩具堆里找出几个橡胶小人，假装他们走进屋子。其中有一个跳舞的小女孩太高而不能直着走进去。凯文咯咯地笑着并说，

### *The dinosaur world.*

It was a rainy day when I called up Kevin's home. William said that Kevin was playing at home. Kevin seemed tired of playing by himself and was very happy to know I called. He talked to me on phone, "Aunt, you come soon. I have made a house. I will show it to you." William also hoped I would come to their home since he was studying English and could not spend time with his son. I hung up the phone and walked to Kevin's home. It was 1:15pm.

When I entered their home, Kevin dragged me by the hand into his play area. There was a cardboard box upside down on the ground with two small squares and a big rectangle cut on one side of the box. Many light red lines checkered the topside of the cardboard box, like the tiles on a roof. Kevin explained that they were two windows ("eyes"), a door ("mouth") and a roof respectively. He then inserted the cap of a pen into a tiny hole on the top of the box and said, "This is a chimney." Following that, he found several plastic figures and pretended they walked into the room. One of them was a dancing girl who was so tall that she could



“你看着小人，碰头了。她长大了。只有这样，她一低头就进去了。”

因为我还没有从包里拿出我的小录音机，凯文提醒我录下我们的游戏和说话。虽然这是我第二次到他家，露营已经成为了我们游戏的一部分。

接下来凯文给我拿来了它新借的书。正如同他第一次给我看的那些书，这些新借的书也是关于恐龙和史前时代的动物，包括 *Raptors Fossils Fins & Fangs: A Prehistoric Creature Feature*, *Dinosaur Bones*, *Dinosaurs Walked Here and Other Stories Fossils Tell*, *Bugs Before Time: Prehistoric Insects and Their Relatives*, *Ornithomimids the Fastest Dinosaur*, and *New Dinosaur Discoveries: The New Inosaur Collection*.

看了这些书的名字后，我感叹道，“啊，你生活在恐龙世界。”我的话引起了在同一间屋里看书的威廉的兴趣，他笑着并故意问凯文，“儿子，你长大了干什么

not “walk” through the door upright. Kevin giggled and said, “Look at the small person; her head is knocking at the door. She has grown up. Only like this, she bends her head then enters the house.”

Because I had not taken out my small portable recorder from my bag, Kevin reminded me to record what we were doing and talking about. Even though this was the fourth session of my observations and the second time I visited his home, the recording had become a routine part of our play.

Then Kevin brought me several newly borrowed books. Like the first time he showed me books, these were also about dinosaurs and prehistoric animals. The books included *Raptors Fossils Fins & Fangs: A Prehistoric Creature Feature*; *Dinosaur Bones*; *Dinosaurs Walked Here and Other Stories Fossils Tell*; *Bugs Before Time: Prehistoric Insects and Their Relatives*; *Ornithomimids: the Fastest Dinosaur*; and *New Dinosaur Discoveries: The New Inosaur Collection*.

After seeing the titles of these books, I commented, “*Ha, you are living in a dinosaur world.*” William, who was reading his English book at the dinner table in the same room, smiled and asked Kevin deliberately, “Son, what will you do when you grow up?” “When I grow up, I will go

呀？”“长大了，我和王小宝，大伟，田田去考古，建个恐龙博物馆。”凯文朗声答道。“是吗？”我说。凯文说，“我给乌龙剪毛。”“哦。”凯文指着书中的一幅画说，“这种龙我告诉你，他虽小，但跑得快。你看这叫青岛龙，在青岛发现的。我爸以前在大连去青岛时发现的。

凯文捡起玩具堆里的一把塑料斧头并拿给我看。我问：“斧头拿来干什么？”凯文答道，“砍树。”“砍树干什么呀？”“造房子，我们要是去考古的时候，没有房子住，拿这玩意儿砍树。”“哦，真聪明。”

凯文的注意力又回到了他的书上。

凯文：这是史前时代的昆虫。你看，这叫蝗虫。这是吃虫子的人。

安娜：哦，谁给你讲的这些？

凯文：是从图书馆借的。这样史前时代的书还有。

凯文：蜈蚣。

for an archeological study with Wang Xiaobao, David, and Tiantian (his three peers). [We will] build a dinosaur museum,” Kevin answered sonorously. “*Really?*” I said. Kevin added, “I will trim the feathers of the bird dinosaurs.” “*Oh.*” Kevin pointed to a picture on one book and said, “This dinosaur, I tell you, although it is very small, it runs fast. You see this is a Qingdao Dinosaur; it was found in Qingdao. My Dad found it when he was in Daliang (a province of China).

Kevin then picked up a plastic axe from the pile of toys and showed it to me. I asked, “*What will you do with this axe?*” Kevin answered, “Cut down some trees.” “*Why will you cut down some trees?*” “Build a house. When we go to look for the fossils, [we] do not have a house to live in. [We can] use this thing to cut down some trees [to build a house].” “*Oh, quite clever,*” I gave him praise.

Kevin’s attention returned back to his books and explained the illustrations:  
K: There are prehistoric insects. Look, these are locusts. They are bugs that eat people.

A: *Oh. Who told you this?*

K: [The books are] borrowed from the library. I have another book about the prehistoric period.

K: (Pointing to a picture) a centipede.

安娜：好可怕。

凯文：我妈也怕。你知道为什么原始时代那些人要吃昆虫？（没等我回答他接着说）昆虫以前很大，和恐龙那样大。

安娜：哦

凯文：史前时代的动物很奇怪。你知道原始大象有毛吗？

安娜：原始大象有毛吗？

凯文：有。（指着一张画有原始人的图）他们，象土著人吃虫子

安娜：哦

接下来凯文说我们来玩 Lego：

凯文：把这个当草地。（凯文把几块绿色的 Legos 接在一起，然后举起一颗小 Lego 说）Snail, snail, 这是蜗牛。（插进“草坪”里）

安娜：放进草丛里。

凯文：现在好了，现在摆恐龙时代。原始大象有毛，其他大象，现代的没有毛。它叫毛象。这是真菌类，毒蘑。

这是土著人的房子。我再找吃虫子的人（他找到一个土著人模样的小人。）这是原始的人，这人爱吃虫子）

（凯文找到另一个塑料小人）这是考古学家，考古的人。这个人很累了。我们

A: *Terrible.*

K: My mother is also afraid of it. Do you know why the people in the primitive age ate insects? (He responded without waiting for my answer) The insects were all huge a long time ago, as big as dinosaurs.

A: *Oh.*

K: prehistoric animals are very strange, very strange; do you know original elephants have hair?

A: *Did original elephants have hair?*

K: Yes. They (pointing to the picture of some primitive people), like the aboriginal people, ate animals.

A: *Oh.*

After the above episode, Kevin suggested that we play Lego:

K: Using these as green lawns. (Kevin connected several green Lego pieces together and then lifted a small Lego block.) Snail, snail, this is a snail. (Kevin inserted it into the “green lawn”.)

A: *(There are snails) in the grass.*

K: Ok, now let's build a dinosaur age. This is a primitive elephant. Other [modern] elephants do not have hair. It is a Mao Xiang (which means an elephant with heavy hair). This is fungus, a poisonous mushroom. This is the tent in which aboriginal people lived. I am looking for the people who eat insects (he found one). He is a primitive, eat insects.

给他建个房子。这时暖气。 我们现在摆上一个大厅，他在大厅吃饭。现在还得用个桌子，因为他要在桌子上吃饭。这是青岛龙。我是 Moshila（一个卡通恐龙）我在晚上出来。（凯文边说边把各种 Lego 插入“草坪”上。

安娜：好的...

凯文：两个蜗牛。（指着原始人）他吃蜗牛。“LuoLuoLuoLuoLuoLuo”（模仿土著人的吆喝声）他用箭，“Ta”，假装射向那个考古学家）

安娜：为什么？

凯文：这是他的地盘。我想找个小人把它安在大象身上。

凯文移到地板上找到一个小人但他并没有回到玩 Lego，而是玩他做的房子。

凯文：狙击手（放一个小人在房顶上）狗（放了一个小木块在门口）这是我们家养的狗。看这人进屋去了。（凯文让一个小人走进大门）

(Kevin found another figure) he is an archeologist. This person [archeologist] is tired. Let's build a house for him. This is [a] heating [system]. We now build a hall for him, so he can have a meal there. Now we should put a table [in the hall], because he (the archeologist) needs to have his meal [on the table]. This is a Qingdao Dinosaur. I am Moshila (a cartoon character which is a powerful dinosaur). I come out at night. (While speaking, Kevin placed the different Lego blocks on the green lawn.)

A: Ok.

K: Two snails. He eats snails (pointing to the "aboriginal man").

"LuoLuoLuoLuoLuoLuo" (Imitating his rendition of aboriginal shouting). He uses arrows, "Ta", (pretending to shoot the archeologist).

A: Why?

K: This is his (aboriginal man's) domain. I want to find a small person to ride on the elephant.

Then Kevin moved to the ground and found a small figure.

K: A sniper (Putting the small person on the top of the cardboard or the roof of the house).

A dog (Putting a small wooden block at the door of the house). This is our family dog.

Look, this person comes into the room

安娜：是的。

凯文：他是， 芝麻关门， 芝麻关门

安娜：芝麻开门吗？

凯文：芝麻关门

安娜：那个故事是讲芝麻开门呢？

凯文：芝麻关门。这是我的海盗屋。我和王小宝，大伟，田田，40个大盗。

安娜：是阿拉伯的四十大盗吗？那他们把宝物藏在哪儿呢？

凯文：我们的四十个大盗。

安娜：哦，你们的。

凯文：我叫卡西。我再装金子。我去芝麻开门，这个房子里头。

安娜：哦。

凯文：芝麻开门（凯文假装打开门让一个小人走进区）。芝麻关门（假装关门）。芝麻开门（凯文又假装打开门让另一个人走进区。）他们所有的都进屋了。

安娜：为什么他们都进屋了呢？

凯文：他们想看金银财宝。这个人是卡西。芝麻开门。

安娜：谁是卡西？

(Operating a small plastic person walking into the door).

A: Yes.

K: He is... Zhi Ma Guan Men, Zhi Ma Guan Men (which means "close the door, sesame"). Kevin sang out the magic words from a tale of Arabian Night's Entertainment, "Alibaba and Forty Pirates."

A: Is that Zhi Ma Kai Men (which means "open sesame")?

K: Zhi Ma Guan Men.

A: Which story is about "Zhi Ma Guan Men?"

K: Zhi Ma Guan Men. This is our pirate house. I, Wang Xiaobao, David, and Tiantian are forty pirates.

A: Are they the forty Arabic pirates? Where have they hidden their treasures?

K: Our forty pirates.

A: Oh. Yours'.

K: My name is Kashi. I left my treasure there. I go to Zhi Ma Kai Men.

A: Oh.

K: Zhi Ma Kai Men (Kevin opened the door and let one small person walk in). Zhi Ma Guan Men (Kevin closed the door). Zhi Ma Kai Men. (He opened the door and let another guy walk into the house). All of them entered the house.

A: Why do they enter the house?

K: They want to check their treasures. This

凯文：我。

安娜：卡西是头吗？

凯文：头。对。然后和大伟，王小宝，田田说话。

安娜：哦，他们四个在里面商量呢。。

当凯文再次提到 Moshila，一个强有力的恐龙，他让威廉给我放映“三大恐龙怪物三次大决战”的碟子。我因而有机会观看这部日本恐龙卡通动画片。凯文非常熟悉这部片子。用威廉的话说，“他可以背下有关恐龙的片子。”凯文一边玩他的玩具一边向我介绍这部片子的人物和情节。

在放映期间，凯文还拿出两本他自己的书。这两本书是关于动物和星球的中文百科全书。凯文以他惯常的方式告诉我这两本书的内容。他指认书中各类动物，这出他们的特点并解释动物之间的关系。有时他会问我这样的问题“你知道为什么.....”通常他不会等我回答就很快的回答了自己的提问。事实上，他的大部分问题我都不能回答上。我问凯文是谁告诉他这些书中的故事。凯文回答，“妈妈。”然后他开始假装像他妈妈一样开始读书了。

guy is Kashi. Zhi Ma Kai Men.

A: *Who is Kashi?*

K: Me.

A: *Is Kashi a head (or leader)?*

K: A head. Yes. Then we are talking. David, Wang Xiaobao and Tiantian.

A: *Oh. They four are discussing inside...*

When Kevin mentioned again that he was Moshila, a powerful dinosaur, he asked his father to show me the disc *The Decisive Battle among Three Monsters*. Therefore, I had the chance to watch the Japanese adventure film about three cartoon dinosaurs. Kevin was quite familiar with this film (using William's words, "he can recite the films about dinosaurs.") Kevin told me about the characters, plot, and climax of the films occasionally while he was playing with his toys.

During the show time, Kevin also brought out two of his own books. These were Chinese children's Encyclopedia about animals and stars. Kevin told me about these books in his usual way. He labeled the animals, pointed out their typical or strange characteristics, explained the relationships between animals, and sometimes he asked me questions such as "do you know why...?" He would quickly answer his own questions without waiting for my answer. Actually, most of the questions I could not answer

他挺直腰板，两手拿着书本，书的距离放在比他光看书时要远一些。（这是中国小学生诵读时的标准姿势。他模仿他妈妈的语调读书；从他的表现我可以很清楚地看到他是正在读书而不是讲述。

他先读一小段，然后接下来讲解一下，接着又假装读一段。虽然他没有真正读书上的文字，他的朗读与书中的内容非常吻合，因为书之中的插图为他提供了线索。

correctly! I asked Kevin who talked to him about the animals in these books. He said, “Mom.” Then he started to pretend reading the pages of the book by mirroring his mother’s acting.

Kevin straightened his back and held the book right in the middle with his two hands. When pretending to read, Kevin held the book further from him than the times when he was talking about the book (This may be the standard posture required for the elementary students as they are reading.) He imitated his mother’s tone to “read” the book; I know he is reading the book instead of talking because of the style he demonstrated. He “read” a short paragraph, and then paused to give an explanatory talk; after that, he pretended to “read” again. Even though he did not really read the words in the page, the meaning of his “reading” quite matched the meaning of written paragraph, since the pictures on the page gave him the cues for the written words.

(Transcript: December 11, 2002; Session 4)

The above description is one example of the sessions I observed Kevin’s play at home. It represents a very typical play session at home, which predominately involved retelling picture book stories and playing with toys and props. Rowe’s (1998) research reveals that children use book-related play as a strategy to interpret and make personal sense of books. Kevin’s book-related play helped him sort out an author’s message, explore

the points of view of characters, and conduct inquires into matters of personal interest.

From this play session, emerged four characteristics of the connections between the child's play and literacy activities at home.

***Play, book comprehension, and literacy practice.*** Play activities helped Kevin to comprehend and practice what he has learned from books. As illustrated in this play session, by building a concrete dinosaur world and a prehistoric period using his Lego materials and miniature figures, Kevin "assimilated" (Piaget, 1962) the information or knowledge about the dinosaur books into his own cognitive frame. He placed the different characters in their corresponding environments (e.g., the "primitive person" living in jungles and eating insects, but the archeologist living in a house with a heating system); he developed interaction (conflict) between the characters (the primitive person and the archeologist) in order to explore their relationships; and he applied his past experiences and knowledge of his home culture to make the remote world (a dinosaur age) portrayed in the books tangible and meaningful in his play context. The episode demonstrates that Kevin clearly understood and remembered in depth the content of the books. Fromberg (1999) discussed intervention studies concerning how play influences the recall of stories. Several investigators found that children's story comprehension improved after training in thematic fantasy play. Interventions that facilitated the ability to retell stories included role playing, rather than adult-led discussion (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982), peer-directed play (Pellegrini, 1984), repeated opportunities to play out stories in small groups (Williamson & Silvern, 1991), and an effective combination of fantasy, verbalization, and conflict



(Pellegrini, 1985). As children play out stories with a positive emotion, they can learn how stories are structured and organized. These story schemata, in turn, help children to focus on important aspects of story and to predict what will happen next, resulting in better story comprehension. Using book-related dramatic play, Kevin actively constructed both the meanings conveyed in books and the structures of different stories.

Further, through play, Kevin also practiced the literacy activities he observed in his daily home life. For example, in this home visit, I observed Kevin pretending to read. Even though he did not recognize the words on the pages of his book, the words he pretended to read clearly demonstrated how he constructed knowledge about written language, that is, print carries meaning, written messages must correspond with oral language, and written language is predictable. Linguists have proposed ways in which play may help children perfect newly acquired language skills and increase conscious awareness of linguistic rules (Cöncü & Klein, 2001). An example is the following occasion when Kevin and his peers used language play to describe the appearance of the aliens in their play theme, "The Attack from Aliens":

KEVIN: This is the aliens' base. They will drink water here.

ANNA: *What do the aliens look like?*

KEVIN: Some are square.

ANNA: Some are square? How about others?

KEVIN: Some look like other animals.

ANNA: *Oh.*

WANG: Some have ball-like heads.

KEVIN: Some are, some look like the head of donkeys.

WANG: Some look like a head that can blow fire.

DAVID: Some look like the head of an insect.

KEVIN: Some look like the head of a dragon.

TIAN: Some look like the head of a dinosaur

KEVIN: Some look like the head of a grass; some look like the head of a flower

(spoke very fast)

WANG: Some looks like the head of a hand.

DAVID: Hu Suo Ba Dao (A Chinese idiom which means talking foolishly)

ANNA: (laughter)

KEVIN: Some, has a hand on his head

WANG: Some has a wood on his head.

KEVIN: Now drain the water. The aliens will die.

(Transcript: March 20, 2003; Session 7)

In this play episode, Kevin and his peers seemed to enjoy using language play to practice the sentence structure "Some look like ..." and use varied vocabulary to demonstrate their rich and active imagination. Another example involving language play with peers follows:

After Kevin completed his own house using blocks, I asked what the name of his house was. He thought for awhile and then put two airplane models beside the

house. "This house is 'Ji Fang' (which means a hangar) because there are airplanes here." Wang then put a car near his house and claimed his house was "Che Fang" (which means a garage). Wang suddenly found a plastic dinosaur and reclaimed that his house was a "Kong Long Fang" (which means a dinosaur's house). Kevin shortened the name "Kong Long Fang" to "Long Fang" and "Kong Fang", and then shifted to "Kong Bu Fang" (which means a haunted house). The two children giggled when they played with the names of their houses.

(Transcript: January 29, 2003)

The above vignettes are evidence of Cöncü and Klein's (2001) statement, "Play provides a superior context within which children may gain valuable language practice as they experiment with the meaning, structure, and function of language" (p. 32). As such, play enables children to demonstrate what they know about literacy, as well as enabling them to actively participate in literacy learning (Barratt-Pough & Rohl, 2000).

Play also provides a risk-free context for children's literacy exploration (Kendrick, 2003). Kevin held the idea from his parents' commentary that he could not read and write conventionally, so he was reluctant to read and write; nevertheless, play provided a context in which he could take risks and attempt reading and writing. On several occasions, if I suggested directly, "Let us write or draw something," Kevin always answered, "I can't." However, if I said, "let us play writing or drawing something," he did not hesitate to engage in these literacy-oriented activities, which sustained his interest over extended periods. Because play activities generate feedback under conditions of minimum risk, children may

acquire the ability to adjust themselves to higher levels of performance (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976). This is why, as Vygotsky (1978) explained, "In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself." (p. 552).

Although play may serve literacy learning in many ways (Christie & Stone, 1999; Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell, & Schmidt, 2000; Vukelich, 1994), after a critical review of the play-literacy literature, Roskos and Christie (2001) found that researchers in general paid little attention to how literacy might serve play, thus enhancing and deepening this significant life experience for children. As a counter-balance, Roskos and Christie posed questions such as: Do more advanced emergent readers and writers engage in more complex play that in turn boosts their intellectual power? How do early experiences with writing and reading impact different forms of play? Although it is beyond the scope of this study, to address these questions, there is evidence of literacy serving play.

*Literacy serving play scripts.* Not only does play serve as a vehicle for Kevin's literacy learning, there also is a reciprocal component whereby literacy enriches his play activities. In this study, a play script is the interrelated events of young children's pretense. From reading books, Kevin gained access to primary script material for his make-believe play. During my interviewing, I learned that every few weeks, William would ride a bicycle to a local public library and borrow the picture books Kevin requested. These books were mostly scientific information books that introduced a variety of animals all over the world and their evolution, different planets, or the prehistoric world that was full of dinosaurs and

primitive life forms. As evident from the transcript of Playing Dinosaur World, Kevin constructed a prehistoric world in which there were poisonous mushrooms, a primitive elephant with long hair, and a primitive person who ate insects such as snails. The setting (a prehistoric world) and the characters were all from the picture books he had just “read” with me. His play scripts were woven together with the information he attained from his reading. When he played with the cardboard house, one Arabic folktale emerged. Even though Kevin seemed not to remember the name of the story (perhaps it was a story told by his parents or caregivers a long time ago), he remembered aspects of the plot and details of the story, for example, the magic phrase “open, sesame” and the forty pirates who hid their treasures in a secret place. These details supported a more elaborated and expansive narrative in his play script.

On many subsequent occasions, Kevin continuously demonstrated this ability to flexibly weave stories and new concepts from his reading or parents’ story telling into his play scripts. For example, when Kevin had seen a coyote around his community, he was afraid of it because he heard that “coyotes attack kids, not adults.” So in his play, he tried to build a solid house to protect him from coyote attacks. He used the plot of the story “The Three Little Pigs” to enrich his play narrative.

Kevin waved a plastic tool up and down and said simultaneously, “I want to plaster, plaster the concrete. The concrete will be hard, very hard, and very hard. (The concrete) can’t be moved. When wolves (coyotes) are coming, they can’t knock down (the house). “Peng”, one wolf was killed by me.

I asked, "Oh is it because our house is made by concrete, so the wolf cannot knock it down?"

Kevin answered, "Yes."

The story sounded like one I knew, so I probed further, "If our house were made of straws, would it be knocked down by the wolves?"

Kevin's answer confirmed my guess, "That is a wooden house. If your house is grass (made with straws), it will be knocked down; (so) you run to bricks (the house made with bricks); if your brick house is knocked down, you run to the iron house."

(Transcript: December 20, 2002)

On one hand, Kevin used books to fuel his play. On the other hand, he was not simply acting out stories or the book content he was told or read, but creatively combined what he learned from stories or books into a play situation. Even though the science books Kevin read were not traditional tales or modern popular child's stories, which have very coherent plots, Kevin still actively looked for the relationship between animals and their living environment and elaborated on his own versions of dinosaur stories within the text of his play episodes. In the prehistoric world, Kevin added an appropriate character - an archaeologist - into his play scenarios (he was a fan of the movie "Jurassic Park"). Because the archaeologist came from a modern society Kevin was familiar with, he could design a lot of details for this character in his play such as building a house, placing a table, and installing a heating system. He also constructed a potential story conflict in his play, specifically, all the dangers the archeologist would face. In another play session at home,

Kevin directed vivid plots to demonstrate the potential conflicts as following:

Sitting on the floor of the living room, Kevin and I pretended to be two archeologists (or paleontologists) who were sweeping the dust covering the fossils of prehistoric animals (the plastic miniature animals) by using two toothbrushes.

Every 5 to 10 minutes, Kevin made a dangerous sound.

Kevin imitated a sound, "Dong, dong, dong."

"*What sound is it?*" I whispered.

"Maybe a dinosaur," Kevin's eyes sparked with excitement and mock fear.

"*It is so scared, a dinosaur...*"

"Don't move," Kevin interrupted my murmur, "If you keep still, the dinosaur will not see you. It is a Tyrannosaurus. Only if you do not move."

"*Oh, let's hold our breath,*" I suggested. (There is silence for awhile)

I whispered, "*Has it left?*"

Kevin answered in a whisper, "Yes." [...]

Several minutes later, Kevin imitated the howling of a wolf, "Wooooooo."

I pretended to be nervous.

Kevin comforted me, "Do not worry; I brought a gun with me." [...]

After 5 minutes, Kevin imitated another sound again, "Dong, dong, dong..."

I asked, "*Is a dinosaur coming again?*"

"No."

"*Then what is that sound?*"

“Luoooooooooooooooo, primitive people.”

*“Oh, the primitive people are coming, are they speaking with one another?”*

Kevin said, “Yes, they found our tent here. They want to eat us. Take an AX.”

*“Are we preparing to fight with them?”*

“Yes, hurry; they do not understand what you said.” [...]

(Transcript: February 2, 2003)

As evident in this session, Kevin not only enacted the original book contents or story plots, but also combined the characters, locations, and events he learned from books, movies, and daily life to create a completely novel drama. In other words, Kevin drew on different texts in his play. Some related observations are available in data reported by other researchers. For example, Kendrick (2003) reported a young Chinese girl’s ability to make intertextual links in her play. Another example is Dyson’s (1999) year-long ethnographic study in an urban first grade classroom; she documented the potential hybrid nature of even the earliest of children’s written texts. These data show that children both borrowed freely and embellished freely from diverse texts. This process in many ways resembles that which readers and writers use to link one text with another, and it is largely through these intertextual connections that children continue to develop as readers and writers (Bainbridge, Edwards & Malicky, 1996). Thus, Kevin’s ability to strategically use knowledge from a variety of resources to compose a play script enhances the process of becoming a good writer.

In short, I found that when I learned what Kevin had been reading I could better



understand his play script and narrative language. Similarly, from Kevin's play episodes, I could learn how much Kevin had gained from his book reading. Some studies document a powerful recursive relationship between play and literacy development within the classroom context of thematic learning centers (Fromberg, 1999). This study in this particular home context provides similar evidence.

*Play, literacy, and identity.* Adelman (1990) assumed that play allows children to explore the identity question of "What am I going to become in this world?" Kevin's case provides some evidence to support this assumption. Through play, Kevin explored and developed his own identity by imitating examples from the books he read and from the mass media he watched. As stated by Fernie, Davies, Kantor and McMurray (1993), "Individuals take themselves up as individuals through various discourses as they are made available in spoken and written form" (p. 98). By reading books and talking with his parents, Kevin knew that the fantastic dinosaur world was reconstructed by the work of archeologists who were knowledgeable people. Kevin also knew pirates were the kind of people who could have adventures on capricious seas because they were physically strong. These characters embodied the type of identity this young boy was pursuing. Kevin proclaimed himself as an archeologist or the head of pirates in his play, which revealed his perception of power as knowledge, wisdom, and masculinity. He seemed to make an effort to build himself up as the powerful characters by acting out these roles in his play. As demonstrated in the previous vignette, when Kevin took on the role of an archaeologist, he became an authority who knew everything that happened in his environment.

