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Play: A "Sideways" Glance at Literacy

by

Maureen Elizabeth Kendrick 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Elementary Education

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Let [play] be like a key
Opening a thousand doors.
A leaf falls; something flies by;
Let all the eye sees be created
and the soul of the listener tremble.

-Vicente Huidorbro

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Play: A "Sideways" Glance at Literacy** submitted by **Maureen Elizabeth Kendrick** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**.

Dr. Ruth Hayden

Dr. Grace Malicky

Dr. Heather Blair

Dr. Marilyn Assheton-Smith

Dr. Robert Jackson

Dr. Rebecca Kantor

December 20, 2000
Date

For Leticia
for welcoming me into her playworld

and

For Ruth
for always leading by example

ABSTRACT

Framed within the perspectives of emergent literacy, social constructivism, and literacy as social status and identity, this study explores the relationship between play, literacy, and culture in the life of Leticia, a five-year-old Chinese girl who is growing up in a multilingual and multiliterate family. As a participant observer, I adopt the role of playmate to examine her play activities at home. The narratives that she constructs in make-believe play focus on the predominant themes of playing house and playing school. These play narratives are analyzed as both literary and social texts.

When playing house, Leticia appropriates material from her family and social cultures, and weaves them into her play texts as a means of exploring family literacy practices and social roles and identities such as mother, wife, sister, store clerk, and daughter. The stories she constructs disclose a complex understanding of literacy, gender, family dynamics and relationships, and economics that one would expect to be far beyond the grasp of a five-year-old. Her narratives provide a means for her to make sense of the world and investigate possibilities for the future.

When Leticia plays school, she reveals a sense of herself as a literacy learner, which includes her perceptions of school culture, her parents' expectations for school achievement, and her position within her classroom. In this set of play narratives, she primarily adopts the role of teacher and as such, often situates herself in a position of power and authority. Her relative status allows her to explore literacy in ways that she was unwilling to consider when portraying more subordinate roles. In each of these narratives, the rules and routines of her kindergarten classroom are carefully and

accurately reflected, and include many of the literacy tasks that help teachers organize and maintain order in their classrooms.

Glancing "sideways" at literacy through play highlights the complex relationship between play, literacy, and culture. The intersection of these three constructs reveals the interplay between story and self, and offers a unique window onto how this young girl constructs her understanding of the world. Through play, Leticia engages in personal storytelling, reveals her literacy "stance," and composes and edits her play scripts using a process similar to that undertaken by writers. Examining the intersection of play, literacy, and culture within the context of children's lives offers a distinctive way for parents, educators, and researchers to understand how young children negotiate a sense of self and story across different times and places.

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Beginnings

If I like a photograph, if it disturbs me, I linger over it. What am I doing the whole time I remain with it? I look at it, I scrutinize it, as if I wanted to know more about the thing or the person it represents.

—Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*

I remember one of the first times that Leticia[1] asked me to read to her. It was during a visit in late November. We were sitting on her bed, the bottom bunk in the bedroom she shared with her older brother, Wilson, who was perched on top. She was feeling restless at that point in the afternoon and decided that she wanted me to read to her. From different places on her bookshelf, she pulled two books: one was English, the other was Chinese. The books should be kept in separate places, she explained, because "Miss Lee [her kindergarten teacher] and daddy say do like that." I began reading the Dr. Seuss book that she had chosen first. She interrupted me after only a few pages to ask why I needed to leave early that day to go to the bank, why I hadn't gone to the bank *before* I came to see her. I tried to explain, knowing that my explanation, as usual, was unlikely to satisfy her. She always wanted me to stay longer than I was able. I continued reading the story. She was subdued after our discussion and listened quietly without any further interruptions. When we were finished, she took the English book from me and picked up the Chinese book. She started to hand it to me then suddenly stopped. Looking first at me then at her older brother, Wilson, she pulled the book away. "You don't know how to hear this book," she told me, "only Chinese people, right Wilson? We Chinese people, right?" (PLC transcripts: November 27, 1998, Session 6).

Leticia was right of course; I didn't know how to *hear* her book. I am not Chinese, and, although I have studied Mandarin, I am just learning to read traditional Chinese characters. As a researcher of literacy, though, I was keenly interested in how this young girl was learning to "hear" books, both in English and Chinese. She was just five years old the day I first read with her on her bunk bed. Even though she was at such a young age, it was already clear to me that what she knew about literacy included not only a body of knowledge and set of processes for using that knowledge, but also a sense of herself and others as participants in literacy events. Leticia was growing up in a multilingual and multiliterate household, and I was particularly interested in how she used the context of play for her own purposes, to explore and construct her understandings of her sociocultural world. My primary interest was how she situated literacy within this sociocultural world and how she situated herself in relation to literacy. In short, I wanted to explore the interplay of her social, cultural, and textual worlds.

Gregory Bateson once commented, "classically, grass on the side of the road is more interesting than where the road's going. I find I make mistakes if I start worrying too much where the road's going."[2] Schwartzman (1976), a professor of anthropology, adopted Bateson's metaphor for the cultural study of children's make-believe play. The three most commonly used approaches for the study of children's play are characterized as: the "upward" perspective (make-believe play is viewed as imitation of, or preparation for, adult activity); the "inward-outward" view (play is interpreted as a psychological projection or as expressive behaviour); and the "backwards" angle (games are interpreted as reversals or inversions of cultural systems). According to Schwartzman (1976), all of these approaches neglect to account for the "sideways" perspective of the child at play—

that is, the view that make-believe play is a text or "a story the players tell themselves about themselves" (Geertz, 1973, p. 237). From this perspective, players become not only the subjects, but also the objects of their own play (Erhmann, 1968 cited in Schwartzman, 1976). As *subjects* of the make-believe play event, children are able to interpret and comment on their relationships to each other as the *object* of their play.

Educators have long viewed play as significant to young children's learning (Bruner, Jolly, & Sylva, 1976; Piaget, 1962; Sutton-Smith, 1980; Vygotsky, 1978). It is an activity through which young children explore their world; it is also the context within which they practice the social behaviours, skills, and activities of their culture (Schwartzman, 1976). As with other cultural ways of knowing, "play provides an opportunity for young children to 'try out' the literacy tools, routines, and scripts that flow through daily life" (Roskos & Neuman, 1993)—to engage in "run ups" to literacy (Bruner, 1984). The relationship between play and literacy has been examined from a number of perspectives, including the relationship among play and achievement in pre-reading, language, and writing (e.g., Pellegrini, 1980); the relationship between basic representational abilities used in play, reading, and writing (Galda, Pellegrini, & Cox, 1989; Pellegrini & Galda, 1991); the relationship between play and narrative competence (e.g., Heath, 1986; Marbarh & Yawkey, 1980; Pellegrini, 1984b; Roskos, 1988); the ways children take on the literate roles of readers and writers during make-believe play (Hall, 1987; Morrow & Rand, 1991; Neuman & Roskos, 1991; Roskos, 1988; Vukelich, 1991); and the role of adult-directed dramatic play training for improving children's comprehension (Christie, 1983; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982).

Kantor, Miller, and Fernie (1992) argue that descriptions of children participating in classroom literacy events can increase our knowledge of young children's literacy development, for example, how classroom experience expands the repertoire of young children and how literacy meanings expressed across classroom contexts reveal children's constructions and use of the forms and functions of written language. Currently, however, there are very few similar descriptive studies with a focus on play that seek to illuminate how the social histories and educative styles of *families* mould children's literate experiences, or how children themselves initiate, absorb, and synthesize the educational influences in their lives. In the present study, I adopt Schwartzman's (1976) approach to studying play to take a "sideways" glance at literacy through the home-based play activities of a young Chinese girl.

THE FIRST VISIT

There is without question serendipity in meeting families who willingly allow a stranger access to their private lives. I first met Leticia and her mother in May 1998, while assisting with the evaluation of a community literacy program for parents with babies. Although I had been involved in writing the funding proposal for the program, I had not been involved with the program participants. The literacy program, which was offered by an agency located in the inner city, was held weekly over a four-week period and alternated between a public library and community centre. The program evaluator, who was suddenly called out of town, had asked me to talk with the program participants to determine what they thought of the program and the books that they had been given for their babies. Linda Tsiu, Leticia's mother, received the program information and materials at a nearby hospital when her youngest son, Richmond, was born.

When I first met Linda at the public library, she assumed that I was one of the program participants and was quick to engage me in conversation. She talked about some of the difficulties she was experiencing with her new baby and seemed to enjoy the social aspect of the program. I offered what little advice I could, explaining that I had no children of my own, but that I was just attending the program that day so I could talk with some of the participants about their use of the books. She laughed when I asked her if she had read any of the books to her baby, who was then only three months old. "Not yet," she confessed, "I'm just too busy right now." Before long her daughter, Leticia, began tugging incessantly on her mother's sleeve, demanding her attention. I soon understood why Linda had so little time; Leticia was full of energy and talked almost non-stop to her mother. Some young children, when surrounded by strange adults, show signs of intimidation; Leticia is not one of them. She seemed perfectly at home in the library and slipped in and out of Chao Chiu, her first language, and English, depending on her audience.

It was mid-September, almost four months later, when I decided to try to contact the Tsiu family to discuss my research study. The family has five members: Howard and Linda Tsiu, and their three children—Wilson (7 years old), Leticia (5 years old), and Richmond (17 months old). In the months that had passed, I thought often of Leticia. She had many of the qualities I was seeking in a research participant: she was outgoing, articulate, comfortable with unfamiliar adults, and very interested in books and stories. I was also interested in the fact that Leticia, who was just starting kindergarten, was making the transition from her home literacy environment to a school literacy environment. I decided to ask the director of the agency that offered the literacy program

to request permission for me to contact Linda at home. It took several days for her to reach Linda by telephone, but on September 18 she was finally successful. I called Linda on September 22. When we spoke, she initially thought that I wanted *her* to participate in my research study and politely declined, indicating that with three young children, she was just too busy. When I explained that I was interested in her daughter's literacy learning, she invited me to come to her house to discuss my research. Although I was relieved by her invitation, I remained concerned that the family would not agree to participate in a long-term research study.

On the day that I finally met with Linda in her home, it was actually my second visit to the house. On the first occasion, there had been no response when I rang the doorbell, and I became concerned that Linda had only agreed to meet with me out of politeness, but really preferred not to be involved in my study. I decided to leave a note for her asking that she call me if she was still interested in participating. Several days passed without a reply. I was not surprised. Many people forewarned me of the difficulties I would face finding a family who would allow me to make weekly visits to their home over the duration of a year. "I certainly wouldn't want someone invading my privacy like that," I was told on repeated occasions. My own concerns about finding a suitable research participant were beginning to escalate.

On September 28, I called Linda with the intention of making one final effort to set up a meeting. When she answered the telephone and I told her who was calling, she was very cheerful and seemed happy, even relieved, to hear from me. She was quick to explain that she had been called to work and had difficulties with my phone line, a common problem in my office at the literacy agency. We agreed to meet the next day. I

arrived at the house to find Linda and her sister sitting together on the living-room floor folding baby clothes from a laundry basket nestled between them. Linda welcomed me in then carefully secured both locks on the door. I sat down at the table to wait. Her sister left moments later, nodding good-bye as she walked out the door. When Linda joined me at the table, I felt immediately at ease with her. She was unassuming, and as easy to talk to as I had remembered from our first meeting. Within a few short minutes, she put many of my initial concerns to rest.

"Oh sure," she said, "I don't mind if you want to spend time with Leticia."

"And your husband? Will it be okay with him?" I asked.

"Oh, that's not a problem," she laughed, waving her hand in the air for emphasis. "As long as it's okay with me, it'll be okay with him."

As we continued to talk, I noticed Linda glancing periodically at the clock on the wall above the kitchen table. She was anxious for me to meet Leticia, who was due to arrive home from kindergarten at any minute. Just before noon, Linda got up from her chair and opened the front door, watching as her young daughter got out of the neighbour's car and climbed the front steps. As she entered the house, Leticia glanced curiously at me before going into the living-room to unpack her backpack. Linda continued to talk with me about her children. At one point she became almost tearful when she explained, "I wish I had more time to spend with Leticia. It's so hard with the baby." Leticia joined us at the table. From her backpack she had rescued a piece of paper and a newsletter from her kindergarten. Following her mother's prompts, she talked briefly about the paper, which had lines and tiny little stamps on it. Speaking in English, Linda introduced me to Leticia. She explained that I worked at the university and wanted

to visit her every week because I was interested in playing with her and finding out how she was learning to read and write. "Would it be okay if Maureen came to visit you?" Linda asked her daughter. "Yeah," she answered with a furtive glance in my direction.

With further prompts, Linda asked Leticia to show me some of her books. Leticia quickly ran off to her bedroom, returning with the Christmas story *The Nutcracker* and some Chinese books that were part of a series. As she sat on her mother's lap, she described, in English, the pictures in the Nutcracker book. Growing restless, she climbed up on the table and sat among the newspaper leafs and teacups, flipping through her Chinese books. Navigating through both English and Chao Chiu, she pointed out various characters and explained what they were doing. Her knowledge of the characters in the Chinese storybooks was very detailed, and her mother proudly asked, "How do you know that?" Leticia responded, "Daddy tell me." Linda laughed, and turning to me with a smile, said "Leticia is definitely Daddy's little girl."

Like the beginning of most relationships, this one was fraught with a mixture of emotions. Many concerns surrounded that first visit. Would the family agree to participate in my research? How intrusive would my presence in their home be over the period of an entire year? I recognized that in undertaking research within the sociocultural context of a family, I was asking them to allow a virtual stranger access to their private lives. I worried about the extent to which I would be permitted such a privilege. Because my entire research study was focussed on one child, I also had particular concerns about the relationship I might develop with Leticia and wondered how willing she would be to accept a strange adult into her play world.

Additional concerns surrounded issues of language because I had chosen to undertake research within a multilingual household, a household where five different languages were spoken: Chao Chiu, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, and English. Chao Chiu is spoken almost exclusively in the home, though all of the family members also use English. Wilson and Leticia speak mostly Chao Chiu in the presence of their parents, but use more English when they are alone or with their cousins. Both children are also learning Mandarin at school and took Cantonese lessons when they were younger. None of the children speak Vietnamese, which is the language Howard and Linda primarily use with Vietnamese-speaking friends and family members. Howard is fluent in both Cantonese and Mandarin, and uses both languages with family members and business associates. Linda speaks some Cantonese, but is not as fluent with Mandarin. Of the five languages, I share only English and some knowledge of Mandarin.

Although Leticia's initial response to her mother's question "Would it be okay if Maureen came to visit you?" was very positive, I also questioned whether she understood how frequently we would be meeting and whether she would tire of spending so much time with me. I wanted to ensure that she was comfortable interacting with me and that she understood why I was coming to visit her.

My concerns not withstanding, our relationship began in early October with story reading and picture drawing. By mid-November, it evolved into a relationship of playmates who, as the vignette at the opening of this introduction reflects, never seemed to have enough time together. Within a short time, this five-year-old girl had come to understand that I was willing to take her lead and engage in almost any activity that she suggested. I played with Leticia on her terms, allowing her to initiate activities, cast me

in different roles, and control my behaviour in a way that provided her with opportunities to construct her own understandings of her social world and herself within that world.

I sensed early in the study that Linda had placed a great deal of trust in me. In late October when I picked up Leticia and her older brother to take them to a park, I remember watching Linda as she stood in the window waving good-bye as we drove away. I thought about the level of trust she must have to allow me to drive off with her two older children after only having known me for just over a month.

January marked another turning point in my relationship with the family. Dinner had become a regular part of my weekly visits and was a perfect opportunity for me to discuss with Linda my observations and questions concerning Leticia's literacy development and play activities. The first time Linda invited me to stay for dinner, I really felt that they had accepted my presence in their home and I had not become the nuisance I feared I might. However, as the weeks passed and I was invited to stay for the evening meal on a regular basis, I became concerned that I might be over-staying my welcome, and that perhaps Linda was feeling some obligation to have me stay. My concern was exacerbated when the children would extend an invitation for dinner without first consulting their mother. Almost without exception, Wilson in particular would request that I stay for dinner. He would typically come home from school at about four o'clock and watch television while Leticia and I played. Although he rarely joined our activities, my staying into the evening seemed especially important to him, and he was always disappointed if I couldn't stay. At one point I asked Linda if I was imposing on their family by staying for dinner so often. She was very quick to reassure me that I was no trouble at all and that she enjoyed practising her English, something that she was

rarely able to do. For the remainder of my study, a formal invitation was no longer extended, and it was assumed that I would be staying for dinner.

The extent to which the Tsiu's took an interest in my life surprised me somewhat. I had not anticipated that the children, in particular, would be so interested in where I lived and what I did. I remember in late December offering to take the two older children out to do something special and suggested several activities, including a movie, swimming, or hanging out at my house. Wilson and Leticia both enthusiastically decided that they wanted to visit not only my house, but also my office at the university. During the period of this research, my life became interlaced with the lives of the Tsiu family. Our relationships and understandings of one another grew stronger and deeper.

THE TSIU FAMILY: SNAPSHOTS FROM THE FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM

The Courtship

At the initiation of this research project, Howard and Linda Tsiu had been married for eight years. Both are ethnic-Chinese, born in Vietnam, [3] though they met and married in Canada. When Linda relayed the story of how she first met Howard, her normally reserved disposition became very animated. I remember how sick she was when I first arrived that day. She said she felt exhausted, hadn't slept well the night before, but somehow her recollections seemed to breathe new life into her. With glistening eyes, she talked about the circumstances surrounding their courtship and laughed openly for having "made things so hard for Howard." I knew Leticia had heard this story before, but she listened intently without interrupting.

"We met at a Christmas party," Linda explained. "Howard's sister had actually invited him there to meet another girl, but we ended up sitting on the same side of one of

the tables and he spent the whole night talking to me. For him, it was love at first sight—at least that's what he tells me. For me, it didn't happen quite as fast. I didn't really like him at first. After that Christmas party, his sister kept trying to get us together. His sister invited me out for supper, and then after that she said to come back to her house (where Howard and the parents also lived) for tea. I didn't have my car at the time, and Howard offered to drive me home. His sister came along and on the way, Howard suggested that we stop somewhere for a snack.

"We were just friends at first, but I knew that he was interested. Actually, a lot of women were interested in him, but he said that I was his first choice. He said he liked talking to me, that I had good values, a good education, came from a good family. You know, all that. Once we went together with his sister and some other people to a banquet at the Fantasy Hotel. I spent the whole night dancing with another guy, just to see what Howard would do. He was so jealous! His face turned all red and he just had this look," Linda giggled, then continued, "I wanted to see how interested he was in me—how persistent he would be. After that he told his sister that he didn't think that I was the kind of girl that he was looking for. He did give me a second chance, though. I went with him to a nearby city one weekend in the spring. It wasn't just the two of us; his sister came too. After that, we started dating and by summer, we were engaged. It happened very fast. I guess it was fate. We got married in the fall. My sister was a bit concerned because I had other men who were interested in marrying me and here I was making this very quick decision to marry Howard. But we went to see the fortune-teller before we even got engaged, just to make sure that we were compatible. We didn't even tell the fortune-teller that we were thinking of getting married, but he told us that we would get

married. My father-in-law is an herbalist and he's really superstitious. He chose the day for us to get married. It has to do with the Chinese zodiac. There are certain days that are bad luck for each of the signs. He knows how to do the analysis so we agreed to get married on the day that he suggested."

Linda showed me the Chinese zodiac chart that was sitting on a nearby table in the living-room. The chart was printed in English on a place mat from the local restaurant where Linda's youngest brother was married recently. She traced a diagonal line from one sign to its opposite across the circle, demonstrating how to tell which signs were most compatible and which to avoid in marriage. We read the descriptors for each of the animals, and Linda asked me to explain words that she didn't understand. For example, in the description for her sign, the Rabbit, she asked me to explain what "articulate" meant. When I told her that it meant someone who was good with language and could easily express thoughts in words, she frowned. "I'm not articulate at all. I think I sound terrible, especially when I speak English." I tried to reassure her, but wasn't convinced that she felt as confident as I did about her English language abilities. Under the sign of the Dog, her husband's sign, the word "candid" was used, and she asked me to explain the word's meaning. She agreed that Howard was indeed candid, which was evident to me on the first day that I met him. Linda and I talked a bit more about the sign of the Dragon, my sign, and whom I should and shouldn't avoid in marriage. Because of my interest in the Chinese zodiac, Linda pulled two books from a shelf on the wall unit in the living room. These books, which were written in Chinese, provided much more detailed and accurate information about each of the signs. They were given to the family by her father-in-law, who uses the same books to advise people when they consult with him

about various aspects of their lives. She suggested that I borrow them and that maybe someone could help me translate the Chinese into English.

The Marriage

In the fall of 1990, thirty-four-year-old Howard Tsiu and twenty-seven-year-old Linda Lam were married at the home of Howard's parents, in a large city in Western Canada. Nine months later their first son, Wilson, was born. Soon after Wilson's birth, Howard and Linda moved from the Tsiu family home to a small two-bedroom apartment in a multiethnic community on the outskirts of the city. Within two years, their second child was born: a daughter who they named Leticia. The family soon discovered that a two-bedroom apartment was too cramped for a family of four. Howard originally wanted to move to a house in the same area, but Linda, feeling somewhat overwhelmed with working part-time and trying to care for her husband and two small children, wanted to be nearer to her mother and sister. Linda's family live in the central part of the city, near Chinatown, and it was to this neighbourhood that the Tsiu's eventually moved.

After eight years of marriage, the bond between Howard and Linda remained strong. It is the family unit, though, that is central in their lives. In fact, it is rare that Howard and Linda ever go out together without their children, even to celebrate an anniversary or birthday. I once offered to stay with the children so that they could have dinner together on a special occasion. Although they were very appreciative of the offer, they politely declined, saying, "It just wouldn't be the same without the children." Linda in particular says that she misses the children when she is away from them, especially the baby. Summer and school holidays are also opportunities to be with family, particularly the extended family. Leticia often spoke excitedly of taking camping trips with cousins

and grandparents. For the Tsiu children, their cousins are their primary playmates both at home and at school, and it is uncommon for other friends to be invited to the house after school or on weekends.

The Mother, Linda

One would never guess by looking at Linda that she is thirty-five years old. Her pale, lightly freckled complexion is young and fresh, with only the hint of a frown line between her eyebrows. She is an attractive woman with a shy smile that always plays at the corners of her mouth; it isn't hard to understand why Howard chose Linda as his wife. On most days when I visited, she was dressed in comfortable clothes: a loose fitting T-shirt, stretchy pants, nylon socks, and plastic flip-flops. When she is at home, she wears an older pair of gold-framed eyeglasses that the baby likes to grab and bend. When she goes out shopping or to run other errands, however, she likes to wear her new glasses, which are very modern, with silver-frames and clip-on sun lenses. On the occasions when we met outside the home, she was likely to be dressed quite fashionably in jeans or a skirt. Her hair would be styled and she would be wearing the slightest trace of pink lipstick. Linda confessed to wanting some of the more stylish Chinese fashions that she had seen in a shop in Chinatown, and said that when she was single, she often "treated" herself.

At the age of seventeen, Linda and her siblings and parents emigrated from Vietnam to Canada. Much of her schooling took place in Vietnam. In fact, she says that of the three languages she speaks fluently (Vietnamese, Chao Chiu, and English), Vietnamese is probably the strongest since she also reads and writes it. She sometimes bought Vietnamese newspapers in Chinatown as a way to "keep up" her Vietnamese.

She described her Chinese as "limited" because at the time that she attended school in Vietnam, the Chinese language was forbidden. Now, she explained, it is often difficult for her to help her children with their Mandarin homework since her Chinese is "completely gone." In fact, she confessed that she often has to wait for her husband to come home so that he can help the children. It is also her husband who maintains correspondence with relatives in Vietnam and China. Several years ago, Linda enrolled in an evening course to study Mandarin. Howard teased her about it and told me that he "wanted his money back" because "she still can't speak Mandarin."

From our first encounters, Linda was very frank about her perceptions of herself as an English speaker. At first, she talked about her English spelling and would sometimes request that I check something she had written. Later on, though, she focussed more on her English pronunciations. She was self-conscious about an accent that she thought was too strong after eighteen years in Canada, and talked with frustration about people not understanding her when she speaks. At home she was articulate and outgoing, and early in our relationship she was quick to say how at ease she was speaking English with me because she never felt that she was being "judged." In contrast, at work, she described herself as somewhat shy and withdrawn. She mentioned that she usually did not like to talk to the other staff members because she did not feel confident in her abilities to communicate. Instead, she chose to "keep to herself" much of the time.

Interacting with store clerks was also something that she told me frustrated her; one occasion seemed particularly challenging. After reading a Safeway flyer, she made note of a certain brand of yogourt that was on sale and said she wanted to "stock up on it" for her children. But when the clerk was ringing the items through at the checkout counter,

the price that appeared wasn't the sale price. Linda said that when she remarked to the clerk, "I thought the yogurt is supposed to be on sale, two for $1.58," she felt he was "impatient" and "intolerant." It made her feel awful that he seemed to assume that because she spoke with an accent, she couldn't read the sale price properly. She said the "impatience of store clerks" has caused her to walk out of a store more than once, and she explained that she typically leaves feeling annoyed and completely lacking confidence in her ability to communicate in English.

Linda laughed, though, when she talked about first learning English in Canada. It was 1979 when she arrived; she was just seventeen years old. She recalled being "bored to death" in high school because she was expected to enrol in all of the regular courses and couldn't understand a word of English. She received no individual assistance and was "just expected to cope." She hated English; typing and mathematics were her favourites. Linda spoke with pride about her teachers being astonished that a young girl who couldn't speak English was the "fastest typist in class" and could work through most of the math equations in her textbook. She learned to keep a ledger after she was married, and maintained the books for her husband's small business when she just had Wilson and Leticia at home. With three children to care for, she stopped doing the bookkeeping, but she said she still likes to practise calculations on the adding machine in the basement. What gave her a sense of accomplishment, she explained, was being able to enter numbers without looking at the calculator keypad.[4]

In relaying her high school experience, Linda also talked about her father's strictness. He was particularly concerned about her desire to learn to drive, given that it would allow her considerable freedom from his watchful eye. She was determined to pass

the driver's text, even if it meant studying an English driver's manual. She persevered, earning her license at a young age and with it, popularity in high school. Spending time with girlfriends and going to their house parties were the best part of high school, according to Linda. She was quick to explain, though, that the parties never involved alcohol or boys. Nonetheless, her father was still adamant that she be home by ten. If she wasn't, she said there would be "hell to pay" the next day. Being late meant having to listen to one of her father's tirades. First, he would yell and lecture her about what can happen when young girls stay out too late. Her mother, who was the next recipient of the yelling and lectures, would be scolded for allowing her daughter to go out in the first place. Before the session was over, he would turn his attention back to Linda and start yelling and lecturing all over again. Linda's mother, upset because her husband was angry with her, would then begin yelling and lecturing Linda. In the end, Linda conceded, "It just wasn't worth staying out late." [5]

When I asked her about her family's journey to Canada, her tone became more serious. Her family left Vietnam having to pay a $2000 (U.S. funds) fee for each of the ten members of the family. With few financial resources remaining, her mother sewed jewellery into the hems of the children's clothing to ensure the family's survival once they arrived in a new country. Linda explained that her parents hoped the hidden jewellery would not be discovered should pirates invade their boat. At one point on their ocean journey, they did encounter pirates. Linda said she was terrified, especially because she knew that rape was a very real possibility. With a heavy sigh, she told me that she was very fortunate, as were all of the women, that the pirates took only material goods. For the entire month spent on board the boat, she recalled only one death—a heart attack. Most

difficult by far, Linda recalled, was the lack of water. With over 300 refugees on the boat, food was rare, but water was almost none existent. Families resorted to bartering, trading jewellery, cigarettes, anything for drinking water, which was never fresh and typically collected in rusty basins and containers. Vacant space on the boat was as scarce as water, with passengers being limited to a small seat where, for thirty days, they sat, slept, and ate.

The boat finally docked in Indonesia, and it was here that the family awaited news from the United Nations about a country that would be willing to accept them as refugees. They remained in Indonesia for a relatively short time—a total of three months—before learning that Canada had agreed to take them as new immigrants and that a family was willing to sponsor them. Their point of arrival was a rural area in Manitoba, where the ten family members were very fortunate to remain together. They lived in a farmhouse for several months and were assisted by their sponsors to purchase groceries and find adequate clothing. Grocery shopping, as Linda described it, was an ordeal because the family had no familiarity with Western food or Canadian currency. She recalled the embarrassment of selecting grapes in a grocery store and witnessing her sponsors' disapproving frowns because grapes were so expensive in the winter. She also talked about the indignity of having to ask for something as simple as stamps to mail letters home because it was an extra expense for the sponsors.

Part of their sponsors' expectations was also that the family send a representative to attend the local Catholic Church. Linda shook her head when she described the chaos that would ensue on Sunday mornings when each member of the family would attempt to negotiate their way out of attending. "I went last time. It's your turn," they would argue. She said that her mother *always* refused to go and that if everyone else also refused, her

father felt obligated to go. Typically, he was the only member of the family who would attend. At the time, the family spoke no English whatsoever, and Linda explained that attending a church was meaningless.

What is most evident about Linda is her strong commitment as a wife, mother, daughter, and sister. Her commitment permeated almost every aspect of her life. She often talked about how much she loved having children, how she missed them when she had to work. She was more inclined to laugh than to scold about a plate of noodles being dumped on the floor or over someone's head. As a mother, she both indulged and tried to discipline her children, fretting about their school grades, how much they ate, and what she referred to as "their bad habits." Sometimes when I would visit the house or talk with her on the telephone, she would relay stories—always within earshot of her children—of their disregard for toys, disrespect for their mother, and general untidiness. Her distant hope was that drawing attention to bad habits would help transform them into good ones. Linda also said that she wanted her children to "gain weight" because her in-laws commented that Leticia, in particular, was too skinny. Leticia, who was keenly aware that her mother would never deprive her of food, seemed to take pleasure in dawdling, eating small bites, fidgeting, and typically taking up to an hour or more to finish what was in her supper bowl. Linda's patience, at times, was taxed to the limit, causing her to lose her temper in frustration.

The Father, Howard

It wasn't until February 1999 that I met Howard. Although I had at that point been visiting the family weekly for over four months, Howard's long work hours at his shop had prevented a chance encounter. Leticia had shown me photographs of him and spoken

with much admiration, so in some ways, I felt that I already knew him. Leticia was so excited that I was finally going to meet her father. When he called to say he was coming home early, she pleaded with me to stay late because she wanted me to "see *baba's* face."[6] I had to admit to being somewhat nervous about finally meeting him, particularly because I wasn't sure how he would perceive my presence in his family. I worried that after an exhausting day of work, he might find my presence an intrusion on his privacy and limited time with the family. I saw myself as having a relationship with Linda and the children, but felt somewhat apprehensive about developing rapport with Howard.

When he walked through the door, Leticia intercepted, grabbing his hand and pulling him in my direction. Linda laughed at her daughter's eagerness as she set the table for her husband's dinner. Although Howard is a slight man in both height and build, he has a commanding presence when he enters a room. At forty-two, his face is still youthful, showing only gentle lines of expression. Dressed casually in loose-fitting jeans and a shirt, and having had no opportunity to remove his coat, he walked into the middle of the living-room. He has a charismatic smile and the type of disposition that immediately puts people at ease. By way of greeting, he inquired whether I had eaten yet and then turned to greet his wife. Linda asked him if he was ready to eat supper and much to my surprise, he declined, saying that he had already eaten with some friends at a restaurant. Without question or hesitation, Linda cleared the table.

Removing his coat, he sat on the sofa perpendicular to the chair where I was sitting with Richmond. Our conversation began with his enquiry about how Leticia was progressing with English. I reassured him that she was doing very well and that I was enjoying spending time with her. He smiled, seemingly pleased with my prognosis.

Knowing perhaps that I was interested in languages, Howard continued the conversation by presenting some of his own interests in history and language. He has a great facility for learning languages and speaks several, including Chao Chiu (his mother tongue), Vietnamese, Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. He reads and writes in all of these languages with the exception of his first language, Chao Chiu.[7] The majority of his formal schooling was in Vietnamese and Chinese, and although he studied some English before immigrating to Canada in his twenties, English has been learned primarily in Canada.

Howard also boasted about being able to greet people and say phrases in several other languages. I was quite taken aback when, upon learning that my mother's first language was Ukrainian, he repeated several phrases in Ukrainian. He seemed quite delighted by my reaction and told me that he likes to "throw people off-guard" by speaking in different languages. He also explained that he believes knowing where someone comes from and what language they speak is the key to understanding who they are. He defined such knowledge as "a starting point," a way of knowing how to relate to someone who doesn't have the same culture and language that you do. The value he places on language was evident in the values that he stressed with his children. Before Wilson and Leticia began kindergarten, both attended Cantonese week-end school and although they no longer attend, Howard said that he continues to speak to them, particularly Wilson, in Cantonese so that they don't forget what the language sounds like. He also talked about wanting his children to be able to speak many languages—not just English and Chao Chiu. At the same time, though, Howard does take a great deal of pride in the fact that his children speak a very "pure form" of his language because both he and Linda speak only Chao Chiu at home.[8]

Being able to communicate with many different people is something that Howard values greatly, perhaps because he believes his own language abilities saved his life when he fled from Vietnam in the early 1980's. He told me the story of the pirates who raided the boat he was travelling on, explaining they would surely have killed him had he not been able to communicate with them. According to Howard, because there was some degree of commonality between his language (Chao Chiu) and the language of the pirates (Hainan, Chow, and Fukiai),[9] he was treated relatively well and was given privileges such as water, food, and even cigarettes. At one point in his story, though, his voice dropped and his eyes became still and serious. "Because I could speak their language," he said earnestly, "I was able to convince them not to rape any of the women."

Howard spoke openly of other difficulties he had endured when trying to flee his war torn homeland. As the eldest son in his family, he took the risk and responsibility of escaping Vietnam with the hope of finding a safe place to bring his parents and siblings. He was candid about not being able to afford the $2000 (U.S. funds) fee for passage on a refugee boat. Determination led him to illegally organize a small refugee boat that would carry some twenty passengers. The fact that he was caught and imprisoned for four months only to reorganize the day he was released from prison speaks eloquently of his ingenuity and commitment to family. Once in Canada, he held three jobs so he could afford to bring other family members to Canada.

Our conversation eventually shifted back to the origins of other languages and cultures, and I was truly amazed by his knowledge of history. He certainly put my own knowledge of the subject to shame. For much of the conversation, Linda remained largely on the periphery and interjected only sporadically. At one point, she expressed her own

amazement, explaining that she couldn't figure out how Howard remembered so many details about places he'd never been. "I just read about it," he told us, "and I remember it." He likes to share his stories and ideas with his children when they watch Chinese television and videos with him. Time spent together is limited, and he takes these opportunities to pass on family knowledge and values that he considers important.

Howard placed a high value on "purity" of language. He takes great pride that his children speak a very pure form of Chao Chiu, unlike his nieces and nephews who are growing up in homes where Chao Chiu is only spoken by one parent. He emphasized that the children should always speak Chao Chiu at home and admonished Linda for "mixing languages" (Chao Chiu and English). He also teased her about "mixing foods" and illustrated his point with a description of how she prepared spaghetti with a Vietnamese twist. 'If I'm going to eat Italian food, then I want to eat Italian food, not Italian-Vietnamese food,' he laughed. Not surprisingly, Howard also knew a great deal about the history of food in what he referred to as "chopstick cultures." His fascination with politics, travel, and history was reflected in the magazine, newspaper, and book collection housed in the basement. Buying the Chinese newspaper had become somewhat of a family ritual, and both Wilson and Leticia could point out the shop in Chinatown where they would accompany their father on Sundays—his one-day off during the week—to buy a newspaper. Once at the shop, Howard also liked to indulge his children with small trinkets and toys.

Although Linda was largely responsible for the children's formal education, both parents worked hard to provide a strong family and upbringing for their children, who were the heart of their home. Both also wanted their children to know the sacrifices they had made

in choosing to immigrate to a new country. However, they felt that the children were still too young to understand their stories of coming to Canada. Howard, though he wasn't one to complain, sometimes talked with frustration about his own family's lack of understanding. "Before they came to Canada, they just thought the streets were paved with gold. They had no idea that I was living in a rooming-house, scrimping and saving every penny so that I could afford to bring them to Canada." When Howard's parents and younger siblings arrived in Canada, they moved into a suite that he had furnished with a colour television, beds, a table and chairs, and had stocked with food. He said that even after being in Canada all these years, he still doesn't think that his siblings have a true understanding of what it was like for him to journey by boat from Vietnam and struggle to survive his first few years in Canada.

Linda lamented that she was unable to read English newspapers when she first came to Canada. She wanted to know the stories that were told about the Vietnamese refugees. From microfiche, I collected articles from the Globe and Mail and the local newspaper to share with her. She has carefully preserved them and wants to give them to her children when they are older. For now, the children have only pieces of their parents' stories, pieces that they have just begun to weave into the fabric of their own lives.

The Only Daughter, Leticia

The Tsiu's named their only daughter Liang. Her Older Brother calls her *Mèi Mèi* and her Younger Brother calls her *Jie Jie*. She was introduced to me by her English name, Leticia. Leticia, unlike her Older Brother, was a child of many words in both English and Chao Chiu. She was tall and slender—"too skinny" her mother said—with long black hair that gradually became shorter during the year she was five. Her face was easily read: bright

and open in one instant, eyebrows knit together in defiance in the next. Her mother sometimes found it difficult to discipline her, and Leticia had learned to play most situations to her own advantage. She was feisty, strong-willed, and at times bossy with her Older Brother and mother. Such behaviours were rarely observed in the presence of her father. Quite rightly, her mother described Leticia as "daddy's little girl," and she thoroughly lived up to the title. She clearly adored her father and often referred to fragments of stories that he had told her about his travels back to Vietnam and China.

Leticia had the most remarkable memory. She could recite her address, including her postal code, telephone number, and the dates of birth for each of her family members, in both Chinese and English. She knew the signs of the Chinese zodiac for her parents, siblings, grandparents, several cousins, and me. She also knew the ages of many of her immediate and extended family members. In fact, age appeared to be an important factor in how she understood relationships among individuals. She referred to her two sets of grandparents in English as "Old Grandma and Grandpa" (her maternal grandparents) and "Young Grandma and Grandpa" (her paternal grandparents). She marked her status among cousins in relation to who was older and who was younger. She knew that I was several months younger than her mother was. She remembered my two cats not by their names, but by their ages. For example, on the telephone she might ask, "What is the nine-year-old cat doing?" She also had an excellent understanding of many of the cultural traditions that were practised in her family. She knew, for example, that her Grandfather (*Ye Ye*) gave her and her siblings their Chinese names.

At the age of three, Leticia's parents enrolled her in an English pre-school program that catered largely to families in their inner-city area. Through the program, she gained

considerable exposure to English storybooks. Her mother told the story of how her young daughter would often amuse her grandparents by "reading" English books to them. She would stand in front of them and, with book in hand, pretend to read a story. Her rhythm and intonation so closely resembled English that Leticia's grandparents, who understood very little English, thought that their granddaughter was actually able to read. At the age of five, though, Leticia knew that her parents' expectations were different now and that pretend reading was no longer "cute." Instead, accuracy in word reading would be stressed, and it was generally expected that she would learn to read in kindergarten.

Linda also had a number of other expectations for her daughter's language and literacy learning. One of her primary concerns involved English and Chinese writing. Linda would often write sentences and request that Leticia sit at the kitchen table and copy them. In one scribbler, for example, sentences such as "I am a girl." and "I go to the mall." were written by Linda and sporadically—with a careless hand—copied by Leticia. Chinese characters were particularly difficult for her, and Linda often reproached her daughter for not being able to correctly write her Chinese name. Over time, considerable tension developed around reading and writing, reaching a point early in Leticia's kindergarten year where she regularly refused to work with her mother. By February 1999, Linda became so concerned about her daughter's education that she enrolled her in a subsidized Montessori school for two afternoons per week. This new arrangement meant that Leticia attended kindergarten five mornings per week and Montessori school two afternoons per week. It also meant that in time, her kindergarten teacher would complain that Leticia was having difficulties concentrating and focusing at school.

Typically, Leticia was accustomed to doing things on her own terms and did not take lightly situations that did not proceed according to her plan, at school or at home. From our first encounter, I knew that her rules rather than mine would regulate our interactions. She was playful, though, and loved to rough house and tumble almost as much as she enjoyed pretend play. She was, in a word, paradoxical: playful yet serious, gentle yet acrimonious, acquiescent yet disagreeable. Our relationship was overwhelmingly a positive one, and almost without exception, whenever I would leave, her parting question at the end of the day would be "What day you come next week?"

The Eldest Son, Wilson

The Tsiu's first son is eight years old. His parents call him Kiam. Because it is considered more respectful for children to refer to family members by kinship titles, his two younger siblings call him *G Ge* (Older Brother). At school, among his classmates, he is more commonly known by his English name, Wilson, which is also what I called him.

I vividly remember the first day we met. Leticia and I were outside in the front yard building a snowman. It was a late afternoon in October and the neighbour, who drove Wilson to and from school, had just dropped him off. As he walked through the gate into the front yard and mounted the steps to the house, his eyes watched my every move from behind his wire-rimmed glasses. At first he seemed alarmed—unsure of my presence in a yard where he rarely played unsupervised. I invited him to join us, and it was curiosity that seemed to draw him back outdoors after he dropped his backpack in the house. I introduced myself, knowing that when he went into the house he probably couldn't resist asking his mother about the stranger in the front yard. He continued to look at me in

silence. Leticia, in her usual way, boldly intervened and began giving directives for how and where he should build his snowman. Though a willing participant, he remained silent for much of the time we spent outside.

During the year of my research, Wilson was in grade two. His school experience began at the age of three when he attended a Head Start program with a high enrolment of children who spoke languages other than English at home. The program was held in the community centre a few blocks from his house. He also attended weekend Cantonese school before starting kindergarten. In any language, however, Wilson was a child of few words, which often exasperated his mother. She scolded him for responding to questions with one-word answers rather than using complete sentences, and became annoyed with him for being too shy. Home reading, particularly in English, could also be a source of tension between Wilson and his mother. Although completing homework after school was expected, Wilson often chose to watch television instead. Linda chastized him for not reading books and for watching television or playing computer games, activities that she believed were not conducive to school success. She voiced a number of concerns about her son's academic performance and expressed disappointment with his report card grades of C's and B's in English, especially in writing. Her expectation was that he should achieve A's, or at the very least, consistent B+'s. She seriously considered enrolling him in weekend school or hiring a tutor to boast his grades. Such steps were not taken, and she explained that in elementary school she tried not to be too concerned about his grades. In secondary school, though, she candidly explained that it would be quite a different matter.

Wilson had a definite preference for active engagement, and when I visited the school it was rare for him not to be out on the playground roughhousing and playing

soccer. He was generally a quiet boy, at times even withdrawn. As the first-born son, however, he was typically obedient to both his mother and father, and tried to demonstrate responsibility for his two younger siblings. Interestingly, in the company of friends and older cousins, his disposition changed dramatically; he became a lively, rambunctious boy who sought laughter and physical activity.

Our relationship was a curious one. He would read with me when his mother requested, proudly teach me how to copy the Chinese characters he had expertly written in the columns of his school scribbler, share his Pokémon card collection, insist vehemently that I stay for dinner on each of the occasions when I visited—but rarely, if ever, would he accept invitations to join our play activities. Instead, he preferred to sit and watch surreptitiously from a separate vantage point, while engaging in another, more private activity. In time, he became less shy and began conversing with me more frequently, often in the form of questions about my life—most particularly my family. He was curious to know about my grandparents, aunts and uncles, parents, brothers and sisters, and husband.[10] Where were they born? How old are they now? Are they still alive? How did they die? Where do they live? The fact that I was separated from my husband at the time that I met the Tsiu's was a constant source of concern for Wilson, perhaps because he knew very few husbands and wives who did not live in the same home.

The Youngest Son, Richmond

The Tsiu's second son is named Sek-Lung. Both Wilson and Leticia call him *Di Di* (Younger Brother). During the time I spent with the Tsiu's, I witnessed many of his developmental milestones: learning to crawl, learning to walk, saying his first word *Baba*

(daddy). He grew bigger and taller with every week, and as he acquired more teeth, he developed the most charming and irresistible smile. Although the vast majority of my time was spent with his Older Sister, he became quite accustomed to my presence, willingly requesting to be picked up, even cuddled. Inevitably if I called the house, Linda would put his ear to the phone so that he could hear my voice. Leticia liked to teach me words in Chao Chiu that I could repeat to Richmond, and his mother was always curious about his reactions to me, particularly when I spoke to him in English.

As the youngest child, Richmond's parents dearly treasured him. He was carefully attended to and doted on by both his mother and father, and on occasion Leticia, although sometimes her mischievous streak caused her to be teasing and aggressive with him. It was unusual for me to arrive at the house and not find him in his mother's arms or sitting in his walker being fed. The sound of Linda cooing and singing to Richmond was a constant part of the background "music" in the house. He was almost always a content baby, happy to wander about exploring, to play with a box or a book, or to interact with his brother and sister. He was also very determined in his pursuits and, like his sister, would rarely accept no for an answer to something that he wanted. Linda often chose to cater to her young son's interests and curiosities, and I never heard her scold him for misdemeanours such as pulling a plate of food from the table or drawing on the wall with a pencil.

The Family Home

I remember the first day I visited the Tsiu's home; Linda locked the deadbolt on the front door soon after I had stepped inside. It wasn't long before I understood why. Several months after I had been working with the family, Linda talked about drug houses in the

neighbourhood and an occasion when they witnessed a police raid across the street. Typically, when I read in the city newspaper about drug raids and gang-related incidents, the occurrences were within a ten-block radius of the Tsiu's home. The convenience of having her mother and sister only a few blocks away, and of living near Chinatown where she does much of her shopping, outweighed her concerns about living in this particular part of the city. Linda was also quick to explain that she never allows her children to play in the yard unsupervised, and emphasized, "We just keep to ourselves."

It was late September when I made that first visit. The weather was still mild in the early afternoon as I drove down the busy main street of Chinatown, with its distinctive yellow signs and awnings sprinkled with red Chinese characters. I drove past the inner-city school where I once worked on a research project, passed the community centre, the playground, and the public library, around the corner and into the neighbourhood where the Tsiu's live. This was a neighbourhood of activity: people were perched outside on their front porches and steps, socializing, sipping out of mugs and pop bottles; two young men, who were walking along the street, stopped at someone's porch to chat. Down the alleyways, back porches were also occupied. Dogs and cats, obviously important neighbourhood inhabitants, sat sunning themselves on steps and sidewalks. The neighbourhood also appeared to be one of transition: signs advertising rooms or houses for rent were posted on a number of doors or hung in front windows; some neglected houses had been boarded up entirely.

As I rounded the last turn onto the Tsiu's street, a prostitute looked with anticipation into my car. From inside his gate, an elderly man watched the comings and goings in the neighbourhood. I parked across the street from their house, which was a

moderate size and newer than many of the other homes. Once inside their chain-link fence, I couldn't help noticing the orderliness of the yard. The flowerbeds on either side of the front steps were framed with a perfect line of cement blocks decorated with carefully painted red circles with yellow centres. As I walked around to the side door, I was met by rows of flowers planted neatly along the fence. A large barbecue, double garage, and small grassy area completed the backyard.

Inside, the house was as orderly as the outside. The main living space was an open kitchen and living-room combination, co-ordinated with a pastel and grey colour scheme. The kitchen table and chairs were situated in front of a small bay window to the right of the front door. The four chairs were upholstered in a fabric with a grey-pink geometric design and one edge of the kitchen counter was within reach. It was here that the rice cooker sat. The rice cooker was a central part of family meal preparation, and on the days when I visited, it almost always contained freshly cooked rice. The kitchen was often filled with the wonderful smells of fragrant rice and garlic. Just below the rice cooker, on a narrow shelf, Linda stacked old newspapers and flyers. When Raymond was napping, she liked to peruse the newspaper for sales at grocery or department stores. A lower shelf held a collection of old worksheets from school that the children used for scrap paper. Cookbooks were also stacked on this shelf, but Linda confessed to rarely using them because she preferred to experiment. The kitchen also had a wide assortment of conveniences, such as a microwave oven and cordless telephone. On most days, there were several pots cooking on the stovetop. Linda never used the oven for cooking, but instead used the space for storing pots and pans. A school calendar was mounted on the

refrigerator door with magnets; a Chinese calendar hung near the kitchen table. Both were used to mark the rhythm of daily family life.

Dominating the living-room was a wall unit housing a collection of electronics equipment, including a stereo, television, and VCR. At one point, Howard had a video monitoring system so they could watch Richmond in his bedroom. Also neatly arranged on the shelves were a set of Britannia Encyclopaedias, Chinese horoscope books, English dictionaries, videocassettes, family photo albums, mementoes, and souvenirs. Most central, however, was a Buddhist altar lit with tiny red lights that could be seen through the front window from outside on the street. Linda explained that they are not a religious family and that her father-in-law had set up the altar. It was also her father-in-law who insisted that Buddhist verses, usually printed in gold characters on red paper, be posted inside and sometimes outside of the house on special occasions. The sayings were often messages of luck and prosperity for the family, and although they were changed periodically, many remained for extended periods.

Plants were also situated on the wall unit and in large pots on the floor. A plastic cover protected the coffee table that sat in front of the sofa and chair. Sometimes the table was moved against the wall, between the sofa and the wall unit. Wilson and Leticia liked to pile library and colouring books on the tabletop, but Linda tried to keep it free of items that Richmond might rip or tear and stuff in his mouth. Usually she would leave the books from the public library in a plastic bag under the table. Using a combination of English and Chinese, Linda used an old scribbler to keep a written record of books, tapes, and videos signed out from the library (see Appendix A). An assortment of toys could also be found in the empty corners and spaces of the living room. Somewhat of an

anomaly was the English alphabet chart—typical of primary school classrooms—that hung above the front door, just below the ceiling. On the living-room wall that borders the hallway, professional family portraits were displayed in large picture frames. There were separate pictures of each child, pictures of both sets of grandparents, and a picture of the Tsiu family. In the family portrait, Richmond is seated on his mother's knee. Wilson is seated to her left and Leticia is seated to her right. Howard, who is positioned behind Linda and Leticia, is the overarching figure.

There were three bedrooms on the upper floor of the house: Wilson and Leticia shared one, Howard and Linda another, and Richmond slept alone in the third room. The baby's bedroom was sparsely furnished with only a crib and a chair because shortly after he learned to walk, he also began climbing out of his crib. Linda wanted to ensure there was nothing in his room that might cause him harm, should he crawl out of his crib in the middle of the night.

Much of my time was spent in the older children's bedroom, which was furnished with a set of bunk beds. Leticia was assigned the bottom bunk. It was covered with her favourite comforter, the corner of which she had worn thin from clutching it at night. Under her bed both children had long, flat cardboard boxes for organizing their toys. Stored in Leticia's box were stuffed toys, board games, and an assortment of Pokémon, Furbie, and Sailor Moon memorabilia. Wilson's box contained action figures, board games, and a variety of materials for building. Their room also had a desk with two drawers, one filled with old worksheets and school scribblers and another filled with drawings, the majority of which were Wilson's. On top of their desk was a small green plastic basket that contained an assortment of Crayola markers and crayons. On

occasion, I also found lucky red envelopes, embossed with gold Chinese characters, that had been given to the children by family friends or relatives. On the shelf above the desk sat framed pictures of Wilson and Leticia at various points in their school careers. Last year's calendar from the public library was tacked to the wall by the clothes closet. The closet was primarily for Leticia's clothes, particularly her collection of fancy and traditional dresses, all of which she refused to wear. A tall, narrow bookshelf stood between the closet and the bunk beds. The shelf was divided into two sections, one for Chinese books and one for English books.

The house also has a large basement with a spacious family room, a second bathroom, a fourth bedroom, a computer room, and a combination laundry-storage room. Like the main living space upstairs, the downstairs family room had a wide assortment of electronics, most which sat on top of a home entertainment stand large enough to house a wide-screen television. The family room was where both of the older children enjoyed lying on the love seat or sitting in the black leather swivel chair to watch television before supper. Beside the television set was a coffee-table protected by a green floral vinyl cover. This coffee table always had stacks of issues of *The Nineties*, a Chinese newsmagazine, and newspapers that Howard purchased weekly at a shop in Chinatown. At the opposite end of the family room was a large white lawn-table. On it, Howard kept business-related items, including invoices, ledgers, and receipts; an electronic calculator and telephone; and a collection of office supplies, such as a stapler, tape, paper, and pens. Hanging just to one side of the outdoor table was a small whiteboard, complete with dry erase markers, mounted on the wall at a convenient height for both Wilson and Leticia to write. Beside this whiteboard was a very durable children's picnic table and a taller

round table with an accumulation of colouring books and well-worn children's trade books.

The computer room was adjacent to Howard's worktable, and after school, Wilson could often be found sitting in the big swivel chair in front of the computer monitor. The computer was a recent acquisition for the family, and Linda had covered the keyboard with a protective plastic film. She was half laughing when she told me that "out of the blue" Howard came home one day with this computer. "I wanted him to talk to my brother first because he knows a lot about computers, but one day he just arrived home with a new computer." Amused, she added, "He doesn't even know how to use it. Now he says he wants to learn to type!" Linda learned how to type in high school, but said it was difficult to find time to figure out how the computer works. Leticia seemed only to have a passing interest in the computer, and it was rare that I observed her using it. She was more inclined to use scrap paper or office supplies from the desk or bookshelf. The bookshelf in the computer room mainly housed old issues of *The Nineties*, computer software manuals, and other assorted Chinese and Vietnamese books.

Both the family room and the fourth bedroom were favourite places for Leticia to play. The bedroom contained several giant teddy bears that an uncle had won for her at the summer exhibition. Old clothes were stored in the closet, along with an abandoned treadmill. Two single beds and two dressers occupied the rest of the space. On one of the dressers was an array of colouring books, school binders, and second-hand storybooks. In between the family room and the bedroom was a small storage room. Sometimes items that wouldn't fit in the small storage space collected just outside the

bedroom. In fact, a boxed Christmas tree served, for the longest time, as a kitchen countertop in a series of Leticia's play episodes.

When I telephoned and often when I arrived in the early afternoon, there was the sound of Chinese music playing on the television or stereo. Linda liked to feed Richmond while the music was playing; she said it calmed him down so he would eat. Late in the afternoon, the television was usually tuned to Linda's favourite soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*. Sometimes she would have to negotiate with the older two children because they would want to watch Pokémon at the same time. On occasion, she succeeded in convincing them to go downstairs and watch television until it was time for dinner. She would often make tea and encourage me to stay upstairs and visit with her.

This description of the Tsiu family and their home context provides textual snapshots of the social history of this family. The snapshots, unique to the times and places they were recorded, are the backdrop for this study of the intersections of play, literacy, and culture. Emerging from this collection of images are Leticia's constructions of literacy and how she defines herself in relation to literacy. The context shapes her choices about participation in literacy events—choices that are about who she is as an individual and as a family member, and about her literacy stance (i.e., her orientation toward literacy). Leticia's home play-literacy activities reflect her social world, revolving primarily around the two major social contexts in her life—family and school. Across both themes and embedded within her social play activities is the element of narrative through which she reveals glimpses of her literacy knowledge and stance, her "self" and her relations with others, her social history and her future.

[1] All of the names and places in this book have been changed.
[2] From "Both Sides of the Necessary Paradox: Mediations on Gregory Bateson and the Death of the Bread and Butterfly" by Steward Brand, *Harpers*, 1973.
[3] Both Howard's parents and Linda's parents were born in one of China's southern coast provinces. They fled to Vietnam in the 1950's during Chairman Mao's Communist rule.
[4] She described an incident from last week that involved Leticia. Linda was "number punching" on an adding machine and Leticia was standing beside her, watching and repeating her mother's hand movements. When she noticed what her daughter was doing, she asked her, "What are you doing?" Leticia responded, "I'm doing like you." Linda said that she had no idea that Leticia paid such careful attention to her.
[5] Linda explained that at the core of her father's strictness was his concern that his daughters might "get spoiled" and that no one would want to marry them.
[6] Her expression here is a direct translation from Chao Chiu. It is her way of saying that I have never met her father.
[7] Neither of Howard's parents is able to read and write in Chao Chiu, although his father reads and writes in Chinese (Mandarin).
[8] None of Howard's or Linda's siblings married individuals who speak Chao Chiu, so of all the grandchildren, only Wilson, Leticia, and Richmond can communicate fluently with their grandparents. Their father's hope of the language continuing to be spoken by his own grandchildren is also dependent on them. Linda places greater importance on her children's abilities to speak English well.
[9] Howard explained that all four of these languages belong to the Min language group.
[10] When I first began working with the Tsiu's, my husband and I had just separated. Although I had some concerns that my new marital status may have a negative impact on the rapport I developed with the family, I tried to be very honest with them about my situation. Wilson, of all the family members, had countless questions about where my husband lived and why we didn't live together. He most often asked these questions when he wasn't in the presence of his mother.

2

Studying Leticia's Social And Textual Life

Stories move in circles. They don't move in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles. There are stories inside stories and stories between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is getting lost. And when you're lost, you start to look around and to listen.

—Corey Fischer, Albert Greenberg, and Naomi Newman *of A Travelling Jewish Theatre Company, Coming from a Great Distance*[1]

Leticia let me in through the side door and sat down on the stairs, waiting and watching as I untied my boots. As usual, she seemed very happy to see me. She fidgeted with the small papers that were in her hands. On some, she had written numbers; others were coupons that she had cut from a newspaper. "See, it's money," she said, waving the papers teasingly in front of me. Linda called hello from the kitchen where she was feeding the baby. I walked up the stairs to greet her. We talked for awhile and she asked the baby, "Do you remember Maureen?" He smiled and reached to touch the sleeve of my winter coat.

Leticia, who seemed bored with our conversation, left the kitchen to go to her bedroom. She returned shortly with a bingo game under her arm and impatiently urged me to come to her room so that we could play. Linda interjected with an anecdote about Leticia's schoolwork that she had seen at the kindergarten open house. "She's so messy with her colouring," she frowned, "and she doesn't take time to do things nicely. She just rushes through things." Leticia silently abandoned her game and brought me some drawings of dinosaurs that she had made. Linda looked at them and asked, "Did you draw them yourself or did you trace them?" At first, Leticia said nothing. Her mother asked again, "Did you trace them?" "Yeah," Leticia responded with a tone of defiance. Linda

looked at her daughter with disappointment. Leticia quietly put her drawings away and both physically and vocally urged me to come to her room. When I turned my attention to her, she eagerly took my hand and, holding the bingo game firmly under her arm, pulled me down the hallway. We sat down on the floor in her bedroom and she began taking the bingo pieces out of the box.

"I'll show you, okay? Okay, you put it like that." She held up one of the letter cards and asked, "Who got *A*?" She continued to instruct me in how to play the bingo game. "And you gotta put it like that," she explained, as she put a red circle chip on my bingo card over the letter *A*. "But always do that," she emphasized, referring to what I should do each time she called a letter.

I picked up a handful of bingo chips and asked, "Do I use these?"

"I pick, I get them for you," she insisted before counting the letters on my card and then counting out the correct number of chips. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. There!" The game began with Leticia calling out the bingo letters. "Okay, now, who gots *A*?" She continued to call the letters until I said, "Bingo!" at which point she was eager to pass the calling role to me.

"*H*," I called as the first letter.

"*H*?" Leticia asked pensively. "My dad's name is Howard."

"*D*," I called.

"I got that, I got that!" she responded excitedly.

"*Q*."

"Nope. I got Howard and *D*," she told me, looking at the two letters that were marked on her card.

"*J*."

"I don't like that letter," she said, making a sour face.

"Why?" I asked.

"*J* is Justin," she explained. "Because my dad say I always kiss Justin."

"So you hate the letter *J* because it stands for Justin?"

"I hate that!" she emphasized.

She turned her attention to the letters on the cards and insisted that I sort through the deck to find the letter *L* for her name. "You put my name out. You put my dad's name out too," she directed, wanting me to find the *H* again so that I could put the letter cards beside her bingo card.

I found *W* first and asked, "Whose letter is this?"

"Wilson is a *W*," she responded with confidence.

Next, I found the *L*. "Whose letter is this?"

"Leticia and Linda."

We displayed the three cards that represented the members of her family.

"Who is missing?" I asked.

"Richmond."

I found the letter *R* and showed it to her.

"Richmond," she said when she saw it.

"Do you have it [on your bingo card]?"

"No," she replied before looking at another card, "Hey, Richmond got here."

"Should we put it out with the other cards?" I asked. She took the letter card and placed it carefully with each of the cards that represented the members of her family. "Put me here, beside my dad," she instructed. She placed the *L* card in between the *H* card and the W card and volunteered, "My dad doesn't like Wilson."

"Really? Why not?"

"Because Wilson's report card has got only B and C."

"Oh."

"That's not good," she continued with a more serious tone.

"Is your dad mad at him?" I asked.

"My brother give his report card to my dad. My dad doesn't like it!" she exclaimed. "I give my report card to my dad. I be really good."

"Your dad liked it?"

"Yeah, my dad like me and my dad buy a watch for me. I in my report card be really good."

"So, you're doing really well at school?"

"Yes, because my report card say I'm good. (PLC transcripts: November 27, 1998 Session 6).

Early in the research study, this simple game of bingo provided a first glimpse into the family dynamics within this home context. The family relationships that Leticia portrays as an incidental part of her play—particularly the importance of her relationship with her father and her desire to garner his approval and recognition—became strong themes in the play narratives she composed. Her symbolic illustration of her close relationship with her father, as demonstrated by her careful placement of the letters representing her name and her father's name, was also reflected in a list of names that she wrote at home a few weeks later. The list was given to her kindergarten teacher, folded in the form of a letter and sealed in a handmade envelope. I immediately noticed it posted on a bulletin board when I visited Leticia's classroom in early December. The list included the names of her teacher (Miss Lee), the teacher's aide (Mrs. Hai), and Leticia's family members printed in this order: Linda, LeeHai, Howard, Leticia, Wilson, Richmond. It was from these people that Leticia appropriated roles and voices in social play.

Like many young children, Leticia writes lists of names as a means of exploring family genealogy and trying to figure out how to position herself among others in her social world. What is her role within this family context? Who is she in relation to her mother, her father, her siblings, and teachers? What are the expectations for members of this family? Dyson emphasizes that when children attempt to answer questions of identity, they do so "not by turning inward to listen to some inner voice, but by turning outward, by listening to, and appropriating, the voices around them (1997, p. 13). Thus, language becomes the medium through which the self is constructed. Indeed, the Bingo game example, taken together with Leticia's expression of identity described in the opening vignette of the *Beginnings* section, suggests that what she knows about literacy moves beyond a set of skills and behaviours that individuals possess to varying degrees. Solsken argues that:

> ...in learning to read and write, children make choices through which they construct definitions of themselves and their relations with parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. In their choices, children, like adults, strive both to be counted as members of social groups and to be recognized as unique individuals. They seek to realize their culturally constructed intentions by acting on the material and social world. (1993, p. 9)

In this study, I explore the cultural context in which Leticia is learning about reading and writing. Her literacy environment is a rich context that includes several spoken and written languages; a wide variety of printed materials including newspapers, flyers, business documents, forms, invoices, storybooks, magazines, and horoscope books, among others; and a series of literacy practices that represent the fluidity of life in

her home. It is this real-life context, and Leticia's sense of self in relation to it, that gives shape and form to her explorations of language, literacy, and culture within the imagined world of play. Leticia's sense of self, literacy, and culture are woven together in the narrative texts that she constructs through social play.

In the following sections, in developing a framework for exploring the relationship between play, literacy, and culture, I present theoretical and methodological perspectives that I consider to be two sides of the same coin. In examining theoretical perspectives on children's literacy acquisition, I consider emergent literacy, the sociocultural context of literacy learning, and literacy as social status and identity. I also consider the link between play and literacy, particularly how children's play with roles and voices fosters their sense of social identity, and the interplay between textual and social spaces. Methodological considerations include a description of tools for collecting information about Leticia's family and school contexts and her play activities, and for interpreting the interplay between play, literacy, and culture.

THE INTERSECTIONS OF PLAY, LITERACY, AND CULTURE: A FRAMEWORK

Perspectives on Beginning Literacy

This is primarily a study of beginning literacy, a subject that has been investigated from a number of perspectives and by a plethora of scholars. Much of this research has focussed on explaining the disparities in the literacy achievement of individuals or groups and in determining ways to overcome barriers to achievement (Solsken, 1993). Assumptions about what is involved in the learning and teaching of beginning literacy have varied greatly, depending on researchers' underlying assumptions about the nature of literacy

and learning. There are two prevailing perspectives in research on beginning literacy—emergent literacy and the social construction of literacy. Although I draw from both perspectives, I locate my study of the relationship between play, literacy, and culture within a third perspective, literacy as social status and identity—a perspective that to date, has received little attention in the study of beginning literacy (Solsken, 1993).

The Emergent Literacy Perspective

The emergent literacy perspective derives its basic assumptions about literacy and learning from cognitive/developmental psychology (Chapman, 1997; Solsken, 1993). Specifically, literacy is defined as a body of cognitive knowledge about written language and a set of processes for implementing that knowledge. Research from this perspective aims at identifying children's literacy knowledge and processes, the sequence in which they are acquired, and the environmental conditions that best support their acquisition. The cognitive-developmental focus of this perspective has also resulted in frequent examinations of home contexts as sites of early literacy learning (Solsken, 1993). Individual children and their patterns of literacy development and knowledge, however, remain the primary interest of studies based in the emergent literacy perspective.

The Social Construction of Literacy Perspective

A second influential perspective on beginning literacy is the social construction of literacy perspective. Assumptions about literacy and learning from this perspective are drawn from cultural anthropology and sociolinguistics. Literacy is examined within the complex networks of social practices (Heath, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Solsken, 1993) and is defined within the context of communities (Ferdman, 1990; Heath, 1983; Scribner, 1988), classrooms (Bloome, 1989), and families (Taylor, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Learning is viewed as the process of adopting

community practices for using and interpreting written language through participation in its social activities. Literacy becomes meaningful according to the values, practices, routines, and rituals of members of particular cultural contexts. Disparities between definitions of school literacy and home and community literacy are typically viewed as limiting the child's access to full participation in school, and ultimately the wider society (Solsken, 1993). In an attempt to resolve these mismatches, families and communities may prepare children for school by adopting the school's literacy teaching methods, or the school may expand its methods by incorporating the child's community and home literacy practices.

Clearly, the emergent literacy perspective and social construction of literacy perspective are not entirely distinct, and in a number of studies the two perspectives have been merged in examining beginning literacy (Solsken, 1993). Such studies attempt to explain the interconnections between social and cognitive factors in literacy learning. In addition, in its focus on environments that support literacy development, the emergent literacy perspective examines social context as an important factor in beginning literacy. From both perspectives, the family has been described as one of the most important contexts for children's early literacy learning.

Literacy as Social Status and Identity

The literacy as social status and identity perspective shares basic assumptions about literacy and learning with the social construction of literacy perspective. It differs, however, in locating the study of social groups and individuals within a larger social and political context. An additional difference is that the social status and identity perspective draws on feminist and critical theory, which are specifically concerned with the everyday social practices by which dominant groups maintain or lose status and

power. More specifically, "gender, race, class, and other constructed categories must be presented as more than 'variables' that may make literacy development problematic. They must be constructed as potentially critical aspects of children's sense of, and expression of, self and others" (Dyson, 1997, p. 6).

Within this perspective, literacy is defined as an orientation toward the knowledge and use of written language that positions individuals and groups within hierarchies of social relations. Literacy learning is the negotiation of one's orientation toward written language and thus one's position within multiple relations of power and status. Research based in the social status and identity perspective examines how the institutional structure and pedagogical practice of schools sort students into groups that differ in social class, race, and gender, and how those differences lead to different academic outcomes.

My explorations of the interconnections between play, literacy, and culture began within the frameworks of emergent literacy and social construction.[2] From both of these perspectives, this young girl's literacy knowledge and skills, and her explorations of various forms and functions of literacy, were clearly visible in her play activities. What were less evident from either of these perspectives, however, were the personal choices and tensions that were an integral part of Leticia's negotiation and management of multiple, and often contradictory, definitions of literacy. Solsken underscores that studies about how children learn literacy cannot be addressed without taking into account that "each and every literacy transaction is a moment of self-definition in which people take action within and upon their relations with other people. From this perspective, literacy learning would rarely be expected to proceed smoothly or without tension" (1993, p. 8).

Language theorists such as Street (1996) and Gee (1989) have also made us aware that language is never neutral, but, rather, reflects particular ways of thinking, acting, interacting, and knowing. According to Bourdieu (1973), success in the educational system is largely dictated by the extent to which individuals have absorbed the dominant culture (i.e., the dominant ways of thinking, acting, interacting, and knowing) or how much "cultural capital" they possess. Giroux (1983, p. 155) similarly locates literacy within a theoretical framework in which "literacy is treated not merely as a technique, but as a constitutive process of constructing meaning and critically interrogating the forces that shape lived experiences." Although his framework provides the base for examining literacy from a critical perspective, very few studies have examined beginning literacy from this perspective. It is the complex dynamics of Leticia's family that first shaped her literacy learning experiences and constructions of her own life history. The tensions and choices around these experiences and constructions of literacy and self[3]—as represented in her home play activities—became the focus of my analysis and inquiry.