Fernie et al. (1993) point out that for the purposes of establishing gender identity, the areas of similarity and overlap between what a male person is and might be and what a female person is and might be are excluded and even negated. This simplification is evident not only in the content of talk, but also in discursive and interactive processes themselves and in the texts used with young children, including the narrative structures, metaphors, and images constructed through characters. Kevin was knowledgeable about the stereotypical male and female roles from the texts he encountered, and he practiced these stereotypes in his play activities. To illustrate, in several play episodes (see, for example, the next selected play session on the playground), Kevin assigned me the role of a weaker character who needed to be protected because of my female identity, even though I was larger and older than him. As a boy, Kevin had an awareness of his masculine identity of being strong, brave, and intelligent.

In her study, "Literacy, Gender, and Work," Solsken (1993) suggests that gender is centrally involved in the dynamics of individual children's literacy learning. For example, through their close relations with mothers, girls remain more affiliated with adult culture and its rules than boys do. As a result, the girls in her study had a desire for adult-like literacy performance (i.e., fluency and accuracy). Nevertheless, for the boys whose mothers assumed the primary responsibility for children's literacy learning within the family, literacy involved tension between connectedness and separation in the relationship of mother and son. Consequently, the boys tended to construct literacy in their own playful way, possibly to assist their independence and male identity. This gives a possible

explanation to Kevin's aggressive leading in our interactions in storybook-related dramatic play. Moreover, it may explain Kevin's lack of engagement in his mother's reading and writing instruction and his involvement in constructing his written knowledge in play activities.

***Play, literacy, and home culture.*** The parents' attitudes towards Kevin's play and literacy life were evident in their interactions with their son. For example, William was a constant supporter of Kevin's play and reading activities. He fostered his son's enthusiasm about the world of dinosaurs by borrowing many related picture books from the local library on a weekly basis and by producing props such as the shadow play of dinosaurs. In this session, he deliberately asked his son, "What will you do after you grow up?" which was indicative of his encouragement for Kevin to pursue his own interest. Julie also actively engaged in Kevin's literacy and play life. From Kevin's pretend reading and follow-up conversation with William, I learned that Julie regularly told stories or read books to Kevin. If it was Julie's turn to look after Kevin, she was much like a "big kid" who played with Kevin by "laughing and rolling together."

### ***Conclusion: Characterizing Kevin's At-home Play***

Kevin's dramatic play at home provides rich evidence of his literacy learning at home. Play functions as a context within which Kevin can explore the world of books. In turn, the world portrayed in books enriches Kevin's play, helping him develop and process scripts. In this reciprocal process, Kevin is not a passive acceptor or reflector, but an active constructor, like a good reader and writer who can make and create meaning throughout

diverse texts. The incorporation of different texts in Kevin's play script can be characterized by Dyson's concept of "hybridization" (2001). Through examining children's appropriations of diverse cultural materials for composing school writing, Dyson concluded that recontextualization processes undergirded developmental pathways into school literacy.

At the same time, Kevin constructed his identity by casting himself as a highly literate person and a powerful male character in play. The images of his preferable roles mostly derived from his cultural context and the written texts he enjoyed. Thus, all his play and literacy behaviour is unavoidably affected by his home culture, particularly, his parents' views and values of play and literacy. Simply put, Kevin's play life at home is an integration of his literacy ability and his identity.

### ***Play on the Playground***

The community Kevin lives in is specifically designed for families with children. The wide green lawns spreading throughout the community offer ample room for children of all ages to get out and stretch their legs. Besides numerous scattered facilities for children such as swings, slides, and seesaws, there are four areas equipped with big jungle gyms and sand boxes. Furthermore, the children living here can easily find their peers on the playground. Kevin is one of the active players on the playgrounds. Unless he is not feeling well, he will play outside at least three to four hours a day. Kevin also has his core peer group on the playground, all of whom are boys. Because of the open space and familiar playmates on the playground, Kevin's playground play scripts tend to be more

expansive and elaborate than those play scripts he develops at home, such as in the following play session.

### 与原始人战斗

这是一个风和日丽的下午，我猜想小朋友们一定在外边的游戏场里玩。当我走向游戏场时，远远看见凯文和王小宝在沙场中的大型游乐架上玩。朱丽叶，王小宝的爸爸，还有李阿姨在一旁聊天。朱丽也看见了我就过来打招呼。凯文让王小宝来叫我和他们一起玩。我接受了他们的邀请。两个男孩争先恐后的同我说话。

凯文先是假装这个的大型玩具架是一个城堡，然后假装它是一个救火车。凯文爬上架板向我介绍里面的设施。

凯文：上面有个东西很好。看啦，这里有个机关。就这个地方，我们一按，我们就，有个地方着火了，我们就从这儿下去。

安娜：哦，我们可以顺着这个杆滑下去。

凯文：这玩意儿，这玩意儿，一按，大门就开了。。一按，大门就关上。

王小宝：跟我上来。

### *Fighting with primitives.*

It was a sunny afternoon and I thought that children would be playing on the playground. When I walked to the playground, I saw that Kevin and Wang Xiaobao were playing around the jungle gym located on the sand. Julie was talking with Wang Xiaobao's father and Mrs. Li. Julie saw me and started to chat. Kevin sent Wang Xiaobao to ask me to play with them. I accepted their invitation. Two boys began talking to me with me simultaneously, competing for my attention.

Kevin first pretended the jungle gym was a castle, and then was a fire truck. He climbed on the deck and explained,  
K: Here is a good thing. Look at it. There is a button. Here, we press it; we will... if there is a place on fire, we will go down from here.

A: *Oh, we can quickly go to the fire truck [by using this equipment].*

K: This thing, this thing, when pressing it, the door will open, press it, the door will close.

W: come up with me (Wang Xiaobao also climbed on the deck)

安娜：好的（我跟着王小宝爬上了架板）。

王小宝：我的城堡不怕火。

凯文：安娜，这儿有个楼，这个楼，有一个管道嘛，接这个管子，这水管，谁就从这儿流下去了。我们这管子嘛，传到那沼泽地底下去了。哦，我们都得下去，都得做个东西过去。

安娜：哦。

王小宝：我们都得游泳过去。

（凯文滑下）

安娜：从沼泽地游过去？

凯文：安娜，赶快下来。

安娜：好的。

王小宝：你就从这儿下吗？（王小宝指着滑梯）

安娜：我就从这儿下。

（安娜边笑边滑下）

王小宝：我也来了。（王小宝跟着滑下）

这时另外两个小男孩也来到游戏架上玩。一个看上去像欧洲移民，一个像南美移民。因为他们说的英语都有很重的口音。

王小宝：（指着安娜的话筒采访录音机）这是你的枪，好吗？

安娜：这是我的话筒。

王小宝：假装是枪。

安娜：我们假装它是枪？我们拿枪干什么？

王小宝：“砰砰砰。”（王小宝假装射击

*A: Ok (I climbed on the deck).*

*W: My castle does not fear the fire.*

*K: Anna, here is an attic. (In) this attic, there is a pipe (Kevin pointed to a slide bar).*

*Through this pipe, the water will run from here. This pipe goes to the underground of a swamp. Oh, we all have to go down. We all need to make something to go out.*

*A: Oh.*

*W: We all have to swim through it (Kevin slid down)*

*A: From the swamp?*

*K: Anna, hurry down.*

*A: OK.*

*W: Do you go down from here? (Wang Xiaobao pointed to the slide.)*

*A: I will go down from here (I slid down while screaming and laughing).*

*W: I am coming (Wang Xiaobao also slid down).*

*(Another two boys came to the jungle gym to play. One looked East European; another looked South American.)*

*W: (pointed to Anna's audio machine) it is your gun, ok?*

*A: This is my mike.*

*W: Pretend.*

*A: [We] pretend it is my gun? What will we do with the gun?*

*W: "Dong, dong, dong." (Wang Xiaobao pretended to shoot at the two boys)*

才来的两个小男孩)

凯文: 安娜, 这玩意儿是猿人...(指着一根吊绳)。

王小宝: 你就体验那个“悠悠悠”, 就悠到下面, 你就跳下来。

安娜: 哦。

凯文: 这玩意儿就是你发现原始人, 你就用这个悠。

安娜: 哦, 你们是说像猿猴一样, 拿着这根吊绳荡来荡去, 是吧?

凯文: 是的。哦, 你看那人, (指着那两个正在我们头顶得横杆上爬行的小男孩。) 这些都是猴子, 这个是树干。

王小宝:: 他们是猴子。“砰砰砰”, (王小宝假装朝两个男孩射击。)

凯文: “砰砰砰”, 他们是原始人, 让我们抓住他们。

这两个男孩比凯文 和王小宝要高大一些, 所以当他们的从滑梯上下来时, 凯文和王小宝就从游戏架边逃跑了。凯文跑向游戏场另一边的小木屋。

凯文: 到这儿来, 这儿很好玩啦。

安娜: 你想玩办家家?(安娜和王小宝一起朝小木屋走去)

凯文: 是的。歇一会儿吧, 安娜。(凯文邀请我走进那个小屋子。)

安娜猫着腰走进这个小屋。

K: Anna, this thing (Kevin points to a hanging rope) apes...

W: You will experience that “swing, swing, swing”, then swing until coming down, then you jump down.

A: Oh.

K: this thing is when you find primitive people; you will use this thing to swing.

A: You mean using this rope to swing like apes, is that right?

K: Yes. Oh, see that guy (pointing to the two boys who are moving on an overhead bar by creeping) they are monkeys. That is a branch.

W: They are monkeys; “Peng” (He pretended to shoot at them).

K: “Pang, pang, pang”. They are primitive people, [so let’s] catch them.

(The “foreign” two boys were older and taller than Kevin and Wang Xiaobao. When they came down, Kevin and Wang escaped from the jungle gym. Kevin ran to the wooden playhouse and waved toward Anna and Wang Xiabao.)

K: Come here, it is really fun.

A: Do you want to play house? (Anna and Wang walked to the playhouse.)

K: Yeap. Have a rest, Anna. (Kevin invited me to enter into the playhouse)  
(I crouched my back and went into the mini-house.)

王小宝：我从窗子进来（王小宝从一个小窗口爬进来）

我们都坐在小木屋的长木凳上。小木屋中间是一张木桌子。

凯文：做饭了。我们来做饭（凯文用小铲子铲沙子在桌上）

王小宝：看我做饭，这样做饭。（王小宝用他的塑料小筛子筛沙子。一些小石子出现在上面。凯文也学着王小宝的样用他的小铲子筛沙子。）

凯文：快来吃，快来吃，安娜（凯文把那些小石子收集起来放在桌上。）

安娜：你这是做的什么呢？

凯文：这是小，大米饭。

王小宝：大米饭。菜是我做的。

安娜：哦，你做的菜。

王小宝：白菜。

安娜：哦，白菜。（王小宝想把白菜弄点到凯文面前）

凯文：不用，我不用。（凯文弄了另外一些沙子在那堆小石子上）加点盐。

王小宝：我加点。。。我加一点糖----

（凯文在地上拾起一片树叶，并包了一些沙子，递给安娜）送给你，饺子，好材料，你先吃点。

W: I come in from the window (Wang Xiaobao climbed in from one of the windows. We all sat on a bench. There was a wooden table in the middle of the room.)

K: Prepare a dinner. We are preparing dinner. (Kevin shoveled a scoop of sand on the wooden table).

W: Look at how I cook, cook like this. (He used his sifter to screen the sand).  
(Kevin also shook his plastic shovel so that some small stones appeared on the surface.)

K: Have these, have these, Anna (Kevin separated the small stones from the surface of the sand and put them in front of me).

A: *What are you cooking?*

K: This is... rice.

W: Rice. But I prepare the vegetables.

A: *Oh, you are preparing the vegetables.*

W: A cabbage.

A: *Oh, a cabbage.*

(Wang Xiaobao attempted to give the prepared "cabbage" to Kevin)

K: I don't need it. (Kevin added some sand to the heap of sand on the table.) Add a little salt.

W: Then I add a little... I add a little sugarrrrr...

(Kevin picked up a leaf from the ground, wrapped some sand and handed it to me)

K: Give it to you, a dumpling. It is made of good material. You try it first.



安娜：让我先尝尝，好哇，好味道，有一点麻，有一点辣，还有一点甜。

(凯文 又找到一块树皮。)

凯文：这是一种盘子。

安娜：哦，这是一种盘子。

王小宝：我也有一个盘子（舞动他的小塑料筛子）。

凯文：我告诉你们，原始人这种动物，他吃虫子。

王小宝：我们加点面包粉。

安娜：好，谢谢你。那我们的菜里有没有虫子呢？

凯文：没有的，没有的，我们不会吃虫子。

王小宝：再给你一点糖。

凯文：安娜，我要给你包饺子。

安娜：哦，你要包饺子。

王小宝：我要给你包包子。

安娜：哇，我今天可真幸福。

王小宝：来，我给你加点盐。

安娜：好的，我来你们家做客，你们招待我。

(那两个小男孩互相追逐穿过这个小木屋。)

王小宝：啊，他们也进来了。

凯文：他们也要做客。

安娜：你们想进来玩吗？

那个欧洲人模样的小男孩回答说：不想，不想。然后他们从窗户爬了出去。

*A: Err; let me taste it, yup, and good taste, a little bit spicy and a little bit sweet.*

(Kevin found a piece of bark.)

K: This is a type of plates.

A: Oh, this is a plate.

W: I also have a plate (waving his plastic screen).

K: I tell you, the primitives are animals. They eat insects.

W: We add a little bit flour.

A: Ok. Thank you. Are there insects in our meal (joking)?

K: No, no, no. We can't eat insects.

W: I will add some sugar for you.

K: Anna, I will make more dumplings for you.

W: I will make a Cha Shako Boa (a steamed stuffed bun) for you.

A: Wow, I am so happy today.

W: Come, I will add more salt for you.

A: Ok. I am your guest today. You are treating me.

(The two "foreign" boys chased each other through the wooden house.)

W: Huh, they are coming in.

K: They want to be guests too.

A: Do you guys want to join us?

The European boy answered with a strong accent: I don't want...I don't want (Then they ran out of the wooden house through the window).

凯文：我要去搬个大木头。（凯文走出小木屋去移动几个短原木。）我们把这个当柴火。

安娜：哦，当柴火。

王小宝：我们现在假装是黑天，好吗？

凯文：好，现在是晚上。

（凯文搬了另一块木头进来。木头很沉，凯文搬得很费劲。）

安娜：哇，我们需要这么多柴火吗？

王小宝：这一块可以用来当门。

（凯文出去搬第三块木头。）

安娜：（安娜走出小木屋）你需要帮忙吗？

凯文：不用了。（凯文把三块木头堆在一个屋角。）

王小宝：我们用一块当门。

凯文：好的。我们在门上贴张纸。

安娜：为什么要要在门上贴张纸？

凯文：我妈妈贴.....

王小宝：纸上有个字。

安娜：哦，你们是说帖福字。

凯文：是的，福，倒过来。

正在这时，那个欧洲小男孩又跑进小木

K: I will bring a big piece of wood. (Kevin went out to move a piece of cut wood). We pretend it as our firewood.

A: *Oh, pretend it is our firewood.*

W: We pretend now is night, is it ok?

A: *Ok, now it is night.*

(Kevin moved the second piece of wood in. The wood was heavy, so he moved it arduously.)

A: *Wow, do we need so much firewood?*

W: This piece can be used as a door, use one as the door.

(Kevin went out for the third piece of wood.)

A: *(I went out of the house and said) Do you need my help?*

K: No, thanks. (Kevin placed the three pieces of wood in the corner of the room)

W: We use one as our door.

K: Ok, [we] post a piece of paper on the door

A: *Why do we post a piece of paper on the door?*

K: My mom did that.

W: There is a character on the paper.

A: *Oh, you mean the character "Fu" (Which means luck.)*

K: Yes, Fu, upside down (Chinese post the character "Fu upside down which means luck is coming and they do that for a coming new year day)

The European boy entered the house again.

He sat on the bench and pretended to eat the

屋。他一下坐在长木凳上，假装吃桌上的“饭菜”。凯文吃惊的望着他，脸上挂着害羞的微笑。他把一个“饺子”递给这个男孩。这个男孩接过饺子假装吃起来，还边吃边说，“姜面包。”

因为凯文和王小宝还没有上说英文的幼稚园，他们听不懂这个男孩在说什么，所以他们离开了这个小木屋。“我们去那边那个。”

另一个小木屋离这个大约有 10 米远。当我们刚走到那儿，两个小男孩又追逐了过来。

那个欧洲小男孩跑进了屋子中，假装锁上了门 并对那个南美洲小男孩叫道，“你进不来了。”

凯文 再次放弃了第二间小屋。他跑向游戏场另一角的圆顶型建筑。凯文钻进这个建筑并假装求救。

凯文：安娜，我掉进去了，我被抓住了。

安娜：你被抓住了？

凯文：土著人抓了我。

王小宝：瞧瞧我的厉害吧。我把土著人打掉。（假装用他的塑料小筛子砍钢条。）

安娜：你要去救他？

凯文：这个很硬，你打不开。

sand. Kevin looked at him with a shy and surprised smile. He handed a “dumpling” to the boy. The boy took it and pretended to eat while saying, “This is my gingerbread. This is my gingerbread.” Because Kevin and Wang Xiaobao did not go to an

English-speaking preschool, they could not understand what the boy said, so they abandoned the wooden house, “let’s go to another (wooden house) one.” The second wooden house was only 10 meters away from the first one. When we reached there, the two boys also chased each other there. The European boy ran into the house and pretended to lock the door and windows while shouting at the South American boy, “You can not enter into the house.”

Kevin then gave up the second wooden house and ran to another corner of the playground equipped with a dome of iron bars. Kevin got into it and pretended to ask for help.

K: Anna, I have been trapped. I have been caught.

A: *Have you been caught?*

K: The primitive people have caught me.

W: Look at me, I am a fearful person, I will knock down the primitives. (Wang XiaoBao pretended to cut the iron bars.)

A: *Do you want to save him?*

K: This (iron bar) is very hard. You can’t cut

安娜:哦,那我们得另想办法进来。

凯文:这儿有洞。可以从这洞钻进来。

那两个小男孩又互相追逐了过来。欧洲小男孩也钻进了这个建筑。凯文看上去有一些怕他们,所以赶紧溜了出来。

凯文:等等我,我出来了。。

安娜:(笑)你逃出来了?

凯文:他在那儿,他进来了。他是土著人,来看食物了。

王小宝“砰砰砰”。(王小宝假装朝那两个小男孩射击)

因为那两个小男孩不懂我们在说些什么。他们只顾自己玩,没有理会凯文和王小宝的射击。当这两个男孩追着跑开时,凯文和王小宝假装跟着他们后面射击。但是当那两个男孩回过头来看他们是,凯文和王小宝又吓得跑了回来。

安娜:(笑)你们又逃了回来了。

凯文:我们在这儿玩行吗,安娜?

安娜:我们玩什么呢?

凯文:我们玩原始人的游戏,行不行?

安娜:好哇,怎么玩呢?

凯文:我们假装那些人,当原始人。(凯文指着那两个在游戏架上玩的小男孩。)

安娜:那我们是什么呢?

凯文:我们是西部牛仔。

it down.

A: *Oh, we have to think of another way.*

K: There is a hole. You can creep in from the hole and save me.

(The European boy came and also got into the construction. Kevin looked afraid and quickly came out.)

K: Wait for me. I will come out.

A: *(laughter) You have escaped from it?*

K: He is here. He is a primitive person. He comes to look at his food.

W: Pang, pang, pang. (Wang Xiaobao pretended to shoot at the two boys.)

(Because the two boys did not understand what we were talking about, they played by themselves without reacting to Kevin and Wang Xiaobao's shooting. The two boys chased each other to the jungle gym. Kevin and Wang pretended to follow them with shooting, but when the boys turned to look at them, they screamed back.)

A: *(laughter) your guys came back again.*

K: Can we play here, Anna?

A: *What do we play?*

K: We play primitives, is that ok?

A: *Ok, how do we play?*

K: We pretend those people are primitives (Kevin pointed to the two boys who were playing on the jungle gym now.)

A: *So who are we?*

K: we are the Western cowboys.

王小宝：我是孙悟空。

凯文：孙悟空是在中国。

王小宝：他可以腾云驾雾。

凯文：好吧。

凯文和王小宝又假装射击远处的那两小男孩。

安娜：你们在展开枪战吗？

凯文：对，他们用箭，“塔塔塔。”我们打枪“咚咚咚。”

王小宝：我有月牙刀。很快。

那两个小男孩没有注意到我们这边的枪战。当一个小男孩从滑梯滑下时，凯文兴奋的叫道，“哇，打掉了一个。”

安娜：真的，有一个倒下了。

那个滑下的小男孩还在地上躺了一会儿。我不知道他们是否在反应凯文和王小宝的射击)

凯文：哦，我受伤了（假装在圆顶建筑上斜躺了一会儿。）

安娜：你怎么样？

W: I am Sun Wu Kong. (A popular monkey character from a traditional Chinese storybook "Xi You Ji").

K: Shun Wu Kong is in China

W: He can Teng Yue Jia Wu (which means mounting the clouds and riding the twist speeding across the sky).

K: Ok.

(Kevin and Wang Xiaobao pretended to shoot at the boys)

A: *Are you playing a battle?*

K: Yes. They are using arrows. "Ta, Ta, Ta" (Imitating the sound and the action of arrow-shooting). We are using a gun. "Pang, pang, pang". (Imitating the sound and the action of Pistol-shooting).

W: I have a Yue Ya Dao (which means a crescent sword.), very sharp.

(The two "foreign" boys did not notice that Kevin and Wang Xiaobao were pretending they were imaginary enemies. When a boy slid down from the jungle gym, Kevin cried excitedly, "wow, one is shot down.")

A: *really, one person has fallen down.*

(The boy who slid down was lying still on the ground for awhile. I was not sure if they were reacting to Kevin and Wang Xiaobao shooting or not.)

K: Ah... I am wounded (he pretended to be shot and leaned on the iron bars).

A: *Are you ok?*

(啊...王小宝 也假装受伤。安娜 不得不给他们治疗。)

他们在那儿微笑着躺了一会儿又很快复原了。

凯文: 安娜, 你在这里呆着, 我们看着你。

安娜: 那我是什么人?

凯文: 你也是西部牛仔。你就在这里头吧。这里安全。(凯文示意安娜 钻进园弧形建筑)

安娜: 哦, 我就在这里躲着, 是吧?

凯文: 是的。

安娜: 那这儿是什么地方呢?

凯文: 原始人的屋子。你进去吧, 你在这儿躲着, 有门, 你进这里头。

(安娜钻进园弧形建筑)。

凯文: (假装用“望远镜”看了看远处。)那有灰尘, 半边天。他们来了。我出去了。

凯文 假装骑马向前冲去, 王小宝也跟着向前冲去, 王小宝边冲边喊: “一往惯例, 一往惯例。”(一往无前)

大约经过 3-5 分钟的激烈战斗, 凯文和王小宝返回。

凯文: 鸣锣收兵。

(“Ahhhh,” Wang Xiao also pretended to be shot. I had to take the responsibility to “treat” them).

They leaned on the bars with a smile for a while and then were recovered from their wounds quickly.

K: Anna. You stay here. We will protect you.

A: *So who am I?*

K: you are one of the Western cowboys.

[You] stay inside of it. It is safe. (Kevin let me into the dome of iron bars).

A: *Do I have to hide inside of it?*

K: Yes.

A: *Where are we?*

K: The cowboy's camp, our home. You can hide here. This is a door. You can go in. (I squeezed into the construction.)

K: (pretending to look out using a telescope) There is dust, half day. They are coming. I am going out.

(Kevin pretended to ride a horse by charging forward and Wang Xiaobao followed Kevin with shouting out “Yi Wang Guan Li. Yi Wang Guan Li. (He was shouting out a Chinese idiom which was not exactly correct, but I interpreted it as” Yi Wang Wu Qian” (which means pressing forward with indomitable will).

After the 3-5-mintues of fierce shooting, Kevin and Wang Xiaobao came back.

K: Ming Luo Shou Bing (A Chinese

安娜：现在是和平时时代了吧？我们已经签订了和平共处的协议。（我感到有必要结束战斗，要不然家长们会感到非常诧异为什么我在鼓励暴力游戏。）

expression which means sounding the gongs to call off the army maneuvers).

*A: So it is time for peace. We already signed an agreement to live together. (I was relieved and attempted to end this battle because I did not want the parents misunderstanding that I was encouraging violent behaviour.)*

(Transcript: December 20, 2002; Session 5)

The playground not only provided Kevin with an open space to play, run, and explore, but it also offered a common area where peers gather together to construct play scripts. Similar to play at home, Kevin still applied a lot of book content (texts) in his play scripts; unlike play at home, Kevin did not manipulate his toys or puppets in the scene, but acted out the roles of play scripts by himself. Since there always were more people moving in and out of the playground, Kevin constantly incorporated or “improvised” (Sawyer, 2001) the changing factors into his own play. Moreover, because he was not the only player or writer of his play script, Kevin sometimes had to discuss or negotiate the scripts with others; therefore, Kevin’s play on the playground has many interesting characteristics such as a sense of stories, collaboration of play script writing, and decontextualized language, and integration of literacy and identity.

***Sense of stories in play narratives.*** The narratives Kevin produced in his pretend play revealed his sense of story. In the play session on the playground just presented, Kevin’s sense of story is evident from his narratives by his use of oral language and pretended actions. For instance, after experiencing the intervention of two other boys in his

imaginary territory, Kevin developed a new play script, “play fighting with primitives,” to include the two new characters. He cast his familiar playmates and himself as western cowboys who fought the imagined primitive people—the two “foreign boys.” The setting of the play script resembled a desolate area where nomadic people lived in tents. The play plots included being captured by primitive people, rescuing comrades, defending their home, protecting women, and wounding heroes. The climax was a fierce battle between the gun shooting group and the arrow shooting group and the resolution brought a cheer of triumph. This play script reflected Kevin’s understandings of the sequential structure and dramatic quality of a story, which demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of the story genre.

Narrative competence is an aspect of literate behaviour as defined by Heath (1982) and Scribner and Cole (1978). These researchers defined narrative competence as the ability to comprehend and produce characters’ actions, motives, goals and language consistent with a particular story line. As narrative competence develops, children acquire an integrative and interpretive framework to use in their encounters with literacy (Fein, 1989). Such competence involves an understanding of story events and actions as temporally sequenced and causally motivated. Using these characteristics may result in the creation of a coherent story. Research in emergent literacy suggests that children’s narrative competence emerges through and is enhanced by repeated experiences with narratives, including storybook reading (Hoffman, 1997), engaging in dramatic play (Kruger & Wolf, 1994; Walker, 1999), and participating in dramatic reenactments



(Williamson & Silvern, 1991). Dramatic play and oral narratives, especially of the sort produced by young children, have similar structures (Branscombe & Taylor, 2000; Bretherton, 1989; Galda, 1984; Pellegrini, 1985). For example, each involves pretending, temporal and causal motivations, problem solving, and characters. These features, in turn, reflect the narrative structure of many of the stories young children hear.