The Interplay of Story, Self, and Play

The following episode underscores the complexities of studying the interconnections between play, literacy, and culture:

> "This is for me, a queen, this is for my brother a king, Leticia said as she presented me with two paper crowns that she had made in school. "Look at me!" she placed one of the crowns on her head. "This house is the castle!" she announced as she gestured with her hands. "I am the queen. Brother is a king, and daddy is a king, baby is a king, mommy is a queen, me is a queen."
>
> She began strategically placing stickers in my hair. "For your hair nicely. Like a princess," she said, integrating me into her play context.

"I'm a princess?" I asked. "How do I look?"

"I'll take you to the washroom and you can see your hair," she offered. First, though, she led me into her bedroom where she proceeded to dress me as a princess. She put a pair of her pants around my waist and tried to tie the legs together around my back. She then draped a T-shirt over my shoulders before warning, "Now the prince is going to come and kiss you!"

"Aha! I thought you didn't like kissing," I teased.

"*You* will kiss the prince," she reminded me. She covered my head with a T-shirt so that my face was barely visible. "Cover your face and then the prince can't see you before he kisses you . . . Now come in the washroom and you can see." She took me into the washroom so that I could look in the mirror, and then led me by the hand back to her room where she told me to sit down. "Here's the prince!" she announced, taking one of her teddy bears and pushing him up to my face. "1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10," she counted, anticipating the moment of the kiss.

Leticia struggled at first with the next scene. "Yooou were going to . . .you, you . . . You got a baby in your tummy. You lie down here."

"On the bed?" I asked.

"Yep. You got baby, then you die. You pretend."

"I died?"

"Yep. You pretend."

She took two toy suction darts from under her bed and pretended to be cutting into my stomach. "You say 'Ow, ow," she directed me, imitating high-pitched, painful screams.

"Ow! Ow!" I said in a "pained" voice.

"Your tummy hurts? Okay, now we take the baby out."

I cried out with pain as she pretended to extract one of her dolls from my stomach.

"It's a baby boy," she said, then made crying sounds for the baby. "Okay, you die already. Pretend. You say, 'Can I hold the baby?' Then you die, okay? Pretend."

"I want to hold the baby," I said weakly before pretending to die.

"Hello, hello." She tapped my face, trying to revive me. "Now the prince is going to kiss you." She held her teddy bear up and said in a deep voice, "I'm the prince, I'm here to kiss you. Close your eyes." The prince kissed my cheek and she giggled.

As directed by Leticia, I awakened and I asked, "Where's my baby?"

"Okay, pretend you die again," she redirected. Once again I died and was awakened by the prince's kiss. Suddenly Leticia hissed, "The king is back."

"He's back? Where's my baby?" I asked, sounding alarmed.

"He took the baby. He doesn't like boy babies," she said gruffly.

"Does that mean he wanted a girl baby?"

"Yeah," she replied in her own voice, then switched to a deeper tone to indicate that the king was speaking: "I want a *girl* baby. I don't want a boy baby. YOU! Come here!" She forcefully pushed me into the living-room, then back into her bedroom. "Okay, now you will get trapped in here," she directed in her own voice. "You got the baby and then you come in here and you got trapped." She bound my hands with a slinky toy and in the king's voice ordered me to stay in her room: "You stay in there for infinity," she barked.

"I have to stay here for infinity minutes?"

"And infinity days," she added. "You pretend," she reminded me. I burst into tears. In the king's deep voice she told me, "If you hide, you will stay until infinity again ...and I'll spank your bum!" I burst into tears again. Leticia grabbed a broken ruler down from her desk shelf and began spanking me with it. "You pretend to cry," she directed.

"Why is the king so mean?" I asked. Leticia responded with laughter. She took out her suction darts and began poking me with them, telling me that she is going to poke my eyes out. "You don't want to get poked, will get died this time."

"The princess is going to die this time?"

"Yes because the king said."

"The king said the princess needs to die?"

"You come out," she yelled in the king's gruff voice. "I'm going to cut your head off and cut your hands off. If you don't come out, I'll cut your feet too!" She began directing my actions in her own voice. "You come out and I'll get ready to cut, okay. You pretend." I crawled out from my hiding spot under the desk and she pretended to cut off my hands with the broken ruler. "You cried out, okay." She continued to provide direction.

"Off with your arms!" the king hollered.

"My arms!" I shrieked.

"Off with your head!" I collapsed on the floor and Leticia scolded, "Not yet!" I stood up again. "*And* your hair!" she finished. (PLC transcripts: November 6, 1998, Session 5).

At its core, this story is an interweaving of fantasy, reality, self, and how Leticia plays her understanding of the word and the world. The story that she constructs is a "bricolage," (Lévi-Strauss, 1969) a cobbling together of seemingly disparate elements that illustrate simultaneously why Sleeping Beauty died; how she thinks about love and marriage; her understanding of childbirth; her perception of herself as the only "girl baby" in her family;[4] and the struggle for power and identity that is an integral part of families. This story represents the starting point of my understanding of how play, literacy, and culture intersect in the life of this young girl.

Social Identity and Social Play

The essence of play is the creation of an imaginary situation (Franklin, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). In play, "children are 'free' from the constraints of concrete objects, real actions, and indeed, their own voices. They infuse their own intentions—their own meanings—into those objects and actions" (Dyson, 1997, p. 13). The "freedom," however, is illusory (Vygotsky, 1978) because children rise above situational constraints and subject themselves to cultural meanings, often replacing the confused and intricate laws of ordinary life by precise, arbitrary unexceptionable rules that must be accepted as such and that govern the correct playing of the game. In the Sleeping Beauty episode, for example, Leticia and I negotiated a shared world in which each player (real or imagined) had a clear identity, a place among the others. To create the storyline, we also had to agree that princesses need suitors, that romance involves kissing (no matter how distasteful), and that death requires a drama.

"Play is about possible roles in possible worlds" (Dyson, 1997, p. 14). It creates a space between child intentions and physical reality—a space where children appropriate "pretend" identities. As Bakhtin (1981) explained, language is a "living ideological thing" because, rather than finding its origins in dictionaries, it comes from other people in other situations. "All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293). Thus, the social enactment of stories involves complex negotiations of identity whereby speech, speakers, and social relationships are inextricably linked. As Gunderson emphasizes, "unlike the Gordian knot, nothing comes

from separating them because they have little or no meaning apart from each other" (2000, p. 694).

Play as a Literary and Social Text

In forming imaginary play worlds, "children reveal their sense of the social world; their unfolding stories reflect deeply embedded cultural storylines about human relations" (Dyson, 1997, p. 6). Stories have become a great interest in language and literacy education, particularly because of the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in classrooms (Dyson & Genishi, 1994). Storytelling is, in fact, a universal meaning-making strategy by which human beings organize and recount their lived experience (Cazden, 1994). For young children, their first stories are typically crafted within the context of relationships where they acquire the ability to articulate experiences for themselves and others (Stern, 1985). Through stories, children fashion their relationships with others and express in subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—ways their individual perceptions of the world around them (Bakhtin, 1981). Stories, in other words, are a medium through which children express and make sense of who they are in relation to others (Dyson, 1997; Heath, 1983; Miller and Sperry, 1987).

Schwartzman (1976) has similarly observed that children's social histories are woven into their play texts. Such stories involve a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of personal life experience. In Leticia's version of Sleeping Beauty, for example, she addressed the question of why Sleeping Beauty died based on her own personal life experiences. Having witnessed her mother's experience of labour and having viewed a dramatic video on childbirth, it is possible that Leticia associated the pain of childbirth with the possibility of death. Through play, she explicitly expressed her meaning in language, which was her understanding of why Sleeping Beauty died.

This heuristic use of language is a skill associated with the comprehension and production of written texts (Pellegrini, 1982). Leticia's play episode is, in many ways, like an oral story within which she not only represents reality in different ways, but also simultaneously develops different modes of grasping and understanding it.

Many educators contend that children's personal stories can serve as an effective bridge into schooling and early literacy (Bruner, 1984; Rosen, 1988). This belief is reflected in early literacy experiences that build on children's ability to articulate orally their personal experiences. Dyson (1997) argues that children's understanding of their social world may be dialogically related to their understanding of their textual world. As Bakhtin (1981) argued, awakening to the socioideological complexity of language use is critical to becoming a responsive and more playful composer able to use a variety of social voices and perspectives to articulate one's 'own' ideas. Educators take it as a given that the more we know about young children's ideas and experiences, the better able teachers will be to bridge learning experiences at home and in the community with learning experiences at school. Yet we know little about the storytelling of children from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

INTERPRETIVE TOOLS

Watching, Listening, and Learning

For over a year, my life was interlaced with the lives of Leticia and her family members.[5] To understand how this young girl constructed and explored the complexities of literacy in her daily play activities, I observed, participated in, discussed, and audio-taped events that focussed on literacy and play within the cultural contexts of Leticia's home and

classroom. I viewed culture as a shared way of interpreting the world—what Geertz (1973, p. 13) referred to as a shared "imaginative universe within which [members'] acts are signs." Culture is dynamically formulated through public dialogue as people enter into and continually negotiate "socially established structures of meaning" (p. 12). Individuals are therefore members of interrelated, but distinctive "imaginative universes" or contexts, including those rooted in experiences shared by those of common ethnicity, race, class, age, and gender (Rosaldo, 1989). Thus, I interpreted the images presented in Leticia's stories as familiar elements and phrases from her everyday contexts (e.g., her home and school cultures).

I also drew on the dialogic vision of language developed by Bakhtin (1981). In this view, learning to use language involves learning to interact with others in particular social situations and, at the same time, learning to use words available in certain situations to a boy or girl, to a person of a particular age, ethnicity, race, class, religion, and so on. Bakhtin suggests that language should be seen as a dialogue that reflects a hybrid amalgam of the multifaceted, cross-pollinated discourse of the class, social group, and speech communities to which the speaker or writer belongs (Sumida, 2000). Moreover, we should interpret the things that people say and write as expressions of larger societal concerns that get articulated through the individual—even when the individual is a five-year-old girl. Language is therefore not something that can be defined and measured, but, rather, it is something that is, in both Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's view, "endlessly developing and meaningful only in the context of dialogue. In this sense, it is through language and the continuous dialogue with our inner selves and others that we experience the world [and] become members of a community" (Yeoman,

1996, p. 597). Social struggle is implicit in this dialogical process. These struggles include those linked to religion, race, ethnicity, gender, and identity; specifically, how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future (Norton, 1997).

In exploring the interconnections of play, literacy, and culture, my first concern was "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), not only in searching for the types of literacy that one family has in their lives, but also in how their child constructs her understandings of literacy through play. Barton and Hamilton argue that "literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts" (1998, p. 8). Literacy, in other words, cannot be defined without examining it within the sociocultural contexts in which it occurs (Moss, 1994). Because I wanted to understand the literacy social practices embedded within Leticia's play activities, I initially focussed my data collection on three types of literacy play activities: object-routine-focussed, reading-writing-focussed, and theme-focussed (Roskos & Newman, 1993). Object-routine focussed activity includes play with literacy tools and routines (e.g., exploring how pens, pencils, and markers work); reading-writing focussed activity centres on written language as the object of interest (e.g, pretending to write a list or read a storybook); theme-focussed activity incorporates literacy into a larger play purpose (e.g., using pens and paper to write a receipt for goods purchased in a shop). Although all three types of play literacy activities were observed as an integral part of Leticia's play, as the study progressed, my interest became focussed on the narrative thread of the play episodes, something that has not been previously examined within different cultural

contexts. These narrative threads and their relationship to Leticia's social and cultural history provided the basis for understanding how she saw herself and the world.

In distinguishing play from non-play, I began with Fromberg's (1992) definition, which essentially captures the features of play that are generally agreed upon by play researchers and educators. According to her definition, play is *symbolic* in that it represents reality with the possibilities inherent in an "as if" or "what if" attitude; *meaningful* in that children use it to connect or relate experiences; *active* in that children are engaged in doing things; *pleasurable* even though children may be engaged seriously in an activity; *voluntary and intrinsically motivated* (by curiosity, mastery, etc.); and *rule-governed* whether implicitly or explicitly expressed. I should emphasize, however, that my primary concern was to understand play by considering Leticia's meaning and definition of play (Kelly- Byrne, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). For example, on those occasions when I took Wilson and Leticia to activities outside of their home (e.g., to the zoo, the university, or the playground), Leticia would inevitably comment upon our return—"But we didn't get to play..."—regardless of what we had been doing, even if it had been playing at the playground. Clearly, she defined "play" as something that we did together in her home. Thus, rather than making general assumptions about the role of play, I sought to understand what it meant to Leticia within particular contexts.

In general, the qualitative field research procedures that I used were similar to those outlined by Barton and Hamilton (1998), Heath (1982), Philips (1983), Taylor (1983), Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) in their classic sociocultural studies of family and community literacy, and Goodwin (1990), Kelly-Byrne (1989) and Sutton-Smith (1980) in their observational studies of children's play. More specifically, I utilized a variety of

research procedures, including combinations of observations and interactions within the context of the home, local neighbourhood, and Leticia's school; recorded conversations; and collected artifacts. Observations always took place within the everyday routine activities of the family and were never staged. Leticia's play interactions at home were audiotaped using a small, hand-held tape-recorder. Observations of her interactions with family members and friends, at home and in the community, were recorded as hand-written field notes. Classroom observations were also recorded in writing.

Interviews with family members were very much conversational in nature, often taking place at the kitchen table over tea or dinner and never adhering to any formal structure. These open-ended conversations were valuable in interpreting and analyzing the literacy activities that occurred within the context of Leticia's play activities. Selecting key details from these conversations allowed me to create "verbal snapshots" (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997) in my written descriptions of Leticia's activities and home environment.[6] Because of the casual nature of these interactions, the conversations were never audiotaped. Instead, I recorded details only after leaving the home context. As Hymes (1980) writes, "In adopting an ethnographic approach one works in situations which require the trust of others, accommodation to their activities and participation in ways that often preclude writing or recording at the time" (p. 74). In such circumstances, he suggests that, in a bid for depth and the validity that this effort brings, certain kinds of reliability may be sacrificed. I was also open to other approaches to data collection and encouraged the family to participate in this endeavour. An example of this includes collecting newspaper and magazine articles that chronicled the plight of the Vietnamese refugee people during the late 1970's and early 1980's. This documentation augmented

the personal information included in the *Beginnings* section that Linda and Howard shared about their journeys from Vietnam to Canada.

Collecting Artifacts

Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) note that as researchers enter the field, they need to train themselves to attend to material objects, what are commonly referred to as "artifacts." These artifacts represent the culture of a particular site. The content and function of written materials used by the family and by Leticia within the context of her play activities were an important resource for understanding the family literacy context. Detailed accounts were made of the forms and functions of print in the home. Photocopies were also made of many of Leticia's writing endeavours at home and at school. Several writing samples, however, were sketched into my field notes because Leticia was often reluctant to part with her drawings and writings.

Representing Experience through Written Language

In the early stages of writing, I struggled to find a way to represent the texture and nuance of my experiences with Leticia, at home and at school. The question of how to craft over 250 pages of field notes and two file folders of literacy artifacts, collected from both home and school contexts, into a document that was representative of Leticia's experience seemed overwhelming. Moreover, the conventional modes of presenting social science data seemed to betray the very nature of this study. Instead, the data demanded a more holistic presentation, one that allowed the reader to grasp "the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences" (Davis, 1997, p. 30).

Recognizing that there are inevitable "gaps between reality, experience, and expressions [of that experience]" (Bruner, 1986, p. 7), I looked for ways to explore context and describe the thick textures of Leticia's life. The difficulty, as Emily Carr (1941) so vividly describes, is:

> Getting the thoughts clear enough, making them stand still long enough to be fitted with words and paint. They are so elusive—like wild birds singing above your head, twittering close beside you, chortling in front of you, but gone the moment you put out a hand. If ever you do catch hold of a piece of a thought it breaks away leaving the piece in your hand just to aggravate you. If one only could encompass the whole, corral it, enclose it safe—but then maybe it would die, dwindle away because it could not go on growing. I don't think thoughts could stand still – the fringes of them would always be tangling into something just a little further on and that would draw it out and out. I guess that is why it is so difficult to catch a complete idea – it's because everything is always on the move, always expanding. *(*1941, *Forward).*

Geertz (1973), who also articulates the difficulty of representing experience through written language, argues "the line between the mode of representation and substantive content is as undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting" (p. 16). "It is not against a body of uninterpreted data...that we must measure the cogency of our explications, but against the power of scientific imagination to bring us in touch with the lives of strangers" (p. 16). He cautions, however, that in admitting the centrality of interpretation, imagination, and creativity, researchers must recognize that the "humanistic" dimensions of their research must always be in close communion with rigorous and systematic

attention to the details of social reality and human experience. Behaviour, interaction, encounter, and gesture must be attended to with exactness, and retained, "because it is through the flow of behaviour—or more precisely of social action—that cultural forms find articulation" (p. 17).

The process of transforming the phenomenon of lived experience to text is interpretative, and interpretative study "is always the project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence" (van Manen, 1991, p. 30). Researchers "textually" present their participants' experiences through written accounts telling a story or recounting conversations (Denzin, 1997). Wolcott (1994) reminds us that all qualitative researchers are storytellers and there are numerous methods by which researchers represent lived experiences through narrative accounts (e.g., ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative). The genre of inquiry and representation of *social science portraiture,* however, seemed best suited to my goal of capturing "the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences" (Davis, 1997, p. 30).

Although framed by the traditions and values of phenomenology, and sharing many of the techniques, standards, and goals of ethnography, portraiture is unique in its focus on the convergence of narrative (i.e., storytelling) and analysis, in its explicit effort to combine empirical and aesthetic description, and in its goal of producing accounts that are accessible to audiences beyond the walls of the academy (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a). Like both the ethnographer and phenomenologist, the researcher or portraitist

interprets people's actions, perspectives, and discourse in context. The portraitist, in other words, believes that human experience has meaning in a particular social, cultural, and historical context—a context where relationships are real, where the actors are familiar with the setting, where activity has a purpose, where nothing is contrived (except for the somewhat intrusive presence of the researcher) (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a). The cultural context not only offers clues for the researcher's interpretation of the actors' behaviour (the outsider's view), it also helps the researcher understand the actors' perspectives—how they perceive and experience social reality (the insider's view).

The portraitist's standard is one of authenticity, capturing the essence and resonance of the actors' experience and perspective through the details of action and thought revealed in context (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a). The "drawing" of the portrait is shaped by both the sociocultural context and the discourse negotiated between the researcher and the participant. The researcher's presence is, in other words, more evident and more visible in portraiture than in any other research form. "The self of the portraitist emerges as an instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective-taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insights" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a, p. 13). While acknowledging that my interpretation of this young girl's lived experiences within the cultural context of her family and school cannot be used to confirm the lived experiences of another, it can "thicken" it (Geertz, 1973).

Making Sense of It All

This study begins with the particular, as most stories do, and the belief that "in the particular resides the general" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997a, p. 14). Lawrence-Lightfoot

describes this idea as a "persistent irony," noting, "as one moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person or place, one discovers the universal" (1997, p. 14). Welty (1983) makes the distinction between listening *for* a story and listening *to* a story, noting that the former is a much more engaged, active position in which one seeks out a story and is central in shaping its coherence and aesthetic. As Metzger reminds us, "sometimes the simple willingness to explore the story asserts the reality of the individual, and then the creative process of finding and telling the story becomes part of the way we construct a life" (1992, p. 49). Critical to my exploration of Leticia's story is my own identity, character, and history.

My Perch and Perspective

There is some controversy among qualitative researchers about the optimal depth, quality, and intensity of research relationships. "Should researchers seek distance or closeness, objectivity or subjectivity, scrutiny or alliance, asymmetry or symmetry in their connections with subjects?" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997b, p. 137). An unusual aspect of the current research is that I take dual roles as playmate and researcher. Leticia clearly saw me as a playmate and paid little attention to my role as researcher. The tape recorder that I used almost from our first meeting only proved to be a novelty on the first day when she was intrigued to hear her own voice on tape, something that she had never heard before. It was also very obvious from an early stage that our play activities within the context of her home were of extraordinary importance to her, as reflected in the enthusiasm she demonstrated in the example included at the beginning of this chapter. In addition, when I asked her what she did on the afternoons when I was not visiting, she

would often respond, "I'm just boring when you're not here," and would query on a regular basis, "What day do you come next week?"

Leticia and I were playmates, and through our play we co-constructed stories about the celebrations and routines of families and classrooms. As playmate and researcher, I recognize that my role was by no means a neutral one—but then, it had never been my intention to fashion such a role for myself. As Kelly-Byrne argues, "the myth of the neutral researcher and the much-desired objectified research account have made it both mandatory and possible to ignore the human reality of the research relationship, in all its chaos and with its many foibles. However, some have always known this and others are far less tolerant of the pristine and ordered research endeavour" (1989, p. 206). When we research human lives, our own lives as researchers inevitably become entangled in the lives of our participants, just as their lives become entangled in ours; it is the complexity and subjectivity of that entanglement that enhances and promotes the richness and authenticity of qualitative research.

Studies of human lives must therefore be embedded in context. Context is what molds, frames, and brings the study to life. "It is part of the total method from within an ongoing interactive situation; it is created by and is part of the meaning of the event. Context includes premises, evaluations, associations, and biographical factors, ecological factors, and intentions and rules about the behaviour in which the participants are involved" (Kelly-Byrne, 1989, 223). In other words, the relationship between Leticia and me affected the context just as the context affected our relationship. As playmates, we co-created a series of narrative texts, and although Leticia initiated the themes and topics of these texts, the course of our interactions also altered or modified the shape and

meaning of the play. Moreover, my presence provided an audience and this may have provided the impetus for her to create play narratives that would not have been created had she been engaging in solitary play. Of critical importance, however, was that our play relationship fostered a deeper and more intimate connection between researcher and participant—a relationship that I believe enhanced productive inquiry in this study. As Lawrence-Lightfoot emphasizes, "relationships that are complex, fluid, symmetric, and reciprocal—that are shaped by both researcher and actors—reflect a more responsible ethical stance *and* are likely to yield deeper data and better social science" (1997b, p. 137-138).

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of our relationship was that Leticia recognized that I knew how to play. I have five nieces and nephews ranging in age from 5 to 14 and have spent considerable time interacting and playing with them throughout their development. I also knew children. I had taught in both primary and secondary school settings, predominantly working with children who spoke languages other than English. As a teacher, I had also been involved in teaching drama and was a member of a community theatre group. I was comfortable moving in and out of different character roles and understood Leticia's strategies for expressing a range of characters in her play activities. An inevitable aspect of our adult-child relationship, however, was that it was asymmetrical, and even though I was playing the role of husband, sister, or mother, and I was freely engaging in the activity, I rarely abandoned myself to the play world as Leticia did. Instead, I remained vigilant and reflective in observing the details of her play. In this way, our play was not that of peers and as such, did not involve the same kinds of negotiations of rules, roles, scripts. Rather, I allowed Leticia to take ownership of the

direction of our play narratives. Our relationship was, nonetheless, an authentic one whereby I related to Leticia on her terms, taking her themes and topics of play seriously, and playing with her in a way that she initiated.

Leticia as Co-Researcher

Along with other meaning systems, I view play and literacy as communication, as social phenomena that are part of a network of relationships. Both are a means by which children begin to make sense of experiences in their sociocultural contexts. In this study, my focus was on discovering how play and literacy were manifest in Leticia's everyday life and how she managed both to her own ends. Shantz contends "the way to reveal explicit and tacit social knowledge and reasoning is to observe social interaction, that is, the child not as a knower *about* the social world but as an actor *in* it" (1983, quoted in Goodwin, 1990, p. 15). Thus, to understand the meaning of her actions, it was necessary to approach the situation from the position of the "actor" (Blumer, 1970)—through the eyes and experience of Leticia.

Understanding her meanings through her words and actions appeared, at least on the surface, to be a simple task. It proved, however, to be deceptively complex. Many adults assume that because they have passed through childhood they understand the unique world of a child. The ubiquitous presence of children in our everyday worlds makes them falsely familiar to us. Children do, in fact, have a culture of their own—a culture of childhood (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988), and as researchers, we cannot assume that the culture of childhood is the same as the culture of adulthood. I could not, in other words, assume that my social and cultural meanings were the same as Leticia's. An important aspect of presenting her social and cultural meanings was listening to and using her

spoken language to create "verbal snapshots" of the situation being described. As Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) emphasize, "one key word, like one key piece of clothing or a gesture, can unlock information about the habits and beliefs, geography and history of a whole group of people" (p. 172). Descriptions of body language (i.e., facial expressions, gestures, voice quality, etc.) were also an important aspect of creating "snapshots" that revealed Leticia's social and cultural meanings.

Kelly-Byrne (1989) argues that many adults have an investment in *not* knowing too intimately what children really mean and how they really feel. She suggests that this reluctance is perhaps the reason why there are so few "participatory" studies with children. For adults who have participated in children's activities and allowed the children to determine the direction of the events, they know that it takes a special skill. Participating with Leticia, on her terms, meant that I had to relinquish adult control and permit her to cast me in roles and determine not only the course of her own actions, but mine as well. Giving up adult control, however, provided access to the three separate realms of Leticia's social world: the *everyday realm*, the *play realm*, and the *intimate realm* (Kelly-Byrne, 1989). The everyday realm was where we related to one another as public persons such as during interactions in her classroom, at home with other members of her family, and in the community. Her play realm is the primary subject of this study; it is the realm where we co-created narratives, exploring fantasies and roles. The intimate realm is where Leticia shared her fears about vampires and monsters with green blood, her insecurities about classroom friendships, and her hopes and dreams. Understanding how the three realms overlap helped me interpret the texts of the play episodes within the broader context of Leticia's life.

Life as Narrative

My aim in interpreting the play episodes was to understand the lived character of play and literacy as they intricately revealed themselves in the social and cultural context of Leticia's life. Believing that narratives of human experience best illuminate understanding, I wanted to present a "multilayered description of the event so that the ideas and happenings could be grasped with a sense of their unruly complexity, but yet made sufficiently systematic and coherent by their transformation into narrative time" (Kelly-Byrne, 1989, p. 208). Polkinghorne describes narrative as a form of "meaning making" that "recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts of a whole" (1988, p. 36). Narrative serves as a lens through which seemingly random activities—in this case, play, literacy, and culture—can be seen as related parts of a whole. I also looked upon narrative as the means by which Leticia was beginning to make sense of the experiences in her life, and her self, in relation to those experiences. Although a number of authors have discussed children's written narratives (Dyson, 1997; Halldén, 1994; Steedman, 1982), children's play narratives have rarely been examined as literary texts. I proceed from the perspective that when stories are told—whether on paper or playground—a narrative genre is used. Through narrative, reality is not only represented, but also constructed by the storyteller. The story is, in other words, a way of understanding reality while telling about it (Bruner, 1991).

Two narrative threads run through this rendering of the year I spent with Leticia, her family, teacher, and classmates. In one, I offer an interpretation of my observations, conversations, and experiences with Leticia and the significant members of her social world. This first narrative is interwoven with the second narrative, which is a selection of

stories co-constructed by Leticia and me during our play sessions. The play stories were read as literary texts using four related acts: observing, connecting, inferring, and concluding (DiYanni, 1990). Observing involved watching the story unfold as Leticia and I played together. It also involved noticing the time and place of the story's action, and the characters' dialogue and manner of speaking. As I observed, I also made connections among the details and began to formulate a sense of the story's emphasis and point. On the basis of these connections, I developed inferences (i.e., interpretive hypotheses) about their significance. Finally, I attempted to come to some conclusion about the story's meaning and how it might be a reflection of Leticia's own family culture and social history; specifically, how it might be a story that she was telling herself about herself (Geertz, 1973).

The four interpretive actions occurred simultaneously and not in neat sequential stages. I did not delay making inferences, for example, until after I had recorded all of my observations. Instead, I developed tentative conclusions as I observed and audio taped, transcribed audio to text, and reread my transcriptions, *while* I related my observations and developed inferences. I changed and adjusted my inferences and preliminary conclusions both during my reading of the play texts and afterward while reflecting on the details of the story within the context of Leticia's family and home. In other words, I adopted a situated perspective in which I examined the elements of the play episodes in relationship to Leticia's social history and the flow of her everyday life (Kantor, Elgas, and Fernie, 1998). Understanding the wider events of her home and classroom life, the social histories of her family members, and the social dynamics of her kindergarten classroom allowed me to explore the meanings literacy holds for Leticia and

her family, her classmates and her teacher, as it is constructed and used within everyday relationships (Kantor, Miller, & Fernie, 1992). Thus, from a situated perspective, literacy is viewed as part of the social history of Leticia's family and classroom.

Recognizing that no reading of a story is entirely objective, and that every interpretation is influenced by our particular language, culture, and experience (DiYanni, 1990), several of the play episodes were also reviewed by one of my peers. Her feedback helped me refine my observations, inferences, interpretations, and conclusions. In addition, my interpretations and conclusions were discussed throughout the research process with various members of the Chinese community. Although readers may disagree with my interpretations and conclusions, it is crucial they still recognize the details of the description as accurate and authentic. The accuracy and authenticity of this study was enhanced by my close proximity to the situation, which allowed description and explanation to take on a first-person quality. "Being there" is a powerful technique for gaining insights into human interactions. Time was also an important consideration. The extended period that I spent with Leticia and the significant others who surround her allowed me to develop and maintain rapport, and enhanced the accuracy of my perceptions of the situation (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, 1997). To increase the accuracy of my interpretations, I also attempted to observe as many instances and varieties of family events and social situations as possible. This process is referred to as triangulation, which involved confirming or disconfirming my interpretations through multiple sources such as field notes, interviews, reflections, and artifacts (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein, 1997).

The two interlaced narratives are representative of a compilation of over 250 pages of field notes based on more than 200 hours of home, classroom, and neighbourhood observations, informal interviews, and a collection of literacy artifacts gathered both from home and school. The ten play sessions included were selected from over 30 home sessions recorded during the course of the entire year I spent with Leticia. These sessions represent most poignantly the character, complexity, and richness of her constructions of story, literacy, and self, and are exemplary of the overwhelmingly predominant themes in her play: house and school.

Leticia's explorations of family and school began in mid-December and remained favourite topics for almost a year after weekly data collection ended. In fact, during a social visit in May 2000, it was obvious when she asked, "Do you wanna play house or school?" that the two topics were still of great importance in her play world. Her play activities during the first phase of data collection (late September to early December 1998) included activities such as playing board games and enacting fairy tale roles. Portions of some of these play sessions have also been included as introductions to the family and the theoretical and methodological frameworks. During the second and final phase of my research, the depth and complexity of Leticia's play narratives increased significantly. As I listen *for* her story in these texts, I get glimpses of her ideas on girlhood, family, motherhood, childbirth, marriage, work, and school. Through her play narratives, Leticia also constructs her understandings of the forms and functions of literacy embedded in family, school, and work contexts. Most predominantly, however, the narratives reveal who Leticia is and how she sees the world (Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994).

[1] See Metzger, 1992, p. 49.

[2] The social construction perspective provided the overarching framework for a previous research study that I conducted on the relationship between play and culture in a rural Kenyan community. A few years later, when I was working as a researcher in an educational psychology department, I gained considerable exposure to cognitive and developmental theories of literacy learning. My interest in literacy grew out of this work in general, and a special project with teachers in South Africa, in particular. Although my work was framed broadly by the political and social context of this country, it focussed more specifically on children's cognitive development. My adoption of an emergent literacy perspective followed as I completed PhD courses in theories of language and literacy development.

[3] I use Heath's definition of literacy as the framework for the study. She defines literacy as "a conceptual tool useful in examining within particular communities of modern society the actual forms and functions of oral and literate traditions and co-existing relationships between spoken and written language. A literacy event is any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes" (Heath, 1982, p. 93). Self is defined according to Norton's notion of *identity*, which refers to "how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across space and time, and how people understand their possibilities for the future" (1997, p. 410). Goodenough asserts that the proper locus for the study of culture is not a society per se, but situated activities. He compares culture to the grammar of a language and emphasizes that it consists of an underlying body of structures, practices, and procedures. In other words, people are not "members" of a culture any more than they're "members" of a language. In studying "culture," I therefore focus on Leticia's family, community, and classroom activities within which cultural structures are situated.

[4] Leticia thought that her parents should love her "twice as much" because she is the only girl and they need to make up for the love they have for their two sons.

[5] I am tremendously grateful to the Tsiu's for their generosity and warmth. They consistently made me feel that I was a welcome part of their lives and were always interested in discussing their children's language and literacy development.

[6] Howard and Linda Tsiu were provided with all copies of transcripts from the play episodes as well as my field notes. The content of my data collection and interpretations was often discussed during dinner. Descriptions of the family members included in *Beginnings* were also approved for inclusion.

3

Playing House

***She had been playing houses . . . and tiring of it was walking rather aimlessly . . . when it suddenly flashed into her mind that she was* she.**

—Hughes, *A High Wind in Jamaica.*

Leticia took a small photo album from the cupboard in the living room wall unit and flipped through the pages until she found the picture of her baby brother in white terry-cloth sleepers. "This," she explained, pointing to the picture of the snowman in *The Snowman* picture book that lay open by the wall where we had been sitting, "is like this." She became engaged by the photos and continued to turn the pages, stopping to offer small clips of her family's history.

"This is a doggy," she said as she pointed to another picture. "This is our house."

"Is that the house where you live now?" I asked.

"Yeah, it's this house. See..." she walked into the kitchen, "it's that kitchen. See this is the same chair," she emphasized, referring to the chair in the kitchen and then the chair in the photo.

For awhile, we returned to looking at the pictures in *The Snowman* book. Then, with excited recognition she suddenly said, "I see this book already!"

"You've seen this book already?"

"Yes, at the Atonement Home.[1] Ooooh, he making fly in the sky! He's in the airport!"

"They're at the airport?" I asked. "Have you been to the airport?"

"Yeah. Take my dad to the...to Vietnam. With my grandpa and my grandma.[2]"

"He went with your grandpa and your grandma?"

"Yeah, I didn't go. Only three people."

"Just your dad and your grandpa and grandma?"

"Yeah, that's it," she confirmed before showing me her father's picture in the photo album.

"And this is...I haven't met your dad. This is your dad right here?" I pointed to the man in the photo she was showing me.

"Yeah. He was going to Vietnam with his mom and dad. Only his dad and his mom go with him. Only, not baby.[3] He leave me and my brother—my big brother—and me and my mommy at home! Then people with us and my auntie come."

"She came to visit you?"

"Yeah. And my auntie . . . she helped feed the baby milk and my mommy had to cook!"

"Oh, it must have been hard for your mom without your dad. What's this?" I asked, pointing to a roasted pig in a photo where her father was holding her baby brother, Richmond.

"This is from long time ago."

"When your baby brother was born?[4]"

"Yeah. I don't know what's this. This is when . . . what?" she puzzled, looking sideways at the date code on the photo.

"Oh, it says . . . it says September 25, 1998," I explained.

"Oh," she responded, seemingly bored with the photos and turning her attention back to *The Snowman* book. (PLC transcripts: October 22, 1998, Session 4)

It was early in the research study when Leticia first shared her family photo album with me. Like most family albums, this one was a collection of memories, special occasions, and family stories. She knew a great deal about her family's history, much of which she remembered from listening to her father's stories. At the time that she showed me the album, I did not fully appreciate its significance to my research. As I spent more time with her, though, she began to elaborate on her own versions of family stories within the text of her play episodes. Through these narratives, she created a make-believe family of her own and provided glimpses into her interpretation of family life, particularly her understanding of childhood, motherhood, and family relations. She presented a family consisting of a mother, father, children, and extended family members such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. She most typically cast herself in the central role of mother and me in the role of "husband" and "father." The texts that she constructed are characterized by a conscientious attention to detail with rich descriptions about the physical organization of the family home, the birth and care of babies, marriage and birthday celebrations, and the day-to-day routine of family life, including shopping and attending school.

In *The Tidy House,* Steedman analyzes a narrative written collaboratively by three eight- and nine-year-old girls who lived in a working-class neighbourhood in Britain. "We can," she states, "with perfect propriety, set the children to one side and examine their text for evidence of the huge mythologies of love and sex that inform our culture... just as we might watch children's play and find it revelatory" (1982, p. 12). Geertz similarly proposed that we consider make-believe play as a text or "a story that children tell themselves about themselves" (1973, p. 237). In her stories, Leticia is not only the

subject, but also the object of her play (Ehrmann, 1968 cited in Schwartzman, 1976). That is, as the creator of the play events, she is not only the *subject* of the event, but is also able to *interpret* and comment on her relationships with others (as these are developed within the social context of play) as the *object* of her play. Leticia's own presentation of family life was therefore not only an articulation of her own family life, but also served as a way of situating herself within the future that she saw before her.

From these perspectives, Leticia's narratives may in many ways represent stories from her own future family photo album. The house that she constructs, for example, is the house in which she will live one day; the mother and father that she creates frequent the shops along the streets of Chinatown in her own neighbourhood and drive to the mall to shop in department stores; the children, who attend Chinese bilingual programs, represent both the children that she knows she will have one day and how her own parents think about her and her brothers. Her additional roles of department store clerk and teacher are the options that she envisions as part of her future. The six stories presented in this section illustrate most poignantly Leticia's interpretations of family life. The stories are set almost exclusively within the family home with only the occasional excursion to school, the mall, or the hospital. The stories are depicted throughout an extended period of time and focus predominantly on the establishment of family ties and social relationships.

Leticia placed great importance on her play activities and managed to maintain a sense of continuity between the plots and characters she created. When I first began to analyze her narratives, many questions emerged about her way of interpreting family life and her position within her family. How did play provide a context for her to construct

stories about her perceptions of her future role of wife and mother? What meaning did she give to the role of women? What did she identify as problems, and how did she depict the various family members' areas of responsibility? The content and structure of the narratives Leticia constructed in play provide some insights.

NARRATIVE 1
January 22, 1999 Session 11

Part 1: Background

It was Mid-January and over three weeks since I had last visited the Tsiu's home. Having already spent three months with the family, I had become quite accustomed to my weekly visits. I knew that Leticia, who had been too sick for a visit last week, would be missing our time together as well. I arrived at the house to find her in good spirits and good health. Linda and I sat together on the kitchen floor and talked for the first time since the start of the New Year. She was anxious to tell me about the "trick" that Leticia had played on us on New Year's Eve when I brought her home from my house. Leticia had fallen asleep, or so I thought, in the backseat of my car on the way home. When I arrived at the house, I carefully lifted her from the backseat and laid her in her mother's arms. "Oh, she really had us fooled." Linda both laughed and shook her head as she looked at her mischievous daughter. "Do you know what she did?" she asked rhetorically. "I brought her in the house and put her down on the sofa—coat and all! I was trying to be so quiet," she continued, "but then I heard her giggling. She wasn't sleeping at all. She just wanted someone to carry her into the house! You know, she does that. She likes it when someone carries her. You're too big for that," she chastized Leticia. Although she looked somewhat sheepish as her mother told the story, the idea of

"being carried" became the impetus for playing "mommy" (i.e., house). While Linda and I continued to talk, Leticia went downstairs and returned with a bag of Lego blocks. At her request, we began to build a house.

Part 1: Pretend You're Coming to My House for a Visit

"Pretend you're coming to my house for a visit," Leticia suggested as Linda left the room to put Richmond down for his nap. I knocked on the door of Leticia's Lego house and waited for her to answer.

"No, you have to phone first," she corrected.

Using the walkie-talkie that she had given to me, I pretended to telephone her.

"Yes," she responded, grabbing her own walkie-talkie.

"I came to your house, but you weren't home."

"I was in the library. I was getting a book for you to read to me."

"Oh, you got a book for me to read to you?"

"You know what I got? *The Witches Grow Up.*[5]"

"The Witches Grow Up? Do you want me to come to your house to read?" I asked.

"Yes, now."

I put down the walkie-talkie and promptly knocked at her door again. "Knock, knock."

"No, ding dong," she corrected me again.

"Oh...Ding dong!"

"Come in...What's your name?" she inquired, breaking character momentarily.

"Lulu."

"Come in, Lulu," she said in a singsong voice. She told me to sit down on her floor and showed me her two library books.[6] She handed me *The Witches Grow Up,* and I began to read from it.

"When her daddy came home, he would toss her into the air," I read. "Does your daddy do that?" She shook her head no.

As we continued to read the story, she asked me about some of the pictures, particularly the ones with signs. When she saw the sign Boys Club, she pre-empted my response and explained that the sign said No Girls.

I continued to read the story. *"Her mother was like a lot of mothers. She wanted her little girl to take music lessons. She listened to her play her violin everyday."*

"It's a Halloween song," she told me, pointing to the musical notes in the storybook.

"Do you think so? Like the Five Little Pumpkins[7] or something?"

"Her bed tucks her in," I read and then asked her, "Who tucks you in?"

"Nobody."

"Does your bed tuck you in?"

"Noooo!" she responded, sounding somewhat unnerved by the idea. The other book that Leticia had signed out from the school library was a Chinese book. As we began to look at it, Richmond suddenly crawled over and took one of the blocks from the outline of Leticia's house. She complained loudly, as usual, and her mother (in Chao Chiu) and I tried to convince her to let her brother have one block. She conceded reluctantly and turned her attention back to the book.

"Let's pretend that *you* are reading it," she suggested, knowing that I am unable to read Chinese.

"You read it to me," I tried to persuade her.

"I don't know how," she protested as she typically did when asked to read Chinese print. We spent some time talking about her Chinese book and I pretended to read the story using the pictures.

Part 1: Commentary

My initial reading of this story was that it was simply an example of pretend reading within the context of play, what Roskos and Neuman (1993) classify as reading-writing-focussed play. Many young children adopt the roles of readers and writers in play (e.g., pretending to read a storybook) as a way of exploring the requirements of the task—to engage in what Bruner refers to as "run-ups" to literacy (Bruner, 1984; Jacob, 1984; Pellegrini, 1984a; Roskos, 1988). In this episode, literacy is embedded in play, serving as a means to strengthen and support the unfolding story. When I first visited the Tsiu's home, Linda talked at length about feeling guilty that she was not able to spend as much time with her daughter as she wanted to because of the demands of having a new baby. Before Richmond was born and because Wilson was in school, Leticia and her mother were able to spend most afternoons reading and playing. With the arrival of the new baby, however, time spent with Leticia diminished significantly. Linda mentioned on several occasions that she thought my research project would provide a good opportunity for Leticia to spend time with someone.

During the year that I spent with Leticia, her loneliness was evident. Playmates from school or her neighbourhood were not a part of her home environment, and with her father working late hours and her mother maintaining a household with three children, Leticia was often expected to amuse herself when she was not at school. Our play sessions appeared to become an important aspect of her home activities. In this play episode, Leticia takes the position of a child being read to by an adult, an experience that was part of her home routine prior to the arrival of her baby brother. Her story may in many ways represent a kind of wish fulfilment in which a visitor arrives at her house to

combat her feelings of loneliness. In this sense, this story's content may help Leticia cope with the change in her home routine and her mother's new obligations and responsibilities.

Within this story of the visitor reading, Leticia's attention is also drawn to the pictures and text in *The Witches Grow Up*. Roskos and Neuman (1993) classify this type of activity as reading-writing-focussed because written language is the object of the child's interest. Her substitution, for example, of No Girls for the sign that read Boys Club indicated that she was attempting to make meaning from the story's pictures. Relating the musical notes in the book to her experience of singing Halloween songs in kindergarten also provided evidence that she was using background knowledge to construct her understanding of the story. This reading-writing-focussed activity includes two storybooks, one English and the other Chinese. When we had completed the English story, Leticia handed me the Chinese book and suggested, "let's *pretend* you are reading it." Her use of the word "pretend" is interesting in this context given that she did not use it when she requested that I read the English storybook. Knowing that I am unable to read Chinese script, but wanting to continue with the theme of the visitor reading to her, she requests that I pretend. Clearly, she has a sense of herself and me as participants in literacy events involving different languages. My request for her to pretend to read the Chinese book was an attempt to probe her own literacy knowledge, something that she was often reluctant to display. Her choice here also foreshadowed the tension that became more palpable between Leticia and her mother around literacy learning in the home, particularly Chinese literacy learning.[8]

In this and many of the subsequent episodes, Leticia placed a strong emphasis on details, insisting on precision in how her story should unfold. The narrative style is in fact so detailed that, at times, each single movement or action in the scene is dictated, and leaves very few openings for the readers' own interpretation. Leticia was adamant, for example, that as the visitor I telephone before arriving at the house unannounced and that I ring the doorbell rather than knocking on the door. This conscientious attention to detail has also been noted in written family narratives. Halldén (1994) argues that the narrative style allows young girls complete control over the telling of the story. It can also be interpreted as a means by which young girls maintain order in their own lives. For Leticia, the order and precision she insists upon in telling this story may help her maintain control over her own feelings of loneliness and consequently, powerlessness to change the fact that her mother must now dedicate herself to the care of her new baby.

The exchange between Leticia and her visitor provides a first glimpse into her views of women's roles. When she answered the door, she changed her register to a cheerful, sing-song voice that communicated warmth and hospitality. Leticia has doubtlessly watched her mother on numerous occasions greet family members and visitors. She also knows that it is her mother's role and responsibility to make their home welcoming and inviting. At the age of five, Leticia has the capacity to identify herself as similar or different from her mother, father, and siblings (Solsken, 1993). In this particular instance, she models her mother's pattern of greeting with the same precision with which she tells her story. She creates an opportunity to try on the language and experience of her mother in a social context of her own making. The nurturing and

caring role that Leticia defines for the visiting woman could also be taken as a reflection of her views on the role of women in domestic contexts.

Part 2: Background

Linda came back into the room, put on a Chinese video, and explained to me that Leticia had been practising a song for Chinese New Year. Leticia abandoned the book and tried to find the song that she wanted to sing for me on the video. Linda attempted to help Leticia, but her daughter became quite frustrated and said in a high-pitched voice, "I know, I know! Okay." Leticia seemed to have misunderstood her mother and thought that she was supposed to sing all of the songs on the video. Her mother reassured her that she did not have to sing *any* of them. Leticia sharply commented that she only wanted to sing the one she knew.

"Maybe you could do the dancing for mommy and Maureen," Linda suggested.

"I'm shy!" Leticia and Linda said almost in unison, then Leticia protested, "I don't want to dance."

"She's so cute when she dances." Linda smiled at me.

"I don't like to be seen." Leticia scowled at her mother.

"You don't like when mommy sees you. Okay, you don't have to dance."

Leticia scanned through the video, searching for the song she knew, while Linda and I talked about the upcoming Chinese New Year's celebration. When Leticia found the song "*Gong Si Gong Si*," on the video, she began to sing along, seemingly oblivious to her audience. Soon after, Linda went out shopping and our game of "mommy" resumed in the basement with Leticia's announcement that she was "going to go to China."

"Who are you going to go to China with?" I asked.

"Grandma and Grandpa."

"And what are you going to do in China?"

"I'm going to work."

"What kind of work?"

"I don't know," she responded hesitantly before taking the story in a new direction.

Part 2: Doing Homework

"What time do daddy come home?" Leticia asked, pretending that she had just arrived home from school.

"Umm. 7 o'clock," I answered.

"Then I better do my homework and home reading. Right, mommy?"

"Okay. Where's you're homework?"

"It's in my bag," she explained as she pulled out a notebook[9] from her backpack. "What do I do?" she asked as she handed me the book.

I looked carefully at the completed pages in the notebook. "Um, you have to write all the numbers from 1 to 10, in Chinese and in English."

"Teacher said we need to write the English 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 *only*," she quickly corrected me. She printed the numbers in English and then announced that she was done (see Appendix B).

"Okay. Now, *you* have to tell me if this is right," I suggested as I began writing the Chinese characters for 1, 2, and 3. Each time I wrote a character, she responded by telling me its English name. I stopped at the number 4 because I was unsure of how to write the character.[10] "How do you make a four in Chinese?" I asked her.

"I forgot," she confessed.

"Okay, where's your home reading?" I asked, expecting Leticia to shift her attention away from her "homework." Much to my surprise, she ignored my question entirely and suddenly got up and said, "I know! I'm going to go downstairs and copy!" She raced down the stairs and into the basement, leaving me somewhat bewildered. When she returned, she had in hand a piece of paper with Chinese writing on it. The piece of paper had been torn from Wilson's Chinese exercise book.

"Whose is that? Was that your homework from before?" I asked when she showed me the paper.

"No, Wilson's," she said, then with a furrowed brow and great determination, began searching on each of side of the page for the Chinese character for the number 4.

"Who wrote these?" I pointed to the neatly formed characters written in a vertical column down the sides of the two pages. "Wilson?"

"No, my mom," she replied. She continued to search, saying to herself, "Where's 4? That's 5...Here's 4!" she announced and then carefully copied the number onto her "homework" page.

"Okay, now you tell me if I'm right." I followed her example and copied the character for 4. She watched me intently, then nodded her head in approval when I was finished.

"Where's your home reading?" I inquired again. Leticia went to find a book and brought back Wilson's home reading book. When I asked her to read the book to me, she replied, "Teacher said that *you're* supposed to read it to me." I read the book, and listening intently, she tried to read along with me. When we were finished, she immediately put it into her backpack, explaining that she needed to take it back to school. Just as she was placing the book in the backpack, Wilson, who had just arrived home from school, saw Leticia with his home reading book.

"That's my book!" he shrieked.

"Nooooo," Leticia denied unabashedly. They struggled over the book for a few minutes with Leticia trying to explain that she was just borrowing it. Wilson relinquished eventually, allowing her to keep the book for the moment.

In the next segment of the play scene, Leticia changed the setting by suggesting, "Let's go to the mall."

"Okay, what are you going to buy?" I asked.

"I want chocolates...I want to buy daddy a newspaper."

"He wants a newspaper?" I asked, curious about her idea.

"Yes," she said, taking one of his newspapers from the table.

"Okay. We need to go pay for this now." We carried our items to the checkout counter that she created using her father's worktable and calculator. The table also had a file folder full of invoices from Howard's business. Leticia pretended to be the cashier and rang the items through. She was very adept at pushing the calculator buttons and "scanning" the items through. Her motions and gestures mirrored those of a practised cashier.

We left the mall with our purchases and went back home.

"When do daddy come home?" Leticia immediately asked. "Is daddy home yet?"

"Umm. Yes, daddy's home. He's on the computer," I answered, wondering how she would respond. She walked into the computer room and happily greeted her father with, "Hi, daddy."

Part 2: Commentary

Part 2 of the play episode begins and ends with Leticia's enquiries about her father, and when he will be home. Leticia's motivation for doing her "homework and home reading" is the anticipation of her father coming home. In her play and her everyday realms, Leticia demonstrated a strong attachment to her father and a desire to garner his approval.

On the first occasion that I met Howard, Leticia sat at his feet and waited patiently for his attention while he talked to me. At one point she got up and sat at the kitchen table with a pencil and paper. She returned to show him the Chinese characters that she had copied from the spine of videotape. I found this particularly interesting given that she had refused to practise her Chinese printing earlier that day with her mother, and that there was sometimes friction around literacy learning expectations in the home.

Leticia's desire to please her father is also evident in her suggestion in the play episode that she buy him a newspaper. Leticia goes with her father once a week to a shop in Chinatown where he buys a Chinese or Vietnamese newspaper for himself and often a trinket for his daughter. Although reading the newspaper is something that both Howard and Linda do, Leticia is aware of differences in how they use and relate to the newspaper. Linda, for example, explained that she does not read Chinese or Vietnamese newspapers very often, but thinks that she should to help her maintain her other languages. Although she does read English newspapers, she explained that it is most often for weather or department store sale information. Leticia's father reads newspapers in different languages because he is interested in politics, history, and economics. He reads to satisfy a personal interest and he reads for pleasure.

The predominant theme in the second part of the episode concerns a child who is eager to do her homework in anticipation of her father coming home from work. It is of interest that although Leticia is exposed to English, Chinese, and Vietnamese print at home, and English and Chinese print at school, her description of her homework assignment—"Teacher said we need to write the English 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 *only*"—and her willingness to read along with me reveal a level of comfort with English

that was not evident with the other languages. The interaction that takes place between Leticia and me is reflective of a typical after school interlude between Wilson and Linda. On most days when I was visiting, Wilson arrived from school to be greeted by his mother's questions: "How was school today?" "What did you get on your math test?" "Do you have homework?" and "Where is your home reading?" In the routine that Leticia established in the play episode, school literacy, in general, and homework, in particular, served as the means for exploring the school-related responsibilities of an older sibling. An important aspect of her appropriation of this role was her insistence that she use Wilson's home reading book rather than one of her own books. Siblings often evaluate themselves and each other against parental ideals, values, and wishes and decide, both consciously and unconsciously, whether and how to be like or unlike each other (Bank & Kahn, 1982). Like many young children with older siblings, Leticia views homework as a milestone—a status symbol of more "grown-up" children—that garners parental attention and the possibility of approval. Her play narrative also highlights her awareness of parental expectations for school success.

The goal of completing both the homework and home reading appeared to be important factors in Leticia's exploration of these tasks. For the most part, the ritual of putting homework and home reading books into a backpack to be returned to school was a significant step in the process. In fact, overall, Leticia took more interest in the completion stage of the process than in the literacy task itself. One exception to this pattern is her sudden interest in figuring out how to write the number 4 in Chinese. More typically, it was her habit to rush through "homework" (i.e., in play), expending as little effort as possible. When she suddenly decided to use her brother's Chinese exercise

book as a resource, she discovered a strategy that helped her solve a problem she had encountered in learning. In this example, play provided a safe context in which Leticia was willing to risk an attempt at writing in Chinese.

NARRATIVE 2
February 1, 1999 Session 13

Background

When I first arrived at the house today, I spent some time showing Linda my wedding album and we compared the traditions of Western and Chinese marriage ceremonies. She looked carefully at the photos of my parents and tried to determine whom I most resemble. During the time that Linda and I were looking at the album, Leticia, although somewhat interested in my pictures, was anxious to continue playing "mommy," the activity she initiated last week. She consistently interrupted, asking, "Can we play now?" When her mother and I were finished, she quickly led me by the hand down the hallway and into her bedroom. The story that follows begins midway through our play session.

Waiting for Daddy

"I want to phone daddy to find out what time he come home," Leticia suggested.

"Okay."

She pretended to press the numbers on the television remote control pad and then held it to her ear, "Daddy, what time you come home?" She looked at me and responded, "At 5:00."[11]

"At 5:00? Oh, he'll be early," I responded.

"Yeah, because he want to read to me," she said with a smile. "Can we look at the picture when you were married?" she continued, temporarily changing the direction of the story.

"You want to?" I asked, somewhat surprised by her request.

"Yeah."

"You'll have to go upstairs to get the pictures," I said, assuming that she wanted to look at the actual photo album.

"Pretend," she reminded me.

"Oh."

She took one of her father's "The Nineties" Chinese news magazines and told me, "Pretend this is your book." She began flipping through the pages, looking for pictures to show me. We engaged in a dialogue much like what might transpire between a mother and daughter looking through a family photo album. "Is this grandpa?" she asked, pointing to one picture. "Is this you and daddy? Is this you, mommy?" she enquired, pointing to another picture in the magazine. She found a picture of a man and woman dancing together and commented, "Oh, that's nice, mommy."[12]

Leticia changed her strategy somewhat with our next series of interactions; instead of discussing what was actually shown in the magazine picture, she would describe something completely different. "Look, that's daddy feeding you a bottle."

"Feeding me a bottle?" I asked, confused.

"Yeah."

"Is that what married people do?"

"Yeah."

"They feed each other bottles? What's in the bottles?"

"Milk...Now here's you feeding daddy," she explained, inventing another picture in the magazine.

"A bottle of milk?"

"Yeah."

She chose another of her father's magazines and we looked at the pictures together.

"Oh, look," I said, following her new method for discussing the pictures. "These are our wedding presents."

"Oooh...Who's that? Grandpa?" she asked, referring to a real picture of an old man.

"No, uncle."

"He died already?"[13]

"No."

"Why he's like that?" she asked, referring to the man's white hair and wizened face.

"He's just old."

We talked about some of the other pictures in the magazine. She often asked which ones were pictures of me (mommy) and which ones were pictures of daddy.

"Know which one I like?" She searched through the magazine to find a picture of a man and woman dancing together.

"Why do you like that one?" I asked.

"I don't know," she said with a shrug.

"She has a pretty wedding dress, doesn't she?" I responded. "You know which one I like?" I turned to a picture of another woman and man and explained, "I like her long braids."

"Is that you?" She continued to pretend that we were looking at a wedding album.

"Yeah."

"I'm done, mom," she informed me, closing the magazine and stacking it back on the coffee table along with the others. "Daddy home, mom?" she asked again.

"Yes, he's home," I told her, "he's going to read you a story now."

"He's home from work?"

"Yes, he's going to read you a story. He just came home."

"Hello, daddy," she said in greeting him.

"What is the story that he's going to read you?"

"Not now, when I sleep."

"Oh, in bed."

"Two books," Leticia explained. "One now, one in bed."

"Do you do that every night with your dad?" I asked, stepping out of my role as her mother.

"He's busy. He needs to finish his work," she said sadly.

"Is he going to read you a story?" I asked, again enacting the role of her mother.

"Not yet. Will you read the story?" she requested.

"Instead of daddy?"

She handed me a colouring book from a car dealership. "Pretend that you read not the real story. Read: The sheep went up."

I began to read what was written on the first page, "Once—"

Leticia interrupted, "Not that, read *that*!" She closed the book and pointed sternly to the title on the cover.

"What's the name of the book?" I asked, knowing that for some reason she did not want me to read the actual print.

"Needy Fred Golden Baby,"[14] she pretended to read.

"Okay," I began, "Needy Fred Golden Baby." I pointed to each word as I read the title. "What's it a story about?"

She did not answer and instead asked me a question, almost as a teacher might. "Who's it by?" She pointed to the smaller text lower down from the title and in answer to her own question said, "It's by Cassie Lam."

"By Cassie Lam," I repeated after her.

I read the title again and then turned to the first page of the story. She interrupted because I did not follow the sequence that she had previously outlined. "By who?" she asked with the patience of a teacher.

"By Cassie Lam," I repeated, pointing to the small text on the front cover.

I looked at the pictures and tried to make up a story to go with them. She scrutinized my "reading" very carefully and protested if she thought that I had read a word that was actually on the page.

"No, don't make it the same," she complained at one point.

"It was the same? What was the same?" I asked.

"Read different words," she scolded me in frustration.

"Oh, you want me to read *different* words."

Eventually, she settled into listening to my invented story and seemed satisfied that I had not actually read the words that were on the page.

Commentary

Linda often described her daughter as "daddy's little girl" and Leticia's adoration for her father was obvious in both her play and everyday realms. In the morning when Leticia was getting ready for school, she would frequently ask her mother what time her father had left for work and, late in the afternoon, she would wonder when he would be coming home. Howard often left the house in the early morning long before his children were out of bed, and returned home in the evening well after they had eaten dinner. When he did come home, Linda had dinner waiting for him. Even though he was only able to spend a short time with the children before they went to bed, Leticia always seemed content once he was home. She would, though, as Linda explained, "make any excuse to get up again" once she had gone to bed. "I'm thirsty. I need go to the bathroom. I can't sleep." Her mother would rattle-off her daughter's excuses. It is likely that Leticia's excuses created opportunities for her to solicit her father's attention. Norton-Peirce concludes, "identity relates to desire—the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation,

and the desire for security and safety" (1997, p. 410). Leticia's desire for recognition (e.g., pretending that her father wants to come home specifically to read a story to her) as well as for security and safety (e.g., her feeling of contentedness once her father came home) were clearly evident in this story.

When her father comes home in the play episode, Leticia chose to alter her original plan and requests that I read the story to her instead. This modification was somewhat surprising to me. It is possible that the logistics of suddenly changing my role from mother to father[15] were unmanageable at that point in the story, and so she opted instead to proceed with me remaining in the role of her mother so that I could read the story. Another interpretation, however, is that Leticia knew from experience that her father is usually tired at the end of the day and does not always have time to spend with her. She has perhaps learned to fill such empty spaces with her own activities, content with the fact that her father is present in the house.

Leticia's requests—"pretend that you read not the real story" and "read different words"—were an unexpected beginning to the reading session. The reading process, which begins with identifying the title of the book, something she has invented from the initial letters of the original title, and the author, is reminiscent of oral reading in a school context rather than a home context. One possible interpretation for her behaviour is that because she did not know how to read the story independently, which her own mother would most likely have expected, she adopts a position of power and authority where she can control the reading of an "invented text." In situations where Leticia felt pressure to perform, for example, to meet her parents' expectations that she read simple books with accuracy and fluency, she typically opted not to participate in the activity. Tension

mounted between Leticia and her mother, and Leticia would become so angry that she refused to engage in most activities involving reading or writing. Midway through kindergarten, Linda's frustration piqued and she decided, on a friend's recommendation, to enroll her daughter in an afternoon Montessori school. She said that she felt "at least this way Leticia learn *something*." Linda worried a great deal about her children's prospects for the future (particularly Wilson's) and consequently, their educational performance. She fretted when Wilson did not get high enough grades and worried that Leticia's kindergarten teacher was not spending enough time teaching Chinese. Requesting that I pretend to read "not the real story" put Leticia in a position of power, allowing her full control of the situation and my actions. She could, for instance, tell me that I had read a word incorrectly or that I was not telling the story the right way. Her authoritarian tone at the beginning of the book reading belied her position as the powerless child and instead placed her in a position of authority over me, the adult reader.

Interestingly, Leticia's interactions around literacy learning with her father were considerably less tense. She succumbs entirely to his authority and follows intently what he is trying to teach her. During a visit the year following routine data collection, Leticia and her mother both proudly announced that her father had taught her Chinese phonics and that Chinese was no longer difficult for her. Leticia scurried off to find the exact page in the book that her father had used to teach her.

In this episode, Leticia wants to please her father by buying him a newspaper. Clearly, she associates newspaper and magazine reading with her father and in play, she makes clear distinctions between how different newspapers and magazines are used and

by whom. For instance, in her role of a little girl interacting with her mother, Leticia adapts her father's Chinese news magazine (i.e., *The Nineties*) to fit with how she defines herself and our relationship in that particular play context. Specifically, she uses the magazine to represent a wedding album and continues to focus on the theme of love and marriage. The text, in other words, does not shape her identity in this narrative; rather her identity shapes how she chooses to use the text.

Interwoven in the plot of this story is the importance of family affiliation and history. Leticia's identification with her Chinese culture was illustrated in the study's introductory vignette where she explained, "You don't know how to hear this book. Only Chinese people, right Wilson? We Chinese people, right?" Her awareness of her Chinese identity was also articulated in a spontaneous comment that she made during a play episode from the previous week:

> "Supper. It's supper, daddy," Leticia announced at the door of the computer room where she was pretending her father was working. She then said to me, "I want rice. I want rice and...We are Chui Dana people." (PLC transcripts: January 26, 1999, Session 12)

The story in this play episode is about belonging to a particular culture and family. Earlier in the afternoon, Linda and I had been comparing our own wedding ceremonies and discussed similarities and differences between Western weddings and Chinese weddings. She said Leticia loves to watch their wedding video and laughed with embarrassment about some of things the bride is expected to do at the dinner party. For example, two oranges decorated with a single cherry were tied around her neck on a string and Howard, who was blindfolded, had to find and remove the cherries from the oranges. Toasting and drinking from bottles was also part of their wedding celebration. When Leticia pretended that her father's news magazine was her mother's wedding

album, she constructed her own understanding of wedding ceremonies and rituals based on her experiences as a member of this family.

NARRATIVE 3
February 1, 1999 Session 13

Background

Leticia's theme of playing house continued for the third week in a row. At the end of our previous play session, she had asked me to bring my container of pennies when I came to visit next time. She explained that she wanted to use them to set up her shop. Our play session began with Leticia tossing my purse strap over her shoulder and walking purposefully toward her father's worktable, which she consistently used as the sales counter in her store. Typically, she pretended to work at the Bay, a large department store where her mother often shopped for clothing for the family. Leticia was very particular about how the counter—her father's worktable—should be arranged. She positioned his desktop calculator near the edge of the table and stacked pennies in front of it. Space was always left beside the calculator for merchandise to be "scanned" in by the stapler, which she set to the right side of the calculator. Papers and pens were kept at the back of the table amongst her father's business documents and receipts. She knew that she was not allowed to play with her father's papers, but used scraps of paper that were carefully selected from one location on the table. Once the table was organized, she opened my purse and removed one of my credit cards.

Cassie and Luanne

"Okay, I'm going to give you one card and then you're going to give it to me. Okay? You pretend to come in and buy something," she directed.

"Am I supposed to be your sister and you're working at the Bay like last time?" I asked, seeking clarification. She nodded. "Okay, I'm going to buy some things. I want some colouring books and pencils for my kids." I picked up the two colouring books that were on top of Leticia's father's newspapers.

"Are you ready?" she asked, wanting to know if I had finished shopping.

"Oh, you're my sister, right? What's your name?"

"Cassie,"[16] she replied.

"Okay. And what's my name going to be?"

"You are Luanne," she told me.

"I wanted to get some books for my kids, but I need some pencils too. I can't find the pencils in your store. Where are the pencils?" I asked.

"Um, I don't got any pencils 'cause it's gone. All of the pencils are gone," she explained.

"Can I buy these two pencils on the table?" I inquired.

"No, you can borrow them."

"I can't buy them from the store?"

"No, just borrow them. Look at the book. At the paper." She picked up a grocery flyer insert from the English newspaper, which had been delivered to the house that morning, and looked through it. "Those books (the colouring books) are not for sale today. Tomorrow," she informed me.

"Oh, so can I come back tomorrow and buy them."

"You need to check the book," she explained.

"These aren't on sale today because it doesn't say in your book?"

"This only says one only. This one only." She held up one of the colouring books. "And tomorrow, that one for sale." She pointed to the other colouring book.

"Oh, you're saying that only this book is on sale today?"

"Yeah, and tomorrow that one's for sale. And the two pencils will be for sale."

"I can't buy this today then?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Okay, then I'll just take this one today."

Leticia used her father's stapler as a scanner and passed it over a series of numbers on the back of the colouring book. She then punched in 11 on the calculator, which she pretended was a cash register. I handed her my card and she swiped it across the top of the calculator, just as cashiers do when customers are using the Interact banking system.

"Eleven dollars," she said.

"So just that one book is eleven dollars?" I asked.

"Yes," she told me.

I counted out eleven pennies and handed them to her. She carefully put them in a pile in front of the calculator and then handed back to me several pennies that she had counted out from another pile.

"Is that my change?"

"What's change?" she asked.

"You gave me this money back because I gave you more money than the book costs," I explained.

"You use that tomorrow to buy the other stuff," she suggested.

"Oh, so tomorrow when I come back. I use this money. Bye."

"Wait, wait!" she called after me. "I forgot to give you a card. I'm going to give you a card so that you know who are me."

"A card so that I know..."

"Who are me."

"Who you are?"

"Yeah."

"Me, I'm Cassie." She removed my international student card from my purse to illustrate. "See my name here," she said, pointing to the word Canadian on the card. "See that *C*? *C-a-s-s-i-e*," she emphasized each sound in the name as though she were reading it on the card. "That's me."

"So do you want me to take that or are you going to keep it?" I asked, recalling that she wanted to give me some sort of card.

"No, I'm going to keep that so that people know who are me," she explained.

"Okay. Bye."

"Bye, Luanne...I'm going home from work now."

"You're going home?"

"Oh, wait, you forgot to sign something," she called me back again.

"I forgot to sign something?"

"Yep. You need to...could you please sign your phone number? Then I'll tell if there's a sale or not."

"So you want me to sign my name or my phone number?"

"Your name and your phone number. Take this paper." She handed me a sheet of loose-leaf paper (see Appendix C).

"You want me to sign with my pen?"

"No, with a pencil." After I signed my name and phone number, she took the pencil and made a swirling mark on the paper as though she was signing her name. "We need to check the phone number," she informed me instead of answering my question. She handed me the piece of paper. "Um, that you need to put on the bag."

"Put this where?" I asked.

"On the bag."

"Is this my..."

"It's this," she explained, pointing to the receipt tape on the calculator.

"Oh, it's my receipt."

"Yeah. Okay, you need to go and I need to go home."

"Okay, bye."

"Bye-bye."

Commentary

Underlying the events in this shopping episode are the predictable routines and well-known aspects of everyday life. Given that Leticia makes sense of much of her world through family relationships, it is not surprising that the life of the main character in this narrative is intertwined with the lives of other family members, namely, her sister. The sisterly relationship that Leticia portrays is reminiscent of the relationship shared by her mother and aunt. The two sisters often consult each other about household concerns, family matters, schools and extracurricular programmes, and shopping, they support each other by sharing childcare responsibilities while the other was working,[17] and their families often take holidays together. Of all her siblings, Linda is probably closest to her sister Julie, and in her narratives, Leticia often includes sister relationships as an integral part of a mother's identity.

Leticia also identifies strongly with her mother's domestic use of the newspaper and the newspaper flyers in particular. In the previous narrative, when she includes a newspaper in the story line, it is something that she wants to buy for her father, most likely to please him. In this third narrative, she takes an active role as a reader and demonstrates how her mother uses newspaper flyers to check prices and look for sales. When asked in another play context why mothers read newspapers, she explains, "to buy stuff" and "to find good schools for their children" (PLC transcripts: February 12, 1999, Session 14). Both examples of how mothers use newspapers relate to their role of caring

for their families. The second example also highlights the importance that Leticia's family places on the education of their children. Shopping is, of course, an integral part of many mothers' daily routine of caring for family members and maintaining and establishing order in the home. Many of Leticia's play episodes included shopping for food, books, gifts for family members and teachers, treats for children, and special items for babies.