In this play script, Kevin also demonstrated the ability to develop a narrative by integrating the books he read, the movies he watched, and the daily life he experienced in his home culture. Kevin's narrative competence developed in his play context made it possible for him not only to understand how words and text convey meaning and to understand the mysteries of written stories, but also to experience imaginative ideas, new possibilities for doing things and diverse ways of thinking. These are the features of a good reader and writer. In many other playground scenarios such as "the Attack from Aliens," "the Policemen on Patrol," and "the Visit to the Seven Planets," Kevin played out the complicated and fantastic stories with such enthusiasm and spirit that his audience and co-authors (playmates) never got bored. The following example, "the Attack from Aliens," involves Kevin, David, Wang Xiaobao, Tiantian, and I.

K: This is a swamp. Come, you see, aliens, they are coming [to attack us].

A: *Where?*

K: (Pointing to the jungle gym) They are there. You go this way, David. There are aliens. Come with me, Anna.

(The other three children followed Kevin to run and scream).

K: Anna, you climb on it (the jungle gym), quick. I am on the ground, catch those on the ground. Da da da, (pretending to shoot the aliens).

A: *Where is it? (Pointing to the jungle gym)*

K: The aliens' home.

A: *Is it a flying saucer (UFO)?*

K: No. It is the aliens' base. We have the aliens' key.

W: The alien's key is in my hand.

K: In my hand (digging something). We dig this thing out. They all will die.

A: *Why?*

K: This thing is a thing for protecting them.

W: Their energy.

(Kevin dug up a small plastic funnel out of the sand).

K: Put it into our barrel. Come, follow us. All follow me. Anna, follow me.

(The four boys ran to a big rock on the lawn.)

K: Where are the aliens, Wang Xiaobao?

W: (After a pause, Wang Xiaobao pointed to the rock) In the ship shuttle.

K: (Kevin jumped on the rock and found a hole under a stone) The aliens' door, it is open.

(The four children encircled the hole and waved their tools to fight with the imaginary aliens.)

K: This is a reflective mirror (pointing to the camera I was using to take a picture of

the play scene). (Transcript: March 12, 2003)

In this play vignette, Kevin constructed a series of coherent plots and intensive conflicts which effectively attracted his playmates' attention and engagement. It seems that Kevin is capable of creating an interesting story which would likely be enjoyed by readers. Fein, Ardila-Rey, and Groth (2000) indicate that "narrative thought might well provide the connective tissue for a variety of literacy-linked activities ranging from socio-dramatic play, through storybook enacting and dialogic reasoning; from knowledge of print, pretend reading and writing to the real thing" (p. 29).

*Collaboration of play script writing (composing).* This play session also carries this message: Social pretending play involves the development of scripts that evolve collaboratively. In natural play settings, young children stimulate each other's imagination (Fromberg, 1999) and learn how to coauthor their stories (Kendrick, 2003). The negotiation processes provide a scaffold similar to that of an editor and author.

In the first part of the play sessions, Kevin and his peer Wang Xiaobao attempted to construct a play script "fire station and fire fighters" together. They pretended the jungle gym was the setting, a fire station, and Kevin specifically located it on a swamp (which was from one of his books). Then Kevin carefully described the equipment in the fire station and Wang Xiaobao always provided more explanation and added more details. However, the first author, Kevin, abandoned the initial play script due to other children's intervening in their imaginary fire station and chose to construct another play script—The Host of The House. The second author, Wang Xiaobao, accepted the new direction of their play script

and played a more active role in participating in this new play script.

In the wooden house, Kevin and Wang become the hosts of it and I was a visitor (which reflected the fact that I often visited his home). When Kevin handed me some imaginary food, Wang Xiaobao, in turn, presented me with another imaginary food treat. Kevin said that he was preparing rice and dumplings, while Wang Xiaobao claimed that he was preparing vegetables and Cha Shao Bao. When Kevin added some salt to the meal, Wang added some sugar. Here, one host, Wang Xiaobao, attempted to compete for the guest's attention and compliment by offering the food items that differed from Kevin's treats. This in turn urged Kevin to design new details or plots for their play script. As Kevin carried some wooden blocks for the "fireplace," Wang suggested immediately, "Let's pretend it is night" and "use one wooden block as the door of our house." The image of a door activated both of the boys' memory of a recent home culture literacy practice: posting a specific character on the door for celebrating a coming Chinese New Year Day. In effect, play provides a collaborative medium in which the children mutually developed scripts based on event knowledge, provided reciprocal scaffolding, practiced literacy skills, and further expanded and extended literacy use. This kind of interaction between peers in play can be understood with Gregory's notion of synergy, a "unique reciprocity whereby [peers] act as adjutants in each other's learning" (2001, p. 301).

In addition, many investigators (e.g., Howes & Matheson, 1992; Jarrold, Carruthers, Smith, & Boucher, 1994; Lillard, 1993) imply that the metacommunication children use in order to maintain the play frame makes it possible for children to move

between their own role and their peers' role interpretations. In particular, pretend play with others provides opportunities to build and expand mental representations by requiring pretenders to (1) negotiate (e.g., decide the topic of and roles within the pretend play), (2) reconcile conflicting views, (3) take on different perspectives (e.g., the role of the character being played), and (4) act out emotional situations (Lillard, 1998). Take the example of "Play Fighting with Primitives." When Kevin was trapped in an imaginary camp (geodesic dome) and Wang wanted to rescue him by cutting an iron bar, Kevin said it would not work by explaining that "this (iron bar) is very hard." While Wang cast himself as Shun Wu Kong, Kevin objected to it at first but accepted Wang's explanation at last. These two boys actually were negotiating the plots and roles of their play script with each other in order to reconcile conflicting views. Thus, play presents a setting for children to expand their understanding of their own mental states and those of others. This is the essential quality for a good reader and writer. A good reader needs to understand the feelings, desires, beliefs, and intentions of a writer in order to comprehend the written pieces appropriately. Similarly, a good writer needs to predict the reader's background knowledge so that the written work is understandable. Therefore, the ability to adopt alternate points of view, which is developed during peer play, allows Kevin to adopt the perspective of authors or illustrators as well as that of their characters.

*Decontextualized and book-like language.* The language used in Kevin's dramatic play is characterized as decontextualized language (using language in ways independent of the immediate situation) and book-like language (using written words instead of oral words).

in conversation to produce language features associated with written language).

For pretending to occur, social dramatic play demands explicit and elaborated language; it is the opportunity to use language in these ways that may have important consequences for literacy development. In the playground session "Fighting with Primitives," play offered different scenarios for Kevin to act out and talk about. The places and times such as a western desert and the prehistoric period are beyond "here and now;" the characters such as primitive people and cowboys in the scenario are not simply "you and me;" and the objects such as arrows, guns and tents in the play are transformed beyond "this and that." Accordingly, the language used in play is different from the children's own oral expression in a real life situation. For example, in this play episode, Kevin pretended, "I am trapped. He is a primitive person. He comes to look at his food." and Wang proclaimed, "I am Shun Wu Kong. I am a fearful person." When Kevin pretended to watch for the movement of the attackers, he made a comment like an experienced cowboy, "There is dust, half day. They are coming." These expressions sound like story language, not the typical conversational language of two four to five-year-olds. Kevin usually made an effort to modify his language to adapt to the play scenarios and characters. Kevin's play activities mostly belong to fantastic childhood drama (Corsaro, 1985) that involves taking on roles which they cannot be expected to encounter in later life (e.g. pirates). Pellegrini (1984) and Pellegrini and Galda (1991) suggest that the symbolic nature of play trains children to use explicit language because players had to define verbally the play roles and props to make their representative meaning clear to other children.

The book-like language used in play also supports play scenarios by precisely and elaborately expressing the complexity of dramatic play. The book-like language that they applied in play was usually spontaneous and very much suited to the situation. For example, Wang and Kevin respectively used two Chinese literary idioms in the play script "Fighting with Primitives." Although Wang did not say the idiom "Yi Wang Wu Qian" (which means pressing forward with indomitable will) correctly, the use of this idiom is appropriate in this play scene. Stimulated by Wang's expression, Kevin also used a Chinese idiom "Min Luo Shou Bing" (which means sounding the gongs to call off the army maneuvers). These idioms precisely and vividly describe a war scene. When I mentioned to Julie Kevin's use of book-like language in his play scripts, she provided more examples of play occasions in which Kevin borrowed written words from the books he has been read. For instance, Kevin used the term "Piao Fu" (which means floating) in playing Sea World and described hooves of a goat as "Feng Li" (which means very sharp) while playing Kevin's Farm. The play situation seemed to encourage Kevin to try out the written-language he gained from books and to transform book language into the oral language of dramatic play.

***Cultural content in play scripts.*** Kevin's play and literacy practices were carried out in a culturally specific way. A socio-cultural perspective takes the position that the contents of dramatic play depend on cultural and contextual factors (Lancy, 2002; Miller, Fernie & Kantor, 1992). While he argues against the assumption that children have unlimited imagination, Lancy points out that children's make-believe and, by extension, other play forms are constrained by the roles, scripts, and props of the culture they live in.

Thus different environmental experiences, available resources, and historical and cultural expectations affect children's perceptions, practices, preferences, and achievements in distinct ways (Seefeldt, 1999). In Kevin's play with his peers on the playground, the content of their play script reflected (or was constrained by) their cultural way of daily life. When playing cooking, Kevin and Wang consulted their own cultural food (traditional Chinese food such as rice, Chinese cabbages, dumplings and Cha Shao Baos). It is interesting that the European boy claimed the same meal on the table was Western food, specifically, gingerbread. In another play episode, Kevin's way of cooking was also typical Chinese style.

Kevin pretended to pour some oil in the bowl and imitated the loud sound of the moment when the vegetables are put into the hot pot (this is the Chinese way to cook vegetables). Julie laughed and said that Kevin was in fact afraid of the moment when the oil hit the hot pot. I said, "me too when I was young." (Transcript: December 28, 2002)

Another cultural aspect of Kevin's play is the use of Chinese idioms exemplified before. Since the expression contained in idioms is intricately linked to each individual culture, learning and using a Chinese written idiom demands an understanding of the historical background of the phrase. Mostly, there is a short story behind each Chinese idiom (they are all formed by four Chinese characters). Like many Chinese parents, Kevin's parents deliberately told Kevin these stories in order to elaborate literary expression and to offer a humorous and fascinating insight into China's cultural history. In



Kevin's play with his core peer group, I was often surprised by their use of these idioms in their play. They used idioms such as "Yi Yi Dang Shi" (putting one against ten), "Zhang Ya Wu Zhao" (saber rattling), and "Dao Qiang Bu Ru" (invulnerability to guns and swords).

The third identified cultural concept of Kevin's play is the episode of posting the character "Fu" in a special festival, which provided evidence of how Kevin and Wang actively constructed their cultural literacy knowledge in their play. When their parents were preparing the traditional ceremony for a New-Year Day, they would experience a variety of literacy practices such as writing Du Lian (which means couplet), sending Red Bags (a red envelop with money), and preparing Lucy Dumplings (baked rice dumplings with a stripe of writing paper for blessing). Kevin often uses his play to further experience those practices. In the play of Tomb-Sweeping Day, for example, Kevin said that he was sending his "mother's mother" (who passed away a few years' ago) a letter by pretending to burn it. While pretending to fly a kite, Kevin said that he would draw his wish on a piece of paper and attached it to the kite so that his wish could be realized.

On the other hand, according to the definition of culture I discussed in Chapter One, Kevin's home culture is a mixture of his Chinese origin and his Canadian life experiences. For instance, the content of play fighting between Western cowboys and primitive people was derived from the movies and TV shows he watches at home. In another example, when Kevin, Wang Xiaobao, and I played drawing together, the theme of their drawing focused on Halloween as the following conversation demonstrates:

W: Look, look, look at this... (Pointing to his own drawing)

A: *What is this?*

W: This is a round thing; I do not know what it is?

A: *I think it is a bucket.*

W: Looks like a thing for hanging a Halloween thing.

K: This animal has a round head, a big body, and then a claw likes this (Kevin was talking while drawing)

A: *Wow, it really looks like a person. These are feet, hands, and a head. Can you write the Chinese character "Ren"?*

(Kevin did that.)

K: This is a skeleton, for Halloween.

W: Mine is also for Halloween. (Transcript: December 15, 2002)

Kevin only experienced his first Halloween a short time ago, but as a result of his peer's influence, he began to explore this new cultural event in his drawing and play. He was also willing to write a Chinese character to label what he had drawn. This combination of the mixed cultural aspects reflects the complexity of a multicultural society in the lives of young immigrants. Through dramatic play, the children expressed their understanding of the multicultural community and practiced the harmony of the coexistence of the different cultures and literacies. Many young immigrants like Kevin are experiencing diverse cultures, languages, and literacies. The internal tensions caused by these differences are difficult to express since young children often lack opportunities for expression. Play, however, provides them an optimal tool to release tension, as well as to find a way to

grapple with differences.

*Literacy, culture, and identity in play.* As the children become familiar with the cultural norms of their family and community, the literacy events they are involved in and the play practices they engaged in also shaped their identity. In the food cooking episode, for example, Kevin and Wang took on the role of hosts to treat a guest. This reflected one of China's traditional customs that people are socialized through family parties and feasts. Kevin and Wang acted like their parents, continually inviting their guest to try different food and to eat more. They also posted the character "Fu" as a symbol of a festival to prepare for a traditional event. Through these play and literacy activities, they were developing a sense of themselves as independent and highly valued members of the family, with significant contributions to make to the family activities. As McNaughton (1995) stated, "families socialize children into their literacy practices, which reflect and build social and cultural identities" (p. 33).

Further, children's identity develops through interaction with others in their society. Through the repeated social interaction afforded by play, children learn important lessons about themselves as well as others. Norton (2000) found that an individual's identity in a group is related to his or her ability to gain symbolic resources such as language, education, and friendship. Kevin's interpretation of texts and his use of reading as a means of learning helped him solve problems effectively. Therefore, Kevin built his powerful role within his peer group by contributing his book knowledge and imagination to play scripts. Kevin was well aware of his advantage in symbolic resources and even claimed proudly, "they all

want to play with me because I have a lot of knowledge.” As a result, he always suggested the play themes and directed the play activities. From Fire Station to Host House to Western Cowboy, Kevin took the role of the director and main character throughout his play sessions. Sometimes, when other peers initiated a new play theme, he would try to change it to his own play agenda or strategically become the first author of it. To illustrate, there was an occasion that Wang Xiaobao and I were shoveling sand into many containers (e.g. an empty egg box) in order to play grocery store. However, Kevin wanted us to play policemen.

K: I will break the eggs. (Kevin destroyed the egg box.)

A: *Why do you break the eggs?*

K: I am a bad guy.

A: *Oh.*

W: I am a good guy. I put in the cookies for you (Wang continued to fill in the cookie box).

K: I will break them. Hei hei hei (Two boys laughed).

A: *I am a good guy. I do not allow you to do bad things.*

K: (Kevin rode on the toy horse near us) I am getting in my car and escaping (imitating the sound of the motor cycle).

W: Shoot him.

K: You can't. It is a swift horse.

W: He broke them (the containers).

K: I am a Black-cloth knight. (Transcript: March 14, 2003)

The above episode shows how Kevin directed the flow of the interaction with purposeful misbehaviour in a play context and hence continued to exert his leading position. However, in order to keep the play activities going smoothly, Kevin sometimes had to acknowledge his peers' point of views and he sometimes accepted their suggestions. To illustrate, consider the play episode "Policemen on Patrol":

K: We are policemen.

A: *I am a police officer.*

K: Officer, officer (pretended to talk with a talkie while attempting to run away).

A: *Yes. I am an officer. I will make an order. The policeman Kevin...*

K: Bao Gao Da Wang (Which means reporting to our head)

A: *Speaking.*

K: There is a bad guy. When I shut down the electricity, he came out from the electrical fence. He came out (Kevin seemed to want to run away).

A: *The policemen should obey their officer's order. You come back. Come.*

K: Obey the order. Do not allow them come.

A: *Now all policemen get into the police car (Pointing to the jungle gym). We will carry out our duties.*

Kevin and David climbed on the Jungle Gym and sat side by side.

D: This is our map (taking out a piece of paper from his pocket).

K: No.

*A: Do we need a map to see where the bad guys are?*

K: Yes, our map. (Transcript: February 6, 2003)

In this episode, since several toddlers were playing throughout the playground, I attempted to lead Kevin and his peers to sit down instead of running. Kevin was directing a play theme called Policemen, so I took advantage of playing an authoritative “police officer” to control his behaviour. Kevin accepted the superior role I took because he was aware of my maturity. However, he tried to deny his peer David’s suggestion in order to keep David in a subordinate role. As I stressed the importance of the map in our play, he changed his mind to accept David’s suggestion. This is what Corsaro (1985) describes as peer culture dynamics—issues of control and ownership, equity and hierarchy, friendship and inclusion, and power and leadership. Therefore, pretend play, in particular, play with peers, provides opportunities to be aware of all aspects of the self and others: consciousness, mind, intelligence, significant symbol, and human interaction (Mead, 1999).

### ***Conclusion: Characterizing Kevin’s Playground Play***

Kevin’s play on the playground is characterized by his sophisticated play scripts, including complex narrative and written language, and mutual stimulation between his peers and himself in constructing their common play themes, their shared cultural contents, and their identities. Moreover, since the playground is more dynamic than the home, the freely shaped play materials (such as sand) and the different people, Kevin used his knowledge of story structure to connect all the factors together in order to make sense of

the world around him through play. Peer culture is also very important in Kevin's play, which helps Kevin perceive his and others' positions in a society.

### ***Drawing, Playing, and Writing***

Piaget's (1962) symbolic function systems include oral, written and printed language, imagery, drawing, and pretend play. Vygotsky (1978) classified imagery, drawing, and oral language as first-order symbol systems, and written and printed language as second-order symbol systems. Play is the bridge ("pivot" in Vygotsky's terms), which connects the first-order symbol system with the second-order symbol system. Moreover, young children's drawing develops through several steps (Wolfe & Perry, 1989), which coincide somewhat with Piaget's (1962) stages of cognitive development and play development. First, children hold crayons, markers, or pens to explore what happens when they work with these materials (i.e., exploratory play). Second, they can imagine that the dots they made on a paper are flies or sesame seeds or that a circle is an egg (i.e., symbolic play). Third, they can plan what story they want to draw and map out on paper (i.e., dramatic play). Finally, they make efforts to follow some conventional rules to draw real objects (i.e., play with rules). In a descriptive study of children's play behaviour while drawing, Escobedo (1996) categorized drawing as play when children transformed objects for constructive and imaginative play. Therefore, for young children, play, drawing and writing often interweave with one another in their daily activities. In this study, I initiated drawing activities with Kevin to find out how he integrates play, drawing, and writing and to gain a broader understanding of his parents' perceptions of different kinds of

play-literacy activities.

### ***Drawing As Play***

Kevin treats drawing as play when it is like his imaginary play at home where he uses props to act out the contents of books and written genres he knows. In effect, by manipulating pens, pencils, crayons, or markers on paper, drawing allows him to play out his knowledge, mostly derived from his favorite informative (or educational, or science) books and from the stories told by his parents or that he has watched on television. Like Escobedo (1999) suggested, drawing may serve as a dramatic medium to organize and interpret children's worlds.

As a coordinator of the child program "Adventure Arts," I have an impression of children's willingness to use pens or markers with paper. However, when I invited Kevin to draw something at our first meeting, expecting his full engagement, he seemed hesitant to use pens and papers.

I took out a piece of paper and a pen, suggesting Kevin draw what we had played.

Kevin hid his hands back and shook his head, "I can't write. I can't draw. You draw it." I asked him what he wanted me to draw, he said, "Ba Jiao Yu (octopus)." I said that I was not sure how to draw an octopus and maybe he could help me. Then I passed my pen to him. He accepted the pen, but only drew several lines to symbolize the tentacles of an octopus while saying, "Like this, like this." Then he handed the pen back to me. (Transcript: November 9, 2002)

Why did Kevin appear reluctant to draw and write? In order to explore this further,



I brought a lot of different art materials such as stickers, markers, colorful pens, pencils, and different types of paper with me and introduced them as the tools for our play. Kevin gradually accepted that drawing was a routine part of our play since he figured out that I liked his drawings and was interested in his interpretation of what he had drawn. He always asked me, "What did you bring for me today." Or sometimes he initiated drawing behaviour, "Let's draw something." If drawing was not initiated or directed by Kevin (not play), but a task assigned by others, Kevin would refuse to draw.

In this study, I purposefully initiated drawing in the first encounter with Kevin; however, I did not impose my intention on him but allowed the child to direct my drawing as he wished. In the following drawing occasions, it was Kevin who became the initiator of playful drawing. Therefore, even though I influenced Kevin's drawing behaviour preliminarily, Kevin still had ownership of his drawing behaviour.

### ***Drawing As Writing I: Genres***

Writing is related to other symbol systems and processes, in particular, oral language and drawing (Chapman, 1994). Kevin's playful drawing illustrates his understandings of different writing genres. A genre is a category of language that is used to classify its form and content (Owocki, 1999). For example, Kevin's mother made a shopping list (a genre); the list is the form; the names of the food are the content. Knowledge of various genres helps writers form clear and efficient messages without expending a lot of energy deciding how to organize their writing. However, genres are not fixed text types; they are better to be thought of as "a typified form of discourse or way of

organizing or structuring discourse, shaped by and in response to recurring situational contexts” (Chapman, p. 352). Therefore, knowledge of genre is also extremely important for readers, because it is used to make meaning from a specific text (Pappas & Pettigrew, 1998). Kevin appears familiar with the expository and story genres in interpreting his drawings. Below is an example of his knowledge of expository writing.

Kevin put a small dot on the paper and said that it was a tadpole, and then he drew the evolution of the tadpole by drawing a long tail from the dot, then drawing four short legs along side of the body. Finally, he used another pen to cross out the tail because “the tadpole has become a frog.” After that, Kevin encircled these dots and tails in an elliptical structure. He claimed that the ellipse was a glass tube that contained epiphytes. Kevin said that there are many small holes in the glass tube, so the epiphytes grew out through the small holes like the roots of a tree. I wrote Chinese characters and English words (because sometimes he used one or two English words to explain the items he had drawn) to label what he had said.

(Transcript: December 28, 2003)

The scribble-like marks Kevin drew on the sheet are not easily distinguishable (see appendix A-1). However, the interpretation that accompanied his drawing surprised me. He could introduce the sequence of the evolution of how a tadpole becomes a frog or the process of how to cultivate epiphytes in a lab tube. If we regard the pictures as the written symbols that he uses to express his ideas, it could be argued that the drawing process is similar to the writing process. In this drawing vignette, Kevin demonstrates his

understanding of a set of expository text structures, such as cause and effect, problem and resolution, comparison and contrast, definition and example, and time order, as well as the content of expository text. Here is another example:

Kevin took out his mother's scribbling notebook and his own crayon. He used a red crayon to scribble on the notebook, simultaneously imitating the sound of thunder. Then he said the thunder and lightening caused a fire, so he needed water to put out the fire. Kevin asked his father, William, if the color of water was blue. William answered, "Eh, yes, the sea is blue." Kevin used a blue crayon to cover the red "fire." After that, he used a green crayon to paint "grass" under the mixed red and blue squiggles. He said that a fire had burned the grass while he used the red crayon again to show how the "fire" spread on the grass. At last, he chose a white crayon to draw clouds in the sky, which appeared to mean that the gathering clouds would bring the rain to put out the fire on the grass. (See appendix A-2)

In the above drawing episode, Kevin illustrates his understanding of the relationship among natural phenomena. He knows that thunder and lighting may cause fire, and that a mass of clouds can cause a heavy rain; he also knows how to describe a sequence of events (e.g., due to the thunder, grass catches a big fire; then the rain puts out the fire; and at last the grass grows again.) From watching his drawing and listening to his interpretation, I reasoned that the informative books he read familiarized him with the schemata as well as the content of expository text. Knowing about the ways in which expository text is organized facilitates children's ability to learn from this kind of writing

(Barr & Johnson, 1997) and makes their reading easier. When children have expectations about these forms, they can anticipate what is coming next in their reading and can mentally prepare to assimilate the information.

In addition to the expository drawing (writing) genre, Kevin also exhibited and developed his ability to use narrative (story) genre in his pictures. There are several examples of how Kevin presents what he knows about the elements of stories and their conventional development by playfully drawing. For example,

Kevin suggested, "Let's draw a ship"

I echoed, "Oh, you want to draw a ship."

Kevin corrected me, "You draw it."

I drew a boat, "This is a small boat, is it ok?"

"This is a ship with pirates," Kevin said, "Draw a small guy."

I did that and Kevin pointed at the figure, "Baden, it is me."

I drew an arrow directing a bubble and filled Kevin's name in the bubble

"What is this?" Kevin asked.

"Give him a name, name who he is?" I answered.

"You draw an anchor." Kevin directed (I drew an anchor).

"Draw David, a big guy.

I drew a big guy with the name bubble of David.

"Draw Tiantian, a tiny tiny baby" (I did that).

"Draw Wang Xiaobao with one eye, one eye guy. This is a pirate ship."

After I drew all his core peers on the deck, Kevin said, "I can swim in the sea."

"Can you? Do you wear your periscope while swimming?"

"No. Because I, my feet were tangled by sea seed."

"Did some sea weed tangle your feet?"

"Yes, drag, I could not drag."

"Oh, how did you get out?"

"Because I drew out a knife, cut, cut them down."

"Oh, it was lucky you brought a knife with you."

"Draw a shark. We are going to catch sharks..." Kevin pointed at the empty space behind the boat.

I followed his direction.

"This big shark is behind us," Kevin said.

"Wow, is the shark chasing you?"

"Yes, but we can catch it, drawing a big spear..." (Transcript: December 4, 2002)

This episode illustrates Kevin's use of drawing to express his understanding of narrative. Under Kevin's direction, I drew the lives of a group of pirates. We began by drawing the setting (a ship in a sea) and the characters (a group of pirates). Then we drew the details of the pirates' adventure, such as swimming in the sea, being tangled by some seaweed, being chased by a shark, and their dealings with all these dangers they were encountering. This is the beginning of a pirate story.