When Leticia adopts the role of store cashier, she positions herself within the world of commerce. Her role is carefully and precisely executed, with very few deviations from an established sequence of events. The routine proceeds as follows: she examines the merchandise being purchased, scans over one area of the item with the stapler, keys in a series of numbers on the calculator, swipes my bank card across the top of the calculator, then asks me for money. Her fingers move over the keypad of the calculator with amazing familiarity for a five-year-old, perhaps from having watched her mother maintain accounts for her father's business and from accompanying her mother on shopping trips. As the cashier, Leticia not only insisted on following a distinct pattern, but also had very strict rules for determining what was on sale and for what price. She insisted that I "look at the book, at the paper" to find out if what I wanted to buy was on sale. In another play episode, she maintained similarly strict rules and refused to sell me something because it "didn't have a check mark."

"Okay, money please," she said patiently.

"How much for this [sticker set] and the ball?" I asked.

Leticia turned the sticker box over and over, seeming to search for something.

"Okay, this is..." she began, continuing to examine the box.

"What are you looking for?" I asked, but received no response. She finally located the bar code on the edge of the box and pretended to scan over it with the stapler.

"How much is the ball?" I inquired.

Leticia searched for the bar code on the ball. "I just need to phone." She picked up the telephone and repeated each number as she pressed the digit. "One ball, one blue ball, hasn't got a check mark on it. You'll check on the ballbasket," she said into the telephone. To me, she explained, "The people say they are going to check on the ballbasket, see what has any kind of check mark on it. They will bring it to you. Put that back, okay."

"So I can't buy it right now?"

"Ah, if it don't got a check mark, you can't buy it." (PLC transcripts: March 10, 1999 Session 16)

These rules and routines represent Leticia's view of commerce. Gilbert notes that when young children construct stories, they "enter into familiar and well-known sets of systematically organized relationships of sequence, ordering, and signification which carry the social values of their culture" (1994, p. 128). In this shopping scenario, the routine of the store's operation and the cashier's role are paramount to the story. Embedded in these routines are literacy events such as issuing business cards and receipts and signing documents. Her understanding of these events is clearly dependent on context. She knows for example, that her mother sometimes writes using a quick swirling motion, similar to her own hand gesture when she writes on my cash register receipt. She knows that people in shops provide written information on cards to show customers who they are. She also knows that customers sometimes write their phone number for cashiers so that they can be contacted about merchandise for sale. These forms and functions of literacy are an integral part of commerce in our society and they

are a special kind of literacy that many young children gain exposure to long before they begin school.

NARRATIVE 4
February 1, 1999 Session 13

Background

Leticia set about constructing a "house" in the corner of the family room beside the bedroom door. The house incorporated both the spare bedroom and the small alcove between the bedroom and the family room. A black leather swivel chair was situated beside the loveseat in the family room. As the door to the house, this swivel chair provided the entryway into the alcove. Just inside the alcove was Leticia's kitchen, which could be identified by the cardboard box that contained the family's Christmas tree. This box represented the kitchen counter, table, sink and stove. She always ensured that the storage closet beside the bedroom door was well stocked with food (represented by plastic building blocks). The spare bedroom, complete with two beds and a dresser, was used as is, but also included the addition of a fireplace (a plastic stool turned upside-down). Leticia often complained to her mother that she wished they lived in a bigger house, a house with a fireplace. She explained to me that if you have a fireplace, "it means you have a big house," and "if it is a *new* fireplace you can cook on it."

Chapter 1: Honey and Wife Get Married

"You be the husband...what do I call you? Um...Honey. I call you Honey, you call me Wife."

"Okay, Wife. What do you want to do?"

"We need to buy a TV."

We walked out of the house and got into the "car."[18]

"Do we have kids?" I asked.

"In the back [of the car]," Leticia responded matter-of-factly at first and then gasped. "We need to get married," she shrieked in a high-pitched voice. "Quick-quick!"

"Should I still drive?"

"No, we need to go back. We're still at home," she explained.

"Oh."

"I need something to wear."

"You need a wedding dress?"

"Yeah, I need a wedding dress."

"Does the husband help the bride get ready?" I inquired.

"No, you need to get flowers."

We used my winter coat as Leticia's wedding dress and I made flowers for her out of tissue. She was quite thrilled to put the coat on, but insisted on finding high-heeled shoes to go with it. She went into the bedroom and retrieved her roller skates and told me that these were her "high-heels."

"We need rings," she remembered next. We searched the basement for something that could be a ring, but found nothing. Leticia did not seem too upset by this and instead, we decided to pretend that we had rings. She directed our procession down the aisle and insisted that we should walk together to the end of the carpet and then stand side by side. She was quite unstable on her roller skates, though, and I had to hold her up so that she didn't fall.

"Now what do we do?" I asked when we arrived at the end of the carpet.

"I don't know," she shrugged. "Here." She pretended to place a ring on my finger. I followed her lead and pretended to place a ring on her finger.

"Are we going to have a big party now?" I asked, not sure how the rest of the ceremony would proceed.

"No, we need to kiss!" she told me, quite matter-of-factly. We both made kissing sounds in the other's direction.

"Wow, it's done," I said with surprise. "We're married!"

"We need to hold hands," she was quick to inform me as we walked back down the aisle.

"Are you going to change out of your wedding dress and wedding shoes?" I suggested, only because I was concerned that the roller skates may cause her to have an accident.

"Yeah...could you hold my flowers?" She handed me the tissue bouquet before going into the bedroom to change. When she returned, she said, "Let's go outside and go shopping. I need to buy a new purse."

"You need a new purse?"

"Yeah. We need to hold hands and go outside."

"Is that what mommy and daddy do?" I inquired, asking her about her own parents.

"No . . . I don't know," she answered, sounding puzzled, as though she had not thought about what her own mother and father do when they go out shopping. "Okay, let's go!" she chimed in a very sweet voice.

Holding hands, we left the house and got into our car. We drove to a shop, with me in the driver's seat. Leticia found an old purse on one of the tables and said that she wanted to buy it.

"Do you buy it or do I buy it for you?" I asked.

"You buy it," she responded quickly.

Leticia temporarily adopted the role of cashier so that I could pay for her purse. When we returned to the house, she noticed my car keys on the table inside and pretended

that we were "locked out." She was quick to remind me, though, that, "It's just pretend!" She went into the house to get the keys, pretended to unlock the door, and said, "Let's go in! It's time to go to bed."

As we went into the bedroom, Leticia was quick to inform me, "You have to sleep with me."

"Good night," I said.

"Good night," she replied and then suddenly remembered, "We need a kiss!" This phase of the play episode ended with us both blowing kisses across the room.

Chapter 2: Honey and Wife Have a Baby

Leticia happily announced, "It's morning!"

"Do I have to go to work?" I asked in a very sleepy voice.

"No, we have the baby today!"

"We're having a baby TODAY!" I responded, shocked somewhat by the sudden change of events.

"Yeah," she explained, pointing to her stomach, "you need to put a baby." She left the bedroom and came back shortly with something square and rectangular under her sweater.

"Oh!" I responded, suppressing laughter.

"We need to go get the baby out," she explained as a matter of fact.

"Do we need to take you to the hospital?"

"Yeah . . . you need the keys [to the car]," she said calmly.

I took the keys and pretended to unlock the car so that Leticia and I could drive to the hospital. She began making noises as though she was in terrible pain. "Oh, oh!" she wailed, clutching the tissue box that she had stuffed under her sweater.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes," she responded weakly.

"Are you still okay?" I kept asking as we drove.

As we were getting out of the car at the hospital, Leticia told me, "We need to hold hands." Once inside the "hospital," Leticia made a bed by pushing together two chairs. She positioned herself across the chairs with her shoulders slightly elevated and her legs stretched out. "You have to hold my hand like this," she explained, putting my hand and her hand upright in the air in a prayer-like position.

"I need to come and hold your hand while you have the baby?"

"Yeah." In silence, she calmly lifted up her sweater and pulled out the "baby."

"Is it a boy or a girl?" I asked.

"A boy."

"What are you going to name the baby?"

"Yiang Wa."

"Yiang Wa? That's the baby's Chinese name?"

"Yeah."

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know," she replied. "We need to find a blankie for the baby." We found a piece of newspaper and used it to wrap the baby. Leticia cradled the tissue box in her arms and gently rocked it back and forth. Together, we walked back to the "car." Once we were inside, she began to make crying noises for the baby.

"Look, the baby's crying," she told me.

"Can you feed him?"

"No, we got no milk for him."

"Do we need to buy some?"

"Yeah."

"Do we have milk at home?" I asked.

"No."

"I'll run into the store, you stay in the car," I offered.

I looked around the room for something that we could use for baby bottles and began to search through the bag of large Lego blocks. I brought back three single blocks from the Lego set and told her that they were baby bottles. Leticia carefully took one and held it in front of the tissue box, pretending to feed her baby. The next order of business that she wanted me to deal with was finding a crib for the baby. I carried a small plastic stool over to where she was sitting in the car. When I turned it upside-down, she was very pleased with the "crib." Once inside the house, we placed the crib at the foot of the bed and carefully placed the tissue box in it. Leticia went into the kitchen and began preparing something.

"Are you making supper?" I asked.

"No . . . yeah, yeah! You need to close the door," she said because I was sitting on the leather chair that she had designated as the door to the house. "You cannot sit on the door," she scolded me. She was quite particular about where I could and could not sit in the house. Because the kitchen was quite small and cramped, though, it was difficult to fit another chair for me to sit. After surveying the difficulty, she finally agreed to allow me to sit on the "door."

"Honey?" she said to me.

"Yes, Wife?"

"Could you just pull Neet out?"

"Pull...What was the baby's Chinese name again?"

"Yiang Wa. The other name will be Neet. No, the boy will be Richmond."[19]

"You want me to bring him out? Are you going to feed him?"

"Yeah," she said, watching as I carried the tissue box out. "Hold it like that," she directed, demonstrating how to cradle the tissue box like a baby.

"Yeah. Tomorrow is um, Richmond's birthday. We need to make a party. You watch TV." She turned on her toy TV for me to watch and pretended to be preparing dinner.

After we ate, Leticia handed me one of her father's Chinese newspapers and told me to "look at it." While I looked at the newspaper, she pretended to wash the dishes. Our play episode ended before we had the birthday celebration because Linda called us upstairs for dinner.

Commentary

This narrative is about Leticia's interpretation of married life. The first chapter details the budding romance between Honey and Wife, underscoring the idea that before couples have children, they "need to get married first." By casting me in the role of husband, Leticia also provides a first glimpse into the meaning that she gives to the role of men. For example, when I ask her, "Does the husband help the bride get ready?" and she responds, "No, you need to get flowers," she begins to outline her expectations of a husband. Purchasing a television and new purse for Leticia is also part of her husband's responsibilities and is specific to the traditional male role of providing material goods for his family. Additional male responsibilities include driving the car on outings such as shopping and going to the hospital, watching television, and reading the newspaper.

For Leticia, married life also includes sleeping together in the same bed. Linda once explained that her daughter understood the relationship of married couples as "people who share the same bed." According to Leticia, "grandpa and grandma sleep in the same bed, mommy and daddy, auntie and uncle, but *not* uncle and his girlfriend." This conceptualization of married couples reflects the cultural values of Leticia's family; specifically, that unmarried couples should not share living quarters. Romantic activities

such as holding hands on public outings and kissing before bed are also rituals important to Leticia's understanding of the marital relationship. Her suggestions that we sleep together in the same bed and pretend to kiss were often accompanied by giggling, suggesting that she has some sense of what takes place behind the closed door of her parents' bedroom.

Particularly important are the names that Leticia chooses for the two main characters. Linda explained that in most Chinese families, first names are not commonly used among family members, who are more typically referred to according to their relationship to one another. For example, *Gē Ge* (older brother), *Jie Jie* (older sister), *Mèi Mèi* (younger sister), and *Dì Dì* (younger brother). Leticia, in this narrative, chooses "Honey" as a term of endearment for addressing her husband and asks that she be addressed as "Wife." Honey clearly denotes endearment and caring. Wife, on the other hand, tends to be more basic and generic to marriage. It is the bride, however, who is the most celebrated on the wedding day. Leticia insists on having a long dress and high-heeled shoes; this costume is her image of a woman on her wedding day. Her husband has no role clothing in particular and serves as more of a prop for the ceremony, which Leticia knows begins with walking down the aisle and ends with a kiss; what happens in between appears to be more of a mystery to her.

"Whatever and whenever children write, and no matter what exotic metaphors they employ, they write out of their own social circumstances" (Steedman, 1982, p. 61). A poignant example of this observation is young girls' conceptualizations of pregnancy and children, in writing and in play. In Halldén's (1994) study of young Swedish girls, for instance, one girl writes about pregnancy as a very private event, as something that she

wanted to keep hidden from her husband. A second girl in the study writes about a woman who gives birth three times to twins. Although the primary topic of this second narrative is human reproduction, no caring routines are described. In Steedman's (1982) *The Tidy House*, the young British girls knew that "children were longed for, materially desired, but that their presence meant irritation, regret and resentment" (1982, p. 25). Somewhat unlike the girls in Halldén's and Steedman's studies, Leticia's creation of a child is a reason for celebration. After sleeping with her husband the night before, she wakes up and gleefully announces, "We have the baby today!" Her comment to her husband, "You need to put a baby" reveals that she has some understanding of how babies are conceived. The hospital scene is even more revealing of Leticia's knowledge of pregnancy and childbirth. She knows exactly how to position herself on the two chairs in preparation for the baby's birth. Changes in her voice and tone suggest varying degrees of pain and discomfort. Her insistence that the husband and wife hold hands during this process is of particular importance and indicates that the husband's support is expected during childbirth.

Caring is another way that the young girls use to establish order in their written family narratives. In Leticia's play narratives, caring takes the form of shopping for food and other household items, organizing the routine of family life, and looking after a husband and baby. Caring for the baby becomes the major theme in the second chapter of the story where Leticia focusses on the routine of cradling, feeding, and rocking her baby. She requests that her husband assist with tasks such as getting milk and a crib, both of which emphasize his role as provider, and taking the baby to her when he is crying, which emphasizes Leticia's role are primary caregiver. Particularly revealing are

Leticia's directions to her husband on how to hold the baby properly. Clearly this role is her domain and she assumes that she needs to teach her husband how to care for his son. Establishing and maintaining order is a main aspect of family life in the written narratives of young girls (Halldén, 1994; Nicolopoulou, Scales, and Weintraub, 1994). Leticia's fastidious attention to organizing her house is a means by which she establishes and maintains order in her play narratives. It is in this narrative that she first builds a large-scale house as a prop for her unfolding family narrative. Interestingly, the arrangement throughout the remainder of her family narratives is always remarkably the same; the house, the central place of interaction among family members, is consistently located in the same spot in the basement.

Throughout the narrative, time is organized according to significant events in the family's life: a wedding, a pregnancy, a baby's birth, and a one-month birthday celebration. Very little transpires to upset the order and ritual of family life. In fact, Leticia only creates two problems that temporarily throw the lives of Honey and Wife into a state of disorder. The first problem they encounter is getting locked out of their house. Interestingly, Wife does not rely on her husband to solve the problem and instead, takes matters into her own hands by crawling through an open space, taking the keys from the table, and unlocking the door. The second problem the couple encounters is a crying baby and no milk. This problem is solved by Leticia's directive to her husband, "We need to get milk." He responds to her request by stepping into the defined role of family provider and going out to the store to buy milk.

NARRATIVE 5
April 28, 1999 Session 18

Background

Before I even had an opportunity to greet Linda today, Leticia was already pleading with me to come downstairs so that we could "play house." Linda laughed and encouraged me to go with Leticia. Once we were downstairs, she immediately set her house in order and drew me into her play world as though no time had elapsed since our last meeting.

Chapter 1: I Have a Baby in My Tummy.

"If you have a baby in your tummy, you shouldn't work," she began. She positioned her father's calculator at the right angle on the table, pretending that it was the cash register in the store where she worked.

I followed her lead. "But you're still working? Are you almost done working?" I asked.

"No."

"Are you going to stop working?"

"No," she replied again.

"So what should I buy?" I asked as I wandered around the shop. "Hmmm. I need a blanket for the baby."

Leticia was delighted with my choice. "For me?"

"For the baby. Don't you think that we should buy a blanket for the baby?"

"For my baby?" She smiled.

"Yeah."

"Yes...And you need this (the squeeze part from the end of a toy horn)," she explained. "When the baby gets born, I'm going to pump it on here (she pointed to her chest) and put it in here (a make-believe baby bottle)."

"Oh, to put milk in the bottle for the baby. How are you feeling today?"

She responded very cheerfully, "Good!"

"The baby's not ready to come out yet?" I inquired.

"Tuesday."

"Is this going to be your last day of work today?"

"Yeah."

"And then you're going to stay home after that?"

"Yeah, when the baby grows up, then I go to work."

As I was about to leave the shop, Leticia suddenly said, "I'm coming home with you."

"You're going to come home with me right now?"

"Yeah."

"Do you want to carry this stuff?" I asked, referring to the baby blanket and breast pump.

"No, because I have a baby in my tummy."

"All right. Let's go."

"Oh, wait," she said. "I have to go to the office." She pretended to be speaking to someone in the computer room. "I'm not going to come here to work anymore. I need to go home."

"Oh, so you told the people that you work for that you're not going to work here anymore."

"Yeah...My baby hurts," she said, opening the car door. "My tummy really hurts."

"It really hurts? Maybe you should sit down and rest. I think you should go lie down."

"At home?" she asked. I walked with her into the bedroom so that she could lie down on the bed. She lay down and clutched her tummy, "Ow, ow, ow, ow. I'm going to sleep," she told me. "Don't close the door."

"I won't. Good night. You have a good rest."

Chapter 2: Expectant Mothers

When Leticia "woke up," she decided that we needed to go out to the store to buy food. At the store, we meet another expectant woman. She created a conversation between the two women, directing me to speak for the other woman.

"When is your baby going to be born?" I asked Leticia.

"In a few months."

"In a few months?"

"[Now] you ask her," she directed me.

I turned away from Leticia and directed my question to the other woman. "When is your baby going to be born?"

This time, Leticia answered for her, "Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!"

"Can I go see?" Leticia coached me to ask to the next question.

"Can we come and see the baby?"

Leticia again answered for the woman, "Oh sure."

"Which hospital?" I asked.

"It's close to Abbott School,"[20] she explained.

Chapter 3: At the Hospital

"Tomorrow, my friend's baby is going to be born," she reminded me, referring to the woman in the grocery store.

"Are we going to go to the hospital and see your friend's baby?"

"Yeah."

"What's your friend's name?"

"She's my sister," she decided.

"Is she older than you or younger than you?"

"Older."

We went back to the house and Leticia lay down on the bed. When she woke up she pretended to be talking to her sister on the telephone. "Hello? Are you ready to go to the hospital? Bye." With a tone of urgency, she told me, "We have to go *quickly*!"

"Is her baby being born?" I asked.

"We have to take her to the hospital," Leticia explained.

"Do we have to take her or is her husband taking her?"

"Her husband is working. Let's go."

We got into the car (the loveseat in the family room) and Leticia sat in the back seat behind me.

"Touch my baby," she encouraged me. I put my hand on the toilet paper roll that she had under her T-shirt. "It's kicking!"

"Oh. Wow!" I responded. She made her tummy jiggle to simulate the baby kicking.

We pretended to drive to her sister's house. "Okay, we're here," I announced.

"My tummy hurts," she complained.

"Do you want to wait in the car and I'll go in and get her?"

"Okay."

I pretended to be talking to her sister as I escorted her to the car. "Okay, get in the car and we'll take you to the hospital."

"Are you holding her hand?" Leticia asked me.

"Yeah," I reassured her. "Can she sit beside you?" Leticia nodded. "There, she's in. Okay, ready? Are you okay? Does her baby hurt?[21]"

"Does *my* tummy hurt?"

"No, does *her* tummy hurt? Is her baby ready to be born?"

"Yeah."

"We're here. Okay, so we're going to take your sister—"

"No, not yet!" she scolded me. "You forgot to close the [car] door."[22]

Once the car door was closed, I said, "Okay, so we have to tell the people at the hospital that your sister is here and she's going to have a baby."

"Yeah, and we have to put her with her name on," she informed me.

"Okay, so she needs to have...um..."

"A tag."

"A tag." Leticia tore the remains of a Canada Post courier tag from a box and insisted on writing the name on the tag.

"What's her name?" I asked.

"Julie,"[23] she told me, and on the tag she wrote the letters JiLmoFg NML. The completion of the hospital bracelet suddenly shifted the direction of the play episode. Leticia very casually cast her sister out of the play episode and placed the bracelet on her own wrist. "She born her baby already," she explained. "Today is my turn."

"Does the baby need a bracelet too?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"The baby's ready [to be born]," Leticia announced.

"The baby's ready?"

"Yeah. It really hurts," she complained. "The baby needs to come out of my tummy."

"Oh, you better come sit down." I put two chairs together and made a bed where Leticia lay down with her knees bent.

"Okay. Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Okay."

Her voice was like a crescendo "Owww. Owww. Owww." She pulled the toilet paper roll out from under her t-shirt.

"Oh, there's your baby! Is it boy or a girl?"

"I don't know," she said, looking inside the toilet paper roll. "Um, it's a girl."

"A girl! What are you going to call her?"

"Mint."

"Mint?"

She spelled out "M-O-N-A-L" for me so that I could write the name on the hospital bracelet.

"What's her last name?" I asked.

"Hmm. Tsiu." I wrote Tsiu on the tag, stuck it on the toilet paper roll, and handed the "baby" to Leticia.

"Here's your baby."

"I'm going to take her home," she said happily.

"Don't you have to give your baby some food? Do you want to use a bottle?"

"No, I feed her here," she said, pointing to her chest. "Pretend you go home for three days and come back, okay, and pick me up." She sat up on the chairs and cradled her baby. "When the baby grows up, it still needs milk. We have to put it all in there," she continued.

"Into the bottle?" I asked. She nodded her head. I went over to another part of the room for a short time before coming back to the "hospital." "It's time to go home," I announced cheerily when I returned.

"Pretend I'm asleep," she suggested.

"You're sleeping?"

"No, I haven't slept."

"You haven't slept the whole time you were here?" I sounded surprised.

"Yeah," she replied. "Can you put the baby right there, on the crib."[24]

"Do you feel better now that the baby's out?"

"Yeah...Pretend you go home and I stay here," she requested.

"Should I come back tomorrow?"

"Yeah. Go home and come back and pick me up."

"Okay, goodnight." I left for a short time and then came back. "Are you ready to come home? No?" She pretended to be sleeping when I arrived. "Are you ready to come home now?"

"Yeah. But I still can't go work. My work is all finished," she reminded me.

"So you're going to stay home with your baby?" I asked. She nodded. We pretended to drive home in the car. "Grandma and grandpa are at home waiting to see you and the baby," I told her.

Leticia replied in a very cheerful voice, "Pretend that grandma and grandpa hug me." She opened her arms in an embrace then turning to me said, "Pretend you're grandma and you hug me."

"Congratulations! You have such a pretty baby!" I exclaimed, hugging Leticia. "Is her name Mint?" Leticia nodded and quickly removed the "hospital bracelet" from the toilet paper roll.

"Oh, so she doesn't need her hospital bracelet anymore?"

Leticia pulled the sticky tag off her own arm as well. "Ow, ow, ow."

"And you don't need yours anymore either?"

"Oh, the baby is hungry. I have to give it some milk."

"Where did we put the milk?" I asked.

"No," she reminded me, pointing to her chest, "I have to feed it from here."

Chapter 4: Mint's Chinese Birthday

"Pretend tomorrow is a New Year for [the baby]."

"A New Year for the baby?" I asked.

"Yeah. Baby born."

"Oh, so it's her first Chinese birthday."[25]

"Pretend I wear a dress," she said excitedly. She requested that I get my jacket from upstairs so that she could wear it as a dress. "Let's get ready for the party!"

"Is the party at our house or is it at someone else's house?"

"At the buffet," she answered.

"Oh, it's at a restaurant."

"Pretend you like my dress," she suggested.

"Oh, wow!" I responded as a husband might. "What a pretty dress. You look so nice. Everyone will be looking at you instead of the baby." At this last comment, she smiled gleefully.

Together, we pretended to walk to the restaurant and sat down at the table. Leticia greeted the family members with "Hi, guys!" She also greeted someone else who she indicated had just walked into the restaurant. "I have a present for your baby!" she said, speaking for the guest who had just arrived. She handed the parcel to me.

"For me?" I asked.

"No, for the baby," she explained.

"What is it?"

"A jacket."

"Oh, thank you," I said to the guest.

We finished the meal and then pretended to drive home in the car. Once at home we went to sleep. "Pretend you sleep with me," she requested. Shortly after I had fallen asleep, she shook my shoulder and said, "Wake up."

"Not yet!" I complained.

"Okay, you can sleep a little bit more. I'll make breakfast." She went into the kitchen and returned. "Here's some toast."

"Oh, toast is my favourite. Thank you."

Chapter 1 (Revised): Let's Start All Over!

"Let's start all over!" Leticia suggested suddenly.

"We're going to start playing all over again?"

"Yes," she said definitively. "I'm going to put on a dress!" She put on my long coat and again requested, "Say you like my dress."

"What a beautiful dress you have on."

"You're the daddy." She began fussing with my hair.

"You need to fix my hair?"

"Yeah," she responded, trying to put an elastic band in my hair. "I need to make it short. Come to the mirror and look at your hair."

"Hmmm," I replied as I looked at my hair, half of which was falling out of the elastic band. Leticia went into the hallway and took her mother's new shoes[26] from the hanger on the door. Leticia put the shoes on and walked slowly into the living room.

"Do you like my shoes?" she asked.

"Wow. Are those your wedding shoes?"

"Yeah."

"They're beautiful! Where did you buy them?"

"Somewhere, but I don't remember," she answered. "Okay, let's go in the car." We pretended to drive in the car to the church where we were to get married.

"Okay, we have to wait because there's lots of girls here and you have to pick. There's lots of girls who want to marry you, okay, and you have to pick and you pick me!"

"Oh, there are lots of girls who want to marry me! Okay, let me think. Which one would be the best wife?"

"You're asking the people [in the church]?"

"Um, yes, which one would be the best?"

Leticia pointed to herself. "Maybe this one would be the best," she suggested.

"Why would that one be the best?"

"Because she almost had a baby and her tummy's getting bigger."

"Oh, so I should marry her because she's going to have a baby?"

"Yeah, and if you don't marry her, she can't get her baby out. And it would very hurt. All of them, their tummies take very long to get big."

"All the other girls? You mean it's going to take too long for their tummies to get big?"

"Yeah."

"Okay, so I should pick this one because her tummy's already big?"

"And it's getting bigger, so pick me."

"Okay, I pick you. Are you ready? Where should we go?"

"We have to go to eat for supper then we have to change into other clothes," she explained.

"Where do we go for the wedding?" I asked.

"To the restaurant. Yeah, we live in the restaurant and we sleep there."

"Okay. Do we cook food in the restaurant?"

"People cook food for us. This restaurant is very big. It's a house."

"But do we make food for the people who come to the restaurant or..."

"No, the people make it, the cooking people. The cooking people live next door."

"Oh, so the cooking people aren't our family then?" I asked.

"Yeah. Everyone live with us."

"Who lives with us?"

"Grandma and grandpa and auntie and uncle," she clarified.

"Oh, the whole family."

"There's lots of bedrooms and lots of washrooms," she explained.

"How many washrooms?"

"Lots. And fireplaces, too. But I only have these shoes. I don't have any other shoes," she said, referring to her mother's high-heeled shoes. "Alright? So when I go out, I have to wear these shoes 'cause I don't have any more shoes."

Footnote: Do You Know How the Baby Gets in There?

"I'm going to make a party," Leticia announced.

"What kind of a party?"

"For the baby. I need to buy a dress. You're the daddy," she reminded me. She put on my coat and asked me how she looked.

"You look beautiful. The dress is going to look so nice for the party."

"I need a bigger box," she said as she searched around the family room.

"What's it for?"

"For the baby," she explained, taking the toilet paper roll from under her T-shirt and replacing it with a larger Kleenex box. She pulled the coat together around her middle and asked me to help her button it.

"Oh, the baby's getting bigger," I commented. "Does the coat still fit even though the baby's getting bigger?"

"Do you know how the baby gets in there?" Leticia asked, stepping out of character for a moment.

"Tell me."

"When the daddy poops, he catch the baby and put it in the mommy's tummy."

"Really?"

"Every daddy does that."

"Every daddy does that?"

"Even my daddy did that. He pooped out his bum. And even you. Even everyone."

"And then what happens?"

"He poops out and he catches it and puts it in the mommy—" she said matter-of-factly.

Chapter 5: A Present for the Baby

"See how big my tummy's getting," she said, continuing with her story.

"It's getting bigger," I agreed. "So only two days now until the baby is born."

"Tomorrow and tomorrow, oh, it's two more days," she calculated.

"Do you hope you have a boy or a girl?"

"A boy and a girl."

"Are you going to have twins?"

"What's wrong with me?" Leticia suddenly scolded herself. "My baby's going to be born tomorrow. Ask my husband."

"Where is he?" I inquired, assuming that I was the husband.

"Ask him," she suggested. "He's at the table."

I turned toward the table and pretended to address her husband. "When is the baby going to be born?"

Leticia answered for her husband, "Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow! Are you worried? Are you scared?"

"No. You come visit me at the hospital," she suggested.

"Okay, what can I bring you at the hospital," I asked.

"A present."

"A present for you or a present for the baby?"

"For the baby. You have to get a bag and fill it with paper."

"I have to get a bag and fill it with paper?"

"Yeah, and you tape a paper on the outside."

"Like a letter?"

"Make a card and put it on the outside," she explained.

"Okay. I'm going to go make a card."

"For me? To bring to the hospital?" she asked.

"For your baby. Tell me what your husband's name is."

"Just husband."

"What's your name?"

"Monique. I'm in the hospital."

"In the hospital? Did you have the baby yet?"

"No. Today's Sunday and my husband's not working."

"Today's Sunday and your husband's not working, so he's at the hospital?

"Yeah, he's with me." She came over to where I was making the gift card at the table.

"I'll show you how to make a present," she volunteered. She found a striped plastic bag on the table and went upstairs to get scissors to cut it. When she returned, she cut open the seams on the bag.

"What animal is the baby going to be?" she asked me.

"Which animal? Hmmm, could it be a dragon?"

"No, it can't be like yours."

"Can it be a rat?"

"A rat? Only if it's the first born."

"Is it the first baby?"

"Yeah, it's okay," she decided.

"Okay, tell me what to do [with the gift card]."

"I will show you. You don't know how to do it," she said. Once the bag was cut, she laid it flat so that it was one large rectangle. "Where's my blankie?" she asked. She found the baby blanket (a towel), a baby toy, and the "breast pump" we used at the beginning of the afternoon, and placed them on the cut plastic bag. "Take all of them," she said.

"And wrap them up together?" I asked.

"We have to tape it," she told me. Together, we wrapped the items in the plastic bag. She promptly took the parcel upstairs to show her mother and so ended our play episode.

Commentary

This narrative is the longest and most complicated of Leticia's stories. It is a story that celebrates the cycle of family life. This story, like others set in the home context, is very exact with the text leaving few details incomplete. In fact, the detailed nature of her narrative is remarkably similar to the descriptive style often found in children's literature. Throughout the five chapters that comprise this narrative, the main character focuses on maintaining family relationships, celebrating family events, and caring for her baby. The time frame is relatively long and marked by celebratory events such as the birth of babies, weddings, and birthdays. The plot includes only short diversions to locations outside the home context, the first of which occurs in the second chapter of the narrative when Leticia suddenly decides that we need to go out to the grocery store. Food is, of course, symbolic of caring for family and is associated particularly with children and the maintenance of order in the home (Halldén, 1994). In Leticia's family, shopping for food and preparing family meals is a major facet of Linda's role as a mother.

Gilbert argues, "we learn how to 'be' women and men, girls and boys, mothers or fathers, wives or husbands, sisters or brothers, aunts or uncles, grandmas or grandpas partly in response to the stories we hear and participate in" (1994, p. 131). Throughout this play narrative, Leticia provides numerous opportunities for the reader to understand the meaning she gives to the role of women. Halldén (1994) describes two types of female characters that young girls typically create when writing family narratives. The first type is the traditional mother who controls the other members of the family and

directs the activities within her home jurisdiction. The second type is the expansive woman who simultaneously tries to maintain order in the home while being involved in activities outside of the family. Although Leticia initially portrays a woman working outside of the home, soon after she learns that she is pregnant, she tells her employers "I'm not going to come here to work anymore. I need to go home." She continues to set priorities between her home and work domains in Chapter 1 when she explains that she will go back to work "when the baby grows up." In Chapter 3, after she gives birth to the baby, she reinforces this decision when she explains that her "work is all finished."[27]

Another clue to the meaning Leticia gives to the role of women is the establishment, early in the episode, of the manner in which her baby will be fed. Given that Wife bottle-fed her baby in the previous narrative, I find the sudden switch to breast-feeding in this episode of particular interest. Leticia is obviously knowledgeable about breast-feeding and breast pumps, and is making a clear choice in how she will feed her baby once it is born. Leticia's actions here relate strongly to the traditional female role of organizing and planning family routines as part of caring for children. She is also remarkably knowledgeable about labour in childbirth and enacts labour pains with acute authenticity, creating a sense of drama for the audience.[28] As an expectant mother, Leticia's vulnerability and delicate physical condition are evident when she reminds her husband that she should not carry things because she is pregnant and when she takes mid-day naps during various points in the story.

Establishing and maintaining family relationships are also important dimensions of the female characters that Leticia constructs. Chapter 2 begins with Leticia awakening from a nap and suddenly deciding that we need to go to the grocery store. Once at the

grocery store, she introduces a third character to the story. The conversation that ensues between the two women provides insights into what Leticia views as important topics of conversation in women's lives. Typical of conversations between expectant mothers, the two women exchange information about their pregnancies and due dates. Consistent with the family theme, the relationship between Leticia and this woman changes several times, beginning as strangers, then changing to friends and eventually to sisters. Central to the sister relationship is childbirth and care, and support for one another. Leticia's insistence in Chapter 3 that they accompany her sister to the hospital and that her husband hold her sister's hand when he helps her from the house to the waiting car is symbolic of the bond between the two sisters. Other family members are also part of Leticia's support network, and she is especially delighted to return home with her baby where she is greeted by hugs from the baby's grandma and grandpa. Within Leticia's family and cultural context, children are one of the most important facets around which family life revolves. The order and routine that she establishes in the story represent a pattern of life she takes for granted; it is a pattern of life that situates the main female character in the role of organizer and nurturer.

As a central part of her understanding of female roles, Leticia continues to interweave her intricate knowledge of pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing into the unfolding story. In Chapter 3, for example, she suggests I touch her tummy because "the baby's kicking." Immediately following this event, she paused to tell me a story about when her mother was pregnant with her: "Mommy and daddy were sleeping and I kicked daddy right in his back!" Leticia also knows the baby requires different care at different stages of development, as demonstrated by the statement "When the baby grows up, it

still needs milk. We need to put it all in [the bottle]." The second part of her statement provides directions for her husband in how to care for their baby.

Leticia's inclusion of the identification tag in the hospital scene reveals her knowledge of literacy in a number of ways. When her sister goes into the hospital, Leticia is quick to point out that "we have to put her with her name on." The name that she attempts to write on the tag, JiLmoFg MNL, is Linda's sister, indicating Leticia's strong identification with her mother's role. In this invented spelling, the initial consonants for both the first and last names are consistent with the spelling of Linda's sister's name, Julie. The "L" and "i" are also correct, even though they are not printed in the order in which they are heard. Once the identification tag is made, Leticia is so taken with it that she places it on her own wrist and in so doing, changes the focus of the story from her sister to herself. When Leticia gives birth to her baby girl, Mint, she makes a second name tag with "M-O-N-A-L" printed on it, which again demonstrates her knowledge of initial consonants. Once she is home with her baby, she promptly removes the tags, indicating she understands that these identification bracelets serve a particular purpose in hospital contexts.

Leticia's suggestion "Pretend you go home and I stay here. I haven't slept," positions her outside of her home context, separated from her husband and extended family while she recovers in the hospital. She suggests her husband return home for several days before coming back to pick her up. When he returns to the hospital, she wants him to know that she has not slept during his entire absence and asks that he take the baby from her arms and place her in the crib. This scenario clearly communicates that Leticia understands that a mother's role is to make sacrifices for her children and

family. She wants her husband to know she has not slept, and is pleased by his dismay. The period of time between the baby's birth and her one-month birthday (i.e., the baby's first Chinese birthday) passes quickly. Leticia plays the role of organizer for this event, but also situates herself in a central position as the baby's mother. In Chinese culture, a baby's one-month birthday is an important family event, a time to honour both mother and baby. Her suggestion "pretend you like my dress" is also rooted in her desire to be honoured and valued by her family, particularly her husband. As Davies (1992) emphasizes, these appropriate patterns of desire are cultural posititionings appropriate to Leticia's gender.

The circle of life in this narrative is ordered by a series of family celebrations. To complete the picture, Leticia decides we need to "start all over again!" and she revises Chapter 1 to include a wedding. In preparation for the wedding, the husband and wife must undergo physical transformations, which provide a more complete understanding of how Leticia constructs gender roles. When Leticia gets dressed for the wedding, for instance, she wants her husband to admire how attractive she looks by commenting on her beautiful dress and shoes. This traditional view of gender is also evident when she attempts to tie my hair back so that I look more like her idea of a man.[29] Most revealing, however, is her perception of how a husband chooses a wife. A good wife, according to Leticia, is someone who will provide her husband with children as quickly as possible. This perception is evident when she makes reference to herself, suggesting that "maybe this one would be the best because she almost had a baby and her tummy's getting bigger." According to Leticia, the other women should not be chosen because "their tummies take very long to get big." The importance of marriage to childbirth is

reinforced by Leticia's statement: "If you don't marry her, she can't get her baby out." This statement also highlights the importance of fathers to the family unit.

This revision and editing of Chapter 1 and the addition of the footnote "Do You Know How the Baby Gets in There?" illustrate the similarities between composing stories on paper and composing stories in play. Providing detail for the reader is all-important, and both writing and play present opportunities for young girls in particular to create a world of their own making, a family life of which they are in control. In family narratives that are written and played, family exists as a compact whole, with an emphasis on human relationships and caring for the needs of family members. The footnote "Do You Know How the Baby Gets in There?" is a particularly fascinating addition to the story, and communicates a keen awareness of audience. Leticia appears to come to the realization that I may not have enough background information to understand the story she is constructing. Her explanation is very matter of fact: "Even my daddy did that. He pooped out his bum. And even you. Even everyone." It is as though she is teaching a peer about the facts of life.

The final chapter begins again with a focus on Leticia's pregnancy. It is interesting that although she gave birth in the hospital segment of the story, she picks up the thread of her previous story from the perspective of a pregnant woman whose baby is growing bigger. Her comment "See how big my tummy's getting" draws us back into her story and again demonstrates Leticia's awareness of audience as she shifts my role from husband to outside observer. The storytelling device she employs here advances the timeline of the plot through words, rather than actions, as she engages me in a conversation with her husband about her pregnancy. Through this conversation, I am

transformed from audience member to a character in the story. My role as visitor becomes an important aspect of the plot as Leticia changes the focus of the story from her own pregnancy to the baby itself. The baby's Chinese birthday, celebrated one month after her birth, provides an authentic reason for using literacy in this play context. Leticia becomes consumed by making a gift for the visitor to give to her baby. She knows that the card, which is taped to the outside of the package, is an integral part of the gift.

The significance of the Chinese zodiac as part of her family and culture are manifest in her question, "What animal is the baby going to be? As noted in the introduction to Leticia and her family, the Chinese zodiac is an integral part of her family's history and cultural practices, much of which has been influenced by her paternal grandfather. Her knowledge of the Chinese zodiac and her ability to remember the sign for each of her family members is quite remarkable, and it is clearly important to her in this play episode that she establish beforehand which animal her baby is going to be. My suggestion that the baby be a dragon is rejected outright. My second suggestion, rat, is accepted only if the baby is the first-born because, according to the zodiac, the characteristics of the rat are best suited to first-born children.

NARRATIVE 6
May 17, 1999 Session 21

Background

Our play episode began with Leticia's suggestion that she pretend to be my little girl. The episode revolves around a family trip in which Leticia plays a young girl named Mint. Interestingly, Mint is the baby to whom Leticia gave birth in the previous play episode.

The Family Trip

"Come on daddy," Leticia said as we were leaving the house. We pretended to walk out to the car with our bags and suitcases. Leticia was using the birthday gift bag, given to me by her family, to carry her blanket.

"Okay," I said when we got to the car, "put the bag in the trunk." I sat down in the driver's seat of the car (the left side of the picnic bench).

"No, daddy's driving, mom. You can't drive," she explained.

"I can't drive?"

"No, you have a baby [in your tummy]."

"Oh, okay."

"Daddy, come on. You sit with me, okay?" she said to me.

"Okay, move over," I said to the people who we pretended were sitting in the back of the car. "Who's coming with us?" I asked Leticia.

"All the families live with us.[30] All the families [are] coming with us. Come on, Wendy.[31] Come on, grandma. Come on, grandpa. I'll sit on your lap (said to me). Grandma and grandpa sit at the front with daddy."

"Is it a long trip?" I asked.

"No, we have to take a airplane," Leticia told me.

"Oh, we have to take an airplane?"

"We're here. Come on, grandma. Come on, mom," she said. "Here you take these (the gift bag). Take all the suitcases."

"Have you got everything?" I asked.

"I helped you."

"Okay. Now..."

"Our auntie's going to say bye-bye to us. Bye uncle, bye Brian, bye auntie." She waved to the other family members.

"Bye." I waved along with her. "Where's the airplane?" I wondered aloud. She asked me to hold the bags that we had packed and set about building an airplane. Using the four chairs from the table, she made a row. In front of the first chair, she took a footstool with a round base and turned it upside-down. The base of the stool resembled a steering wheel. "That's for the driver," she informed me.

"Have you been on an airplane before?" I asked as I watched her make the airplane.

"Daddy. Daddy has."

"Where do you want me to sit?"

"At the front," she said.

"At the front? Okay. You have to put the suitcases under the seat."

"You sit there with grandma," she told me. "Oh, what about grandpa? Here comes daddy! Daddy drives the plane."

"Daddy drives the plane? Where are we going?"

"Banff...and Vietnam."

"When we get off the airplane where will we be?"

"Banff," she explained and then suddenly said, "We need to go home."

"We need to go home?"

"Yes, we need to get stuff for Banff and we need to get a card from Vietnam."

"We're going to send a card from Vietnam?"

"Come on, mom, all our stuff's there."

"Do you need your blanket?" I asked, carrying the gift bag with the blanket back to the house.

"No, Vietnam is hot," she reminded me. We left the blanket in the house, and pretended to collect other materials before returning to the airplane.

"Okay, ready?" I asked. "Tell me when we're there. Is it going to take a long time to get there on the airplane?"

"No, we're almost there," Leticia explained.

"Oh good. What are we going to do in Vietnam?"

"Just buy stuff. We're going to send it home."

"You're going to send it from Vietnam?"

"Where did you bought that teddy [a panda bear that I gave her]?"

"In—"

"San Diego?" She finished my sentence.

"San Diego."

"What did you saw there?" she asked.

"I saw the zoo and I saw the ocean."

"And what?"

"And I saw some stores and...I went to school there."

"And what?" Directing my response, she added, "You bought some stuff there, from some stores."

"Yes, and I bought some stuff at the zoo."

"Let's go to Vietnam and buy some stuff," she suggested.

"Where are we staying in Vietnam? In someone's house or in a hotel?"

"In a hotel. Okay, let's buy some stuff." She walked around the room looking for things to put into her bag. "I want to buy something for uncle," she told me.

"Okay."

"Maybe we could buy this [a tin box]," she decided.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Open it."

"Do you think grandma would like that?"

"It's for auntie," she informed.

"Where do we pay for it?"

Leticia walked over to where her father's desk calculator sat and pretended to key in some numbers. "Do-do-do-do, done. Put all the stuff that we bought in the bag [my gift bag]. I'm going to buy this coat for Brian [her cousin]."

"Are you buying stuff for everyone who came to the airport to say good-bye to us?"

"No, it's for teacher too. I have to write this for teacher," she said, showing me a folder.

"Oh, you have to write what you did on your trip for teacher?"

"Yeah. This is a good folder. And this [a box of Kleenex] for um, for the teacher. We need to go."

"Are we going home from Vietnam or are we somewhere else?"

"It's night-time," she reminded me. "We need to sleep. Where's daddy?"

"He's gone to sleep."

"I'm going to sleep, 'kay. Goodnight."

Commentary

Leticia often tells her mother that she wishes their "whole family" could go on a "big camping trip." Most of their family holidays do in fact include extended family. Leticia is happiest when her house is filled with cousins to play with and aunts, uncles, and grandparents to visit. This narrative appears to serve the purpose of wish fulfilment, a cherished wish about living and taking a trip with her entire extended family. Being with family provides Leticia with a strong sense of belonging and identity. As part of her story and within the context of the trip, she also depicts various family members' areas of responsibility. Her father, for example, is head of the family, and is responsible for driving not only the family van, but also, interestingly, the airplane. Her mother, who is pregnant, cannot drive because of her condition. The mother's pregnancy is symbolic of her primary responsibility in the family, to produce and care for children. Her other

responsibilities include sitting with her daughter, organizing the suitcases, and shopping for gifts for family members. The mother's responsibility of organizing the suitcases is also shared with the grandmother. Both grandparents have the honoured positions in the front of the van beside the father.

Visiting Banff and Vietnam are both interwoven into Leticia's family history. A recent family holiday was a trip to Banff National Park that she made with her immediate family, her maternal grandparents, an aunt, an uncle, and a cousin. The trip was made over a long-weekend just before school started because Linda and her sister wanted the children to have something to write about with respect to their summer holidays when they returned to school. Making time for a holiday was difficult because Howard was so busy at work and Linda was caring for her six-month-old son. A few years ago, however, Howard took several weeks holiday to travel back to Vietnam with his parents. This trip marked his first return since he left in 1980, and he commemorated the occasion by making a video to share with Linda and their children. In constructing this narrative, Leticia was obviously influenced by her father's stories and experiences. She has never flown on an airplane, but she knows that at the airport, family members often come to say goodbye. She also knows how to safely stow her baggage under her seat. She has never been to Vietnam, but she knows that it is hot and that she will not need her blanket. Leticia talks about visiting Vietnam with her father one day, and she tells me that they are going to cross the water in a yellow boat, a boat that he has shown her on video and in photographs.

Howard returned home from Vietnam with numerous gifts and a promise that he would never travel without his family again because he missed them so much. The idea

of buying special things for family members becomes a salient part of Leticia's story in the final part of this narrative. Indeed, shopping appears to represent the reason why people travel, as she so pointedly reminded me about my own recent trip to San Diego. In the play episode, Leticia, in consultation with her mother, takes the important responsibility of finding gifts for family members: something for uncle, grandma, and auntie, a coat for her cousin Brian, and a box of Kleenex for her teacher.

She also takes responsibility for keeping a journal about her trip to Vietnam, to give to her teacher. Writing in the journal serves the authentic purpose of communicating her travel experiences to her teacher while she was away from school. Although I did not observe this practice in Leticia's kindergarten classroom, her inclusion of the journal demonstrates a clear understanding of audience and purpose for this form of writing. A second example of her understanding of literacy forms and functions is sending cards from places you visit.

CONCLUSIONS

The first narrative included in this chapter was recorded in mid-January. It represented a significant turning point both in my relationship with Leticia and her family and in Leticia's orientation towards literacy. In the three months prior to January, her play activities included literacy as part of a game or practise activity such as drawing and labelling pictures. January marked a transition to make-believe play and a fascination with playing house. It was during this time that her play activities became thick with the literacy practices that flowed through her house and family life. The stories she created in play reveal her growing competence with literacy and storytelling, and her sense of identity within her family and culture. In examining the six narratives presented in this

chapter, it is evident that Leticia's stories become more coherent, more connected, and more detailed. Her ability to include and manage multiple characters and voices, and to create intertextual links and continuity between narratives, also improves over time. Of equal importance is that her knowledge of basic story grammar, as demonstrated in this group of narratives, by far exceeds what she is able to communicate in written stories.

Reading a story with a visitor, waiting for a father to come home from work, marking family history in photo albums, shopping in department stores, visiting a relative in the hospital, falling in love, getting married, birthing babies, maintaining the order of households—this is the "cultural material" that Leticia incorporates into her narratives. It is material she appropriates from her family culture and weaves into her play contexts, as a means of exploring social roles and identities. Play allows Leticia to infuse herself into "new ways with words" (Dyson & Genishi, 1994, p. 5), into ways of constructing her understanding of gender, self, and family relationships. Weedon suggests that:

> The range of ways of being a woman open to each of us at a particular time is extremely wide, but we know or feel we ought to know what is expected of us in particular situations – in romantic encounters, when we are pandering the boss, when we are dealing with children or posing for fashion photographers. (1987, p. 86)

Although Leticia is exposed to a multitude of female roles through family, school, and media, in her family narratives she typically chooses the roles of mother, wife, cashier, and daughter. These are roles and voices that circulate in her cultural and social worlds, and these are roles that she most likely sees as part of her future identity. Leticia's

stories show her understanding of how her culture has "read" and given meaning to human relationships:

> How they have made sense of such diverse activities as reproduction, aggression, love, anger; how they have sorted the flux of human experience into orders and sequences; how they have made decisions about what counts as "living happily ever after" and what counts as "living unhappily ever after" (Gilbert, 1994, p. 128-29).

Leticia's narratives around the theme of playing house reveal a complex understanding of literacy, gender, family dynamics and relationships, and economics that we would expect to be far beyond the grasp of a five-year-old. Her narratives emphasize relationships between family members and the necessity of working to maintain those relationships. Overall, her narratives can be examined as her ways of making sense of the world and of investigating possibilities in life.

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[1] The Atonement home is where she attended a Head Start programme last year.
[2] Leticia remembered this experience from 1996, when she was only three years old.
[3] She was referring to herself.
[4] The photo is from the one-month celebration following Richmond's birth.
[5] This is a book that Leticia recently signed out of her school library.
[6] As part of her kindergarten program, Leticia is expected to sign out two library books each week, one book must be English, the other Chinese.
[7] This is an English song that she sang at kindergarten around Halloween.
[8] Linda expressed disappointment on a number of occasions that Leticia was unwilling to practise printing Chinese characters. She often chastized her daughter for this, particularly Leticia's inability to write her Chinese name.
[9] The notebook originally belonged to her older brother but her mother has been using it to teach Leticia how to print Chinese characters.
[10] Although I had been studying Mandarin, and had observed the kindergarten teacher write the character for 4 on a few occasions, at that moment, I was unable to recall how to write it.
[11] I realize at this point that each time I said her father would be home at 7:00, which is often the time that he does come home, she most likely felt very disappointed because of the lateness of the hour.
[12] Her comment surprised me somewhat because I knew from talking with Linda earlier that dances are not a common part of Chinese wedding ceremonies.
[13] Both Leticia and Wilson often asked me questions about members of my family who had died. On one occasion, Wilson asked me in his mother's presence whether my grandfather was dead already. Linda scolded him and told him not to talk about death.
[14] The actual title read: *Nissan Fun & Games Book.*
[15] At this point in the study, Leticia had not yet cast me in male roles such as husband or father.
[16] Cassie is the name of a little girl on Linda's favourite soap opera *The Young and the Restless.*

[17] Because Linda tried to arrange her work schedule for days and evenings when Howard was home, she rarely required her sister to watch the children. Julie, however, because she didn't have the same flexibility with her job, often sent her son to Linda's after school. She would typically pick him up around the children's dinnertime and would share the evening meal with her sister.
[18] The car was the loveseat and its cushions, which she took off and set upright, were the doors.
[19] Her baby brother.
[20] There is a hospital very near to where Leticia's family lives and this is where all three of the children were born.
[21] I am using her language to describe "being in labour."
[22] Put the loveseat cushion back in a standing position.
[23] Julie is her mother's older sister's name.
[24] The crib is a small plastic stool that has been turned upside-down.
[25] Meaning the baby's first birthday according to the Chinese calendar.
[26] The shoes, which have approximately a 6-centimetre heel, were a gift from Linda's parents.
[27] During numerous conversations, Linda said that she wished she could stay home full-time with her children and not work at all. Howard encouraged her to quit her job, reassuring her that they would make due without her income, but Linda did not want to lose her seniority at the hospital.
[28] When I discussed with Linda her daughter's knowledge about labour pains and birthing, she was quite surprised and although could not identify any particular experience that might have been influential, she suspected that a birthing video might have shaped her daughter's perceptions. It is also possible that, unbeknownst to her mother, Leticia has overhead childbirth conversations between her mother and other women.
[29] Leticia often expressed a fear of men with long hair, emphasizing that she thought they were "bad men."
[30] She is referring to all of the members of her extended family.
[31] Wendy is the name of Leticia's pretend sister. It is also her cousin's name.

4

Playing School

When Tasmika played school she did not write "I love you" messages. Instead she made lists of words and wrote the alphabet.

—Denny Taylor & Catherine Dorsey-Gaines, *Growing Up Literate*

LETICIA'S DAY AT SCHOOL[1]

The traffic is light as you wind through the river valley to the west side of the city. A left turn off the main thoroughfare takes you onto a quiet residential street lined with big trees and small single-family dwellings, worn duplexes, and other low-income housing. Windover Elementary School, which is a twenty-minute drive from the Tsiu's house, is at the end of the street. Although there are several other public schools in the Tsiu's inner-city neighbourhood, Windover is the closest one with a Chinese bilingual program. The school has a population of approximately 300 students, 40% of whom have Chinese or Vietnamese heritage.

Kindergarten starts at a quarter to nine. I watch as the children enter the school with their parents and car-pool drivers. The children struggle to remove winter jackets and snow pants before hanging them on name-tagged hooks in the hallway outside their classrooms; some are assisted by parents or passers-by, others announce with pride, "I can do it myself." Leticia acknowledges my presence by handing me her outdoor gear and saying, "You hang them up." I comply and follow her into the classroom. I sit down in the big chair behind the carpet where the children sit. When Miss Lee, the kindergarten

teacher, comes in, she closes the classroom door behind her. Through the small window I can see anxious parents lingering, peering in to see what their child is doing. There are more parents than usual at the classroom door this morning, and most of them are mothers.

8:45 As the children enter the kindergarten, they stop only briefly to retrieve their inside shoes from their *cubbies* before choosing a book from one of the two boxes on the floor. One box contains English books; the other contains Chinese books. On the large piece of carpet in front of the classroom calendar, Miss Lee, has taped nametags for each of the children. The nametags, which are written in English, are organized into colour groups and designate where each child should sit. Leticia sits down in her spot and shows me a Chinese book with pictures of a baby in a wet diaper and a baby peeing. Laughing, she points out the nude baby in one picture is a boy. She goes to find another Chinese book then shares a picture of open hands with the boy beside her. Many of the other children are also sharing their books. Miss Lee goes around and stamps the hand of each child who is sitting and reading. Today she is using the letter "p" and tells the children that it is "p" for "perfect."

8:48 School announcements are made over the intercom. Most of the children temporarily stop looking at their books and listen as the principal reminds them of playground safety rules, sends birthday wishes, and outlines procedures for the afternoon assembly.

8:50 Miss Lee takes attendance today by calling the children's Chinese names. Last month, attendance was taken in English. At the start of this new month, not all of the children recognize their Chinese names and are reminded by nudges from more fluent classmates. As attendance is taken, the children continue to look at their books. Leticia

shows pictures of fruits and vegetables to Jason who sits beside her. Although her book is written in Chinese, she speaks to Jason in English. But when Miss Lee calls her Chinese name, she quickly responds, "*Wo zai zhe* [I am here]." Once the attendance list is complete, two students take it to the office. The other children are instructed to put their books away, one row at a time, as their colour group is called.

8:57 Daily calendar exercises begin in English. The children are asked to identify what day yesterday was, what day today is, what day tomorrow will be, and what the week, month, and year are. Miss Lee has made new calendar dates using a variety of Christmas shapes. The children try to figure out which shape will come next in the pattern. The exercises are then repeated in Mandarin.

9:08 Many of the children have grown restless and Miss Lee asks everyone to stand up for stretching exercises. She speaks in Mandarin, repeating words such as ears, eyes, face, mouth, neck, and hands, while the children pretend to be washing the corresponding parts of their bodies. Next, the children practise counting in Mandarin as they jump.

9:12 Some of the children have grown thirsty and begin asking for drinks. Miss Lee tells them that if they ask in Mandarin, they can get a drink. They must also identify their Chinese name on the wall chart. Leticia very quickly finds her Chinese name card, but struggles somewhat to string the words together to ask for a drink.

9:16 The morning message is written on individual word cards, in both English and Chinese:

> Good morning, Miss Lee.
> Good morning, Mrs. Hai (the kindergarten assistant).
> Good morning, Ms. Kendrick.
> Good morning, kindergarten.
> Today is Thursday, January 14, 1999.

Miss Lee writes the morning agenda on a small, portable whiteboard. On the ledge of the whiteboard are four coloured markers joined together, cap to end, like a stick.

Agenda:
1. Morning message
2. Story
3. Work
4. Snack
5. Recess
6. Centre time
7. Go home

The children read the morning message and agenda together. In English, Miss Lee asks them to find the words "good" and "morning." She then compares the similarities between my last name, *Kendrick*, and the word *kindergarten*.

9:26 Miss Lee reads a story in Mandarin to the class. At first the children are not very engaged, but as she continues to vary her intonation, she successfully lures them into the book and they sit listening intently.

9:37 *Work time* is next on the morning agenda. Mrs. Hai hands out the children's work booklets, a collection of worksheets on the theme of winter. Today, the children are asked to complete the worksheet about winter clothing, which involves colouring the items on the page that would be most appropriate for winter. The items include rain boots, umbrellas, swimming suits and sunglasses, an assortment of hats and coats, and mittens and scarves. Leticia completes the page quickly, using only a green marker to partially colour each of the items. [2]

10:00 When the children are finished their *work*, Miss Lee tells them that they can get their snacks. For the children who don't have snacks, Mrs. Hai brings around a bag of crackers. Leticia has a banana and invites me to sit with her. She asks, "Do you come to

my house today?" and I explain that I can't because I have to go to Chinese school at five o'clock. She comments, "English people cannot speak Chinese, but they can learn."

10:10 The children get ready to go outside for recess. When Leticia goes out, her first concern is finding her older brother, Wilson. Typically, once she locates him, she is content to play on her own with only the occasional trip back to see where he is playing. Today, she can't seem to find him and looks around, asking aloud, "Where's Wilson?" When she can't find him, she sends her cousin, Ryan, who is also in her kindergarten class, to find him. Ryan refuses to go so Leticia pushes him, snapping at him in Chao Chiu,[3] "Go find Wilson." Ryan makes an ineffectual effort to find his cousin, but quickly comes back to join our game of chase. Leticia gives up looking for her brother and insists that she and I hold hands for the duration of the game of chase. When recess ends, she pulls me in the direction of the school and leads me in through the doorway. She stops to remove her coat and rather than hanging it on her hook, hands it to me. She quickly takes her boots off and rushes into the classroom. Mindy, another one of her cousins, finds Leticia's boots on the floor and points them out to me. I ask her if she should get Leticia to come and put her boots away. Mindy shakes her head and volunteers, "I'll do it."

10:35 When everyone comes back into the classroom, they again choose books and sit down on their spot on the carpet. This time, Leticia chooses an English book, *Aesop's Fables*. When Miss Lee passes by, Leticia shows her the book she is looking at and says, "Miss Lee, we didn't have a chance to read this story yet."

Miss Lee responds, "No, not yet."

"I want tomorrow."

"Maybe," Miss Lee says as she continues to circulate around the room, putting stamps on the children's hands to reward them for good behaviour.

10:41 Leticia chooses a second book, *Mother Goose*.

When the other children begin putting their books away, Zhou puts his away before his row is called and Leticia follows. When Miss Lee calls their row, Leticia tells her, "I already put mine away."

10:43 Centre time follows recess. A chart on the wall is used to indicate which group goes to which centre. Miss Lee asks Leticia to show Zhou[4] how to put the group names up on the Centre charts on the cupboard doors. She leads him over to the chart and, without using words, demonstrates what he is supposed to do. She continues to hand him one card at a time and he places them on the chart. When he is finished, she motions him to come back and sit down on the carpet.

10:46 During Centre time, Leticia's group is assigned to the house centre.[5] At first, Leticia is very direct with the other children, insisting that she is the "mommy," Gary is the "daddy," Leanne is the grandma, and Jason is the brother. For the most part, the other children don't dispute the roles that she has assigned. Only Leanne protests that she doesn't want to be the grandma, she wants to be the sister instead. Although Jason, who is the smallest child in the classroom, agrees to be the brother, he makes it clear to everyone that he is the "big" brother and that his name is Ash.[6] Leticia announces to her "family" that she is going to work at the hospital and leaves the house centre area. Jason responds proudly, "I don't cry because I'm big." And Leanne chimes, "I'm big too. I'm the big sister."

10:51 Leticia returns to the house centre and picks up her baby from the carriage. She tells me that her baby's name is Pikachu.[7] "I'm going to feed my baby. He eats very fast," she says. She gets some dishes and a spoon from the kitchen and notices that the sink is not properly situated in the hole in the counter. She takes a moment to try to fix it, but gives up and goes to feed her baby. She says, "Gary, I mean, daddy, can you fix this sink?"

10:54 As Leticia is looking for a spoon, Leanne comes into the house and takes the baby in the carriage outside for a walk. Leticia calls after her in frustration, "You're too small!" Leanne doesn't respond and Leticia becomes annoyed, "I don't pick Leanne [to ask a question] for my show and tell." She leaves the house in pursuit of Leanne. Within a short time, she brings the baby and the carriage back to the house.

11:02 Leanne decides that they should go camping, and she and Jason begin ferrying dishes and food out of the play house. Leticia protests, "I don't like camping!" and tries to redirect the players in the house centre. She is unsuccessful, and Gary joins in with the camping preparations. Mae joins the game and tells everyone that it is mother's birthday. Leticia seems very pleased with this change of events. The family goes about making preparations for the birthday. As Jason and Leanne set up the outdoor picnic area, they argue over who gets to be older.

11:10 Mae and Leticia sit in chairs near the picnic site and pretend to be talking on the telephone. Mae has paper and pencil in hand, and is recording information about the kind of birthday cake that Leticia wants. She requests a "Pikachu" cake, and Mae hands me the paper and pencil and asks me to write Pikachu birthday cake.

11:17 It is almost home time, and the children are asked to clean up their centres and get ready for home.

11:28 I help Leticia pack her bag and get ready to go. The woman who gives her a ride is somewhat impatient with Leticia's fussing about where to put her papers, her mitts, her socks, and other school belongings.

11:31 I say good-bye, and tell Leticia that I will see her next week.

Expectations at School

To Howard and Linda Tsiu, school is serious business and they expect their children to succeed. They want them to learn English in particular, but Chinese as well, because of its importance to their culture. During her kindergarten year, it was expected that Leticia would start reading and writing in both languages. Howard and Linda also want their children to have opportunities in life; opportunities that for Leticia include being educated enough to attract a successful husband. Leticia talked about wanting to be a teacher when she grows up, but it was never clear whether it was her own idea or an idea fostered by her parents. In either case, her aspirations are strongly encouraged by her parents, who want her to develop good work habits and to meet with success early in her schooling. By December of Leticia's kindergarten year, it was their hope that she would already be reading. Leticia is keenly aware of her parents' expectations and tries in her own way to garner their approval.

At school, Leticia chose how she would participate in literacy activities. Colouring worksheets, for example, almost always elicited the same lackadaisical response described in Leticia's day at school. Colouring was also something that she did not

appear to enjoy at home, although she had a plethora of crayons, markers, and colouring books. She was interested in storybooks, though, and listened intently when stories were read aloud in kindergarten. She also enjoyed looking at books during the scheduled times in the kindergarten, and often shared pictures with whomever was sitting beside her. Both her parents and teacher thought she should put more effort into her written work at school, especially her Chinese. Her parents were particularly disappointed that she was unable to write her Chinese name for much of her kindergarten year. English printing and speaking came much more easily to her. In fact, Miss Lee, Leticia's kindergarten teacher, described her as one of the stronger English speakers in the class. Her Mandarin, however, was assessed as average.

Friendships at School

For the most part, Leticia appeared to enjoy school, although she sometimes worried about who she would play with at recess. In the classroom, she occasionally negotiated friendships with the promise of toys and food, often relying on the company of her cousin Ryan for partner work. Her other cousin Ivy was much less reliable. Their relationship was tentative, at best, and was more off than on during their kindergarten year. Invitations to Leticia's sixth birthday party included only Ryan and myself—and of course, Wilson, whose attendance was assumed. Recess always began the same way, with Leticia seeking out her brother. He tended to dismiss her in front of his friends, but her awareness of his presence pacified her enough that she would engage in some other play activity on her own.

Leticia's playground companions varied. Sometimes she would play with a small group of girls from her classroom, other times she would play with Ryan and one or two

of the other kindergarten boys. Her interactions with me also varied at recess. There were occasions when, along with a collection of other little girls from her class, she would cling tightly to my hand for the full fifteen-minute break. On other occasions, she ignored me entirely, preferring instead the company of her peers. At times of particular insecurity, she would dictate in advance who I was and was not allowed to play with at recess. If I associated with someone she had blacklisted with statements such as "Don't play with Irene at recess," she would punish me. "I don't like you. You play with Irene!" she would scold and avoid me for the duration of my visit. However, the incident would be long forgotten by the next week. Sometimes she was also a bully with children, threatening not to play with them if they did not co-operate with her plan.

Although Leticia's kindergarten class participated in special projects with a grade six English classroom and the English kindergarten, friendships with children outside of the Chinese bilingual programme were uncommon. I remember a day when the two kindergarten classes practised their songs together for the spring concert. The children all sat on risers with the English kindergarten on one side and the Chinese kindergarten on the other. There was a noticeable gap where the two classes joined on the risers. The six children—three English and three Chinese—sitting side by side looked across at each other as through an invisible wall. Miss Lee had noticed the same separation on other occasions, and said that during her two years at the school she had actively tried to get the two classes more involved.

As children enter school, they face the new task of understanding who they are in relation to their teacher and fellow students and of co-ordinating who they are at home with who they are at school (Miller & Mehler, 1994). Children must also come to

understand who they are in relation to literacy at school (Solsken, 1993). How Leticia accomplishes these tasks and whether she encounters them through the same type of discourse that flourished in her home environment became important questions in examining how she portrayed school literacy and school culture in play. Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines argue, "to understand something of the ways in which children learn at home, it is essential that we know something of the ways in which they are taught at school" (1988, p. 99). Leticia's narratives around the theme of playing school provide important insights into her perceptions of literacy learning at school and into her self and others in relation to literacy.

NARRATIVE 7
December 10, 1998 Session 7

Background

It was 4:30 and Leticia always stopped whatever she was doing so that she could watch Pokémon with Wilson. I joined Linda in the kitchen while she prepared supper. When the programme was over, Leticia decided that she wanted to play school. She took the file folder that I had given to her mother to collect her writings and drawings, and opened it on her lap. She removed her Chinese printing scribbler from the folder and asked me for my pen. Everyone in the living-room (her mother, two brothers, and myself) was told to sit down on the carpet so that she could take attendance.

Miss Lee Just Lazy

"I am Mrs. Hai," she announced. "Who are you?" she asked Wilson.

Wilson was experimenting with different Pokémon names, and he practised writing them on his hand. He would show his hand to Leticia to see if she could guess his name.

She was unsuccessful in reading them and he took great delight in this. Of the two names that he had written, Pokémon and Pikachu, he chose Pikachu.

"Richmond is Yee-Yee and my name is Pee-Pee," Linda said giggling. Leticia laughed at the names. "My name is Leticia," I told her.

"Okay," Leticia said and began to take attendance. "Pikachu?" There was no response from her brother.

"Pikachu?" she said again, with volume and impatience.

"You're supposed to say *I am here*," I whispered to Wilson.

"Yeah," Leticia scolded.

"No," he retorted. "I am not Pikachu. I am Leticia, too." Both he and Leticia laughed. She continued to call the names of her students. Each time we responded with "I am here" she made a check mark in her book next to a squiggle that she had made to represent each student's name. The baby was having trouble sitting still and crawled determinedly over to Leticia to get her folder. Linda and I kept pulling him back, and tried to encourage him to sit on one of our laps. Using her best "teacherese," Leticia scolded, "Yee-Yee, you're supposed to listen!"

After taking attendance, Leticia decided that her name was not going to be Mrs. Hai, but was Mrs. Lee instead. Linda, although she had gone into the kitchen to feed the baby, continued to participate in her daughter's game.

Leticia pointed to her brother and me, "Leticia and Leticia can go down to the office. Do you know where's the office?" she addressed me in particular. I shook my head no, and she pointed to the bathroom door in the hallway. "There's the office. You take the attendance there."

"Tomorrow, Yee-Yee and Pee-Pee can go to the office," Leticia noted.

Wilson temporarily went back to watching TV and when I returned to the living-room, Leticia handed me a paper from her file. On it was a drawing that I made of her Christmas keychain when we were playing earlier in the afternoon.

"You need to colour this," she told me. "Just pretend!" She seemed fretful when my pen almost touched the drawing.