My findings in Kevin's case also elaborate many theorists' claims about the

connection between drawing and writing. For example, drawing is a form of iconic representation that reflects the distinctive features of the represented experience (Bruner, 1964), a graphic image that represents what children know, not what they see (Piaget, 1969), and a graphic speech that conceptualizes an internal representation of a story (Vygotsky, 1978). As in Kevin's example, drawing pictures may help beginning writers formulate and organize their thoughts in a less conventional and more flexible form of graphic symbolism. Drawing may help children develop characters, plots and themes in a story.

In turn, Egan (1997) claimed that imaginative play and fantasy stories, which "most powerfully engage children" (p. 346), motivate children's art behaviour. In Kevin's case, he "read" books and used props to reenact the book contents in his play. Additionally, if provided with art materials in a play context, he would represent either the book stories, or his own fantasies, in his artwork. Most importantly, Kevin was very glad to play out his knowledge and stories through drawing. "To little children, drawing is a language – a form of cognitive expression – and its purpose is not primarily aesthetic" (Goodenough, 1975, p. 14).

### ***Drawing As Writing II: Pictographic Drawing / Scribble-like Writing***

During the course of this study, I also collected some examples of Kevin producing Chinese character-like forms among his scribbles. After Julie, his mother printed out some images of dinosaurs and other favorite animals from the internet, Kevin drew some scribbles on the empty spaces below these images (See Appendix A-3, -4, -5). At first, I did

not pay attention to these scribbles. However, as I collected more examples, I became increasingly more interested. I asked Kevin what the scribbles represented. He explained that they were the names of the animals. I asked Kevin to say the names. It was an easy task for him because the images on the papers reminded him of the names. These representative scribbles are not linear squiggles like English words, but embody the square shape of Chinese characters. If the image was simple, the “scribbled character” was simple; if the image was complicated, the “scribbled character” was more complex. When there were two images in one picture, Kevin gave “two characters” to describe them. In the literature on emergent literacy, some researchers (e.g., Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988) recorded how some young children developed their letters from scribbles. My study provides a specific example of how children from a different literacy system (i.e., hieroglyphic and ideographic writing) develop their words from scribbling. This example reflects Kevin’s awareness of the shape or form of the Chinese characters. Similar to Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines’ interpretations of many of the pictures they collected with word messages, I appreciate what Gardener (1980) has referred to as the “interesting mixes of graphic and linguistic resources, in the service of complex conceptualization” (p.23). It is doubtless for me that the linking of messages—of drawing with words—has begun in Kevin’s play. Another supportive example is that in an interview, Julie reported that Kevin scribbled something on a sheet and said that he had written a ticket for her and asked her to use the ticket to borrow books from the local library.

Meanwhile, with Julie’s effort to teach Kevin to write conventional Chinese

characters, Kevin started to learn the conventional spelling of some Chinese characters such as “Ren” ( 人 ) and “Kou” ( 口 ). It is interesting that Kevin persisted in describing his effort in writing these Chinese characters as drawing. Even though his mother and father immediately corrected him when he said he wanted to draw “Ren” or “Kou,” he did not change his expression and ignored his parents’ correction.

I said, “Ok. Let’s write “pirate ship” on it, so we can know what ship it is.”

After I wrote “Pirate Ship” in Chinese, Kevin said, “I can draw a mouth, a mouth.”

“Ok.” I thought he really wanted to draw something and handed the pen to Kevin

“One, one again, one again “(Kevin was actually writing the Chinese character

“Kou” one stroke by one stroke.)

Kevin’s father approached us and explained that Kevin was writing a Chinese character.

I asked Kevin, “Can you write another Chinese character?”

“Yes. I can draw Ren.” Kevin wrote the character Ren on the paper with a reversed stroke. (Transcript: January 30, 2003)

For English literacy, Kevin has realized that English is another written language which differs from his home language. On one occasion, when I asked Kevin if I should label his drawing of “a Christmas tree” in Chinese or in English, he thought for a while and chose the latter. While I wrote “Christmas tree” in English slowly, Kevin watched very intently. After I completed it, he brought it to William, his father, and pointed to the English word and said, “Look, Christmas tree, English.”



From these play and drawing episodes, it is evident that in Kevin's life, drawing and literacy learning are integrated in his main activity—play. Because of the characteristics of the play context (i.e., it is voluntary, low-risk, and pleasurable), Kevin can freely express his stories and explore written words through drawing. As Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) concluded, "Drawing, writing, and reading appear closely connected" (p. 84).

### *Kevin's Parents' Views of His Play and Literacy Practice at Home*

It is widely accepted that the parent is the first and most important teacher in a child's life. From social constructivism comes a tradition of researching parents' beliefs in order to achieve an understanding of their children. Therefore, parents' beliefs in, and value of, a child's play and literacy learning may greatly influence the child's play and literacy activities. In order to further understand the features of Kevin's play and literacy activities at home, I investigated his parents' views of young children's play and literacy learning. Because parents are members of cultural communities, they utilize multiple sources of cultural knowledge to form beliefs about children. These resources include their own childhood memories, participation in routine activities, media texts and advice from respected others (Nichols, 2002).

I used these categories to guide my conversations with the parents and my observations of their interaction with Kevin. The parents' discourse and behaviour is classified into three sections: the parents' views of Kevin's play, literacy learning, and the connection between play and literacy.

### ***Kevin's Parents' View of His Play***

Even though Kevin's parents, Julie and William, have different personalities (Julie is outgoing and talkative and William is more reserved), they share a similar view of Kevin's play activities. They believe that play is a natural phenomenon in early childhood and has positive functions in the development of young children's imagination, creativity and problem solving.

Julie: Play...it is helpful. He, he (Kevin) sometimes plays or manipulates the things with an imagination. It seems that the adults cannot do things like that. After studying, the adults do not have a good imagination any more. [They] almost follow the books (laughter). Honestly, I do not know what children can learn [from play], but when I cook, Kevin plays nearby. His play is very interesting. While he plays, he seems "Jing Jing Le Dao" (which means taking delight in talking about his imagination).

William: For Kevin, if he wants to play, that is ok. I don't want him to stay inside (in rooms) for a whole day. I let him go outside to play, close to nature. At his age, people always play. I think play may promote his creativity, maybe comparison. For example, when he plays with these toys, he may think what to build or does the construction look like something or not. From this process, he can learn something.

Julie and William believe play has the potential for enhancing some important factors of children's cognition. Their views and beliefs about the value of play derive from their personal experiences. Julie remembered that her childhood was free and playful

because her father (a senior engineer in a big government institute) encouraged his children to pursue something that they were interested in.

Julie: Yes, we lived in the Si He Yuan (a traditional residential building in northern China, several families living in several houses which form a closed square), so we can call each other to play so easily. [My father] He always encouraged us to learn what we were interested in. He gave some suggestions to us, but the final decision on what to do would be made by us, so if we wanted to play, he would not interfere with us, but many parents did.

Julie also mentioned the case of her nephew as an example of how children can naturally move from play to study at a certain age and therefore the transition from play to study did not concern her. Consequently, she would not prevent Kevin from play.

My sister's child, he liked to play by himself. He could play with a small eraser for a long time. Some children do not know they should study, but some know to work hard from a young age. This child played a lot until entering a junior high school, and he began to work hard. For Kevin, I think now it is the time for children to play. When he reaches a certain age, he will want to study by himself. If parents limit their young children's play, the child will not have a happy childhood.

Julie said that she did not understand why some Chinese parents were so worried about their children's study when their children were just around five years old. She assumed that young children would eventually transit their interests in play to study as they grow up and become more mature.

William grew up in a small town where he remembered all the pleasurable time he spent in the fields of his rural hometown. His description of the fun of his childhood was even reflected in Kevin's narrative. "When my dad was in Benxi, there were many, many frogs. When you went to there (the water pools), they (the frogs) would jump out." William emphasized the importance of play and hoped for happy childhood memories in Kevin's future life.

Although Julie and William share a similar attitude toward Kevin's play, they take different roles in their child's play activities. William is an onlooker of Kevin's play and often positions himself at the periphery of the play area. He always quietly watches Kevin's play and listens to Kevin talking. His typical response is "yes", "ok," and "uh-hum". He rarely intervenes in Kevin's play, but constantly supports his son by providing props or answering his question. During some observed play-sessions, for example, when Kevin was playing with something, he often asked his father, "Where is my gun, dad?" "I can't find the flower Lego." "I want to you cut a dinosaur for me." Or "What are these fishes? I only know..." William responded to his son requirements quickly and demonstrated constant support for his son's play activities.

On the other hand, Julie is an active participant of Kevin's play. If it is her turn to look after Kevin, she always plays with him. Sometimes, she follows Kevin's play themes, but she frequently asks questions or makes suggestions. For example,

Kevin said he would go to a forest for archaeological studies.

Julie asked him, "What do you need to prepare for before going to the field?"

Kevin: "Tooth brushes [for cleaning the soil which covers the dinosaur fossils]."

Julie: "What else?"

Kevin: "A gun [for fighting with the primitives]."

Julie: "What else?"

Kevin: "A bowl [for containing the food]."

Julie was not satisfied with Kevin's answer, so she probed Kevin further, "En, yes, these things are also important, but what is the thing you need to prepare first, the most needed thing."

Kevin: "An axe."

Julie: "Why?"

Kevin: "I can use it to cut down a tree to build a wooden house. I will be very tired; I need a house to sleep."

But Julie was still waiting for Kevin's "correct" answer, "That is not the first thing you need to bring with. Think again."

Kevin thought for a while, and then took out a child's backpack from somewhere and started to pick something out from it. At last, he found a compass which was what Julie wanted him to find. (Transcript: January 6, 2003)

Sometimes Julie took the lead in initiating a new dramatic theme of play, or built a complicated block building while Kevin was a subordinate player and helper:

"Mom is going to build a platform on the top of the camper; can you find some materials for mom?" Julie talked to Kevin as she was proficiently constructing a

camper using Legos. Kevin was playing with his own small figures while watching what Julie was doing.

In separate interviews, William and Julie explained their beliefs about adults' roles in young children's play. William thought play belongs to the child. According to him, adults do not quite understand children's play, so it is better to follow children's imaginations and meet children's needs instead of instructing them. "Children are excited and satisfied during play time, but it is a boring thing for adults," said William.

On the other hand, Julie explained in detail why she purposefully tried to enhance Kevin's thinking by increasing the sophistication of their play.

Julie: I feel that Kevin, playing with him is one hand (just playing with him is only one aspect of engaging with him). On the other hand, you can act out your own imagination or themes without asking him to learn. He will become interested in what you are doing by observing you and then he will follow you. In fact, kids like to learn new things. They learn from adults. You do something a little bit beyond his age level... For example, what you do should be better than what he does. He always watches what you are doing. He watches you very carefully. I think children are learning in this process. So sometimes he may progress ahead of other children, or maybe progress ahead of his previous level. If you only follow his level of play, such as looking for the toys he wants, he will always play with his own original idea. He does not have an opportunity to learn from other people. I found this out just recently. He did not play cooking before. When I led him to play, he learned,

grabbing some grass as vegetables or scooping sand as rice. After cooking, I pretend to call somebody to have dinner together. So Kevin knows how to play cooking: first put some oil into the pan, and then heat it. He then taught other kids. You do not need to pay attention to what he is doing, or whether he can follow you or not. You play in your own way. The key thing is that many Chinese adults do not want to play [with their kids]. (Transcript: February 12, 2003)

In general, the parents' positive attitude toward children's play means that first, they do not interrupt his playtime and second, they actively encourage him to learn while playing. Kevin, therefore, has plenty of time to freely practice and develop his understanding of everything around him, including written language. Encouraged by his parents' support for his play, Kevin also develops a positive view of his play activities and his play competence. In one instance, he claimed proudly, "Mom goes shopping, dad cooks, and I play. They [mom and dad] all want to play with me." In addition to the parents' positive attitude toward Kevin's play, their distinctive roles manifested in Kevin's play activities exert different functions in Kevin's development. On one hand, William, with respect to Kevin's play intention, helps him develop and represent autonomously chosen themes. This autonomy (or agency) provides Kevin with opportunities to "assimilate" the outside world into his own frame and to build strong confidence in controlling his world. On the other hand, by actively tutoring (or scaffolding) Kevin's play, Julie offers the opportunity for him to go beyond his own play level and reach new heights. In the play literature, both parental roles of intervention and non-intervention are validated by

research studies. For example, Pellegrini and Galda (1993) reexamined ten years' research on symbolic play and literacy and found that adult played a smaller role in symbolic play and oral language production than previously believed. Conversely, other research studies (Bondioli, 2001; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Vukelich, 1991) showed that adult involvement facilitated children's use of literacy during play. It looks as if the parents' practices conflict in Kevin's play, but they actually have different functions for Kevin's play life. This consequence reminds us of the complexity of the effect of educational values or approaches applied in a specific case. There is no one single educational method that can foster a child's maximum development. To achieve a greater effect in enhancing the child's play and literacy activities, multiple methods will be required since they may function differently on different occasions.

### ***Kevin's Parents' View on His Literacy Learning***

Compared with the enjoyable play memories of their childhood, Julie and William had unpleasant experiences with their literacy learning. Julie said that before going to school, her mother already taught her some Chinese characters and Arabic numbers. However, she was not good at the subject "Chinese Language" in school. Julie thought that the literacy she had learned at school seemed useless. She especially devalued her middle school literacy education. She commented that the articles in her textbooks were not related to her daily life. The requirements to divide and analyze paragraphs and to summarize the main ideas of the articles or paragraphs were described as "torturous." (The learning experiences are structured in carefully controlled systematic sequences which



atomized and segmented learning). "Why do we have to cut and separate an article like that?" Julie questioned.

William's parents had a strong preference for traditional Chinese education. They let their children recite a lot of "Tang Shi Song Ci," which are the heritage poems of the Tang and Song Dynasties, even though William did not understand the poems' meanings. William thought this trained his memory to become strong. However, he complained that the traditional Chinese education emphasized too much the memorizing of knowledge instead of letting learners express (or write) their own ideas; he explained that now he has difficulty coming up with ideas. When studying college English in Canada, he realized the importance of writing appropriately and expressively.

Julie and William's personal experiences of literacy learning affect their perceptions of and interaction with Kevin's literacy learning. Julie wanted Kevin to learn reading and writing in a meaningful way and did not want Kevin to learn by rote without comprehending (or understanding) it. William always encouraged Kevin's expressions of his own ideas by tolerating his son's mistakes.

**Early reading.** From their own report, this family engaged a lot in oral storytelling and in reading books.

William and I have to rack our brains to think out a story for him (Kevin). We do not have enough Chinese storybooks at hand, so we tell many stories about the Chinese idioms from our memory. If we can't remember the stories exactly, we will make them up. Sometime we tell such things as "Zi Xiang Mao Dun" (Spear and

Shield). We don't know if he really understands or not. We just tell him. It is good.

It is good. Now we also told him the stories of "Xi You Ji" (A classic Chinese novel which tells how four characters overcome all difficulties to learn Buddhist scripture). (Transcript: February 12, 2003)

Julie seems to have figured out the peculiar function of book reading in Kevin's literacy learning, which oral storytelling does not achieve.

When you read books to him directly, he can remember [the book words]. If you only tell stories, your talking is not as exact as the book's writing. He appears not to remember the details of the [oral] stories firmly.

This excerpt demonstrates Julie's realization of the importance of reading books with young children. She also talked about the disadvantage of Kevin's literacy learning due to their "language or literacy environment":

Now the borrowed books are all English books, we still have difficulty reading English books. These books are about animals with pictures and illustrations captions. The words about the animals, I really do not know. I have to look them up in a dictionary to learn what they are. There are many words I have to look up in the dictionary, so reading is often interrupted. I lose my patience and Kevin also loses interest. We read fewer books to him than we did in China. Those books, if written in Chinese, maybe you (the adults) want to know too, so you will be interested in reading them. I feel, after he came here, his knowledge about animals really stays at the same level. He only looks at the pictures. Sometimes he is more willing to read

the books brought from China, me too (because) we can read them directly, but there are few Chinese books here [in Canada].

***Early writing.*** As stated earlier, Julie and William's perception of learning to write also originated from their personal experiences. Julie said that her literacy learning in her elementary school might be useful because she learned and memorized the basic 3000 characters. Julie said that at that time, she had to do several hours of homework every day, such as copying ten pages of Chinese characters. It was often that she copied one character 50 times, so the repetition let her remember how to write it correctly. When she wrote the character again, she would write it out without thinking. William also commented, "Learning to write (characters) was a fixed thing, such as spelling. Nobody can teach a child this kind of thing. It is something he needs to memorize by himself." The parents' view reflects Dzau's (1990) remarks that among the Chinese, it is widely acknowledged that language proficiency is increased by the number of words and texts mastered.

***The effects on Kevin's literacy learning.*** In an investigation of the relationships between parents' perceptions of literacy learning and their children's early literacy knowledge and perception of learning to read and write, Anderson (1995) found before they begin literacy programs in school, children develop perceptions of literacy consistent with those of their parents. Kevin's case supports this finding. Julie and William's views of young children's literacy learning affect Kevin's literacy learning interest and behaviour. On the one hand, since Julie emphasizes learning to read in a meaningful context and William addresses the importance of expressing ideas, Kevin is keenly interested in

making meaning from books and has confidence in expressing his own ideas. The first time I met Kevin at home, I asked him to show me his favorite things. Kevin immediately took out three books and opened one of them upside down.

Kevin: These are from the library, borrowed, [we] will return [them]. I don't know what this thing is. Introduce, introduce (Kevin sometimes uses "big" words or formal words in his oral conversation); I don't know what dinosaur this is?

*Anna: So, you...*

Kevin: What does this write?

*Anna: This... let's turn it upside up. (I turned the book)*

Kevin: (Kevin pointed to a picture) this is a meat-eating dinosaur.

*Anna: Oh, really?*

Kevin: I tell you, this is a killing dinosaur, [because it has] very sharp teeth. It is a meat-eating dinosaur (turn another page). It eats the plant-eating dinosaur.

*Anna: Dinosaurs also eat dinosaurs?*

Kevin: Yes. Plant-eating dinosaurs also fight with each other. They fight for a domain... (Transcript: December 12, 2002)

Kevin's discussion with me about the three books lasted for more than one hour.

His talking revealed how his parents discussed the contents of the books with him, which include relating to their past experiences (my dad found it when he went to Qingdao), finding the relationship between the animals, and looking for the cause and effect (Do you know there was a day, the dinosaurs...disappeared, [they] were bombed by falling stars

[and] burned in earth.) This demonstrates that Kevin is actively involved in shared storybook reading and is confident in his understanding of the contents of the books, even though he can not recognize the words on the pages.

On the other hand, Julie and William's perception of the inevitable step -- memorizing and copying the individual words--towards being literate caused tension in their attempt to teach Kevin to recognize and write some Chinese characters and Kevin's lack of motivation to do this. The following is Julie's narration of this kind of tension:

When I taught him to recognize characters or to count numbers, he could only concentrate for several minutes; then he started to fret or look tired. He also refused to write characters. I asked him, "What can you do if you do not like to study?" He seemed to be affected by my words. One night, he shook me up, "I can count, one, two, and three...." Another day, he pointed to some words in a storybook and said that "this means 'xxx' ...it is easy, write like this." Then he used his index finger to scratch on the book like he was writing" (Transcript: November 16, 2002)

During my observation, Kevin sometimes engaged in playful writing (he referred to it as drawing); however, some underlining cultural conceptions of writing (e.g., accuracy and preciseness) in Julie's mind conflicted with Kevin's attempts. Two examples include:

When we got some sheets and pencils, Kevin claimed that he would draw "Kou" (a Chinese character). This time, he made a correct one except that he reversed the order of the strokes. At this moment Julie was busy with a pot of boiling water, so she did not see the process (otherwise, I supposed she would criticize the wrong

writing order like most Chinese parents and teachers might do). Encouraged by my appraising, Kevin then said he would draw another Chinese character “Ren.” Julie overheard that and corrected her son, “You are writing” and came to watch Kevin’s writing. This time she found Kevin wrote the character “Ren” in the wrong order, so she pointed it out and demonstrated the writing process. After that, Kevin refused to write another character. (Transcript: December 28, 2002)

In another home visit, Kevin told me that the squared scribbles he made under the pictures of animals were their name. “This says a *primitive elephant*,” he pointed to a squiggle. I said it was great and I would photocopy it. Julie, who was doing house chores, came to have a look. However, after glancing at the “writings,” she laughed, “Is that a character? It is only scribbling.” Kevin’s face became red and he took an eraser to his “writing”. I asked him, “What are you doing?” “I want to wipe it out. I don’t want to your machine to copy it. You only copy these (the pictures),” he answered sulkily. (Transcript: March 3, 2003)

Julie’s perception on the process of learning to write derives from her early literacy learning experience and her cultural values. Specifically, she believed that knowing how to write characters (or words) correctly and precisely is the first step of beginning reading and writing. Anderson and Gunderson (1997), in his studies of the cultural differences among parents’ perception of literacy acquisition, concluded that most Chinese-Canadian parents held traditional views on literacy development, emphasizing the direct teaching of literacy skills and the importance of accuracy and preciseness.

Julie and William thought of the process of early literacy learning as having two steps: first, recognizing codes (written words) in books; second, making meaning from the codes. Since they do not want their own painful literacy experiences to be repeated in Kevin's life, they do not push Kevin to memorize words if he is not interested in doing so. However, they are distressed by the thought that if Kevin does not learn to read and write basic characters (words), he will not be able to enter into formal literacy practice. If Kevin is only limited to looking at the pictures of the books but other children have learned the written words, he may fall behind at the beginning of his school literacy learning. This is why sometimes they still try to directly instruct Kevin on the conventional way of printing. Their cultural views about beginning reading and writing have them concerned that Kevin's ability to read and write conventionally can not eventually come out of his own interest in these play activities and that play activities alone will not help Kevin develop the ability to read, write, and spell conventionally. Their concerns reflect those of many Chinese immigrant parents because they can not see the connection between the play activities young children engage in and their early literacy learning.

#### ***Kevin's Parents' Views on the Connection between Play and Literacy Learning***

Julie stated her difficulty with connecting Kevin's play with his literacy learning in an interview:

Play... In our family, we only know the field of mathematics. Because he doesn't to learn to read and write at all. ... For him, this (conventional reading and writing) is almost empty. I feel that he does not "Kai Qiao" (which means having one's ideas

straighten out). We let him play; but there is no connection between play and literacy right now for him.

As for William, he sometimes felt “play and literacy are in conflict” and “it is a time conflict.” He concluded that, “If a child plays a lot, the time for recognizing words or reading books will be less.”

Why do both parents have difficulty in relating the idea and actions of play to the child’s literacy learning progress? The fundamental barrier to noticing the connection is their widely accepted traditional views on literacy learning. Not only in eastern society, but also in traditional Western society, play and work are treated as opposites; work is set up as diametrically different from play (Solsken, 1993). Literacy learning, as related to schooling, inevitably, is seen as a place for work and thus play becomes excluded (Barratt-Pugh & Rohl, 2000). Bearing this traditional view, Julie and William treat literacy learning as a serious endeavor, as a task people have to undertake. Therefore, they do not apply play as a medium or context for literacy learning or artfully introduce literacy objects into their child’s play environment.

The parents also do not understand the cognitive link between play and literacy; that is, how the internal features of young children’s play such as structure and process relate to written pieces. As analyzed previously in Kevin’s play sessions, pretend play and reading and writing both involve symbolic representation, narrative thinking, and the use of decontextualized language. Nevertheless, Julie and William can not perceive these links so that play and literacy seem unrelated to each other on a superficial level.



Moreover, the parents have not extended their recognition of literacy learning from a traditional perspective to an emergent literacy perspective; thus, they do not regard some emergent literacy behaviour (e.g., pretending reading or scribbling words) in Kevin's play as literacy learning. Further, since the parents treat literacy learning as serious school business instead of real life "ideological literacy" activities (Street, 1984), they do not recognize the connection between play and literacy even though there were many moments when Kevin did use his knowledge of print and practiced literacy skills in his play. These literacy activities included the child using print and negotiating its structures, meanings and purposes in his play. For instance, Kevin found a plant-tag (a label with an English name for a plant) and suggested, "Let's use it as the sign of our pirate ship." Another example is when Kevin scribbled something on a piece of paper and sent it to Julie. He said, "Mom, this is the ticket I wrote for you, so you can use it to borrow books from the library." Another example is when Kevin pointed to the label of a glass bottle and said, "Hong La Jiao (red pepper)" because he knew that this bottle used to contain hot peppers. His parents rarely noticed these teachable moments for reading and writing in play.

However, since the parents are both studying in a new cultural environment and they realize that there are different cultural values and methods of education, Julie and William are open to the new ideas or experiences they encounter. They often mentioned their study experiences in Canadian schools and compared them with their learning experiences in China. They praised Canadian education for offering students the opportunity to express their ideas in a free situation and encouraging students' imagination,

creativity and critical thinking. Through observing my interaction with Kevin, they attempted to adopt methods they thought were good for Kevin's literacy learning, because they considered me an expert in the field of childhood education.

For example, when I found that there were very few literacy materials in Kevin's play props except for picture books, I brought stickers, papers, pens, pencils, markers, a calendar, and a notebook to him. In addition to drawing pictures, Kevin also used some of these tools in his play activities. He put the notebook into his backpack and said he would use it to record the fossils he finds when he (the archeologist) studies in the field. He was interested in the different pictures of cars on the calendar I sent him and he asked every adult he knew which car they wanted to buy and pretended to make notes at the same time. Julie seemed to be interested in the interaction between Kevin and me and she noticed the literacy activities which occurred in Kevin's play. She not only started to buy some stickers for Kevin, but also made some "written props" for Kevin's play scenes.

On the constructed Lego world, I found there was a scroll extended by two cotton-wraps which was fixed at the gate. Four Chinese characters "Dao Fu Nong Chang" were written on the scroll. "These say, Kevin's Farm," Kevin said when pointing to the four characters. "Oh, it is very nice. Who wrote it?" I asked. "My mom," Kevin answered. (Transcript: March 3, 2003)

In a later interview, Julie reported her awareness of literacy learning in Kevin's play activities:

But I always feel that the young children's learning is very interesting. For example,

this morning, we opened our newly bought computer. We typed on the keyboard together. He has not recognized the alphabet letters. We just typed the letters. He pressed the letters such as A, B, C, D; and then I accidentally pressed several S's on the computer. Kevin immediately "scolded" me for doing something wrong. He carefully deleted the extra "S", keeping only one S on the screen. (Transcript: March 14, 2003)

Julie's description demonstrates her increasing sensitization to (awareness of) Kevin's emergent literacy behaviour. Therefore, when the parents' views evolved through their encounters with different cultural experiences, their behaviour was altered accordingly. This may create a changing home culture that shapes the child's play and literacy activity as well. When the parents realize that Kevin is conducting some literacy activities in his play, they may increase Kevin's literacy behavior by providing literacy-related play props or settings; hereby, Kevin engage in more day to day literacy activities, and he treat literacy learning as enjoyable as his play. As Neuman and Roskos (1991, 1993, 1997) constantly stress, when children are offered play experience with literacy-related resources, they act in a literate way. Sonnenschein, Baker, Serpell and Schmidt's (2000) study also show that children who are highly motivated to read, who think reading is enjoyable and valuable, are more likely to choose to read independently. Such independent reading is a powerful predictor of reading achievement (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997).