"Do you have a snack? It's snack time." I shook my head no. She moved me over to the table beside the sofa and pretended to bring back cookies.

"Thank you, Miss Lee."

"It's not *Miss* Lee, it's *Mrs.* Lee," she said with annoyance, then announced, "Now, I read a story." She searched through her public library book bag for a story to read, and removed two books. "Today, I'll read this one. Tomorrow, I'll read this one," she said.

"Teacher, I want to read the Ginger Man book," her mother called from the kitchen. Leticia looked through the bag for the book. When she found it, Linda said, "Yeah, yeah, that one," and commented to me, "She can read it."

"This is Mrs. Lee's new book," Leticia began, holding the book in front of me so that I could see it from where I was sitting on the floor. She looked over at her mother and baby brother and tried to get the baby's attention, calling "Yee-Yee! Yee-Yee!"

"Yee-Yee, listen to the teacher," Linda told the baby.

Leticia held the book up so that we could all see the pictures and began to tell the story. "The Gingerbread Man. A little old man and a little old woman had a son. Then some children come to their...What's this?" She pointed to the next word in the sentence.

"House," I told her.

"House," she continued. "The little old woman said (she pointed to the word said) "I'm going to make you something to eat." Leticia was struggling to remember the exact words for the story and had a hard time continuing.

"The teacher is lazy," her mother commented from the kitchen when Leticia was unable to continue. "Can Leticia move closer? She cannot listen to you," she asked, seemingly hoping that if I sat closer Leticia would allow me to help her read the story.

"I don't want to read it. I don't remember," she said quietly, looking down at the floor.

"Oh, you're doing a good job! You're a good teacher," I said in an effort to encourage her to continue.

"I don't remember. I only know this letter," she told me, turning to the back of the book. Showing me the words *Then SNAP!* She read them with great expression, then closed the storybook. "Um, Mrs. Lee cannot read this now. Mrs. Lee forgot to read. Mrs. Lee don't remember."

"You just lazy. Miss Lee just lazy," Linda said laughing from the kitchen.

"Nooo," Leticia said sadly, avoiding her mother's gaze, and then snapped harshly, "It's not *Miss* Lee, it's *Mrs.* Lee!"

"You just lazy." Her mother's words hung in the air—

"Nooo!"

"She tried really hard last night, the teacher," Linda said with pride. "She sat there [at the kitchen table] and she read it by herself."

"Did she?" I remarked.

"She tried really hard!"

Commentary

The heart of this school narrative is Leticia's desire to be a teacher and the portrayal of one of her favourite kindergarten activities—story reading—as the main teaching event. In her role as the teacher, she knows just how to hold the book so that her students can see the pictures and the words. She knows how to vary her voice and tone to create

drama and interest in the story. What she does not know, however, is how to read the exact words in the story, and this problem, in relation to Leticia's mother's expectations, percolates below the surface of the narrative, eventually erupting into anger and disappointment between Leticia and her mother.

The episode begins with light-hearted humour as we choose names for the students we will play in Leticia's classroom. Linda chooses Pee-Pee for herself and Yee-Yee for her infant son. Although the rhyming names have a distinctly Chinese sound, Linda and Leticia laugh at the English interpretation of Pee-Pee. Wilson[8] cannot decide between the names Pokémon and Pikachu, which are characters from his favourite television program. He teases Leticia by writing the names on his hand, enjoying his status as the older brother and the fact that his younger sister cannot read yet. I choose to play Leticia, wondering how she will respond to me as the teacher. Leticia initially takes the name of the kindergarten aide in her classroom, but quickly changes her status by adopting her teacher's name with one modification—she insists on being called *Mrs.* Lee rather than *Miss* Lee. She emphasizes this distinction each time she is referred to as *Miss* in error, which, like many of her family narratives, reveals the importance she places on the status of marriage.

The morning routine of taking attendance follows with Leticia carefully using checkmarks and other notations to record who is present and who is absent from her classroom. During this routine, she insists on silence and co-operation from her students. When Yee-Yee, her baby brother, does not comply, she scolds, "Yee-Yee, you're supposed to listen!" in the authentic tone and language of a teacher. With similar authority, she directs "Leticia and Leticia" to take the attendance to the office. It is early

in December, and Leticia already knows the culture of her kindergarten classroom; she knows the procedures for talking like a teacher, taking attendance, scheduling time for a snack, assigning work, and reading a story. In this narrative, though, story reading becomes the primary focus, and although Leticia has chosen her own book, she is uncharacteristically open to her mother's suggestion that she read the "Ginger Man book." Linda listens intently from the kitchen and encourages Richmond to "listen to the teacher."

Leticia begins her story reading by building a sense of excitement about the book. "This is Mrs. Lee's new book!" she tells her students with enthusiasm. She positions the book so that the pictures and text are visible from her students' perspective, and turns to the first page of the story. Knowing implicitly her mother's expectation that she try to read exactly what is written on the page, she struggles to identify each of the words. In her attempt to both retell the story in her own words and read the exact words on the page, the two methods conflict and attempts at word reading prevail. When Leticia is no longer able to continue reading the story, Linda becomes frustrated, asserting, "The teacher is lazy" because she believes her daughter has the ability, but is not putting in the effort to read. As a strategy, she suggests I move closer to assist her daughter with reading, but Leticia has already given up, seemingly powerless to change the situation. She is honest with her "students," though, and does not attempt to save face, confessing instead, "Mrs. Lee cannot read this now. Mrs. Lee forgot [how] to read. Mrs. Lee don't remember." Linda's repeated comment, "Miss Lee just lazy," causes Leticia to lash out at her mother with "It's not *Miss* Lee, it's *Mrs.* Lee!" in what is perhaps a vain attempt to exert her status and power as the teacher. Linda tries unsuccessfully to encourage her

daughter to continue by explaining to me that Leticia was able to read the book last night. Leticia predictably refuses, and our play episode ends in disappointment and frustration.

NARRATIVE 8
February 12, 1999 Session 14

Background

When I arrived at the house today, Leticia was very anxious for us to play. She didn't want her mother and I to talk for too long and consistently interrupted us. Although her original idea was to play house when we went downstairs, our play quickly evolved into playing school instead. At kindergarten today, Leticia's class was involved in a special school wide cross-age matching activity. This event becomes the subject of her play activity.

Taking Attendance and Other Rules of Kindergarten

"Pretend we already married, okay?" Leticia began the play episode by transporting us back to previous episodes of playing "mommy."

"Okay, we're already married."

"You be the daddy," she requested.

"Okay, what do you want me to do?"

"We already got a baby."

"Where's the baby?" She found the tissue box that we used last week and I cradled it in my arms like a baby.

"What am I going to do today? Do I stay home with the baby?"

"I'm going to work. I work, I teach kids. I'm a teacher."

"What grade do you teach?"

"Grade three."

"Can I come to the class to help?"

"No. Good-bye," she said, casting a cursory glance at me as she pretended to leave the house. She turned suddenly on her heel and revised the role that she wanted me to play. "You teach in kindergarten. You be Miss Lee, 'kay?"

"*I'm* the teacher now? Then who are you?"

"*I* am Miss Lee."

"And who am I?"

"No," she said with a sudden change of mind, "I am Miss Lawson."

"What do you teach?"

"I don't know." She shrugged and then changed her mind again. "*You* are Miss Lee, you teach kindergarten." She asked for my car keys and used them to lock and unlock her house, car, and classroom. She decided that the far end of the family room was going to be the classroom because she wanted to use the whiteboard that her father had mounted on the wall.

After the initial confusion, Leticia decided that she wanted to be Miss Lee and that I was to play Mrs. Hai. She wiped off the picture on the board and then turned to me.

"You need to make a newsletter."

"Oh, I need to make the newsletter, okay."

"I'm going to do morning message," she announced before writing "Goob ne A W" on the board. She read the message back to her students, "Good morning (Goob), Miss Lee (ne), and Mrs. Hai (A W)," and then told me that I needed to go to the office to get "something." I asked her if I should finish writing the newsletter when I come back, to which she responded yes. I handed her the newsletter before I left because I wanted to make sure that I was doing it right. I pretended to write Chinese characters the way that I have seen Mrs. Hai write them.

She looked at my newsletter with disappointment. "No, you need to make the newsletter."

"In English or Chinese?"

"English!" she said somewhat exasperated.

"But Mrs. Hai always writes it in Chinese," I explained, thinking that she would want me to do things exactly as they are done in her classroom.

"You don't know how!" she reminded me sharply. "You have to finish. Today, you have lots and lots of time."

"I have lots of time today? Why do I have more time today?"

"'Cause tomorrow we don't have any time to teach other kids. Because tomorrow we have fun."

"What are we going to do?"

"Make crafts and painting. The kindergarten will go with their buddy and they'll go to make craft or painting..."

"Oh, fun. Okay."

"...and we can have some soup."

"Should I put that in the newsletter."

"Yep, and tomorrow will be really, really long centre."

"Oh."

"And they can play in the house after they make craft."

"Where are they going to go to make their craft?"

"And we are going to watch dragon dancing, okay. And we're going to eat lunch and have fun, and we come home at three. We got a looong day tomorrow. So we don't need to do work."

"Okay."

"All the kids are going to come to our class with their buddy and then we're going to make crafts and eat lunch and watch movies and have a story."

"But we're going to do centres first. We don't need to work," she emphasized again.

"Okay, we'll do centres first."

"Yep. Today we are having a new centre. A pay centre. You buy something and then you need to pay. I need to make a phone call, you teach the kids." She went into the computer room and picked up the disconnected phone that was on the floor under the desk. "Hello," she said into the telephone, "we're getting ready. I need to check which children are going to which classroom. Okay? We're almost ready." She came back to the table in the "classroom" where I was sitting. "The grade one is after so we should be getting ready now. I need a pencil and a paper so that I can take attendance. Today is Linda and..." She pretended to read a list of names on her blank piece of paper. "We need to write the names here [she pointed to the right side of the page]. Okay, write Edward," she instructed me. I started writing his name, but she quickly stopped me. "Not here! Here." She was very particular about wanting the names written on the very far right side of the page.

"Where do you want me to write?" I asked again.

Her tone was directive. "Down at the bottom where the line is." She pointed to the first line on the right side of the page below the wide top margin.

"What do you want me to write?"

"Edward!" she said impatiently.

She continued to name her classmates one-by-one, as I wrote their names down. After listing several students whose names began with the letter *J*, she commented, "There's lots of people's names start with J in our class!"

"I don't know anymore," she said when she couldn't think of anyone else in her class.

"You know what I have, what Miss Lee gave me?" I took out the class seating-chart that Miss Lee had given to me when she changed the name tags from English to Chinese. We checked one list against the other trying to figure out whose names we had missed. Leticia read the names from the chart and I checked for them on the attendance sheet that

we were making. When I put actual check marks beside the names, Leticia became annoyed. "You're all wrong. Today is not their turn and then we don't write a check mark."

"Don't put a check mark beside their names?"

"If today is their turn to take attendance to the office, then you check it."

"So should I cross off the check marks?"

"Yes!"

I began scribbling over all of the check marks, but she stopped me before I had crossed off all of them. "Wait, stop, stop! Today is Linda and Zhou," she said, wanting me to leave the check marks beside their names.

"Did you take attendance today?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Is everyone here?"

"Iris is away. Tomorrow will be Denise and Gary. If people is not here then they need to take it, then if people here—all the people here—then they don't need to take it."

"If all the people are here, then they don't need to take the attendance to the office?"

"Yeah."

"Okay. Should I bring the attendance sheet?"

"Miss Lee take it, not Mrs. Hai!" she scolded.

"Oh. Should I leave it here for Miss Lee then?"

"Yeah, Miss Lee only need to come [to the office]."

"So is Mrs. Hai in the classroom already?"

"No, Mrs. Hai doesn't go in first," she corrected me. "We quickly got to take attendance."

She looked down her list of names, making a steady tapping sound with her pen on the tabletop as she check-marked the names.

"Okay, all these kids are here." She read each name on the list and said, "You say *I am here*. She continued to call the names and then stopped. "Iris is not here." She continued to take attendance and occasionally commented "Good," just as Miss Lee does, when I responded, "I am here" for each of the students.

"Today, it's Denise and Gary."

"Denise and Gary now take the attendance down to the office?"

"Yep. Pretend you are taking Denise and Gary. Oh, okay, um, now we need to go to...we need to go earlier."

"Go where earlier?"

"Remember what I told you?"

"Oh, to make the crafts and stuff?"

"Yeah."

"Oh."

"I need to take the attendance back from the office, 'kay?"

"You're going to get it?"

"Yeah. 'Cause I need to check the names that go to the rooms." She went back into the computer room to retrieve the attendance sheet then returned to the computer room to make a telephone call. "Okay..." she said into the receiver.

"Who was on the phone?"

"Um, Mrs. Bertrand [her school principal]."

"What did she want?"

"She said we need to start now 'cause all the kids already went. The kindergarten is all so slow. Um, William and Leticia need to go to the English kindergarten. All of them, the classmates, need to line up first then go. Okay, wait." She continued to look down her list of names. "We need to go to other class."

"We need to go to the English kindergarten?"

"Mrs. Hai can you take them down."

"To the English kindergarten?"

"Yeah, and come back and take the other kids."

"Leticia and Wilson, come on," I said, pretending to escort the two children to the English kindergarten (which had been designated as the bathroom). "Okay, who's next?" I asked upon returning to where Leticia was standing.

"Okay, Stephen and Lana go to grade six. Jason and Linda go to the grade four. Felix goes, too. And Keena and Ryan need to go, too."

"Where do they go?"

"They need to go to our classroom and get ready. And then they will be able to paint whatever they need, or crafts, or anything else. And all the kids will be going in there and people could go to the other class. Can you take them, Mrs. Hai?"

"Okay." I left and returned for more instructions.

"Mrs. Hai, Zhou needs to go to the grade two."

"To the grade two, okay. There he goes."

"Okay, Leticia and Wilson is done so they could just go to the...William go and help his sister. And Leticia go with Wilson Tsiu. We need to sign their name out so that they can play with their brother. Then when they're done, they can go play. Leticia can go with her brother, then if Leticia don't know what to do then her brother will show her."

"Okay."

"Tomorrow afternoon, after school, after kindergarten, Leticia will go to her brother's room. 'Cause Mrs. Hai said she needs to be there in the afternoon. She needs to stay until two o'clock."

"For the craft or for Chinese New Year."

"No, anyone who has any brother and sister in their class. Only those kids can go with Leticia."

"Oh, only if you have a brother or a sister?"

"Yeah. It's almost time to go home."

"What about centres? What about the new centre?"

"That's after. We need to go home now. Um, Leticia could go first, after Wilson. Leanne goes to her sister's class. Jason needs to go home 'cause he doesn't got any brother or sister."

She continued to name each child in her class who has an older brother or sister in the school. These children were to stay at school for the afternoon. She also named the children who didn't have brothers and sisters at school, and indicated that they "need to go" home.

"So the kids who are staying in their brother's or sister's class, what are they going to do there?"

"Oh, all kinds of stuff. They're going to do all kinds of work. And if the kindergarten don't know, their brother or sister will teach them. And Miss Lee will be there and Mrs. Hai. Come on, let's go!"

Commentary

Similar to the first school narrative, this story highlights the rules and routines of classrooms. The school context that Leticia creates is an extension of her home context where she lives with her husband and baby. Of all the school narratives, this one appears to provide the clearest window onto how Leticia views her future roles as wife, mother, and teacher. Although she plays a somewhat less traditional woman in this school narrative than she does in her family narratives, the establishment of her role as wife and mother at the beginning of the story appears to be an important facet of defining her character. Similar to her family narratives, I am initially cast in the role of husband. When Leticia realizes that my role does not fit within her idea of a school context, she

quickly reassigns me to play a fellow teacher and, as a result, we move completely into the school environment with no further reference made to the home context.

In an attempt to integrate me into her play context, Leticia casts me in the role of Miss Lee, the kindergarten teacher, and interestingly, she initially takes the role of one of the grade three English teachers in her school. Prior to this play episode, I never had occasion to hear Leticia mention Miss Lawson, but it is possible that during the cross-age activities in her school that day, this teacher's role and authority particularly influenced her.[9] She quickly changes her mind, though, and decides she wants to play Miss Lee, perhaps because she is more familiar with her own teacher's role and wants me to play Mrs. Hai. Assigning me the subordinate role of teacher's aide, rather than allowing me to play Miss Lee, establishes a clear relationship of power whereby Leticia has authority over me. Negotiating prior to play who will be included in the story and who will take which role is comparable to the pre-writing process that young children engage in as they embark on writing a new story.

My role as Mrs. Hai is clearly a subordinate one, with Leticia directing my every action, commanding that I "go to the office to get something" and "make the newsletter." She reinforces the power relationship between the teacher and the teacher's aide on two occasions, the first when she reminds me that "Miss Lee take [the attendance sheet], not Mrs. Hai," and the second when she admonishes me with "No, Mrs. Hai doesn't go in [to the classroom] first." Leticia also has very distinct ideas about how Mrs. Hai should produce the newsletter. It is interesting that although the kindergarten newsletter is routinely written in Chinese, when I pretend to write in Chinese, this is entirely unacceptable to Leticia and she makes a strong demarcation between what I am allowed

to do in pretend and what I am able to do in reality. A similar distinction was also made when she explains in the study's opening vignette "you don't know how to hear this book." At the age of five, she already has a keen awareness of my linguistic and literacy skills, only permitting me on a few occasions to pretend to read Chinese books in English or copy Chinese characters under her supervision. Rowe and Harste argue that young readers and writers frequently demonstrate metalinguistic awareness, including not only knowledge about the structures of language, but also "beliefs about oneself and others as language users, knowledge about orchestrating this complex of concepts and strategies in the face of particular literacy events" (1986, p. 236).

In this narrative, Leticia also demonstrates an increased awareness of school routines and school culture when she adds new components to the routine she established in the first narrative in this chapter. The additions include writing the morning message and making the class newsletter. The spontaneity with which Leticia writes the morning message was somewhat surprising to me. Outside of the context of play, she would generally refuse to read or write anything unless she was confident that she could do it with accuracy and fluency. In this scenario, she writes the message using her own invented spellings, as a natural part of her teacher role. She reads the message to her students, pointing to each "word" as she has represented it with individual letters and combinations of letters. This example represents one of the first occasions I had to observe Leticia engaging in reading and writing without the support of copying text from a printed source or oral dictation.

Following the routine procedures of taking attendance, Leticia sets the scene for the remainder of the plot, which focusses on preparing to have fun. Ironically, it is the

preparation for fun—the literacy-related rules and routines of organizing school activities—that becomes the dominant focus of the remainder of the narrative. Although she lists a number of "fun" activities such as "making crafts and painting," "have some soup," "really, really long centre," "watch dragon dancing," and emphasizes that "we don't need to do work," none of the activities actually takes place in the play episode. Instead, the day is consumed with tasks like taking attendance and "checking the names that go to the rooms." She executes these tasks with painstaking detail, systematically checking off the names of the students in her class, never confusing where they are to go and with whom.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this narrative is Leticia's idea of pairing younger and older siblings so that "if the kindergarten don't know what to do, their brother or sister will teach them." The idea, which was not a part of the school activity that had taken place earlier in the day, may in some way represent a kind of wish fulfilment; Leticia's deeply held desire to have the security of her brother's presence and assistance with tasks that she lacks the confidence to complete on her own. Her idea for the new centre, the "pay centre," is also intriguing, particularly because the pay centre is an adaptation of shopping scenarios that transpired during episodes of playing house. Both the idea of pairing children with older siblings and having a pay centre, complete with cash register and money, are meaningful examples of the how children's play can inform school curriculum. As Harste, Woodward, and Burke emphasize, "experience reveals that when research and curriculum development are conducted in functional language situations [such as play], the use of the child as informant can become a self-correcting strategy for the profession (1984, p. 51).

NARRATIVE 9
March 22, 1999 Session 17

Background

Leticia and I retreated into the basement to play so that we wouldn't wake Richmond during his afternoon nap. As we descended the stairs, Leticia lifted her arms in the air, indicating, as a small child might, that she wanted to be picked up and carried. This gesture was a clear signal that she wanted to "play mommy." I lifted her into my arms, carried her downstairs, and sat her at the table. The family room, which was usually very neat and tidy, was somewhat dishevelled today; the tabletop had loose-leaf pages and markers strewn across it. Suddenly Leticia changed her mind about what she wanted to play. "I'm Miss Lee, you are Mrs. Hai," she announced as she got up from her chair and stood by the small whiteboard mounted on the wall.

The Sea Animal Big Book

"I'm going to make the morning message, you do the newsletter," she directed, picking up the four dry erase markers that she had connected end to end exactly the way Miss Lee did in the kindergarten. She removed the cap from the black marker and tried to write on the whiteboard, but had some difficulties because the marker had dried up. She tried one marker after the other in an attempt to write the morning message, but abandoned them and chose instead to stack the loose-leaf sheets into neat piles on the table. Picking up one of the stacks, she asked, "Can you help me staple this?"

"Do you want to staple it like a book with three or one here [in the top left corner]?"

"Um, one...Okay, these are their work and they can do anything they want," she said, referring to the children in her classroom. I collected my field notebook from my backpack and as I was opening it, a small paper book about sea animals fell out. The book consisted

of several photocopied pages stapled together. Miss Lee had given it to me for my files the last time I visited the school.

Leticia immediately recognized the book as one from school and gasped, "You took that home?"

"Miss Lee gave it to me," I explained.

"Okay," she replied cheerfully, taking the book from my hand. "I'm going to copy this, okay? I'm going to copy this. Make a big book."

"Oh, you want to make a big book."

She added more sheets of paper to the booklet that she made previously and brought it to me to staple, this time along the side "like a book." She was very insistent that I not put any staples through the holes of the loose-leaf sheets.

"Now I'm going to make a book," she said excitedly. "I'm going to copy it" (see Appendix D). She then looked carefully at the detailed pictures and the Chinese print and asked, "Can *you* copy this for me? Can you? Can you copy this for me?"

"Do you want to do some of it and I'll do some of it?" I suggested. [10]

"No. You draw right there," she said, referring to the middle of the first blank page in her book, "and I will draw right there." She pointed to the top of the same page.

"So do you want me to write the title?" [11]

"No, I want to write it."

"Okay, that's what I thought."

She took my black marker and started copying the English title of the book.

"*S*," she said, and continued with the name of each letter as she wrote it on the page after directing, "You spell the word."

"E–a– and then a space and a big A–n–i–m–a–l–s. There you go."

"Sea Animals," she read as she ran her finger under the title.

I pointed to the English word below the title and asked, "Do you know what this word says?"

"No," she said somewhat sheepishly.

"That says name."

"Oh yeah," she responded with relief. "Put the name," she said to herself. "Name." She repeated as she printed the word.

"Did you read this book to your mom last week?" I asked, remembering Miss Lee's instructions to the kindergarten students.

"I didn't take that book home yet."

"No? But I thought that you were supposed to read it when your mom came to school [for parent teacher interviews]."

"Yeah, I didn't do that."

"You could take this one and read it to her today," I offered.

"I need to write the Chinese," she said to skirt my suggestion and then carefully copied the Chinese characters in the title.

"You're a very good printer," I commented as I watched her print the first character.

"I need my sunglasses," she said suddenly.

"Are they where your mommy is in the kitchen?"

"No, on my room."

"In your room?"

"Can you go get it? It's too little."

"So, do you mean that you need your sunglasses to see the Chinese writing?"

"Go get it. Go go go go go go go..." She hurried me out of the room.

"It's on your desk?" I asked from the stairs.

"Yep."

I went upstairs and brought back her sunglasses, which she promptly put on. After copying the last of the four characters she said, "Read this!—*Hai.*"

"*Hai,*" I repeated after her.

"*Yang.*"

"*Yang.*"

"*Dong.*"

"*Dong.*"

"*Wu.*"

"*Wu. Hai yang dong wu.*"

"*Wu,*" she repeated, correcting my pronunciation.

"What do you want me to do now?"

"Do all the pictures. There's the picture right here (on the cover)."

"Do you want me to trace it?"

"Yeah, I'm going to teach the kids, okay?" She rearranged the chairs around the table so that she could try again to write on the whiteboard with the dried out markers. "Miss Lee has new markers. Mommy said she's going to buy me new markers." I suggested that we tape a piece of paper to the whiteboard so that she could use her other markers to "teach the kids."

As I was taping the paper to the whiteboard, she suddenly noticed that I had been tracing the picture from the cover of the book.

"You know what my dad said, you shouldn't trace."

"You shouldn't trace, right."

"*You* too!" she said somewhat indignantly.

"I know, me too."

"You have to use your imagination. You *don't* copy."

"What if I leave what I've done and I draw a real picture?"

She looked again at what I had traced. "No, trace it."

"No, I'm going to draw it for real," I replied.

"No, put it in [the book under the loose-leaf page] and just trace it."

"I thought daddy said that wasn't a good thing to do."

"Just you can trace. Not us," she said, attempting to persuade me.

"I shouldn't trace either."

"*You* can trace. Only big people."

"I know how to draw, too. Can I show you?" I tried to convince her of my drawing merits.

"No, just put it back."

"Watch, I can look at it and draw."

"No, I don't want you to..." I carefully drew part of the picture and Leticia seemed suddenly reassured that the drawing would not be spoiled. She watched me drawing as though mesmerized. "Are you concentrating?" she asked. I nodded and showed her the picture, and asked her what I should draw next.

Pointing to one of the small fish in the centre of the picture she said, "That one."

I drew the fish as she watched intently. "Draw that starfish," she directed, comparing the original with my drawing to determine whether I was missing any of the little details.

"The hardest part about doing this is the Chinese writing," I commented. "Do you think that writing in Chinese is hard?"

"Hmm?"

"I do. It's hard for me. Is it very hard for you?"

"No."

"Do you think that you're a good artist?"

"I don't know. Sometimes."

"Is it better that I'm not tracing the picture?"

She nodded her approval and commented on my drawing, "That's a poison fish."

"It's a jellyfish...Do you think that I'm doing a good job, though?"

"Yeah." Together we finished drawing the picture. Leticia consistently chose to draw aspects of the picture that were simple and easy to copy. The more complicated figures were either left for me to complete or for us to negotiate about who would draw what.

"I don't want to draw that," she said, pointing to a sea plant.

"You want me to draw that? Do you want to do the lines on it?"

"No...yeah, I want to," she said, taking a second look at the drawing.

"You do?" Somewhat surprised, and I watched her interest as she drew the lines. "That looks perfect," I told her. We continued to fill in the details of the picture and then moved on to the next page.

"You do that," Leticia said, pointing to the Chinese characters. "I'll do that." She was referring to the English sentence *This is a blue whale.*

"Okay, you want me to write the Chinese and you'll do the English. Do you want to write the English first?"

"Yep."

"Okay." She carefully printed: *This is a blue whale*, omitting the word "is." She then read the sentence above it in Chinese: *Zhè shì yi tou lan jing.* She used her best "teacherese" and waited for me to echo what she had read. I followed her lead and repeated what she had read.

"What's that?" she asked, referring to the circle at the end of the Chinese sentence.

"That's a period."

"It's like this?" she asked, pointing to the English period.

"Yeah, but it looks different in Chinese." I begin writing the Chinese sentence. "Miss Lee can write so fast. Even Mrs. Hai. I'm so slow," I complained.

"Do you wish you were Superman?" she asked in a serious tone.

"Do I wish I were Superman?"

"Yeah, you're a hero."

"A hero?"

"Yeah."

"I wish I could talk Chinese."

"*I* can talk Chinese," she emphasized.

"Now we have to draw [the blue whale]? Which parts on this picture do you want to draw?"

"The killer whale and the dolphin and the fish," she said, flipping through the book and pointing out all of the remaining pictures she wanted to draw. "You draw the crab, I'll draw the shark." She outlined who would draw each of the pictures and consistently assigned the more complex and difficult drawings to me.

"I want to do that [the English sentence]," she continued and began neatly copying the words from the book.

"You're good at that. Now I'll do this one (the Chinese text)? Does this say people?" I asked, referring to one of the characters in the Chinese sentence.

"Umhm," she confirmed.

"I wonder why it says... What does it say? The whole thing?"

Zhè shì yi tou shi ren jing, she read.

"I wonder why it has people [i.e., *ren*] there?" I carefully printed the Chinese characters while Leticia watched. "Do you want to do the period at the end?"

"Yeah..." As she printed, she said the sea animal names in Chinese, *lan jing, ren jing.*

"*Jing* means whale?"

"Yep, it's whale. This is a killer whale," she said, reading the English sentence.

I try to translate the Chinese sentence into English. "In Mandarin, *yi* is the word for both 'one' and 'a'? This is *one* killer whale?" I asked as I read the Chinese characters in English.

"Yeah. This is one," she confirmed.

"Are these two [characters] blue?"

"That's blue," she pointed to one of the characters. "See, *lan*, that's blue."

"Oh, *lan* is blue." I finished writing the sentence in Chinese.

Linda and Richmond joined us downstairs to see what we were doing.

"Who drew this?" Linda asked, looking at the cover of the book.

"We did it together," I explained. "Leticia drew this [the killer whale] and I drew this [the blue whale]."

"She copied? She put it on top?"

"No, she drew it herself. This one [the cover], she drew all of the smaller detail stuff."

"That is nice!" Linda responded with uncharacteristic enthusiasm.

"I'm going to take it school tomorrow and show Miss Lee," Leticia told her mother.

"Do you want to read it to Mommy?" I asked, expecting her usual "No." Instead, she began to read the first two sentences to her mother.

"Oh, really good," praised her mother. Leticia continued to draw the picture of the dolphin as her mother observed.

"You just look at the picture and draw it?" Linda asked.

"Yeah."

"Yeah," Linda commented to me, "I think that she is better at this than Wilson."

As we moved to the next page and I began to write the Chinese characters, Leticia told me, "Do it quickly. You need to learn to write fast 'cause you're slow."

"I know. How could I get faster?" She looked at me, but didn't respond.

"Look! We got no more pages!" she gasped when she realized that we were only part way through copying the book and had only two pages left.

"We can add more on. How many do we need?" I asked.

"Okay, count how many pages I need."

"Um, five," I answered. She counted out five loose-leaf sheets and we stapled them to the back of our book. We continued to work on the book for another twenty minutes until Linda called us for supper.

Commentary

This narrative begins with the assignment of the same character roles and responsibilities as Narrative 8 (Taking Attendance and Other Rules of Kindergarten). Literacy tools emerge as an important component of Miss Lee's role. The four dry erase markers are particularly important to the task of writing the morning message. The statements "Miss Lee has new markers. Mommy's going to buy me new markers," highlight Leticia's strong identification of the markers with Miss Lee's role as a teacher. The dry erase markers, like chalk, represent to her the role and authority of a teacher. The whiteboard, papers, staplers, and "work" for students are also literacy tools associated with Miss Lee's position within the school context. When Leticia sees the Sea Animal book fall out of my notebook, she gasps, "You took that home?" expressing the distinction she makes between literacy items that belong at school and literacy items that belong at home. The realization that I have Miss Lee's authorization, though, appears to ease her concern, and our play activity becomes focused on producing a "big book" to match the smaller one.

Leticia is very excited about constructing the big book until she begins to examine the Chinese and English text and the pictures in the book. Her request, "Can you copy

this for me," appears to result from her conclusion that copying the text and the pictures on her own will be too difficult. As I scaffold her venture, though, she gradually immerses herself in copying selected portions of the text and pictures. She first initiates writing the title of the book in English, obviously feeling confident enough with the print. As we move from the title to the word "name" on the cover of the book, though, she becomes somewhat reluctant when she was unable to read the word. Upon recognizing what "name" means, she is able to continue with an increased level of confidence. In fact, this book making activity marks one of the first instances where I observe Leticia choosing to write Chinese characters. She is quite secretive about her printing, though, and requests that I go to get her sunglasses upstairs while she works on the book. At the time I suspected that getting me out of the room allowed her time to copy the characters without the watchful eye of an adult.

When I return with her sunglasses, she excitedly launches into teaching me how to read the sentence she has written in Chinese. This is the first full Chinese sentence that I have observed her print, including time spent with her in the classroom where she rarely uses Chinese printing in her assignments.[12] She is confident and does not hesitate as she points to each of the characters, telling me what they say and waiting patiently for me to repeat after her. In her role as teacher, she listens carefully to my pronunciation and corrects my errors with subtle accuracy. At school, Leticia does not use Mandarin as frequently as many of the other students, relying instead on her knowledge of English, so I was therefore surprised by the confidence with which she approached teaching me how to read in Mandarin. As the teacher, Leticia appeared far more willing to risk making mistakes, perhaps because she knew that no one was going to correct or reproach her. As

we proceed through the book, she is, in fact, so confident with her ability that she complies with my suggestion made for the second time to read some of the book to her mother. Linda too is quite amazed at both her daughter's reading and drawing. She responds with uncharacteristic enthusiasm to Leticia's reading, stating, "I think she is better at [drawing] than Wilson." Leticia is obviously very proud of the book we have made and as usual, she wants to take it to school to "show Miss Lee." Connecting her world at home with her world at school is of obvious importance to her.

In making the book, Leticia directs me to print the Chinese characters from the book. I approach the task as an artist rather than a writer, and copy the characters without completely understanding how to produce each of the individual strokes. I am slow and methodical, and when I express my lack of confidence, she responds with, "Do you wish you were superman?" Her comment is an interesting one, and it is obvious that she associates speed with superman and his powers. I wonder, though, if she also sometimes secretly wishes for superhuman powers to help her meet the demands and expectations of her parents and teacher. At school, Leticia is as reluctant to use Chinese print as she is at home. Activities, for example, that involve using both English and Chinese texts are often completed with only the English text. Her Chinese printing scribbler at school contains characters that are written quickly, but not carefully and Leticia is sometimes asked to rewrite what she has written. She casts me in her own position as a struggling student when she reprimands me as I print the Chinese characters, saying, "Do it quickly. You need to learn to write fast 'cause you're so slow." Her statement "*I* can talk Chinese" in this play episode and her statements "We Chinese people" and "We Chiu Dana people" in other episodes, reveal a possible tension between her strong

identification with her Chinese culture and the difficulties she experienced with Chinese literacy.

Copying the pictures for the book also meets with some reluctance from Leticia and she initially assigns Mrs. Hai the responsibility. Her reaction to me tracing the pictures in the book reveals the expectation of her parents, particularly her father, that she use her imagination instead of tracing. Although learning to draw is emphasized more for Wilson than for Leticia, it is important to both Howard and Linda that their children use all of their abilities to excel in school. Similar to her response to printing the Chinese characters, Leticia appears to question her drawing ability and is reluctant to engage in a task at which she thinks she might fail. As we work through drawing the picture, first by tracing and then free hand, her confidence increases and she becomes more willing to explore her own drawing capabilities. The context of play provides a safe environment in which Leticia is willing to risk not meeting parental or teacher expectations. Her position of control and power as the teacher in particular may give her the confidence to undertake literacy activities that she will not do under normal circumstances in the role of a subordinate student in a classroom or a subordinate daughter at a kitchen table.