### ***Conclusion: Highlighting Kevin's Parents' Influence on His Play and Literacy Activities***

The interviews and observations in this study reveal that as the result of the influence of their childhood memories, cultural values, educational experiences, and advice from experts, Julie and William formed and evolved their beliefs about young children's play and literacy learning. The beliefs they hold may affect their behaviour as well as the child's perception of, and activities during, play and literacy learning.

Since the parents believe that play is a beneficial activity for young children's general development, they support their son's play activities by providing a variety of cultural props to his play activities and by modeling what they assume are appropriate behavior. Accordingly, Kevin has plenty of time to develop his "buddy personalities" (Vygotsky, 1978) in his favorite activities with full agency. This is why his play behaviour is quite frequent and sophisticated. The sophistication of Kevin's play activities, to some extent, is fostered by his home culture.

On the other hand, his parents' perceptions of literacy learning are more complicated than their thoughts on play. Their childhood experiences of learning to read and write lead them to believe that memorizing and copying words was the only way of becoming literate. Julie and William also believe that the greater number of conventional words which children can recognize and spell, the faster they can start their own independent reading and writing. The parents conform to the Chinese emphasis on accuracy and preciseness because they want to save the child from the labor of learning from his mistakes. In Julie's words, she wants her child to, "avoid the winding way."

However, the parents do not have pleasurable memories of their own literacy learning experiences, so they avoid forcing or pushing their child to accept their direct instruction on conventional words. Nevertheless, they feel conflicted by the child's nature to pursue playful things and the nature of literacy learning, which they assume must be a serious undertaking. Because Julie and William do not understand the relationship between play and literacy learning, they can not consciously take advantage of play to guide Kevin's literacy learning. Consequently, Kevin learned from his home culture that literacy learning requires study, which conflicts with his free play. Thus, his love of play threatens his success in literacy learning. Kevin's views affect his behaviour so that he is reluctant to take the role of reader and writer except in play contexts.

Even though there are several well-written studies on parental beliefs regarding children's literacy acquisition (Anderson, 1995; Anderson & Gunderson, 1997; Charlene, 2000; Gunderson & Anderson, 2003) and parental views on children's play (Bruce, 1994), few studies explore parental perceptions of the connection between play and literacy. Through analyzing a family case, my study initially explored the relationship among the cultural factors, parental beliefs and behaviours, and their child's views about play and literacy learning as well as their behaviours involved in play and literacy. This may provide readers some insights of how the socio-cultural aspects influence the child's play and literacy development. Since the cultural and social understanding in Kevin's home refer to play as fun and literacy as work, this understanding affects his play and the incorporation of literacy activity into this context. Thus, a consideration of the social and

cultural aspects such as parents' perceptions in early childhood education is necessary.

### *Summary*

Chapter Four describes the play and literacy activities of a five-year-old boy who is growing up in a recent Chinese immigrant family to Canada. During the period of my observation, this boy Kevin spent most of his time and energy playing at home and on the playground. His other activities, such as literacy learning, drawing, TV watching, and self constructing were embedded, served, and developed in play.

The analysis of Kevin's play at home and on the playground reveal the intimate connection between play and literacy learning in these aspects: the internal structure of dramatic play shared by the story genre, the convergence of play with the texts of books as well as media texts and cultural texts, and the common language features in written books and dramatic play. Kevin understands the functions, purposes, and forms of written language by using literacy materials or by demonstrating literacy behaviour in his play activities.

Moreover, Kevin's data shows that by reading books and encountering moments of literacy learning in Chinese culture, he found sources for his self construction and then actively built his identity in a variety of play activities. Kevin also gained a sense of self and others through cooperating and negotiating with his peers in social dramatic play. This may help him become a good reader and writer who is someone that has the ability to understand himself and other people.

Further, Kevin's case provides evidence of how home culture filters into his play

and literacy activities, particularly, his parents' views of young children's play and literacy learning. Even though his parents value play in some aspects of their son's development, their unawareness of the relationship between play and literacy may limit them from solving the seemingly conflicting activities in their son's development: play and literacy learning. Does this convergence of play, literacy learning and home culture exist in a girl who is growing up in another recent immigrant family from mainland China? What will be account for their similarities and differences? The next chapter will explore Ivy's play life.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Ivy's Play Life

### *Ivy and Her Family*

I first met Ivy (a four-and-half year old at that time) and her mother, Christine, in a community program, Adventure Arts. After the preschoolers finished their drawing with their mothers or grandparents' help, I invited them to write their names on their work. A girl named Mengmeng sitting beside Ivy quickly wrote her Chinese name on her drawing; Ivy could not write her own name. Christine said, "Look, Ivy, Mengmeng can write Chinese characters, but you can't." Mengmeng's mother comforted Ivy, "Ivy has her own advantage. Ivy can draw pictures very well." Half a year later, when screening the children in the community for this study, when Ivy was almost five years old, I thought she would be an appropriate candidate for this study in terms of her age, gender, ethnicity, and immigrant status. When I contacted Christine, she welcomed my plan to spend time with her daughter in her play and literacy activities. Ivy's father also agreed and said, "It is ok for me if it is ok for my wife, because her mother spends the most time with her." I also learned that Ivy has a teenage sister who was studying in the nearby secondary school and her permission was also gained.

### *Ivy*

Ivy was just 5 years old when she enrolled in an afternoon kindergarten program starting in September 2002. She was quiet and self-contained in the presence of her parents, waiting for my questions and suggestions with watchful eyes and did not elaborate on her



brief responses. She regarded me as a respectful teacher and acted politely. However, within the frame of play or when she was with same-aged peers, she was more relaxed, cheerful, and childish. While doing writing or drawing, she was meticulous and wanted to get every word or detail perfect. At many times, she spent ages decorating around the writing, making it look pretty.

Ivy was also told that while playing with her, I would record what we played so that I could write a book about her play. The pocket audio tape recorder rarely attracted her attention. However, when I took pictures of her work such as block buildings and drawings, she was curious to have a look and also asked me to include her in the pictures. Every time when I said I would leave, she negotiated the time I should go in order to keep me playing with her for a longer period.

Ivy has many Chinese story books which have an orientation towards definite educational purposes such as learning Chinese pinyin (the Roman letters for the sounds of Chinese Characters) and Chinese characters. These books include many fancy stories such as *Green's Fairy Tales*; *The Little Girl Who Sells Matches*; *The New Lion King*; *The Rose Princess*; *The Story of Xi You Ji*; *The Machine Cat*; and so on. Her English books are mostly borrowed from her school (kindergarten) library. Ivy also owns many books that are particularly for teaching children to practice drawing from simple shapes to more elaborate forms as well as many literacy-related materials such as markers, pencils, and notebooks.

Ivy's play materials are well arranged on a bookshelf that is placed in a corner of the kitchen. It is like an exhibition of various toys: a large collection of airplane models and

cars, a crown, a jump chick, and other decorative things. The building blocks and puzzles are always tidily arranged on the ground or in the containers. Ivy also has a beauty box that contains many fancy or decorative things for dressing up such as butterfly clips, shining rings, and bracelets. There also are a variety of beads that are clustered into strings.

Ivy shows a keen interest and competence in drawing, painting, and model-building. Her visual perception skills are her strength. She spends most of her play time in solitary activities, either in the presence of family members or with objects such as books or toys, in front of the television screen or in her bedroom.

### *Christine, Leo, and Nora*

Ivy's parents, Christine and Leo, always stay in their home, an expensive two-bedroom condo in a prestigious university area. Christine is a tall and graceful woman with gentle voice. She always wears comfortable clothes and does housework in a leisurely way. Leo is a short and diligent business man who always stays in front of his computer and by the business phone. Sometimes we could hear him doing business with his customers on the phone. Both of the parents are friendly and polite towards me, but they are careful not to intervene in my interaction with Ivy and also keep their personal lives from me. Ivy's teenage sister, Nora, is in Grade twelve. She seemed busy with her own life of school, traveling, and parties. Ivy and Christine told me that Nora occasionally sent beautiful things for Ivy or drew a picture with her. However, since she has only come to Canada for two years, and now is trying to pass the provincial examination for post secondary education, she chooses not to spend her time playing with Ivy. Christine also prohibits Ivy

from disturbing her older sister, despite how much Ivy likes to play with Nora.

Christine and Leo were also a constant and strong support during this study. Even though they visited their parents' families back in China for one and half months during the Chinese Spring Festival, they contacted me immediately after coming back and permitted my visits at any time.

### ***Ivy's Play and Literacy Activities at Home***

Children's play development not only has several stages (Piaget, 1962), but also demonstrates individual differences (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999). One of the individual differences in preschool has been described in terms of object-versus-people orientation (Emmerich, 1964). Some children are more attracted to activities where there is a lot of interaction with people. Others prefer solitary activities where the focus of attention is on the object. Another individual difference variable concerning a play, fantasy-making predisposition, has been proposed by Singer (1973). Singer finds that children high in fantasy-making abilities display higher levels of imaginativeness, positive affect, concentration, social interaction, and cooperation during free play than children with low fantasy-making tendencies. The third individual difference, types of imaginative (dramatic) play styles, was identified by Wolf and Gardner (1979). Wolf and Gardner reported two types of imaginative play: "Patterners" and "Dramatists." The former displays considerable skill and interest in making patterns, structures, and orders with objects and materials. These children are interested in an object's mechanical and design possibilities rather than in communication or interpersonal events; the latter exhibits a strong interest in

human surroundings such as what others did and felt. Even though Kevin and Ivy, the two young children I observed in this study, are the same age and have similar backgrounds, their individual differences in play and literacy activities are evident. The focus of this chapter is on the characteristics of Ivy's play and literacy learning and how her home culture (mainly their parents' views and behaviours) shaped these characteristics.

Ivy spends most of her time with her family members, her parents and old sister, and sometimes with the peers she got to know in her kindergarten class. She is taken out by her mother occasionally to walk in the community garden or play in a nearby park; however, her daily play and literacy activities primarily occur at home. In this chapter I presents Ivy's solitary play and play with her peers at home.

### ***Play Solitarily with the Presence of Adults***

下午三点，我接到克瑞斯丁的电话。她告诉我艾维已经从学前班回来，正在家里等我到来。

克瑞斯丁和艾维在他们的公寓里和我问好。克瑞斯丁称我为夏老师并简单的介绍了他们的家。这是一个两个卧室的公寓。主人卧室归克瑞斯丁和她的丈夫，另一个卧室住着他们的大女儿。艾维现在住在一个小间里。小间里放置着一张儿童床，一张儿童书桌和椅子。这个小间被布置得非常可爱而且颜色鲜艳。墙上贴着艾维画的小马和飞机，书桌上摆着精致漂亮的文具。

At 3:00 pm. I received Christine's call that meant that Ivy had come back from her kindergarten class and was waiting for me at her home.

When I rang the doorbell at their condo, I was greeted by Christine and Ivy. Christine called me "teacher Xia" and gave me a brief introduction to their home. This was a two-bedroom suite. The master bedroom was for Christine and her husband Leo; another bedroom was for their old daughter Nora. Ivy was placed in a small nook that contained a child's bed, a child's desk and chair. Ivy's nook

他们的客厅干净 整洁。艾维的玩具架则放在厨房的一个角落里。一架钢琴则摆放在走廊上。这套住宅不算很宽敞，但是很昂贵。因为它附近有一所排名很好的中学以及大学。克瑞斯丁告诉我，就像她一样，许多中国移民住在这儿是为了孩子，虽然家长本来不喜欢这儿太安静太偏僻的地方。

我问艾维她最喜欢玩什么。艾维回答说，“我最喜欢画画。”克瑞斯丁在一旁纠正道：“夏老师是问你最喜欢玩什么，你可以带她去看看你的玩具。”我和艾维来到放在厨房的玩具架边。艾维很快用地上的积木搭起了一个房子。然后向我介绍哪儿是门，哪儿是窗户。“谁住在这房子里呀？”我问道。艾维没有回答。

克瑞斯丁过来说艾维喜欢玩飞机呀，汽车呀，马呀，而不是娃娃。“她是一个小女孩，但我不知道为什么她喜欢玩男孩子的东西。艾维把她的飞机和小汽车介绍给我。艾维说她有不同类型的飞机，并指给我看映在飞机上的数字比如“777”，“747”以

was small but lovely and colorful, with her own drawings posted on the wall and pretty stationery on the desk and in the drawers. The living room was bright and neat. A toy shelf was placed in a corner of the kitchen and a shining piano was in the hallway. This suite is not spacious but very expensive because of the location of the building, which is near a highly ranked secondary school and a prestigious university. Christine told me that many Chinese, like her, lived here for the purpose of enrolling their children to a good school even though they did not enjoy the quiet and isolated area themselves.

Then I asked Ivy what her favorite play activity was, she answered, “I like drawing best.” Christine corrected her daughter’s answer by saying, “Teacher Xia asked your favorite play activities. You can show her your toys.” We then came to the kitchen corner where the toy shelf was placed. Ivy quickly built a house with her building blocks, and introduced me where the door was and where the windows were. “Who lives in the house?” I asked. Ivy did not answer.

Christine said that Ivy loves planes, cars, and horses, but not dolls, “She is a little girl, but I do not know why she loves the boy’s stuff.” Ivy then showed me her planes and small cars. Ivy showed the types of the planes by indicating the number “777” or “747” or “Air Canada”

及英文字母“AIR CANADA”。艾维说这些英文字母是外国字。

克瑞斯丁拿来一摞艾维画的画。这些图画包括画的很精美的飞机和马，包括许多细节。克瑞斯丁说，“这些画是照着书上画的。”艾维拿起一幅图说：“嗯，为什么这儿不是……为什么这儿不是……所以这可能不是我画的。”艾维又拿起另一张画说，“这是另一张画得很好的画。”但是，一旁的克瑞斯丁纠正她说：“这张是妈妈画的，但是有些部分是你画的。这树是你画的，你还给小马涂了颜色，是吗？”艾维点点头。克瑞斯丁又对我说：“她喜欢画马，飞机，有时也画人，但是画的人不太像人。没有人教她画，这儿也没有人的画可以造这画。我说艾维的图画技巧发展得很好。”克瑞斯丁看上去很骄傲并说艾维画的画由透视感。

我拿起一张画有公主的图画问艾维：“她是谁呀？”“我也不知道。”艾维回答说。另一张画是艾维从一本故事书插图上照着画

printed on the planes. She said there were “foreign words” (written English) on the plane.

Christine brought a pile of Ivy's drawings to me. These pictures included several elaborate drawings of planes and horses, focusing on the similarity to and the details of the real objects. Christine said, “These pictures are from books. She copied the pictures.” Ivy looked at one picture while saying, “well, why there is not... why there is not... so maybe it is not the one I drew.” Ivy picked another picture out and said, “there is another drawing which is well done.” However, Christine corrected her, “this was drawn by mom, but some parts were drawn by you. The tree was drawn by you and you also colored the pony, did you?” Ivy nodded her head. Christine then said to me, “She likes to draw horses, planes, and sometimes people, but the people she draws are not as good as the horses. Nobody teaches her to draw people, and there aren't many pictures of people to copy.” I said Ivy's drawing skill was very developed. The mother seemed to be proud of that and told me Ivy's drawing indicated that she had “Tou Shi Gan” (the technique of representing three-dimensional objects and depth relationships on a two-dimensional surface).

I picked up a drawing of a princess and asked Ivy, “Who is she?” “I do not know,” Ivy answered. Another drawing was a copy made by Ivy from an illustration of a storybook—two

下来的：两只狼，躲在一块大岩石后面，偷窥着一辆奔驰而过的马车。“这是一个故事吗？”我问道。“这是一张图。”艾维回答道。“我猜它们是两头狼。”我指着图中的两头狼说。“它们是绿色的狼狗。”“它们在干嘛呢？”“它们在看马车和人。”“这些人要去哪儿呢？”“它们要去马儿要去的地方。”艾维看上去不太清楚有关这幅画的故事或是不太感兴趣去自己用这幅图编一个故事。

克瑞斯丁接下来建议道，“艾维，你给夏老师弹个琴吧。”艾维没有理睬她妈妈的建议。“这个像小桥一样。”艾维指着一块积木说。然后她又指着先前在地板上建好的一个东西说，“你觉得它像不像小桥？底下是海，上面是桥。走路的。”接下来艾维描述了她的皇冠的形状像一个小公主。“这儿是手，这儿是她的头，这儿是她的裙子。”艾维还用这些积木搭了一架飞机和一辆火车。

克瑞斯丁给我拿来一个表面有凹形的小凳子。因为我仍然和艾维一起坐在地板上，艾维就用这个小凳子玩她的车。由于小凳子表面的凹形，小车在上面来回滑动。“[因为]这儿有一个斜坡。”艾维解释道。

wolves, hiding behind of a big rock, were looking at a galloping horse with a carriage. “Is this a story?” I asked. “This is a picture,” Ivy answered. “I think they are wolves.” I pointed to the two wolves. “They are green wolf dogs.” Ivy corrected. “What are they doing?” “They are looking at the carriage and the people.” “Where are the people going?” “... They are going wherever the horse goes.” Ivy appeared to know little about the story of this picture or was not interested in making a story from the picture on her own.

Christine then suggested, “Ivy, could you play piano for your Teacher Xia?” Ivy ignored her mother’s request by not answering and moving. “This looks like a bridge,” Ivy showed me a piece of arched building block. Then she pointed to a block building she had constructed previously and said, “do you think it looks like a bridge, the floor is a sea, and the bridge is for walking.” Then she described how the frame of her crown looked like a princess, “These are her hands, this is her head, this is her heart, and this is her petticoat.” She also used the building blocks to build a plane and a train.

Christine brought me a slightly hollow stool to sit on. Because I continued to sit on the floor with Ivy, Ivy put a small car on the stool. Due to the cupped surface, the small car ran back and forth. “[Because] there is a slope,” Ivy explained. Ivy then tried different cars on the

艾维接下来把她的所有车子都拿到小凳子上做试验。有的车移动的距离很短，艾维看着这辆车说：“[因为]它的轮子有些小。”我表示同意。但是另外一辆大轮子的车也移动的不是很好。艾维推测道：“可能是它太旧了吧？”接着她又试了一辆新车，这辆车也移动不是很好。艾维把车拿起来检查了一番，下了一个结论“这个轮子转不快，有点麻。它的顶也很大。我们共花了艾维 5 分钟比较那些车滑动快，哪些车滑动慢。接下来，艾维又给我演示她的电动陀螺。她把它放在不同的表面上试验它转动的速度。我问艾维，“这个玩具是你自己挑的吗？”艾维回答说，“不，桐桐送给我的。”克瑞斯丁听到了我们的对话说道，“桐桐是住在 11 楼的小男孩。”

下午 3:55，艾维的爸爸和大姐姐回到家。我们相互打过招呼后，艾维的姐姐忙着准备去度假，艾维的爸爸则在主人卧室里忙着自己的工作。克瑞斯丁说，“你们自己玩吧。我们不打搅你们两个。”克瑞斯丁离开我们去忙着照应她的丈夫和大女儿。

下午 4 点，艾维建议道：“我们画画吧。”

stool. One car moved just a little distance. Ivy looked at it and then said, “[Because] the tires are small.” I agreed with her. Another car with four big tires did not move well. Ivy reasoned, “Maybe [because] it is an old one.” Then, she tried a new one and it still did not move smoothly. Ivy examined it and concluded, “it is the tires, a little bit Ma (which means the tires were too tight). It also has a big top (so the heavy top prevented the car from moving well).” We spent almost 15 minutes in trying to figure out why some cars ran longer and faster than the others. Following that, Ivy played an electric “Luo Tuo” (peg-top). Ivy put it on the different surfaces to see its turning speed. I asked her, “Did you select this toy by yourself?” Ivy answered, “No, Tongtong sent it to me.” Christine overheard us and said, “Tongtong is a boy living in the 11<sup>th</sup> floor.”

At 3:55 pm, Ivy's father and old sister came home. After greeting me, her older sister was busy with preparing for holiday travel to Australia and the United States. Her father was busy with some business on the phone. Christine then said, “You play by yourselves, and we will not disturb you two.” So she left and was busy with her husband and older daughter.

At 4:10 pm, Ivy suggested, “Let's draw pictures.” I followed her to her small nook. Then Ivy started to draw a plane and a horse.



我跟着她到她的小卧室。艾维一口气画了一匹马，非常流畅，没有任何涂改。她做的画让我印象非常深刻。艾维一边作画，一边解释说，“这是马的耳朵。她还有一根毛。这马的这个（鬃毛）特别好，这儿跟一个东西一样，跟一个雪梯一样。我这个马还没有拉车。我就画个小公主。”艾维画了一个小公主坐在马上。“小公主要去干什么呢？”我问道。“去玩吧。但我可以给你画个城堡。她刚从城堡里出来。”

我看见桌上一张纸上写有几排像字母一样的曲线。我问道，“这些是你写的吗？你写的是什么呢？”“我也不知道我写的是什麼。但是我现在也不愿意.....你看这是亮笔。”艾维向我演示这支笔的彩色墨水。她用这支笔写了一个中国字“人”。“噢，你会写人这个字。”艾维则问我，“它是不是发亮的？”她写这个字只是为了展示笔的特殊墨水。“你能写其它的字吗？”我问道。“当然，”艾维自信的回答道。“我会写大，我会写木，然后在旁边再加一个跟同样的，桐桐，然后再加一个木，然后再加一个同，桐桐。桐桐老跟我一起玩。艾维写的字非常端正，正确，就和她的画的风格一样。

Her fluent drawing and the elaborate images of the play and horse really impressed me (see appendix B-1, -2). While drawing, Ivy said, “this is the ears of the horse. It has a cluster of hair. Its mane is very good. It seems like something... like a snow ladder. This horse does not drag a carriage now, I draw a princess.” After Ivy drew a princess riding on the horse, I asked, “What will the princess do?” “(She will) go for a play. But I can draw a castle for you. She is just coming out from the castle.”

I found there were several random strings of scribbles like English letters on a sheet of paper. I asked, “Are these written by you? What have you written?” Ivy answered, “I don’t know what I have written. But now I don’t want to... look, this is a bright pen.” Ivy showed me a pen with special ink. Ivy used this pen to write a Chinese character “Ren 人” (which means a person). “Oh, you wrote the character Ren,” I said. Ivy asked me, “It is bright, isn’t it?” She seemed to just want to show me that this pen had special ink. The alphabet-like scribbles on the sheet were also written for trying out the different ink colors of the pens. “Can you write other words?” I asked. “Yes,” Ivy answered confidently, “I can write “Da 大” (which means big), I also can write “Mu 木”(which means a tree). I add a “Tong 同” (which means the same) to the “Mu”. I write a “Mu” again, I add a

之后我从克瑞斯丁那儿了解到桐桐是一个5岁的小男孩，他和艾维在同一个学前班。这两个孩子一周在一起玩一次。克瑞斯丁同意让我观察两个孩子在一起玩的情景。

我还发现有一本一年级的汉语课本放在艾维的小书架上，于是我让艾维给我看看她最喜欢的书。艾跑到她妈妈的卧室里搬来一摞书。这些书是不同国家，不同时期的一些有名的童话故事。大多数书是特别为学习中国字和汉语拼音而设计的。

“这是一本图画书。这两本是给小孩涂画，这都是让我画的。这个有马。”接着艾维翻看她的涂色书让我看书中的马儿。事实上，艾维只是涂了所有的马儿，其它的都忽略了。艾维花了半个多小时谈论这些马儿。她谈论的内容主要集中在马的不同形态上。比如说，这匹马在跑，那两匹马正在打架。这匹马没有跑起来，那匹马戴着盔甲。

“Tong” again. Tongtong 桐桐, Tongtong always plays with me.” These Chinese characters Ivy wrote were very fine and accurate like her drawings.

I later learned from Christine that Tongtong was also 5-years-old and enrolled in the same kindergarten class. The two children play together once a week. Christine agreed to let me observe when the two children played together.

I found there was a Chinese textbook for grade-one students on Ivy's small bookshelf on her desk, so I asked Ivy to show me her favorite books. Ivy ran to her mother's living room for her books. Christine and Ivy brought a pile of Chinese books. These books are all popular storybooks of different times and countries. Most of them are particularly designed for learning Chinese Characters and Pinyin (the Roman letters for the sounds of Chinese Characters).

“This is a picture book. These two are for a child to fill in colors. These are all for me to fill in. There are horses.” Ivy pointed to two coloring books. Then Ivy turned the pages of her coloring books and let me look at all the horses in the books. In fact, Ivy only colored the horses and ignored all the other things. Ivy talked about the horses on the pages for more than half an hour. Her talking focused on the different configurations of the pictures of the

当我们的注意力转向故事书时，艾维大声读着书页的标题，“四个好朋友。”然后她又看着另一本书的标题，她指着其中一个字说，“我知道它是马。但是，她好像发现这个字不太吻合她记忆中的字。事实上，这个字“与”和“马”非常相似。

接下来，我想让艾维给我将书中的故事。下面是我们的交谈。

安娜：你最喜欢什麼故事呢？

艾维：我最喜欢马的故事。

安娜：你给我讲一个马的故事，好吗？

艾维：我不会讲马的故事。你看这儿有小斑马过河。小斑马，我会照着它画一个。  
小斑马过河（指着图画书的标题念道。）

艾维然后从她爸爸的废纸篓里找来一张纸。这张纸是一封用英文写的信。艾维指着信的第一个字母说，“H, H 是马, Ma 是马, 是马, /ha/, /ha/。”接着艾维画了五线谱，并标上了七个音符。

horses. For example, this horse was running and those horses were fighting; this horse was not running and that horse wore armor.

When we turned to a storybook, Ivy read loudly the title of the book “Si Ge Hao Peng You” (which means four good friends). Then she looked at the next storybook’s title. She pointed to one character and said, “I know it is “Ma 马” (Which means a horse). However, she seemed to struggle for awhile because this character did not exactly match the one in her memory. This Character “Yu 与” (Which means and) is similar to the character “Ma” in appearance but is slightly different.

After that, I asked Ivy to tell me the story of the book. The following was our conversation.

Anna: “What are your favorite stories?”

Ivy: “I like the stories of horse best.”

Anna: “Could you tell me a story about horses?”

Ivy: “I can’t tell a story about horses. Look, here is a small zebra across a river, a small zebra, I can copy it. “Xiao Ban Ma Guo He” (Ivy pointed to the title and read the characters).

Ivy then grasped a sheet of paper that was a draft of her father’s business letter written in English. Ivy pointed to the first letter of the first word and said, “H, H is Ma, Ma is horse, /ha/, /ha/, is H. H is horse, /ha/, /ha/.” Then Ivy drew a staff (a set of five horizontal lines) and labeled the seven pitches between the lines while

下午 5:30, 克瑞斯丁走过来又让艾维给我弹琴。但是, 艾维说她只是想和我玩。克瑞斯丁坚持让艾维弹琴, 我说我很想听艾维弹琴。最后艾维勉强坐在琴凳上谈了几个练习曲。有留下来和我玩。她又花了一些时间把五线谱上的练习曲照着画了下来。当我准备离开时, 艾维想让我第二天来玩。克瑞斯丁解释说, 夏老师很忙, 艾维听了很不高兴, 她说, “那么, 再明天, 再明天, 再再明天。” 下午 6 点, 我离开了艾维的家。

singing.

At 5:30 pm, Christine came to ask Ivy to play piano for Teacher Xia, however, Ivy said that she only wanted to play with me. Christine persisted in getting Ivy to play the piano and I also said that I wanted to listen to Ivy play. At last, Ivy reluctantly sat on the bench and played several practice pieces with a flat face. After several minutes, she quickly left the bench and persuaded me to play with her for another ten minutes. She actually spent the time drawing a set of horizontal lines and copying the pitch notes from her Piano practice book. She also let me draw a G clef for her. When I prepared to leave, Ivy wanted me to play with her the next day. Christine explained that teacher Xia had many things to do. Ivy was not happy with the explanation and said, “then, next tomorrow, next next tomorrow, next next next tomorrow.” I left their home around 6:00 pm. (Transcript: November 16, 2002; Session 2)

Ivy's play and literacy activities at home are influenced by her home environment and atmosphere. Since her home is a condo in a high rise, it is not easy for her to get out frequently. Ivy spends most of her time in this two-bedroom suite. As well, the neighbors near her home seemed to have little contact with each other possibly due to the different owners' ethnicity. This is likely the reason why Ivy only had friends from her kindergarten class after living here for more than two years. Even though her parents stay home a lot, they have their own work and habits which require Ivy to play by herself; and they prefer

their home to be quiet and neat; thus, Ivy's daily activities are less mobile than Kevin's. For example, she always sits silently, doing something like drawing, playing puzzles, or playing piano. While interacting with adults, Ivy appeared to be self-restrained and lacked animation and enthusiasm. This play session is my first visit to Ivy's home and I was labeled as "Teacher Xia" by Christine, which positioned me in a place of authority. This might have alerted Ivy to the power relationship between us and she may have regarded me as a supervising adult rather than a playmate. The followings are Ivy's play features identified from this play session as well as evident in other play episodes and interviews.

*The Patterner: Play with shapes or forms.* Ivy's play often focuses on imagining and describing the visual shapes of her toys or block buildings instead of enacting or creating a story. When she played with block buildings in this selected play session, she used the sentence structure of "looks like" to describe a "bridge," a "house," and a "train;" she also described how the frame of a crown looks like a figure of a princess and how the mane of a horse looks like a snow ladder. Her play behavior has the characteristics of "patterners" (Wolf & Gardner, 1979) who tend to focus on the intrinsic qualities of objects and to use toys to make patterns, build shapes, and so forth. In the above play session, Ivy exemplified this play style by playing with different cars on a hollow stool. She explored the reasons why different cars run differently on the same surface of the stool and she attempted to figure out the intrinsic relationship between friction and her cars' qualities.

Ivy's play orientation seems to have a relationship with the style of her literacy learning (e.g., storytelling). In distinguishing the individual differences in storytelling,

Kavanaugh and Engel (1998) hypothesized that patterners, whose play is focused primarily on what can be done with objects, might tell brief stories that refer sparingly to past events. On the other hand, dramatists, who explore interpersonal relationships in their play with others, might tell long detailed stories about past events. This hypothesis was evident by an interview with Ivy's mother:

"When we ask her what happened in school today or what have you learned from school, she has difficulty telling you. She says very simply, two to three sentences for many things. Sometimes other parents asked her, 'where were you living?' She said, 'Living in China before.' She could not tell in detail which city she lived in China and her past experiences in China, but other children can say many things."

The following is one example of how Ivy talked about her recent experience of visiting Seaworld Park in Hong Kong during the Chinese Spring festival.

Ivy opened one book named "Learning to Draw Animals-2000 Samples" and pointed to a dolphin, "I can draw a dolphin." Then she started to copy it on her paper.

*I asked her: Have you seen a real dolphin?*

Ivy: When we went to Hong Kong, there were dolphins in Seaworld Park.

*Anna: Can you tell me about it?*

Ivy: En... I have seen small fish and big sharks. Also Macdonald, also Coke.

*Anna: How did you play there?*

Ivy: I also rode the Guo Shan Che (a roller coaster).

*Anna: Did you come into something very funny?*

Ivy: Yes, I saw a real horse which had [dragged] a wagon.

*Anna: How did you feel?*

Ivy: It was playful. I did not want to leave. (Transcript: February 20, 2003)

Ivy really liked this visit to Hòng Kong since she often mentioned it in high spirit. When she talked about this experience, however, she focused on the objects she observed or the shapes of the objects instead of narrating a complete event or episode.

Ivy's preference for playing with shapes of objects is also reflected in her interest in and ability to master the forms of Chinese characters. She has the confidence to spell and recognize many Chinese characters accurately. All the Chinese characters she demonstrated were well-written in the order of writing strokes and the complexity of the characters. There were no mistakes in her spelling. Similarly, her ability to recognize Chinese characters quickly and accurately also reveals her personal features in the identification of pictographic forms. In this play episode, even though confused by two very similar characters "Ma (马)" and "Yu (与)" at first, Ivy immediately recognized something different between them. She also noted "foreign words" printed on her airplane models by the shape of them and reflected in her play with her special pens. When some children explore with written language, they usually play with basic graphic features, such as the linearity of the print (Clay, 1975). It is likely that the ability to distinguish visual shapes, which developed in her play, helps Ivy to recognize sight-words effectively.

On the other hand, the absence of dramatic (story) elements in her play appears to

have a relationship with her attitude towards and behaviour in story reading and writing (drawing). During my observations, Ivy rarely engaged in dramatic play by assigning roles to her toys and other people or taking roles herself to play a story from a book or a life episode. My observations of other girls around her age at home show that most of them engage in dramatic play such as playing house or playing school. However, Ivy never initiated dramatic play by herself in my visits; she even refused her peer Tongtong's suggestion of doing a dramatic play of the Second World War and my suggestion of playing house (see the next play session). In a later interview, Christine said that she sometimes told stories or read books to Ivy at bedtime. Ivy enjoyed listening to familiar stories but she did not like to look at a picture book by herself or retell the stories to others. Christine's words confirmed my impression of Ivy's attitude towards stories and books: she did not show an enthusiasm for the characters, plot, and conflicts of the stories in her books except for the shape of the figures--horses. In this play session, she showed me her story books, but she only tried to talk about what the horses in the books looked like or pointed to some Chinese characters she knew. When I asked her about the stories, she had difficulty retelling them in a narrative way (i.e., telling a story using a story line which includes basic elements such as what the settings and characters are, what the relationships between characters are, and how a story develops and resolves). This is also evident in her mother's comment: "Her narrative competence is not very strong. When we tell her a story and ask her to retell some, she only retells it roughly. That is, she can not use the original words you tell her." The following is an example of Ivy retelling a story to me with my



probing.

I found there were two English storybooks on the end table, so I picked up one and asked Ivy, "The Elephant. Have you looked at (read) this book?"

Ivy: (Nodding her head) Yes.

*Anna: Can you tell me the story?*

Ivy: Mei Yong La (Impossible), I do not know English.

*Anna: Can you tell me the story by looking at (reading) the pictures?*

Ivy did not respond.

*Anna: Ok. Let me read it...this book tells us the story of original elephants that have not long trucks (I started telling the story in Chinese).*

Ivy: (Pointing to the nose of an elephant) This original elephant, why was its nose so small (short)?

*Anna: Why?*

Ivy: (Pointing to the noses of other elephants) Were other elephants' noses also small (short)?

*Anna: Yes. Why did they differ from our modern elephants? Is that because they wanted to eat bananas in high trees?*

Ivy: (Turning to another page) This, look at it, there is a big crocodile, it made its (the elephant's) nose long.

*Anna: Really? It was because the big crocodile bit the elephant's nose and dragged the nose very long. But why did the big crocodile bite its (the elephant's) nose?*

Ivy: It (the big crocodile) likes to eat it (the elephant's nose). I borrowed this storybook before. I listened to the story before.

*Anna: Who told you the story?*

Ivy: My dad.

*Anna: So could you tell me the story; I really want to know it.*

Ivy: (The elephant's nose) did not grow by itself, but (it) was drawn long by the big crocodile.

*Anna: Why?*

Ivy: Then all of the elephants come to the crocodile to make their noses longer, so they can eat things. (Turning to another page, a giraffe falls into a brush with thorns) look at the giraffe. It has thorn all over its body.

*Anna: Oh.* (Transcript: March 25, 2003.)

In this story-retelling episode, although Ivy knew the plots of the story, she did not effectively retell it. Like her description of the different horse configurations in the selected play session, her interest focused on the actual pictures of the storybook and she enjoyed showing the details of the drawings to me. The tone of her answers to my questions appears to indicate she assumed that I knew the plot of the story and the relationship among characters like she knew. In other words, Ivy seemed to lack awareness of others' perspectives or audience. Because she assumed I had the background knowledge, this made it difficult to understand her retelling of the story.

Similarly, Ivy did not enact or dramatize stories of her books or episodes of her

daily life experiences autonomously in either her play activities or drawing narratives.

When I attempted to elicit stories from her play or drawings, Ivy's responses were always short or reluctant. In the play session, after Ivy built a house with her building blocks, I asked her, "Who lives in the house?" She did not respond. When Ivy showed me a drawing of a princess, I asked her, "Who is she?" She answered, "I don't know." When I asked Ivy if the copy of an illustration of a book (two wolves, hiding behind of a big rock, are looking at a galloping carriage) was a story, she replied, "This is a picture." She seemed to be only interested in the images on the paper instead of trying to make stories from the images. Nevertheless, Ivy's orientation to play and literacy learning may not be regarded as a deficit since literate competencies and modes of meaning-making are changing, multiple, and fluid (Nixon, 2001). Ivy may have been making meaning of another sort. That is, she has some strength in the visual dimensions of literacy (Anning, 2003) in that she is able to making meaning from pictures and labels if under a circumstance that is non-threatening. This will be further explored in the discussion of the next play session, "Play with Peers."

*Personal developmental contexts: Play, home culture, and literacy.* There are newer concepts from literacy studies, such as visual and hybrid literacies, multiple literacies, and multiple modes of meaning-making (Millard & Marsh, 2001; Nixon, 2001; Pally, 2000). This play session demonstrates the significant multiple literacy practices in Ivy's family: Qin, Qi, Shu, Hua (music, Chinese chess, Chinese handwriting, and Chinese painting and drawing). In the traditional Chinese society, "Qin, Qi, Shu, Hua" are four literacy skills which symbolize that a person having these skills is a well-educated person;

particularly, they are labels for a female from a “Shu Xiang Men Di (highly-literate family).

Ivy’s mother Christine embodies this cultural content. She learned the traditional Chinese instrument “Er Hu” when she was young; now she hopes her daughter can play piano because “Qin Qi Shu Hua, Qin (music) is placed in the first place.” Even though Ivy does not like to play piano, she did reflect this home culture content into her play. For example, she drew a staff (stave) while playing with me. She also folded a model of a piano using a sheet of paper. Sometimes she sang while drawing or added some pitch notes on her picture.

“Shu (handwriting)” emphasizes the shape and form of written words. Ivy made an effort to keep her handwriting accurate, neat, and beautiful; for example, she used lines to support her handwriting and she carefully erased the wrong words or “dirty things” on her paper.

Another example is she used her standard to comment on her peer Tongtong’s “ugly” handwriting in the play session that follows. “Hua” is the most important part of Ivy’s play and literacy life. Ivy expressed several times that, “I love drawing the best; I only like to draw; or drawing is my play.” Christine commented that Ivy could be absorbed in drawing for three to four hours without disturbing the adults in the same room. Drawing is also one of the literacy activities the whole family engaged in. The three female members also draw the same pictures together and the father bought many drawing materials and books to support them. For example, Ivy’s father bought her a professional artists’ book, *The Art of George Stubbs: A Visual Celebration of One of the Masters of British Art*, because she loved it very much even though this book is complex far beyond her age.

In her case study of an Appalachian family, Purcell-Gates (1995) concludes that

children's literacy learning is affected by the significant people in their lives. As stated previously in this paper, the intimate people in children's lives greatly influence their perceptions and behaviors. Ivy's mother, Christine, is the main caregiver and educator in her home life. Therefore, Christine plays an important role in shaping Ivy's play and literacy behavior. In this home visit, for example, she was listening to the dialogue between Ivy and me. When Ivy said her favorite play activity was drawing, Christine regarded Ivy's answer as inappropriate so she repeated my question and suggested the answer to Ivy. Another example is when Christine tried to persuade Ivy to play piano for "Teacher Xia" even though Ivy did not want to stop playing with her toys. While we were drawing or writing, Christine always watched over her shoulder to make sure Ivy was doing perfectly in front of Teacher Xia. In another visit, Ivy wanted to draw a horse for me. She started to draw the horse from the left side of a sheet. Christine intervened.

Christine: Don't start from the edge. [You] should put the horse in the middle [of the paper].

Ivy: I always draw a horse here.

Christine: Why start from the edge. There is a large empty space behind. [You] should arrange your picture.

Ivy ignored her mother and still drew the head of a horse from the left edge of the paper. Halfway through drawing a horse, Ivy said she has a wagon horse, and then she ran to get it and show me how to unload the equipment from the toy horse.

Christine came and said, "You have not completed the horse. You should draw it

first.” (Transcript: March 25, 2003.)

When commenting on her daughter’s drawings, Christine always compared them to the original pictures or objects that Ivy was copying. Sometimes, Ivy added something new to the picture she copied. For example, she drew a skate for a kitten and added a ship, a house and some trees to a teacher-assigned coloring picture. Since the skate is well drawn, Christine’s remark was positive, “Ivy Fa Hui (created) this part.” However, Ivy’s drawings of the ship, house and trees were not as skillful as her drawings of the horse; Christine therefore disapproved, “Originally, this was a very nice picture. She added these things (which made the picture) Luan Qi Ba Zhao (What a mess).” Christine’s comments implied that she believes a good drawing is more important in aesthetic aspect rather than in representational. This standard is also applied to Ivy’s learning of Chinese characters; that is, early writing is a practice of motor skills and should be perfect at the beginning.

Ivy’s father is also important in her life. However, since he is the financial supporter of this family, his interests and focus are mainly on his business. I have learned that during the first two years, Ivy, her old sister, and her mother lived here while her father was in China. Ivy’s father came to Canada finally because of the need to keep his immigrant status. This long separation has estranged Ivy from her father emotionally. This is evident from what Ivy told me on another occasion: “I got used to sleeping with my mom. Now dad comes, so I can’t sleep with my mom. It is dad; otherwise, if [I] don’t have a dad, I won’t sleep alone.” I gather from these kinds of comments and from my observations that even though Ivy’s father takes some responsibilities for helping Ivy’s literacy learning such as

reading English stories, buying her favorite drawing books, and teaching her to use a computer, he rarely plays with her. During my visits, he was always present at home; he responded to Ivy's requests such as setting the video games for us and bringing the books Ivy was looking for, but he was not interested in our play activities. He always concentrated on his own work, reading or writing business letters or contracts.

As introduced previously, Nora cannot spend a lot of time to play with her younger sister because of her own study. As required by their parents, Nora always stays in her own room to do schoolwork while Ivy plays quietly in another room. Ivy knows that her older sister needs to study seriously and diligently to read and write English in order to go to the good university near their home.

In order to become an integral part of her family, Ivy may tune her play and literacy learning style (orientation) to meet her mother's standards and her family's serious attitude toward literacy learning.

*Gendered identity in play and literacy activities.* Ivy's play and literacy activities also reflect her understanding and development of self (a girl) in her family. Ivy is aware of her female identity through her mother and sister's role models and emphasis. She loves objects that are beautiful and decorative. In this play session, Ivy showed me the toys she loves: a silver covered crown, a box of shining rings and necklaces, some butterfly clips, and colorful bright pens; she told me some of them were given by her sister Nora. While drawing pictures, Ivy made a lot of decoration on them, such as using laces, diamonds, or hearts as the frame of her pictures. Christine and Nora sometimes drew the main part of a

picture and let Ivy do the decoration part to make the picture fancy. In her study of “gendered literacy,” Barrs (2000) points out that boys are encouraged to specialize in what Rosenblatt (1978) terms “efferent reading,” where readers read mainly in order to acquire information or to understand a text, and girls are encouraged to specialize in “aesthetic” reading, which involves the use of language, sounds, form and the exploration of affective response. Solsken (1993) also states, “In general, an aesthetic stance toward text may be regarded as female” (p.43). Girls, like Ivy, may orient to what is considered a gender-appropriate stance in relation to reading and writing.

Christine and Nora also model a whole set of behaviors around reading and writing that include quietness, relative immobility, and interest in conventionally female topics. The fantasy storybooks Ivy read have stories about princesses and the like. In fact, princesses and horses are the most mentioned characters in her play activities. She also learned that a girl is expected to produce a neat and ordered product, such as a drawing or a piece of writing. In the next play session “Play with Peers,” she scowled at a boy’s dirty and messy handwriting and did not allow him to make her own drawing “ugly.”

Nevertheless, through observing her play and talking with her mother, I found Ivy seemed to be resistant to the future role of becoming a traditional female who takes the most responsibilities for the domestic world, like her own mother. She rarely played house such as cradling dolls or pretending to be a mother. Ivy expressed in one of our conversations that she wanted to be an artist in the future; this is why she spends most of her time and energy drawing, and why she treats her drawing as the same thing as her play



and literacy learning. One possible explanation may be that Ivy found that there was a conflict between being an artist and a housewife from her mother's example. Christine was a musician in China, but she is a housewife in Canada.

Ivy's solitary play with the presence of adults demonstrates how her family environment and members shape her play style, literacy learning activities, and her own identity. Nevertheless, there are occasions when same-age peers come to her home to play with her.

### *Play with Peers at Home*

下午三点，我到达艾维家，艾维和她的伙伴桐桐正在她家等我。两个孩子都很高兴见到我。这是我第一次见到桐桐，一个5岁的男孩子，戴着一幅眼睛。艾维在桐桐的一同玩耍时显得特别活跃。他们从一个房间跑到另一个房间，还在沙发上腾跳。

过了一会儿，俩个孩子带着我到厨房的玩具架边。地板上有一个用积木建好的房子。于是两个孩子决定重新把积木块分一分，各自搭一个不同的房子。桐桐很快搭好了一座房子并说他的房子像火箭。“看这儿。”桐桐用他的食指放在积木的弓形的底端。我们可以在这儿点火。“艾维也加入了桐桐的想象中。她说没有人是坐在火箭里，人都是坐在太空穿梭机里。

At 3:00 pm I arrived at Ivy's home.

Ivy and her peer-Tongtong were waiting for me. The two children were all glad to see me even though this was the first time I met Tongtong, a 5-year-old boy who wore glasses. Ivy seemed more active with Tongtong's company. They ran from one room to another room or jumped on the sofa.

After a while, the two children led me to the toy shelf in the corner of the kitchen. There were some building blocks on the floor, so the children each decided to build a house. Tongtong quickly completed a house and said his house looked like a rocket. "Look at here," Tongtong used his index finger to test the arched bottom, "we can fire the rocket here." Ivy also engaged in Tongtong's imagination. She said that nobody was sitting in the rocket because the people were all sitting in a space

当桐桐拿这艾维的玩具飞机玩时，桐桐说他的飞机快起飞了，所以他需要一支笔和一张纸写下飞机起飞的时间。我把自己的笔和一张笔记本纸给他。艾维说她也需要笔和纸来写下发射她的火箭的时间。艾维自己从爸爸的废纸篓里找到了纸和笔。桐桐把纸放在厨房的桌面上抄下了桌上时钟的时间：3:23。艾维第一次为她的火箭画了一个发射基地。然后向我要火箭发射的时间。我把自己的手表给她看，让她自己挑一个数字写下。艾维坚持让我告诉她，所以我就说了一个时间：8:30。艾维先画了三条横线，然后利用这些线条把数字写在中间。

桐桐说现在是起飞的时间了。他一手拿一架飞机模拟操纵他们的飞行。同时，他不断警告道：“艾维，艾维，两架敌人的飞机已经起飞了。快来，起飞你们的飞机，和他们战斗。”艾维看上去不想加入桐桐的想象中的战争。她向我介绍她的玩具钢转。桐桐沉浸在自己的想象世界中非常兴奋。他说道：“战争开始了，快，艾维，向我开火。”桐桐的飞机向我们越飞越近，最后撞在艾维搭好的房子上。

shuttle.

While playing with Ivy's toy airplanes, Tongtong said that his fighting planes would take off so he needed a pen and a sheet to write down the time for taking off. I supported his idea by giving him a sheet of my notebook and a pen. Ivy said she also needed to write down the time for firing her rocket and she found herself a piece of paper and a pencil. Tongtong put the paper on the counter of the kitchen and copied the time (3:23) of the clock on the counter. Ivy first drew a "launch base (田)" for her rocket, and then asked me the launch time of her rocket. I showed my watch and let her choose numbers to copy. Ivy insisted that I told her the time; I said "8:30". Ivy drew three parallel lines first and then copied the Arabic numbers from my watch between the lines. (The lines were used to help her write more standard.)

Tongtong said that it was time for his airplane to take off. He held two fighting airplanes to imitate them taking off. At the same time, he warned, "Ivy, Ivy, two enemies' airplanes have taken off. Come, take off your airplane. Fight with them." Ivy seemed not to want to take part in Tongtong's imaginary fighting. She talked with me about her toy drill. Tongtong was excited with his own game. He said, "A war is starting, come, Ivy, fight with me." His airplanes were flying

艾维看上去很恼火：“你为什么要撞我的房子？”桐桐坐在地板上愣了一会儿，然后解释说：“这不是我的飞机，这是别人的飞机来袭击了。”艾维还是很不高兴。我在一旁安慰道，“桐桐只是在玩战争的游戏。我们的房子倒了不怕，我们还可以盖又大又新的房子。听了我的话后，艾维又很快搭起了她的房子。

下午 3:55，艾维建议说：“我们玩拼图吧。”桐桐反对道：“我不喜欢玩拼图。”“那你想玩什么？”我问道。“我想玩第二次世界大战。”“我不喜欢。”艾维反对道。“那我们玩娃娃家好吗？”我建议道，可是两个孩子都表示不感兴趣。最后，桐桐继续玩他的第二次世界大战，并模拟飞机声，轰炸声，以及飞行员之间的对话。同时，艾维在一旁让我同她玩“捉迷藏”的游戏。因为我们的游戏不一致，所以我们玩的时间都不长。

艾维接着向我展示她的几个有趣的玩具，其中一个“跳小鸡。”另一个是玩具螺丝，可

close to us, and then they knocked Ivy's house down. Ivy seemed to be annoyed, "Why did you knock my house down?" Tongtong sat in amazement for a moment then explained, "They are not my airplanes. They belong to enemies. It is other people's airplanes which attacked your building." Ivy still looked unhappy, "I see it is you who knocked my house down." I said, "Tongtong is only playing war. It doesn't matter that our house is knocked down because we can build a new house again." Ivy quickly built a house again after my words.

At 3:55 pm, Ivy suggested, "let's play a puzzle." Tongtong opposed, "I don't want to play a puzzle." "What do you want to play?" I asked. "The Second World War." Tongtong answered. "I don't like it," Ivy opposed. "Do you want to play house?" I suggested. "No, I don't like it." Both of the children ignored my suggestion. Therefore, Tongtong continued to play Second World War by imitating the sounds of flying, bombing, and the conversations between pilots. At the same time, Ivy was trying to play "hide and seek" with me. Neither of the games lasted long enough due to the disagreement of play choice.

Ivy then showed us several of her "funny" toys, one was a Jumping Chick; the other was a screw driver which could split a

以用来拆玩具卡车。艾维还捡起了一个小的塑料交通牌告诉我们说，“第一排的字是‘停’；第二排是法文。”桐桐表示不同意艾维的说法，他认为第二行是另一种语言。艾维说“是爸爸告诉我的。我爸爸既懂英文，也懂法文。”

接下来，艾维建议我们一起玩电子游戏。桐桐立即表示同意。然而，他们花了很长时间决定玩电子游戏的顺序。他们两人都同意让我第一个玩，因为我最大。然后桐桐认为他应该第二个玩因为他是客人。但是艾维不想成为最后一个玩游戏的。我说我不知道怎样玩这个游戏，所以我想先看看他们玩。我愿意最后一个玩。两个孩子接受了我的建议，但是仍然讨论他们之间的顺序。艾维的妈妈走过来建议用一个公平的方法，“石头，剪子，布。”这是传统游戏中决定顺序的方法。

当游戏顺序决定后，我们一块来到客厅，艾维的爸爸帮我们安好了电子游戏。这个游戏是关于一个小男孩或者一个小女孩骑上一个

toy truck. Ivy also picked up a small plastic traffic sign and told us, “the first row of the word is ‘stop’, the second is French.”

Tongtong disagreed with Ivy and said that the second was another language. Ivy defended her idea by saying that “My father had told me. My father can understand both English and French.”

After that, Ivy suggested we play electronic videogames on TV. Tongtong agreed with her immediately (Their interests then matched). However, they spent a long time negotiating the order of play. They both agreed to let me play first because I was the oldest. Then Tongtong thought he should be the second player because he was a guest, but Ivy didn't want to be the *last* one to play. I said that I did not know how to play the game, so I wanted to watch their play first and I was willing to be the last one to play. The two children accepted my suggestion but still negotiated their own order. At last, Ivy's mother came to suggest a fair way “Shitou, Jianzi, and Bu” (which means Rock, Paper, and Scissors). This is a traditional way to decide the order of play among players.

When the play order was decided, we marched to the living room where Ivy's father helped us set up the game. The game was about a boy or a girl who rides on a tiger to climb the Great Wall. Along the way there are

老虎爬长城。在沿途中有许多苹果他（她）必须采集同时还有很多陷阱他（她）必须避开。艾维和桐桐很快进入了游戏的情景中。刚开始他们还把游戏板递给我用，但是我失败的很快，他们也就渐渐的忘了我的份儿。

这两个玩游戏的之间也存在着竞争。艾维看上去很在乎领先于桐桐的角色。当她玩得很顺利时，她会说，“看我怎么样？我行吧。”桐桐通常点点头，眼睛紧盯着游戏。桐桐看上去更在乎玩游戏而不是谁比谁玩的更好。所以桐桐很快追上了艾维并超过了艾维的游戏级数。艾维并不服气桐桐比她更好。她坚持重复同一个游戏级别。并把她的失败归结于外因。比如，“这是因为你同我说话。这是因为你压住了我的线。”之后，桐桐想玩最难的一级游戏。艾维警告他第五级非常难，但桐桐执意要玩。艾维从游戏中退了出来并建议我画东西。

艾维从爸爸的废纸篓里拿来几张纸。她画了一个骑着小马的公主。我问她这个小公主是谁，她住在哪儿？艾维总是回答说：“我也不知道。”

apples the player should pick up and traps the player should avoid. Ivy and Tongtong were quickly absorbed in the game. They gave me several chances to play at first, but since I soon failed, they gradually stop handing the joystick to me.

There was a competition between two game players. Ivy seemed to care a lot to keep ahead of Tongtong. When she played the game effectively, she said, "Look at how I did? I am good, aren't I?" Tongtong usually nodded his head and looked at the game intentionally. Tongtong seemed to care more about playing the game than about who was a better player. Tongtong caught up with Ivy quickly and passed her level of the game. Ivy was not convinced he was better. She insisted on repeating the same play and attributed her failure to other reasons such as "It is because you were speaking to me;" or "It is because you press my controlling cord." At last, Tongtong wanted to try the most difficult level. Ivy warned Tongtong of the difficulty of play the level five, and then she retreated from the play and suggested that I draw something.

Ivy brought several sheets from her father's waste basket. She skillfully drew a pony with a princess. I asked who the princess was and where she lives. Ivy always answered, "I don't know."

I started to draw a picture while

我也开始画一张图，边画边讲：“这儿有一座房子，房子的四周有树林。有一个叫遥遥的小姑娘正在家里玩。遥遥的妈妈在屋子外边的游泳池里游泳。一只老虎向遥遥家走来。”当我讲故事时，艾维很专心的看着我的画并听我讲述。于是我问她：“不好，一只老虎来了，他想吃掉这个小姑娘，怎么办呢？艾维说：“我也不知道。”在一旁玩电子游戏的桐桐听见了我们的对话，停下手中的游戏说：

“我可以用枪打这个老虎。”他要过我手中的笔，在我的画上添了一个手拿枪的人，还特意画了子弹飞出弹膛向老虎射去的情景。我说他的主意不错。桐桐干脆关掉了电子游戏，拿起一张纸开始画一串城市屋。他还画了一座高楼并说这是他住的地方。我问她住的楼叫什么名字。桐桐回答道：“无底洞。”

艾维说她也想画她家的房子。但是画之前，她借了我的画开始照着画。当她画了一个同我的画差不多的房子和游泳池后，艾维瞥了一眼桐桐的画并评价道：“你画的树真难看。看看我的树，向云一样，漂亮吗？”桐桐并不在意艾维的评价，只顾埋头画自己的。

describing my drawing: “There is a house surrounded by woods, a little girl named Yaoyao (Ivy suggested the name) is playing at home. Yaoyao’s mother is swimming in a swimming pool outside of the house. A tiger was approaching the house.” Ivy was intentionally looking at my drawing and listening to my narrative, so I asked, “Too bad, a tiger is coming. It wants to eat the little girl. What can we do?” Ivy said, “I do not know.” Tongtong overheard our conversation. He stopped playing his game and said, “I can fight with the tiger by using a gun.” He asked me to give my pen and picture to Tongtong. He added a hunter who was holding a gun and the gun was targeting the tiger. I said that it was a good idea. Tongtong turned off the video game and picked up one sheet to draw his own picture which was like a cluster of town houses. He also drew a high-rise and said that it was the building he lives in. I asked him what name of the building was. Tongtong answered, “Wu Di Dong” (which means an endless hole).

Ivy said she also wanted to draw her own house. However, she borrowed my picture, and started to copy it. After drawing a similar house and swimming pool on her sheet, Ivy glimpsed at Tongtong’s picture and commented, “The trees you draw are ugly. Look at my drawing. The trees look like

艾维画了一条通向远方的小路。然后她看上去不知下一步该画什么。我问她：“谁住在这个小屋里？”艾维想想后在屋子的墙上画了一个“十”字。桐桐说教堂在晚上不开门，艾维反驳道：“晚上教堂里有人在唱歌。”

桐桐表示同意然后又勾头画他自己的画。他用了一个大圆圈把他所画的房子都圈在一起。他说这些房子是在一个国家--中国。然后他在画的右上角写了中国两个字。我说这真是一幅好作品。

艾维的想象力也被桐桐的想象力激发了。她开始画一些不同的路通向不同的建筑。整个画面安排非常整洁和均衡。可能是受桐桐的影响，艾维也宣称她的房子是在一个国家里。我问她是哪一个国家？她却不能回答。所以我给了她一点暗示：“这个国家是你以前住过的呢，还是现在住的？”艾维说：“是现在。”我说那就是加拿大。艾维表示同意，但她说她不会写加拿大这几个字。在一边的桐

clouds. Are they beautiful?” Tongtong did not mind Ivy's comment and bent his head over his drawing.

Ivy drew a pathway extending from the door of the house to a corner of the paper. Then she seemed not to know what should be drawn next. I asked her, “Who is living in the house?” She said that it was a church. I asked her how she knew that. Ivy then drew three “十” on the wall of the house. Tongtong said that the church was not open in the evening. Ivy refuted, “There are people who sings songs in the evening.”

Tongtong was convinced and went back to his own drawing. Tongtong drew a big circle around what he had drawn and claimed that these building were in the country, China. Tongtong then wrote “Zhong Guo 中国”(China) on the right corner of his drawing. I said it was a really good picture.

Ivy's imagination seemed to be aroused by Tongtong's rich imagination. She started to draw different roads extending to different buildings, and some were castles. The arrangement of these buildings was nicely balanced. Under the influence of Tongtong, Ivy claimed that the houses she had drawn were also a country. I asked her which country she had drawn. She could not answer. So I gave her a clue, “Is it the country you are

桐一下来了兴趣，主动提出帮助，“我知道怎么写，像这样。”他一把拖过艾维的图画并开始在上面写字。艾维立即表示反对并拖回了自己的图画：“不，不要写在我的纸上。”但是桐桐已经在她的纸上写了儿笔。艾维看上去很不舒服，但是她很快想出了一个办法来除去那儿笔脏东西。那就是，她把那儿笔改变成一个房子的一部分并自然地成为她的图画的一部分。

我则给桐桐另外一张纸写“加拿大”这几个字。桐桐写下汉字“家”。这个字与“加”同音。但桐桐说他会写另外两个字。我于是示范了三个字的写法，并一边解释这三个的组合。艾维和桐桐听后表示说，“那很容易。”然后各自把这三个字抄在了他们的纸上。

living in now or the country you lived in the past?” She said, “now”. I said that then the country is Canada. She agreed with me, but she said that she did not know how to write the word Canada. Tongtong offered to help, “I know how to write, like this.” He quickly pulled Ivy’s picture to start writing the word on it. Ivy protested and pulled her paper back, “No, don’t write on my paper.” Tongtong had already written several strokes on Ivy’s paper. Ivy seemed upset. But she quickly figured out a way to compensate for the “dirty thing;” that is, Ivy changed the strokes into a frame of a house which very naturally became a part of her picture (See appendix B-3).

I offered Tongtong another piece of paper to write the word Canada. He wrote the character “Jia 家” (which means family) on the sheet. This character “Jia 家” has the same sound as the character “Jia 加” (which is used as the conventional character for the translation of “Ca”). Tongtong then said that he did not know how to write the other two characters. I demonstrated the three Chinese characters “加拿大” (which is the audio translation of Canada). While writing, I explained how the characters look. Tongtong and Ivy both said, “That is easy” and copied the characters on their own papers.

I asked them further what other



我进一步问他们还会写哪些中文。这两个孩子立即开始展示他们的能力。桐桐说他会写“我”字。他边写边说，这个字很难写。艾维说她也会写，并也写了“我”字在她的画空白处。同时她还加了几个汉字组成了一个简单句，“我爱妈妈，我爱爸爸。”桐桐则写了一个词组以命名他的作品“我的中国。”

这儿有两个细节我在他们作画过程中观察到。艾维非常注意她的作品的整洁。如果她发现她的画上有什麼东西不太干净，她会很小心的擦去。桐桐也发现他写错了一个字。艾维建议他擦掉这个字。但是桐桐用他的笔把那个字涂成一个小黑块。艾维说：“你为什麼要涂掉它？太难看了。”

我知道这两个孩子都开始了上英文学前班，所以我问他们：“你们能写英文吗？”他们说他们还不会写英文，但是能写字母。艾维让我说一些英文字母，然后她写出来。我说“b”。

characters they could write. The two children immediately showed their competences to write many characters. Tongtong said he could write “Wo 我”(which means I). While writing, Tongtong commented that this character was difficult to write. Ivy also wrote a “Wo” on her paper. Then she added more characters to form a simple sentence “I love Dad. I love Mum.” Tongtong wrote another character “de 的” (which is a helping character for the form of adjectives.). Tongtong connected the two characters with the previous two characters “China”, so a phrase “我的中国” (which means my China) was on his paper.

Ivy cared about the neatness of all her products. When she found there was some mistake on her paper, she carefully erased it using her eraser. Tongtong also found he made a mistake in writing a character. Ivy suggested that he erased it, but Tongtong used his pen to paint the whole character into a dark mark. Ivy commented, “Why do you paint it? So ugly.”

I knew the children had already gone to an English kindergarten class for four months, so I asked them, “Can you write English?” Their answer was that they could not write English, except for the alphabet. Ivy let me call out different English letters so she could write

艾维说“那简单”并很快写出了大小写字母。我又说出了其他几个字母，艾维都很正确地写了出来。艾维看上去很喜欢玩这个练习。但是桐桐却不愿加入。他说他要把他刚才画的这幅图寄回在中国的祖母。然后他把这幅画折叠成一封信。艾维则建议我和她调换角色玩听写。这次是她考我，桐桐还是拒绝艾维的邀请加入这个游戏。在我顺利听写出另几个字母后，艾维又让我们互换了角色。这一次艾维碰到了几个难写的字母比如 w, v, s. 当艾维不能写出这几个字母时，一旁桐桐兴致高昂提供帮助。他正确的写出了这几个字母。我们听写完 24 个英文字母后，一起唱起了字母歌，这让屋子里的大人们很高兴。当我说我不得不告别时，艾维说：“再多玩一会儿。”我们约定当我的手表走到下午 6: 50 时我就回家。

them down, like playing dictation. I said, “b”. Ivy said, “That is simple.” She quickly wrote the upper case and lower letters on her sheet. I called out six letters and Ivy wrote them all correctly. Ivy seemed to enjoy playing this practice, but Tongtong did not take part in it. He said he would send the picture he had drawn to his grandma in China. Then he folded his drawing into a letter. Ivy suggested that we take turns playing the dictation. This time Ivy tested me. Tongtong still refused Ivy’s invitation to participate in this play. After I correctly wrote several letters, Ivy took her turn to be dictated to. Ivy, however, had difficulty writing such letters as w, v, and s. When Ivy could not write them out, Tongtong seemed in a high spirit to offer his hand. He correctly spelled all the letters Ivy could not spell. After we completed the “dictation” of 24 letters, we sang “The Alphabet Song” together which pleased the parents in the room. When I said I had to leave, Ivy said, “Play longer, please.” At last, we agreed that we would play until my watch came to 6:50 pm.

(Transcript: December 20, 2002; Session 4)

After entering a kindergarten class, Ivy met several Chinese immigrant children who had similar backgrounds to her. Thus, Ivy made friends with these children, and their families also started to associate with one another. This changed Ivy’s play and literacy

learning situation; that is, besides her solitary play at home or with adult accompaniment, Ivy had opportunities for playing and for learning to read and write with peers. This change brought new features to her play and literacy activities which will be discussed subsequently.

*Literate activities promoted by playing with peers.* In this play session, there are three ways in which Ivy's literate activities are promoted by playing with her peers: increasing literacy-related behavior, taking part in composing dramatic play scripts, and practicing school literacy through play. First, stimulated by her peers' application of literacy materials in play, Ivy also included reading and writing in her play. For example, when her peer Tongtong said he needed a piece of paper to write down the times for his airplanes to take off, Ivy also found a sheet to draw a runway for her plane and copied the numbers on my watch as the time for her airplane to take off. Another example is that Ivy said that the traffic sign "Stop" was written in both English and French, which caused an argument between Tongtong and her. This argument manifests their awareness of different written languages which symbolizes the same meaning. The understanding of the arbitrary nature of written language (i. e., metalinguistic awareness) will help children transfer between the different literacies they encounter. Here is another episode of an argument between the two children about environmental print:

Ivy: This is phony money (Showing a ten dollar bill to Tongtong and me).

Tongtong: Real money (he leaned forward and tried to examine it).

Ivy: You don't know how to find if it is real or not. Here, here, there are some

marks... (She pointed to the words "Sport money" on the bill.)

*Anna: Who told you that?*

Ivy: My mom.

Tongtong: It is a ten-dollar [bill]. (Tongtong pointed to the number "10").

Ivy: I already know. (Transcript: December 10, 2003)

In this episode, Ivy and Tongtong appear to understand the functions of numbers, marks, and written words on this paper money. Their competition to display their knowledge of print makes them examine the print on the paper money in detail. Moreover, even though Ivy did not initiate dramatic play and showed resistance and avoidance in creating dramatic elements in her playing and drawing independently, when her peer engaged in dramatized play, she would gradually take part in playing it or composing a play script together. In the selected session, Ivy showed several occasions of engaging in Tongtong's imaginative play, for instance, launching rockets. When they drew their houses, Ivy was also influenced by Tongtong's imagination and creativity. She first only copied my drawing of a house; then she expanded her picture into a cluster of houses which surrounded a church. She also claimed that these houses were in Canada after Tongtong stated that his house was in China.

Inspired by Ivy's behavior in playing with peers, I sometimes acted as a "capable" peer to scaffold Ivy's play activities. My purpose was to test how the context of play can invite the "Patterners" (Wolf & Gardner, 1979), like Ivy, to participate in dramatic play or to compose a dramatic play script collaboratively. Here is an example:

Using the building blocks on the ground, Ivy and Tongtong each built a garage. Ivy distributed her plastic animals such as horses and dinosaurs between Tongtong and her. I suggested that they tell a story by using these buildings and animals.

Ivy: But I can't tell a story.

Tongtong: This is a soldier. He has a gun. (Pretending a rectangle building block is a soldier)

Ivy: I don't like a soldier.

*Anna: So maybe he is a prince. Are you going to hunt something, dear prince?*

Tongtong: Yes, [I am] riding on my big horse (he let the "prince" jump on a plastic horse).

*Anna: Oh, [You are] going to a forest. There is a castle there (pointing to Ivy's building).*

Tongtong: I am going to knock at the door (He started knocking).

*Anna: Knocking at the door? Maybe there is a princess living there. Is there a princess living here? (I asked Ivy).*

Ivy: Yes.

*Anna: Hi, beautiful little princess, what's your name?*

Ivy: Ivy. (Then Ivy picked up another plastic horse) My horse is like this, is it beautiful?

*Anna: Oh, a pretty white horse.*

Ivy: (Ivy moved a square building block from her "castle") I moved this; I pretend

this is a little princess.

Tongtong used the head of his horse to hit the head of Ivy's horse.

*Anna: Are they greeting each other? Do they want to play together?*

Tongtong: I am going to hunt a dinosaur. Bang-bang (he pushed a toy dinosaur down).

Ivy took a plastic box from the toy shelf and looked for something in it.

*Anna: What are you looking for?*

Ivy: Small animals.

*Anna: Oh, you want to hunt them?*

Tongtong: "Bang-bang." (He "hunted" another dinosaur and put it close to his horse).

Ivy: Uh. (She picked a butterfly clip out from the box) Look, there is a little butterfly. (She put the butterfly on the ground and picked up two small beads from the box) there are gems. You have the yellow gem, I have the red gem, and Tongtong has nothing. On my pony, this little princess has this red gem. Put on here, Baoshi Ma (a horse named precious stone). Then we go to a small forest; there are small animals in the forest. There is a little butterfly. Let's hunt this little butterfly... (Transcript: April 15, 2003)

In this play episode, I made an effort to involve Ivy in composing a dramatic play script together. With Tongtong's participation and my invitation, Ivy eventually engaged in this dramatic play and demonstrated that she has the ability to imagine and create

something new and dramatic.

In addition to increasing literacy-related activities in play and the coauthoring of dramatic play scripts, Ivy seemed to be interested in practicing her school literacy skills through play. As evident in this play episode, she enjoyed “playing dictation” with Tongtong and me. When she could write down the upper and lower case letters dictated by me, she gained the feeling of achievement; when she could not write down some letters, she could release her embarrassment and disappointment because this was only play. Her interest in playing school literacy was also evident in another home visit:

Christine brought a pile of picture booklets for English recognition and asked Ivy to read the English words and sentences for me. However, Ivy pushed them aside and continued drawing her horses.

One hour later, I asked Ivy while pointing to a picture “Hand” on one of the booklets, “*Do you like it?*”

Ivy: Yes. This is called hand, mouth, hamper, brush, piano... (Naming while pointing to the pictures).

I followed her by repeating these words. Sometimes Ivy found a minor difference between my pronunciation of a word and her pronunciation; she would repeat the word several times to make sure I pronounced the word right.

*I praised her: Wow, you are wonderful. You know so many words.*

Ivy: Yes. I also know these (she started to read some simple sentences) It is a cat; it is a dog; it is a ball...

With the time passing, Ivy appeared not to tire of this practice but was full of energy.

At last, she used a clipboard to cover the pictures and let me read first. I pretended to be hesitant reading some words or sentences. Ivy then applied many strategies, such as using sound-word connection or describing the object by words or by actions, to help me, the student. For example:

Ivy: How to read these?

*Anna: They, they are...*

Ivy: Like this (imitating the action of running)

*Anna: They are running.*

Ivy: Yep. Ok, this needs to be read by you.

*Anna: Let me read alone?*

Ivy: Right.

*Anna: This is, this is...*

Ivy: this is something people hold, not a cat, "woof, woof."

*Anna: This is a dog. (Transcript: April 30, 2003)*

In the above playing school episode, Ivy became a very responsive and capable teacher to scaffold my English learning. Even though she showed indifference in her mother's suggestion of reading these English words and sentences before, now she was so engaged in playing school that she practiced all of the booklets with considerable expression.

Therefore, even though Ivy's play seems to lack dramatic elements when she plays



alone or is accompanied by adults, she still can be involved in dramatic thinking and behavior when playing with her peers because “children have a natural inclination towards playful endeavors” (Wilford, 2000). The power of peer interactions in play is also supported by Stone and Christie’s (1996) study. After examining the collaborative literacy learning that occurred in a literacy enriched sociodramatic play center, they found this collaboration in play was very effective in getting young children to engage in reading and writing behaviours.

*Social identity in peer culture through play and literacy activities.* Children understand and develop their identities through interaction with other people, particularly, playing with their peers (Corsaro, 1985). They are looking for something which entitles them to positions of power. Many children in a literate society quickly discover that the ability to access symbolic resources (Norton, 2000) through reading and writing gives them a strength which can place them in a high position in their social environment (Rowe, Fitch & Bass, 2001).

By demonstrating her capacity to access symbolic resources, Ivy tried to gain power and to build her identity in play interactions with her peers. Ivy often pointed out the “environmental print” she knew well in her play; for example, she read the numbers or words on her toys such as airplanes, traffic signs, and a bill of phony money. Another example is that Ivy showed Tongtong and me one of her parents’ magazines, *Reader’s Digest*, and told us this was a good book because of the winged horse logo on the title page. “Books that have the sign of a flying horse are all good,” she seemed to be proud of

introducing her knowledge about good books to us. When we discussed what we would play together, Ivy usually suggested that drawing was the priority. Perhaps, this was because she knew that her drawing skills were superior to many children and it was acknowledged by many authorities. She said to Tongtong, "Let's draw something, Teacher Xia said last time my drawing was not too bad." As evident in previous play vignettes, Ivy enjoyed playing school, particularly when she could take the role of a teacher. This is consistent with Kendrick's (2003) and Gregory's (2001) observations that young girls often take the role of the teacher in play to show their power through controlling literacy learning.

During constructing their identity and power in a peer group, children often compete or cooperate with each other in relation to reading and writing (Rowe, Fitch & Bass, 2001). In this play session, Ivy and Tongtong wrote many Chinese characters on their own paper in order to show their competence in writing. They said the word (e.g., Jia which means family) they could write was very difficult and the word they could not write (e. g., Na) was "an easy one" after I demonstrated the writing of the word to them. They not only showed their control in their own text, but also attempted to give criticism or offer assistance to their peers so that they can gain the high-status role. For example, in play drawing, Ivy demonstrated her power by criticizing the mess of Tongtong's picture. She also criticized Tongtong's inability to draw a close rendering of an airplane in another play vignette, which even caused Tongtong to think of a strategy to avoid her criticism. He claimed that he was doing "Su Miao" (a pencil sketch) or he was only drawing a small

fighting plane rather than a huge passenger plane like Ivy's. Tongtong also tried to build his superiority by offering his hand to Ivy in reading or writing. For instance,

After Ivy completed her drawing, I said I wanted to photocopy it. Ivy gave her drawing to me but Tongtong reminded her, "Have you written your name?" Ivy withdrew her paper and said, "I will write my name." Tongtong attempted to grasp Ivy's drawing while saying, "I can help you to write the word 'name'." "I know how to write the word 'name'." Ivy used her hands to cover her own paper while starting to write the English word "name" by capitalizing the first name and drawing a blank following it. (Transcript: March 27, 2003)

In this play episode, either Tongtong's eagerness to offer assistance without requesting and Ivy's refusal of Tongtong's kindness demonstrates their attempts to keep their high status in play and literacy activities.

### ***Ivy's Parents' Views of Her Play and Literacy Activities***

As described and discussed in this chapter, Ivy's play and literacy activities have distinctive characteristics which differ from the play and literacy features of Kevin. The factors which influence Ivy's play and literacy activities may include her own personality, physical environment, and her home-life experiences. The home-life experiences of the young child are vitally important in the development of play behaviors (Johnson, Christie, Yawkey, 1999). Smilansky (1968) and Singer (1977) have both made the case that young children not only need a generally positive home environment and positive relations with parents to flourish in their imaginative play development, but that children also require

specific modeling and encouragement to engage in make-believe play. Since parents' behaviors are usually shaped by their underlying beliefs, it is necessary to explore Ivy's parents' beliefs and views of her play and literacy activities so as to gain insight into the features of Ivy's play and literacy learning.

### ***Ivy's Parents' Views of Her Play Activities***

When reminiscing about their play activities during their childhood, Christine and Leo both narrated with a smile:

Christine: I liked to Wan WaWaJia (play house). I loved to play dolls or stuffed animals; even now I still like them. I also played cooking a lot. If there were no other people playing with me, I could play solitarily with "Zi Yan Zi Yu" (soliloquize) or with imaginary friends.

Leo: When I was young, many kids gathered together everyday. We played Zhua Qiang Dao (catching a thief or robber), or Douji (fighting like cocks). Running, shouting, very excited.

When commenting on the functions of play in the development of young children, these parents spoke about play in positive terms and Leo particularly promoted free playtime.

Christine: I feel, in play, she creates something, and imagines something, like the pony she made or drew. She stuck wool on the head and the tail of the pony which could even stand up like a puppet.

Leo: Children are born for play. If you prevent them from playing, they will be very

unhappy. You should not occupy the child's playtime because of wanting her to learn something such as playing piano and reading or writing.

However, some reasons came out in the interviews to explain why the parents do not engage much in their daughter's play. For example, Christine puzzled about why her daughter disliked girl's toys such as dolls or cooking utensils: "She rarely hold a doll like most girls. This is strange, I do not know why..." As for Leo, he felt that girls were tender and delicate, so he could not engage in the "rough and tumble play" with his daughters the way he did with his playmates as a child. He thought it was Christine, not him, who should be the model for the girls. He also believed that the adult should not enter into or interfere in any way with a child's play; he told Christine not to push Ivy to be "an adult-like kid" and said, "Let her play by herself." The idea of gender appropriate behavior and the hands-off attitude about the adult's role in play lead Leo to spend time reading English books to his daughter but did not lead him to play with her.

Ivy's play situation is undergoing change because she is getting to know more peers in her neighborhood, and even her parents are changing their ideas by exchanging information about how to educate their children in Canada with other Chinese immigrant families. They also very sincerely asked me to give them suggestions for Ivy's development after their interview. In my last home visit, Ivy told me with a secret smile that her parents played "Wa Wa Ja" (house) with her.

### ***Ivy's Parents' View of Her Literacy Learning***

Regarding how Ivy should learn to read and write, Christine said that her opinion

conflicted with Leo's:

I am not sure, but at first she has to learn Chinese characters or English words.

Three hundred characters are basic to start reading books by herself. I find the child has much Shen Shuo Xing (capacity for learning). If you Ji Yi Ji, Ya Yi Ya (push her), she can achieve many things. But her father has an opposite opinion; he does not allow me to push Ivy too hard. He always says, 'Our parents had no time to teach us, we still grew up very well.' He always holds his own opinion. We may not be the ideal parents. We do not teach Ivy to read and write everyday. Some parents have a strict daily time schedule for their children, such as one hour for playing piano and one hour for learning English..."

Christine has taught Ivy to recognize and write Chinese characters. According to Christine, her daughter can recognize 200-300 Chinese characters and can write at least 20-30 of these. Christine said that Ivy's English was not as good as many of her kindergarten counterparts because her own English was not good enough to teach Ivy. "Even though Leo can teach Ivy", Christine said, "Like most [Chinese] men, he does not care very much about teaching his child regularly." Christine does not allow Ivy to "disturb" her old sister since Nora herself has important school work to do. Now Christine is planning to pay a tutor to teach Ivy English.

When I introduced the concept of "invented spelling" and asked Christine's opinion about it, she said, "I feel that it is better to let a child write and read correctly. The correct writing will be more Jiandan (simple), more Zhiguan (visual). If she has some creative

thinking, we will not prevent it, but we do not allow her to have a bad habit.”

From my observation and interviews with her, it appears that within this family, Christine has the major responsibility for Ivy’s literacy learning while Leo is urged occasionally by Christine to participate in instructing their daughter to read and write English. Christine’s view of literacy learning exhibits two traditional Chinese values. First, memorizing some basic Characters or words is the prerequisite to start reading. In traditional Chinese “Qi Meng Jiao Yu” (primary education), children aged six went to “Shi Shu”(a private school) and recited their first text “San Zi Jin”, a poem written in three characters a line, by rote. Even though there are many stories and morals behind the rhythm, children were not taught these stories and morals because it was assumed that they will understand the poem gradually with their increasing knowledge of written words and Chinese culture (Ping, 1995).

The traditional way to learn reading and writing is still valued in modern Chinese literacy education in the form of “Ji Zhong Shi Zi Fa” (the method of recognizing words by classifying them and memorizing them together) and “Xin San Zi Jin” (a new poem written in three characters a line). It is worthy to note that these methods are based on thousand of years of literacy education experience and the characters in the poem are the most frequent characters used in Chinese books. Moreover, children enjoy reciting this poem because of its rhythm and rhyme; this reciting is much like language play if it is not imposed by adults.

The second value of “accuracy and preciseness” (Anderson, 1995) is advocated by Chinese people in learning drawing, handwriting (calligraphy), and beginning literacy.

Traditionally, Chinese people believe that learners usually start their apprenticeship by copying masters' works exactly. They think that carelessness in the study of the details of the texts (such as the spelling of words) leads to failure (Ping, 1995). Only once a learner has mastered motor skills, can he or she start to create something freely.

Christine's view of literacy learning greatly influences her daughter. As evident in Ivy's play and literacy activities, she liked to play at recognizing or spelling individual Chinese characters rather than playing out a story; she insisted on applying the standards of exactness and orderliness with her drawing and spelling even in her play. These all reflect Christine's cultural beliefs about early literacy learning.

#### ***Ivy's Parents' Views of the Connection between Play and Literacy Learning***

While answering my question about the connection between play and literacy learning, Christine said, "Almost no help, no connection. Ivy spends most of her play time drawing, making crafts, or sometimes playing with her toys such as her horses and airplanes, so she does not learn to read and write in her play."

Leo's answer considered more the types of play: "There are different kinds of play. If the child spontaneously plays around, it will not prompt literacy learning; however, play spelling is different...Play parenting helps develop their oral language, but not their written language...Play is a natural thing, but reading and writing becomes more and more abstract and serious with their development. This is why play can't help a child to learn reading and writing."

As analyzed in Chapter Four, parents and some early childhood educators separate



play and literacy learning into a play (frivolous chores) and work (serious business) dichotomy (Solsken, 1993) because of traditional beliefs, lack of understanding of the cognitive link between play and literacy learning, and a reading readiness perspective. Christine does not regard Ivy's play-based encounters with print as fully appropriate literacy behavior and she seeks to engage Ivy in the activities that she values. Therefore, she treats her daughter's literacy learning as an occasion for formal instruction rather than an opportunity to share her own pleasure in books and dramatic play. In order to meet her mother's goals for her, Ivy seemed to have some anxiety about achievement in relation to reading and writing. Reading and writing were not simply rich and rewarding forms of play for Ivy, but activities by which her competence would be judged.

Leo's analysis particularly represents the sharp divisions of language and literacy skills in traditional education. He separates free play from educational or instructional play, and he also separates oral language development from written language development. These separations may lead parents like him to ignore the fact that many emergent reading and writing behaviors are embedded in different play activities. The four language skills, (speaking, reading, listening, and writing) usually develop in a holistic way and play is a context that can integrate the four skills (Dever & Wishon, 1995).

### *Summary*

Chapter Five depicts a five-year-old girl's play and literacy activities at home. Ivy is growing up in a recent Chinese immigrant family. Her play reflects the traditional Chinese beliefs about how to teach young children to read and write. The analysis of Ivy's

play reveals that her play style is like “Patterners” who are more focused on the shapes and qualities of objects than they are on meanings of these objects. This play style relates to her literacy learning in that Ivy appears to be more interested in the recognition and spelling of individual words than she is in comprehending the words and creating stories.

Ivy’s play and literacy learning style reflects her home literacy activities and is influenced by the significant people in her family. Particularly, her parents’ views of play and literacy learning shape Ivy’s perception of and her behavior in play and literacy learning. However, when playing with peers, Ivy demonstrates a broader engagement in a variety of literacy-related activities and also shows her imagination and creativity in dramatic play. Meanwhile, Ivy develops her identity through play with familiar adults and her peers. Her sense of “gendered identity” is shaped by the female models at home which are reflected in both her play and literacy activities. That is, through play, Ivy internalizes the external conventions of “being a girl” in her culture and family context. Her sense of peer identity builds on her play and her reading and writing interactions with her peers. These interactions are full of competition and cooperation in relation to symbolic resources. In short, Ivy’s play and literacy learning have personal characteristics which differ from Kevin’s play and literacy learning. However, we can draw some common conclusions from these seemingly distinctive cases. These will be discussed briefly in the concluding chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX: Play as an Integrated Way to Early Literacy Learning**

The term “integrate” derives from a Latin word that means to make whole or renew. Integrated learning is a systematic approach that views learners as diverse, highly individual, whole persons who learn best when their senses and emotions, their many kinds of intelligences, and their diversity are all actively involved in the process of learning (Todd & Martel, 1992). Educators have argued that integrated learning is more authentic because it parallels real-world tasks and not those developed solely for schooling. It is also said to be more meaningful because knowledge construction is an integrative process; rarely is knowledge or information needed to answer isolated questions (Gavelek, Raphael, Biondo, & Wang, 2000). As evident in this study of play, early literacy, and home culture, play is an integrated way to early literacy learning. Play is not only a developmental way to learn reading and writing, but also a cultural, individual, and social way to learn reading and writing, especially for young children.

### ***Play: A Developmental Way to Early Literacy Learning***

This case study of two young children growing up in Chinese immigrant families demonstrates that play is a developmental way to early literacy learning in several ways. First, play provides a forum for learning or reinforcing many cognitive skills which are necessary for becoming literate. These cognitive skills include symbolization, observation, sequencing, making inferences and predications, problem solving, logical reasoning, and memory skills. In both Kevin and Ivy’s play activities, there is rich evidence that play

provides a relaxed context in which they have positive affective factors to engage in practicing and developing their cognitive skills. Take, for example, an episode from Chapter Four. Through carefully observing what his mother did in play, Kevin remembered the sequence of cooking Chinese food. When he started to play cooking, he symbolized some objects as food, predicted the reactions of his playmates, and solved a problem by casting the intruder of his imaginary play scene first as a guest and later as a "primitive." In Chapter Five, Ivy also developed her particular observation and memory skills in her drawing and play. These cognitive abilities are fundamental for young children to successfully learn to read and write (Fromberg, 2002; Hall & Robinson, 1995). As readers or writers, they need to understand the representative nature of words, to observe the surroundings and events for composing, and to make inferences and predications for understanding or being understood.

Second, play is itself rather like the act of composition or having literate potentials (Hall & Robinson, 1995). For example, Kevin's case in this study illustrates the extent to which play can be considered as writing. In Chapter Four, the ways in which Kevin and his playmates create scripts for their play have many important relationships with the process of writing. The children's play schemas are developed much like ongoing narratives (Kendrick, 2003), which not only are organized with beginnings, middles, and endings, but also include settings, characters, conflicts, climaxes, and resolutions. There are two types of language used in Kevin's play. One is the dialogue spoken by the characters, which features decontextualization and book-likeness. The other is the discussion and negotiation

of play scripts, representing reflective activities of the composers. Moreover, Kevin's play is not simply reenacting stories, but creating a story by coherently and logically hybridizing various texts he has encountered (Dyson, 1999; Kendrick, 2003). As was shown in Kevin's play episodes, he interwove storybooks, video programs, as well as family events into his play scripts.

Third, play seems to invite actual reading and writing behavior when the play environment is full of literacy materials (Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Roskos & Neuman, 1998). Children like Kevin and Ivy live in a literate society in which reading and writing activities occur frequently in day-to-day life. If there are available literacy-related materials around, children will spontaneously and autonomously involve reading and writing into their play. In Chapter Five, for example, Ivy identified different airplanes by reading the print on them, wrote the time for her airplane to take off, and played school by teaching how to read English words and sentences from picture books.

Finally, play demonstrates personal styles or orientations of literacy learning. Comparing Kevin's play and literacy learning with Ivy's, we can see individual variations of children's play and how these variations reflect or influence their literacy learning. Kevin uses play to comprehend information in his books and to create stories (narratives). His focus in reading and writing is on meaning making. On the other hand, Ivy uses play to practice her fine motor skills, and she is interested in learning to recognize and spell words. She concentrates her reading and writing more on forms than on meanings. Hall and Robinson (1995) state that the complexity of children's play predicts their writing skills

later in school life and that the nature of children's play predicts the nature of their writing styles.

Since play effectively develops cognitive skills necessary for becoming literate, involves daily reading and writing activities, and embodies the process of reading and writing, play may lead young children to become competent readers and writers. Although there are numerous research studies on the relationship between play and literacy development, most of the studies (Clawson, 2002; Dyson, 1997; King, 1985; Widdowson, 2001) are situated in institutions such as preschools or schools, and they primarily examine the play and literacy learning of children from Western cultures. My study provides new evidence of the connection between play and literacy learning from a different setting (family), a different cultural background (Chinese culture), and a different written system (an ideographic writing). The findings in this study support many conclusions of previous play-literacy interface studies and extend the range of participants and settings.

### ***Play: A Cultural Way to Literacy Learning***

Play provides a context for the two children to learn cultural knowledge in relation to reading and writing. Kevin and Ivy's play illustrates the content of their cultural reading and writing. In Chapter Four, Kevin played out many literacy practices that are part of traditional Chinese festivals, such as the Chinese Spring Festival and the Tomb Sweeping Festival. He also flexibly used a variety of Chinese literary idioms to facilitate his play expressions. Ivy's play in Chapter Five also manifests the traditional Chinese literacy

practices of females such as “Qin, Qi, Shu, Hua” (Chinese music, Chinese chess, Chinese handwriting, and Chinese painting and drawing).

Moreover, the two children’s play reflects their home norms and beliefs of early reading and writing. Kevin’s parents emphasized the importance of learning to read and write in a meaningful way and the importance of expressing the learner’s own ideas. As a result, Kevin engaged in his play primarily to make sense of the information from his books and to create dramatized stories. On the other hand, Ivy’s mother valued the mastery of a certain number of individual characters and the order and neatness of writing. Ivy thus engaged in her play primarily by practicing the forms of images or words. Moreover, both Kevin’s and Ivy’s parents hold the cultural belief that literacy learning is study or work but not play, and they value “accuracy and exactness” for beginning literacy learning. These beliefs and values resulted in an objection to formal reading and writing instruction in Kevin’s case, and a preference for seriousness and perfection in reading and writing practice in Ivy’s case.

This study demonstrates how these children learned and practiced cultural aspects of reading and writing through play. Moreover, the parents’ views of the connection or separation of play and literacy affect their children’s combining and dividing of play and literacy learning. These findings may shed light on the socio-cultural aspect of young children’s literacy learning for educators working in multicultural environments.

### *Play: A Personal and Social Way to Literacy Learning*

Play is a supportive medium for construction of self or identity. Positioning oneself as male or female is not just a conceptual process, but also a physical process (Davis, 1989). Through play, Kevin constructs his masculinity and Ivy constitutes her femininity. Kevin takes roles of male characters found in books and mass media, such as strong pirates, intelligent archeologists, and brave Western cowboys. Ivy pursues the characteristics of females in books, such as beautiful princesses and talented artists. In her study, Dyson (1997) pointed out that many stories in books offer children roles as powerful people to play and also demonstrate limiting ideological assumptions about different gendered people. The knowledge of male and female is embedded in the narrative structures of books and play, in the very discursive practices through which each child's identity is formulated and sustained (Davis, 1989).

Play is also a supportive medium for positioning oneself in a social world. In their play, Kevin and Ivy both build their powers in their peer groups by demonstrating their access to "symbolic resources" (Norton, 2000). Kevin's book knowledge and book stories facilitate his leadership in composing dramatic play scripts and getting a storyline going; Ivy attempts to show her neat writing (drawing) and her recognition of conventional words to show her superiority to her peers. Through play, literacy becomes a tool to manage identity, specifically, to manage identity in terms of membership in, or rejection of, particular social groups.



Most importantly, play is a supportive medium for understanding others' perspectives and for learning the skills of how to effectively communicate with one another. Kevin interprets or negotiates dramatic play scripts to or with his peers; Ivy exchanges ideas and comments with her peers in play. Through these attempts to cooperate with or challenge other people, Kevin and Ivy develop awareness of their own perceptions, ideas, and feelings, as well as those of others. This awareness is fundamental to becoming a good reader and writer.

All in all, play is a unified (integrated) way for young children to develop and practice their reading and writing abilities and skills developmentally, culturally, individually and socially. This study may provide readers with an insight of how play, literacy learning, and identity constructing are infused with one another in young children's play lives.

### ***Implications***

What can we take from these two case studies of play and literacy learning at home? This study has important implications for parents, early childhood educators, and family literacy providers in assisting children's play, self and literacy development.

#### ***Implications for Parents***

1. This study shows that parents play an important role in their children's play and literacy learning through their attitudes towards, comments on, and behaviours in their children's play and early reading and writing. Therefore, parents should not devalue their own competence in promoting children's play and literacy learning. Instead, they can play

an active role in facilitating these activities.

2. This study also implies that children's early literacy development should be located within play-based experiences that support children's ideas, purposes and social interpretations. After providing a social context that enables the child to perform at a higher level than before, parents then step back to let the child explore, experiment, and practice what has been learned.

### ***Implications for Early Childhood Educators***

1. For many young children, play is the key to open the door to reading and writing. This study reveals that the children, in a home culture which differs from the Eurocentric, middle-class families, are still converging their literacy learning with play in a specific cultural context. This further validates the importance of early childhood educators using play to facilitate literacy learning of children from diverse family backgrounds.

2. Early childhood educators can also bridge the gap between school literacy and home literacy through play. Play helps early childhood educators discover children's literacy knowledge as well as parents' views of literacy learning. Play is a useful medium for gathering information about children's literacy knowledge because it frees children to show their real-world abilities (Owocki, 1999). Furthermore, play is the best context to link in-school literacy instructional activities with out-of-school influences, including family culture. The connecting point of school and home literacy may very well be play since a play context offers diverse "authentic" scenes in which to use reading and writing naturally.

3. Literacy-enriched play environments in preschool and school settings should include literacy props and play scenes that reflect the children's lives and interests. The goal is to create literacy environments with specific play settings that appeal to young children's play preferences and meet their developmental and cultural needs as emerging writers and readers.

***Implications for Family Literacy Program Providers***

1. Family literacy programs would do well to emphasize the importance of an entertainment orientation toward reading and writing. If parents are encouraged to balance their preferred skills-acquisition approach with enjoyable literacy games and activities, the play-like activities can supply children with important motivation for mastering reading and writing.

2. Effective family literacy programs are not imposed by designers or coordinators, but are derived from the cultures of the groups served. Thus, family literacy program providers may learn from this study that there are different play and literacy activities at home. These activities may be the precious resources for conducting culturally responsive family literacy programs.

3. To conduct a culturally responsive family literacy program, the providers need to understand and respect other people's beliefs and values. They also need to acknowledge and appreciate what parents are doing to help their children's literacy learning. By giving parents ownership and responsibility for the literacy-related play activities, a family literacy program provides an opportunity for them to become more instrumental in their

children's educational activities.

4. An explicit explanation of how play and literacy connect with each other is necessary. It is important for parents to understand why experts in childhood education strongly promote children's play. In addition to using the theories and experimental studies to persuade parents, another effective way may be to generate opportunities to let parents observe their children's play and to point out the moments children apply their literacy knowledge and their practice of reading and writing. The best way to understand the profound importance of play is to watch it in action. When parents perceive the teachable moments and the growth of their children's literacy learning in play, they may be encouraged to further assist their children's learning through play. This forms a positive situation; that is, practice and beliefs spiral forward.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

1. There is a need for further case studies in diverse cultural contexts. Brooker's (2002) study points out the importance of in-depth case studies in research into young children's language and literacy learning. The uniqueness of an ethnographic case study is its capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts; however, a corresponding disadvantage is the difficulty of generalizing from a single case. Therefore, even though there are several studies (Kelly-Byrne, 1989; Kendrick, 2003) providing insights on some young children's play and literacy activities at home, future ethnographic case studies on the connections between play and literacy learning in culturally diverse families are still needed, particularly studies that focus on the connection between play and literacy for the

developing child as a newcomer to a different culture. The different cases can gradually provide us with a holistic picture of the function of play-literacy interface in home contexts and its importance in assisting young children to become literate. In addition, further comparisons among the cases may be conducted to find the common patterns in them and to hypothesize possible relationships between diverse factors.

2. There is also a need to take different perspectives in discussing results from the research into the play and literacy connection. Recent research trends on the play-literacy interface suggest that many studies take one of the three perspectives (Roskos & Christie, 2000), including cognitive, ecological and socio-cultural perspectives, to explain their results. However, they rarely discuss the same phenomenon from different perspectives, which constrains the fullness and persuasiveness of their explanation of the play and literacy connection. Denzin (1989) points out that besides data triangulation (the use of more than one data source), theory triangulation (the use of multiple theories or perspectives) will minimize bias and increase the "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1984) of a case study.

3. In addition, there is a need for further research into diverse social interactions in children's play and literacy practices. For example, we need to understand how parents' belief systems affect the specific ways in which they interact with their children, and ultimately how beliefs filter down to impact children's feelings and long-term achievements. While substantial research has produced evidence of the origins of emergent literacy in the linguistic and nonlinguistic interactions between adults and children in the

storybook reading context (Anderson, Anderson, Lynch, & Shapiro, in press), we know far less about this cognitive enterprise in play situations that involve literacy. Process analyses of the influences of peer interaction during play in literacy engagement and knowledge construction are also few. Fine-grained analyses of collaborative processes might reveal the benefits of the play situation for literacy learning.

### *Final Thoughts*

The study reported here is an attempt to broaden our understandings of the play and literacy connection in a number of ways. First, it uses ethnographic research techniques to record and analyze the embedded play and literacy learning of two young children who are growing up in recent Chinese immigrant families. Second, it describes a wide range of the children's play and literacy practices in their home culture by analyzing data from two settings (home and playground) and different events (play with parents and play with peers). Third, the observational focus of this study is guided by three theoretical lenses: emergent literacy, social constructivism, and critical theory. Such multifaceted views (approaches) allow and widen the understanding of the "converging worlds" (Kendrick, 2003) of play, literacy, and culture. However, there are limitations inherent in ethnographic case studies, such as generalizability and subjectivity discussed in previous chapters. I do not generalize the findings from the two case studies into other Chinese immigrant families, and I believe the readers will arrive at their own conclusion by reading the thick descriptions of the cases. I also acknowledge that my explanation is one interpretation and not the only "valid" interpretation that could be drawn from the data.

Upon finishing the writing of this study, both children were staying at home for the summer time and preparing for their new school year (Kevin will go to a kindergarten classroom and Ivy will be in Grade-One). Their parents are all expecting a good start to their children's school life. I am also curious about how changes over time in these children's literacy behavior in play situations may inform us about the continuity or disparity of the school and home literacy learning. Even though my role as a participant observer in Kevin and Ivy's homes ended after I had completed this study, our friendship continues. We sometimes phone each other for setting a time to play together and enjoy the wonderful time together.

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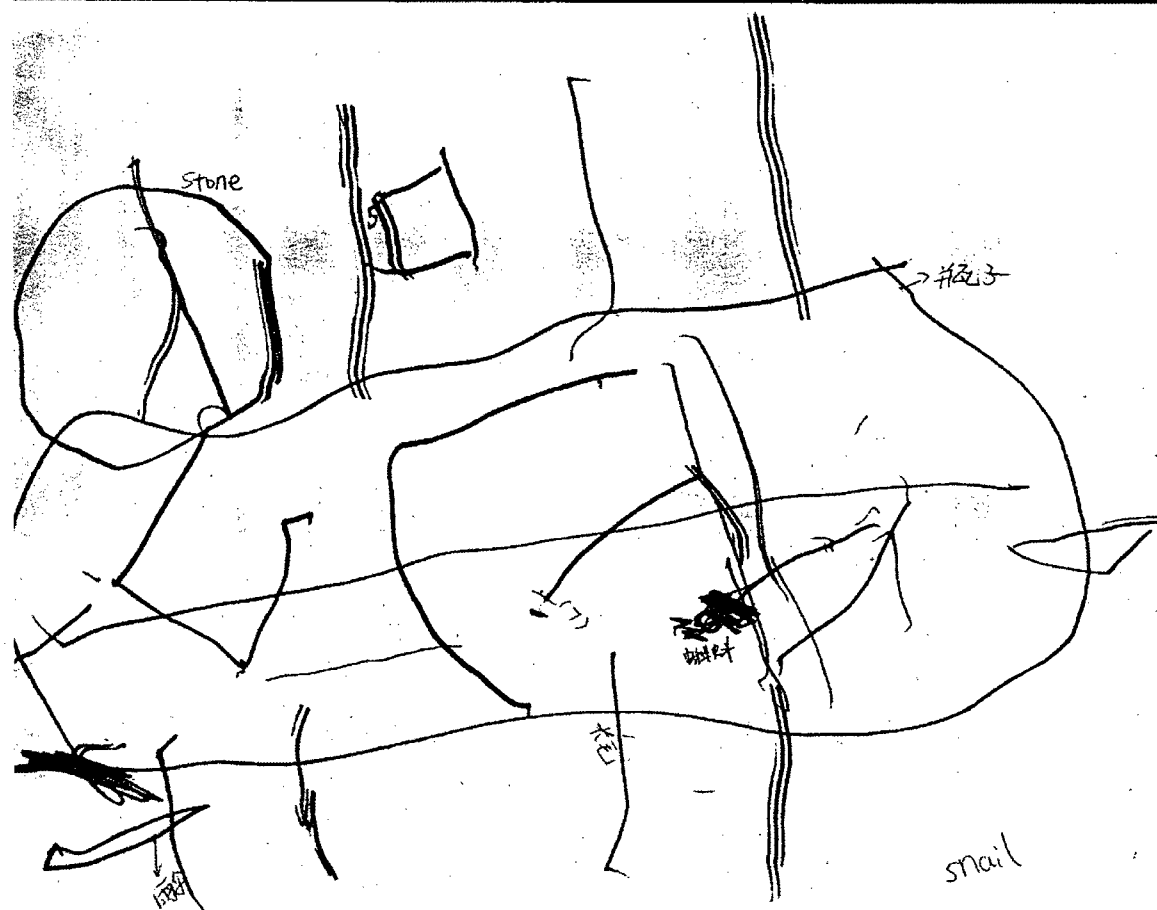
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## Appendix A-1:

Kevin's drawing of *an experimental tube*



## Appendix A-2:

Kevin's drawing of *lighting, fire, and grass*

**IMPORTANT**  
 • MAKE DARK MARKS  
 • ERASE COMPLETELY TO CHANGE

Academic Year 19  
 Term 1 2 (optional)

Course number Section number

Name of teaching assistant

The University recognizes the importance of high quality teaching for the academic preparation of its students and accordingly requires that all instructors be annually evaluated by procedures which include provision for assessment by student.

**\*\*SUMMARIZED STATISTICAL RESULTS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE PUBLICLY\*\***

Students please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. The instructor is an excellent teacher					
2. The instructor is a good teacher					
3. The instructor is a fair teacher					
4. The instructor is a knowledgeable teacher					
5. The instructor is a helpful teacher					
6. The instructor is a personable teacher					

My suggestions for improving the above are as follows:

**\*\*FORMS WITH PERSONALLY WRITING COMMENTS WILL BE DESTROYED\*\***

2002 12 28

**Appendix A-3:**

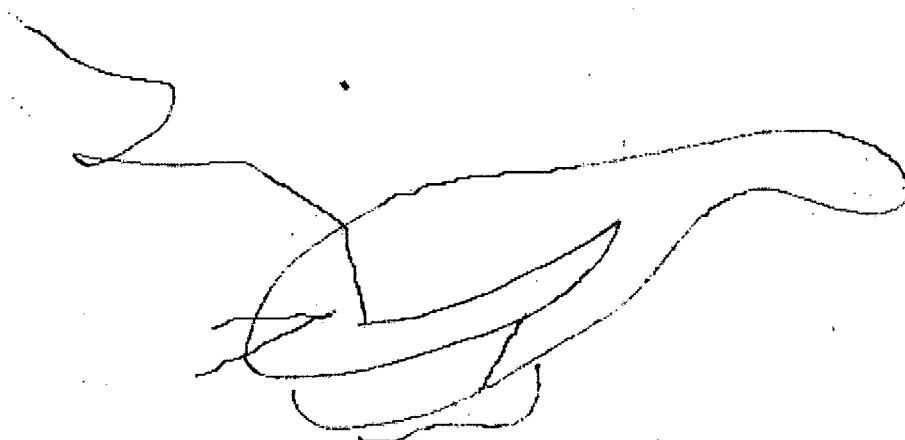
Kevin's version of the Chinese character for *snake*





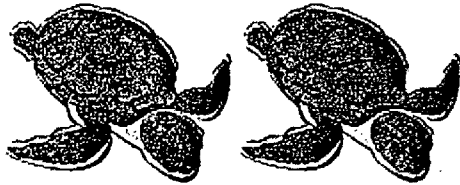
**Appendix A-4:**

Kevin's version of the Chinese character for *dinosaur*



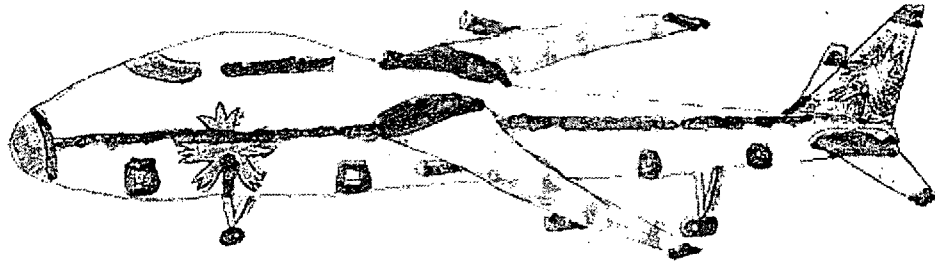
## Appendix A-5:

Kevin's version of the Chinese character for *turtles*



**Appendix B-1:**

Ivy's drawing of *an airplane*



Name Amy

## Appendix B-2:

Ivy's drawing of a horse



### Appendix B-3:

Ivy's drawing of *houses in Canada*