NARRATIVE 10
April 12, 1999 Home Visit 18

Part 1: Background

Leticia spent the first part of the afternoon trying to teach me how to play "Pokémons." At several points, she became very frustrated with me because, as I tried to explain, "I don't know how the show works, so I don't know how to do the story." After several attempts to teach me the storyline, and much frustration on both of our parts, Leticia gave

up and decided that she wanted to play school instead. Our play episode took place upstairs, in the main living room.

Part 1: Let's Play Teacher

"Let's play teacher," Leticia suggested.

"Okay."

"I name you Cassie."

"Okay, I'm Cassie," I replied.

"No, Joelle," she suddenly changed her mind.

"Joelle," I repeated.

"Okay, put the books away... We're going to read a story and then—I'm Miss Lee, okay—we're going to read a story before we have centres."

"Do we have any work?" I asked.

"No. We don't have any work," she said in her teacher voice then whispered, "Pretend you're talking to your friend while I read the story." Taking her two home reading books out of a plastic bag, she set the Chinese book to one side and held up the English book so that I could see the cover.

"I'm just going to read the English book, not the Chinese one," she explained. "Okay, the story is by McArr," she said in a sweet, sing-song voice. "I'm going to read the story and you have to be quiet, Joelle."

Pretending to talk to the person beside me, I said, "That looks like a good story. I wonder what it's about."

"No, not like that. You have to whisper," Leticia redirected with gestures. She continued to pretend to read the story while I whispered to the person beside me.

In a loud, stern teacher voice she demanded, "Joelle! Will you stop talking? One more time and it will be time out."

I shuddered and pouted as though I was about to start crying at any moment. Leticia took great delight in my reaction and occasionally laughed out loud.

"Okay, I'm going to start again," she told me, "and you talk for a long, long time." She began to read the book again as I whispered to the person beside me.

"Joelle!" she snapped in her sternest "teacher" voice. "Time out!" She could not refrain from giggling as she said this. "You cry," she directed me.

I began sobbing out loud, "I'm sorry, Miss Lee. I won't talk anymore. Please don't put me in time out."

In her meanest voice she shouted, "No! You're time out! Go!" She pointed to the bedroom door.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry," I pleaded.

"Say you want your mommy," she suggested.

"I want my mommy," I cried.

"No! No more school for you. Go out." She pushed me out her bedroom door into the hallway.

"Please let me stay in?"

"No, you go out in the hallway. Go! Go out! You stay out there for ten minutes. I'm going to tie you up." She pretended to tie my hands above my head and forced me to stand against the wall.

"You're a very mean teacher," I said, to which she responded with laughter. I sat down in the hallway and waited for her to decide that my time out was over.

"What are you doing?" she snapped when she noticed that I was sitting down. "No sitting down." She began hitting me very meanly and physically. The situation seemed to be getting out of control, so I suggested that we play something else.

Part 2: Background

Following the incident with the mean teacher, Leticia and I took a break from our activities, and I sat down with Linda at the kitchen table while she was preparing dinner. Leticia went into her bedroom and came back with a small tape recorder. While Linda and I were talking, she tried to get it to work. She initially wanted to take the batteries out of my machine so that she could use them in hers. I searched for extra batteries in my bag and put them into her tape recorder. She decided that she wanted to listen to music and began looking for a Chinese cassette tape. When she couldn't find the tape, she tried to reinitiate playing school.

Part 2: Let's Have School Time Now

"Let's have school time now," Leticia suggested. She took out one of her home reading books and said, "Okay, we're going to read a story."

"You're going to read that one to me?" I asked.

"Yeah," she responded, glancing furtively at her mother who was sitting in the hallway at the door to the basement. Linda nodded her encouragement.

Her voice rose and fell with the telling of her story:

Once upon a time a long time, a children were sleeping. She was sleeping in her own bed. And then she saw, she almost waked up. In the morning, she goes, "Mommy, mommy!" She had no things. She just don't know she had no things to wake her.

"I'm going to tickle you." She wanted to wake her up, but she can't. Just tickle her.

She said, "Achew!" And then, she just woke up. She walked quietly to the hallway and went to wake mommy and daddy up.

"Mommy, daddy, wake up! You are late for work. I have to go to school!"

The clothes she got off her bed she just slept on. The purple sheets were all over. And then it was full of water all over the place. And then she started to wanting to running. And then she went to mommy and daddy's room. She knocked at the door.

"Knock, knock." Even the clothes are full of water.

Even the carpet, the carpet are all wet.

"Oh my gosh," she said.

"I don't know if you can do that," she said. She went into mommy and daddy's bed. Mommy and daddy's bed are wet!

"What are we going to do? Everything is all wet."

Their baby's all wet. All of the things are wet. Even the kitchen are wet all over. Even the closet was wet. Even the foods are wet. All these things are on the floor. Before she put on her skates and skated, the hallway didn't have no water. Only if she goes in anywhere, if she goes inside or outside, before she goes skating she says skate.

There's a poor little bear. It's on the...[to me] What's that? I told her, "The fridge." *He walked out and eated all this food from the kitchen. He made a horrible messy thing. Even the milk are poured out. Even the egg are broken.*

Even the banana are broke. The polar bear eat everything.

"Mommy, you're not eating the carrot here." And there are some grapes on the floor. There are some cherry on the floor. And some bowls on the floor. It's broken.

"Oh my gosh, what are we going to do?" Even the cups are broken. Even the table.

"Help me! What am I going to do?"

And then, the polar bear just walked out the door.

"A polar bear walked in here!" He's still scared. She just walked over to her mommy.

"A polar bear, mommy."

Mr. Fufayo comes in, "What are you trying to do with my bear?"

"He made a mess in our house. And it's all so dirty."

"What's his name?" I asked.

"Mr. Fufayo."

"Mr. Fufayo?"

She continued: *Mommy and daddy waked up. "What's all the mess here?"*

And she made all these things for the bear, for the polar bear, and they all beed friends. The End.

"That was a very good story," I told her.

Linda applauded from the basement door. "You did a good job. Give her a hand, Richmond. Yea!"

Commentary

Both Part 1 and Part 2 of this narrative involve story reading in a classroom context. In Part 1, Leticia explores the status and power of a teacher, and the idea of what might happen to a student who does not meet the teacher's expectations for behaviour during story reading time. Her aggressive approach to disciplining her student, which appeared to result from our frustrating and confusing attempt at recreating a story from the Pokémon cartoon programme, becomes the predominant theme in the plot. Time out is something that Leticia has never experienced. In fact, when I asked her about having a "time out" at school, she looked at me in horror and shouted, "I never time out! Not ever. Not even once." The thought of having a time out is obviously unthinkable to Leticia; nevertheless, she has an interest in exploring the teacher's power role in this context. Although she is keenly aware of the authority teachers have over students in schools, she takes great delight in abusing her power in this play context. The situation, in fact, becomes so out of control that Leticia is actually hurting me in her attempts to make me

stand up and accept the punishment of time out. It would appear that the incident serves as an outlet for Leticia's frustrations, an outlet that would not have been acceptable in reality.

In the second part of the narrative, Leticia portrays the teacher's role of story reading from a different perspective, focussing more on the reading process, in general, and the storybook, in particular. Her pretend reading in this play context reveals her knowledge of storybook language and the oral reading process, something that is not as evident in the first example. As she "reads," she demonstrates her ability to "talk like a book," as she makes meaning from the story's pictures. Although in other school–related narratives, Leticia includes storybooks as play props, she only engages in pretend reading on two occasions, the first of which is described in "Miss Lee Just Lazy" (Narrative 7) in this chapter. It is interesting to compare the strategies she uses in these two examples. In the first example, when she attempts to read the "Gingerbread Man," she struggles to meet her mother's expectations that she identify each of the words in the text and confesses that she only knows one word, "SNAP!" She gives up in frustration and does not attempt to read any of the other words or to retell the story from recall, her mother responds with disappointment, saying that Leticia is "just lazy."

In the second example presented in this narrative ("Let's Have School Time Now"), Linda, although sitting within hearing range of the story, is occupied with her infant son, and Leticia appears less apprehensive about exploring the content of her book and the role of a reader. She uses pictures to tell her story and unlike the first example, does not focus on identifying words in the text. Through her retelling of the story, she reveals her knowledge of story elements in a number of ways. She begins her story with the phrase

"Once upon a time," which is typical of the language of English fairy tales, and she continues to tell the story using the familiar sounding pattern and cadence of storybook language. The characters she introduces at the outset of the story are members of a family: a mother, a father, and a daughter. The characters encounter several problems early in the plot. The first problem, which stems from Leticia's own family experience, focuses on not having an alarm clock and being late for work and school. Because Leticia and Wilson stay up late, they often have trouble getting up in the morning and the possibility of being late for school is a reality they are confronted with on most mornings.

The second problem, "it was full of water all over the place," creates drama and suspense, drawing the listener into the storytelling. Characteristic of many children's books, Leticia develops the suspense in her story further by providing a detailed description of everything in the family's home that has got wet. The reader is left hanging, wondering how the mystery will be resolved. The separate elements of the plot are woven together with the presentation of a third problem, a poor little bear that "eated all this food from the kitchen" and "made a horrible messy thing." Leticia introduces the character Mr. Fufayo at this point. Mr. Fufayo, whose name is typical storybook style, enters the house and asks, "What are you trying to do with my bear?" The problem is resolved when the mother wakes up and "made all these things for the bear." It is interesting how the mother in this storybook plays a role similar to the mother in many of Leticia's narratives. Specifically, she solves the problem at hand by re-establishing the order of the household. This incident moves the story to its conclusion, which ends happily, as most fairy tales do, because "they all beed friends."

CONCLUSIONS

Solsken reminds us that "what children bring into the classroom is an orientation toward literacy constructed in their families, which includes a sense of themselves within a set of expectations about the social relations involved in reading and writing (1993, p. 10). Through her school-related play-literacy activities, Leticia reveals a sense of herself in relation to literacy, which incorporates her perceptions of school culture, her parents' expectations around literacy learning, and her position within her family and classroom. Her narratives also include playing at possibilities for the future, and negotiating roles and identities in which she acts upon her material and social world in an attempt to organize self in relation to the future (Willis, 1977).

In many of the roles and identities that Leticia constructs in this set of play narratives, she situates herself in a position of power and authority. Her relative status allows her to explore literacy in ways that she was unwilling to consider when portraying more subordinate roles. In her production of the big book about sea animals (Narrative 9), for example, she takes the position of teacher and assigns me the subordinate role of teacher's aide. As the teacher, she engages in printing and reading Chinese characters, whereas in her daily routine at home with her mother or at school with her teacher, she is far less willing to risk reading or writing something incorrectly. She also investigates the teacher's power to control students' behaviour when she severely reprimands a child for talking during story reading time. The context of play provides an opportunity for Leticia to experiment with power relationships in relation to literacy. Norton (2000) uses the word "power" to reference the socially constructed relations among individuals, institutions, and communities through which symbolic and material resources in a society

are produced, distributed, and validated. Leticia clearly understood that teachers represented symbolic resources such as language, education, and friendship (Norton, 2000) that placed them in a hierarchical relationship to their students. Moreover, she used the status of a teacher to control student behaviour and maintain order in her classroom. It is interesting that in Leticia's play world it is only teachers, not mothers and fathers, who punish children.

In the final narrative in this section, Leticia chooses to "read" a library book to her students. This event also demonstrates her willingness to participate in literacy activities within the context of play. Although Linda was in the room at the time that we were playing, her attention was devoted to her infant son. This perceived distance from her mother appeared to provide enough space for Leticia to embrace the task of reading a story. In contrast, in the first narrative in this section, Leticia appeared to be less carefree in the direct presence of her mother. As a result, she became frustrated reading the Gingerbread Man, perhaps because she could not meet her mother's expectation that she read with accuracy and fluency. In general, however, play appeared to provide a "safe" environment where Leticia on her own could explore different aspects of print and stories, in both English and Chinese.

Leticia's kindergarten routine is carefully and accurately reflected in each of the four school narratives that she constructs. Of particular note is her intimate acquaintance with many of the literacy tasks that help teachers organize and maintain order in their classrooms. She is, in fact, so consumed with the portrayal of school rules and routines that she dedicates much of her school-based play to tasks such as taking attendance, organizing students, and enforcing rules for behaviour during story reading. Her

understanding of storybook language and story structure, however, is also evident in her narratives. Overall, her conception of teachers and school practices appeared to be based on a variety of experiences including her kindergarten experience, her awareness of her brother's classroom routine, and the roles of other teachers in the school.[13]

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[1] The schedule of events during Leticia's Day at School is a composite sketch representing a typical school day. The composite is comprised of observations from several days; each piece of information included was chosen for the insights it offers into Leticia's school life.

[2] Leticia seems quite disinterested in colouring in general. Much of her schoolwork is completed in the same manner and both Linda and Miss Lee have mentioned that Leticia needs to take more care when printing and colouring.

[3] Of all of Leticia's extended family, only Ryan's family speaks Chao Chiu. Her other aunts, uncles, and cousins speak a variety of other languages in their homes including Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and English, depending on which language is shared by the parents.

[4] Zhou is autistic and seldom uses language. Leticia doesn't understand why Zhou behaves the way he does and she often laughs with her mom about the unusual things that he does.

[5] The house centre was consistently the most popular during the school year.

[6] Ash is the name of the boy on the Pokémon cartoon series, a favourite programme among children in this kindergarten.

[7] This is the name of a Pokémon character.

[8] Wilson's involvement in the narrative represents the first and only time that he participated in our play activities.

[9] When asked why she wanted to be Miss Lawson, Leticia relied, "I don't know."

[10] Throughout this narrative, Leticia and I move in and out of the roles of Miss Lee and Mrs. Hai, respectively.

[11] The title, like all of the text in the book, is written in both English and Chinese.

[12] For example, the kindergarten students are often encouraged to print Chinese characters on posters that they make in art and science. Leticia's posters typically only include English letters and words.

[13] "Time out," for example, was not used by her kindergarten teacher and was most likely something she had observed elsewhere in the school environment.

5

Play: A "Sideways" Glance At Literacy

A child moves out through concentric worlds even with her first steps, but whether these worlds are encountered as wholes or as fragments and whether they provide an entry into other spheres of imagination and experience depend on how they are presented, how attention is gradually shaped and how the cosmos gradually unfolded.

—Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

THE INTERPLAY OF STORY, SELF, AND PLAY

This study began with an exploration of the intersections of play, literacy, and culture. I considered in particular how a five-year-old Chinese girl's orientation toward literacy is embedded in story, self, and play. Glancing "sideways" at literacy through play reveals the hidden intricacies of Leticia's early literacy development. Play provides a window onto the personal stories that "express the knotted relevancies" (Bateson, 1979) of her life, her literacy "stance," storying as a cultural practice, and the process of "authoring play."

Play Narratives as Personal Storytelling

Personal storytelling is a strong suit for many young children (Eisenberg, 1985; Heath, 1983; Miller & Mehler, 1994) and several educators contend that it provides an instrument for bridging the transition between the home and school literacy environments (Bruner, 1984; Rosen, 1988). While there has been a considerable amount of research on children and narratives, studies that deal with children's *own* stories are very much in the minority (Nicolopoulou, Scales, and Weintraub, 1994). One notable exception is Miller

and Mehler's (1994) study of personal storytelling in families and kindergartens. The researchers found that young children use personal storytelling as a tool for expressing and making sense of who they are, and present important questions for further research. For instance: Is personal storytelling practised routinely in families from different backgrounds? How do children practise personal storytelling? What are the implications of these practices for self-construction in early childhood? For Leticia, play within her home context provides an occasion for storytelling and is a domain for cultural knowing and self-construction.

The play texts that Leticia constructs provide a window onto the space where play, literacy, and culture intersect. As an adult participant in her play world, I gained insights into how she practises personal storytelling and the implications of these practices for literacy learning and the construction of identity. Whether told on paper, playground, or at the kitchen table, children's stories help them cope with life and add to their personal store of knowledge (Whitehead, 1999). Leticia, like many young children, needs to "talk about and play at funerals and crashes, as well as superheroes, weddings and space monsters" (Whitehead, 1999, p. 31). She also needs to create narratives about her own identity, relationships, and feelings. Her play narratives expand immeasurably her world, and multiply the companions who travel through it, helping her deal with complex topics such as loneliness, wish fulfilment, desire, romance, motherhood, family relationships, and possibilities for the future. As Metzger explains:

> A story is like a lens or a frame: it gives focus, it unifies, it organizes diverse images into a coherent meaning. Without the frame or focus, the events would be random and disconnected. Story provides the relationship, the links, the

> connections. One of the reasons we tell stories is that the existence and the nature of relationships become clear in the process of telling. (1992, p. 59)

Play as a form of personal storytelling also provides an opportunity for Leticia to try on the language and experience of others, "to infuse [herself] into new ways with words" (Dyson & Genishi, 1994, p. 5). According to Bakhtin's perspective:

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with [her] own intentions, [her] own accent, when [she] appropriates the word, adapting it to [her] own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in neutral or impersonal language, but rather exists in other people's mouths, in other people's concrete contexts, serving other people's intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (1981, pp. 293-4)

Toohey (1996) explains the process of constructing a voice as wrestling language from "other people's mouths" and "other people's intentions." In play, Leticia tries on other people's utterances, taking words from other people's mouths and appropriating those utterances to gradually serve her own needs and relay her own meanings. She takes her mother's phrases while cuddling and caring for her babies in the family narratives in Chapter 3; she uses her teacher's tone and language while reading stories and reprimanding students in the school narratives in Chapter 4; and she literally lifts from the pages of storybooks the words and voices of characters, such as the king, in her rendition of *Sleeping Beauty* in the illustration in Chapter 2. In her play contexts, Leticia uses these voices to serve her own storytelling purposes.

The voices and story patterns that surround us can often have a seductive appeal because they connect with deeply held desires and fantasies to be loved, wanted, and cherished (Norton-Peirce, 1997; Walkerdine, 1990). Davies suggests:

> Because story provides substantial and detailed manifestation of the culture, it is through story that children can learn the patterns of desire appropriate to their gender. They discover what positions are available to members of their sex and how to live the detail of those positionings and they come to understand and take up as their own particular patterns of desire relevant to their gender. (1992, p. 1)

Using both a sociocultural and a poststructuralist perspective, Fernie, Davies, Kantor, and McMurray (1993) explored the complexities of how children appropriate new identities in the process of becoming gendered persons. They found that young children adopt fluid, multiple, and sometimes contradictory gender roles in play. The present study serves to complement classroom studies of self-construction by offering insights into how a young child appropriates identities as part of her home play activities. Leticia takes up the gendered positions of mother, daughter, or sister in the majority of her family play narratives. Such positionings allow her to maintain a traditional gender order that reflects her own family and cultural values. In her school narratives, she locates the teacher in a position of power and her depiction of the role influences how she executes tasks such as reading stories to the students in her classroom, writing morning messages, taking attendance, organizing students for instruction, and interacting with the classroom aide. Her portrayal of a kindergarten teacher was particularly interesting given that her own teacher operated more from a social constructivist perspective than an authoritarian one. It is possible that the teacher Leticia constructs in play represents

multiple "teacher" voices from her preschool experiences in the Headstart program, the afternoon Montessori kindergarten, and her older brother's school experiences.

Although myths and traditional tales have long been recognized as powerful socializing tools, the socializing potential of the less formal genre of personal storytelling has received far less attention (Miller & Mehler, 1994). The writers Eudora Welty and Norman MacLean attribute their sense of story to family experiences. Welty, for instance, attributes her sense of story to personal stories she overheard in family conversations (Metzger, 1992). Maclean explains that his autobiographical fiction originated in stories he told his children when they were young (Miller & Mehler, 1994). The Brontë sisters are an interesting comparison. Following the death of their mother and their isolation from their father, they created a world of their own which they explored in an endless series of "games" that in time became play, novels, chronicles, and poems (Bentley, 1969).

Leticia's sense of story finds its origins both in the socializing effects of family experiences and in her own series of games. She is a collector of stories remembered from events that she witnessed, both as a central participant and a bystander; conversations that she overheard, particularly conversations about childbirth; and stories of family history relayed by her older brother, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. By remembering, she uses play to fashion new stories out of the familiar refrains of the old. Her play narratives are therefore powerful tools for exploring identity, social history, and family practices. It is within this play space that she has the freedom to construct and explore her own understandings of the stories that comprise her life history.

"When children tell stories, they reveal something important about who they are and how they see the world" (Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994). As Steedman emphasizes, "Whatever and whenever children write [or play], and no matter what exotic metaphors they employ, they write out of their own social circumstances" (1982, p. 61). By exploring children's own stories, we may begin to understand their social circumstances and how they represent the world in order to understand it. In the words of Genishi and Dyson:

> Stories help us construct our *selves,* who used to be one way and are now another; stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the "real," the official with the unofficial, the personal with the professional, the canonical with the different or unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the future..." (1994, p. 242-3)

Most studies examining children's own stories have focused on collecting dictated stories composed in classroom contexts (e.g., Dyson, 1997; Gilbert, 1994; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994). Play narratives, especially those constructed in home environments, have largely been omitted from studies of personal storytelling, yet they have the potential to make an important contribution to our understanding of early literacy development.

Miller and Mehler underscore that "the stories people tell about remembered experiences from their own lives provide an important, indeed a privileged site for self-construction because multiple sources of narrative-self-affinity (e.g., temporal, evaluative) converge in this narrative genre" (1994, p. 41). They also argue that such

stories should be included as an important component of childhood socialization models. Their claim is supported by two related assumptions about talk: first, talk is a pervasive, orderly, and culturally organized feature of social life in every culture; and second, talk is a major mechanism of socialization. As such, the authors explain that personal storytelling as a type of discourse can be examined as a medium of childhood socialization and self-construction. Because the consequence of both personal storytelling and play are the acquisition of narrative skills and self-construction, I would argue that existing models of child development and socialization are incomplete without the inclusion of children's play narratives. That is to say, a comprehensive account of how children develop their own identity would have to take into consideration "not only the child's moment-by-moment interpersonal encounters, but his or her participation in iterative narrations of those encounters, which are themselves embedded in moment-by-moment interpersonal encounters" (Miller & Mehler, 1994, p. 47). Many of Leticia's iterations of interpersonal encounters are narrated through play, and are an important means for her to experience and re-experience self in relation to others. Although play has been examined in models of child development and socialization, the content of play narratives and their potential to inform our understandings of childhood self-construction have been widely overlooked.

In summarizing current research investigating the link between dramatic play and literacy, Rowe (1998) delineates four distinct lines of research. One approach uses naturalistic observations to describe the ways children adopt the roles of readers and writers as part of their dramatic play. A second approach explores, from a psychological perspective, the relationship between representational abilities used in play, reading, and

writing. A third line of research, rooted in cognitive psychology, examines adult-mediated dramatic play training for improving reading comprehension. The fourth approach investigates how preschoolers make connections between dramatic play and the meanings they encounter in books. My findings point to a possible fifth line of research that would explore the relationship between play narratives and literacy learning in diverse home and classroom contexts. Systematic examinations of children's play narratives as both literary and social texts have the potential to contribute to current thought on literacy learning and self-construction in early childhood. From a pedagogical perspective, play narratives could also be used as the basis for reading instruction in emergent literacy classrooms. In many ways, play narratives as a form of personal storytelling are a kind of *Bildungsroman* (Bakhtin, 1986)—they are a story of children's "becoming."

Leticia's Literacy "Stance"

Leticia uses both reading and writing to support and sustain the family and school narratives that she composes. By enacting the roles of a reader and writer, she displays her knowledge of the forms and functions of written language that are inextricably linked to events in her home and classroom. She also reveals hidden attitudes and feelings about literacy learning in her family and kindergarten. Thus, an integral aspect of Leticia's play-literacy activities is what Schön refers to as *stance*—"a kind of competence [that] involves not only attitudes and feelings but ways of perceiving and understanding" (1987, p. 119).

Perceiving and Understanding: Literacy Practices at Home and School

The literacy events that Leticia uses to support "playing house" reflect how her family members use literacy. She listens to stories read by visitors and parents; visits the public library; does homework and home reading; uses flyers, identification cards, and receipts; records phone numbers; makes birthday cards; and sends postcards from far away places. As Leichter reminds us, "print does not merely reside in a household but rather flows through it" (1984, p. 40). How Leticia uses literacy in playing house resonates with a number of other studies examining the nature of literate behaviour in young children's pretend play episodes. Roskos (1988), for example, categorizes literacy acts in play according to three domains: *activities* (reading books to pretend babies), *skills* (printing alphabet letters and words), and *knowledge* (using reading and writing in specific situations, like dining out). Roskos and Neuman (1993) developed a typology that includes object-routine-focused (exploring literacy tools and routines), reading-writing-focused (written language in the form of print or a story is the object of interest), and theme-focused activity (play is setting-bound, functions of literacy are emphasized, and play tends to have a narrative thread). The types of play literacy activities described by both Roskos (1988) and Roskos and Neuman (1993) were clearly evident in Leticia's play activities. Examining Leticia's use of literacy in play from a broader perspective, however, reveals a common thread throughout. Specifically, she portrays literacy use at home as a tool for maintaining and ordering of family life.

The literacy events that Leticia embeds in playing school involve a different set of practices than those included in playing house. There are very few descriptive studies of children playing school, and the examples presented in Chapter 4 provide a fascinating

glimpse into one child's early understanding of "doing school." In her role as the classroom teacher, Leticia takes attendance, reads to her students, organizes students for activities, writes morning messages and agendas, makes lists of names, reads seating charts, and makes teaching materials. Interestingly, much of the literacy that supports her unfolding classroom stories highlight literacy as the maintenance and enforcement of classroom routines. Kantor, Miller, and Fernie emphasize that "literacy meanings are constructed through the values, practices, routines and rituals of the members of a sociocultural community" (1992, p. 186). At the young age of five, Leticia already demonstrates an understanding of forms and functions of literacy as they are used in different sociocultural communities, namely, school and home. In her home context, where a wide variety of supplies were readily available, Leticia could be very resourceful in locating and creating literacy tools and objects to fit her play themes. Although Leticia's kindergarten play activities were not the focus of the current study, it is interesting to note that at school, literacy activities did not appear to be a significant part of her play routines. Hayden (1989) cautions that in classroom contexts, locating items such as paper, pencils, and other tools only in central locations like the teacher's desk or the writing centre, diminishes the children's access to such items and may even prevent them from using the tools for the tasks for which they were intended. This observation may in part explain the discrepancy between Leticia's home and school play-literacy activities.

In constructing her own orientation toward literacy, Leticia must "confront and respond to contradictory meanings of literacy in the larger society as they are expressed first within families and then within classrooms" (Solsken, 1993, p. 218). Anderson and

Gunderson (1997), in their examination of literacy learning from a multicultural perspective, argue that literacy activities which many Chinese Canadian parents consider important to their children's literacy learning are antithetical to an emergent literacy perspective. Leticia's parents' expectations are reflected in Anderson and Gunderson's findings. Specifically, as parents they expected accuracy and precision in the early stages of reading and writing. In other words, making up stories from picture books was not considered "real reading" for a five-year-old. Miss Lee, Leticia's kindergarten teacher, operated from more of an emergent literacy perspective and generally saw her students as constructors of their own literacy. Although we have yet to understand how families and teachers handle these contradictions, for Leticia, play appeared to be a context where seemingly disparate definitions of literacy co-existed. Moreover, play was an important way for her to grapple with, and explore, different definitions of literacy, to practise, in a safe, non-threatening environment, the roles and expectations for literacy at home and at school. Within the world of play, she was free to establish her own expectations and to determine her own status in relation to others and in relation to literacy.

Attitudes and Feelings: The Spaces in Between

Cummins (1994) situates the development of literacy learning and identity within Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) framework. He describes the ZPD as an interpersonal space where new understandings can arise through collaborative interaction and inquiry. Newman, Griffin, and Cole (1989) label this space the "construction zone." Within this construction zone, Leticia and I co-constructed play narratives, and she began to define and interpret her own reality and identity. The construction zone is also a "safety zone" in which her identity is constantly affirmed

through shared experiences where *she* defines the characters and storylines of the narratives. According to Cummins, "this conception extends the ZPD beyond the cognitive sphere into the realms of affective development and power relationships" (1994, p. 26), specifically because the construction zone can also be a constriction zone if the context constricts rather than extends children's identities and learning. That is to say, because Leticia was allowed to determine the direction of play, she was free to construct and interpret her own realities and identities. Moreover, as Heath reminds us, "occasions and relationships of intimacy and common knowledge and trust rarely present themselves for [children] and adults to come together through story" (1994, p. 216). For Leticia, play provides such opportunities.

Davies (1989) found that when observing children's play, she was heavily reliant on language and symbolism for apprehending the meaning of their play. Sometimes children would provide an explanation for play actions, but typically there was no immediate answer. Observers of children's play often find that once children step outside of the context of play, they may experience difficulties finding the words or concepts to encapsulate the event. Learning to interact with Leticia, on her own terms, was central to understanding the attitudes and feelings about literacy revealed in play. By playing with her and accepting roles that she assigned, I gained important insights about her literacy knowledge and skills, her perceptions and attitudes, how she saw herself as a young Chinese girl, and how she viewed the world. Unquestionably, what she revealed in play by far exceeded her ability to articulate her understanding of the world around her. Indeed, what Leticia revealed in her play narratives was not as clearly visible in other venues of her life (e.g., in interactions with her parents and teachers).

Delpit (1988) argues convincingly that issues of power are enacted in classrooms and that there are codes or rules for participating in power. In her portrayal of school literacy, Leticia demonstrates an understanding of this "culture of power." Her awareness of issues of power is most pointedly reflected in how she positions herself in relation to others and how these positionings dictate her willingness to participate in literacy activities in play. For example, when she adopted a position of power (e.g., as the teacher making the big book about sea animals), she was more willing to take risks with her learning, and allowed me to scaffold her explorations of various forms and functions of literacy. When portraying a more subordinate position (e.g., a child), however, she was less willing to engage in reading and writing tasks that she could not complete independently. As Ferdman concludes, "people's perceptions of themselves in relationship to their ethnic group and the larger society, as reflected in what I call cultural identity, can change, and in turn be changed, by the process of becoming literate" (1990, p.201).

Solsken argues that "we need to examine more closely the ways that families' and schools' definitions of work and play are linked to status and dominance relations in the larger society and how such definitions intersect with approaches to literacy learning" (1993, p. 217). In a longitudinal study focusing on children's literacy learning from kindergarten to grade two, Solsken (1993) found that girls identified more strongly with mothers who treated literacy as play as opposed to work. Linda typically treated literacy as work, which resulted in considerable tension between Leticia and her mother. Interestingly, although her father also treated literacy as work, she responded to him with a strong desire to garner his approval. According to Solsken (1993), forms of literacy

modelled by mothers may be devalued by themselves and others unless they are made to fit definitions of male work or play. It is possible that Leticia did not perceive the forms of literacy modelled by her mother (i.e., literacy tasks that served to maintain and order family life) as being as valuable as the forms of literacy modelled by her father (i.e., work-related literacy tasks). Thus, perhaps because she viewed her father's literacy knowledge as more important than her mother's, his recognition of her literacy learning milestones became the family "stamp of approval."

Gender dynamics around literacy in families involves a highly specific interaction of many factors, including mother's predominant role, father's perceptions, and the gender and age of siblings and their role in each other's literacy learning (Solsken, 1993). Leticia's older brother played an important role in her literacy development, not only as someone who scaffolded her learning, but also as an example of what she was expected to accomplish. Howard and Linda often made comparisons between their three children, noting where one had strengths or weaknesses relative to the other. For example, they believed that their youngest son, Richmond, learned to speak much more quickly than the other two children. Wilson, who sometimes experienced difficulties with English in school, was considered to be very good in Mandarin. Leticia, on the other hand, excelled in speaking English, but struggled with Mandarin. Printing in Chinese proved to be particularly troublesome. At her urging, Wilson sometimes "covered" for his sister and printed Chinese characters or her name so that she could show her mother. When Leticia showed her mother something that was printed very neatly or was of a difficult nature, Linda was usually quick to ask, "Did you write it or did Wilson?" or "Did you trace it?" She knew so well each of her children's capabilities. In Chapter 3, when Leticia made

the big book for her "students," her mother was obviously surprised at the neatness and care evident in the drawings and printing. On this occasion, play provided a safe context in which Leticia allowed me to scaffold a literacy task that involved both Chinese and English printing. Outside of the context of play, she would rarely agree to print Chinese characters, let alone attempt to read them.

Recent studies of English as another language have encouraged investigators to pay particular attention to the importance of the social contexts in which another language is learned, the learners' relations with other participants, and their different modes of participation (Norton, 1997, 2000; Toohey, 1996, 1998). Rogoff (1990) maintains that it is while participating in social activity that newcomers incorporate the language, skills, and perspectives constituting the activity, thereby stretching their concepts and language. Flaherty and Woods (1992) explain that, while research has frequently focused on short-term variables associated with cognitive and linguistic development, an equally important issue for children who are learning English as a new language is the social aspect of their adaptation to school culture. For Leticia, play is clearly a critical social context in which to learn and practise the language and literacy skills (English and Mandarin) she is learning in school. Moreover, playing school and adopting the role of a teacher appeared to assist her adaptation to, and perhaps mastery of, school routines and school culture. Play may in many ways help her bridge the gap between home and school cultures, in general, and literacy practices, in particular.

Although classroom play has not been the subject of this study, it is worth noting that I did not observe at the school the same richness and quality of play that I observed at home. This difference is particularly interesting given that I spent, on average, one day

per week in Leticia's kindergarten classroom. As Adelman posits, "in the classroom for the occupational training for alienated work there is no place for children's actuality and so no play" (1990, p. 201). There are cases of successful adult engagement with children at play in playschools and the home (see e.g., Kelly-Byrne, 1989; Tizard & Hughes, 1984), but few in schools. To capture the meaning of children's play from the point of view of the children, it is necessary to participate in children's actualities.[1] According to Adelmen (1990), this process involves "long, intense observation, invited participation, and suspension of adult judgement of reality, priority, significance, and worth" (1990, p. 202). Fernie, Davies, Kantor, and McMurray's (1993) speculation that in the classroom, the "presence" of adults may be operating even when they are not watching may provide a partial explanation for why Leticia (and the other children) did not use make-believe play to compose rich, detailed story scripts. At home, this principle of the "watchful" adult only appeared to operate when Leticia was concerned about her mother intervening to correct something she was reading or writing as part of her play narrative. Another partial explanation may be that in Leticia's kindergarten, where play has been stemmed and divided into work (i.e., in the form of learning centres), it is the teacher, not the children, who defines play. From a pedagogical and research perspective, if we are to understand how children see themselves as participants in the world, we need to adopt the most sensitive engagement and extension of their play.

The Multiple Worlds of Play

Dyson (1989) argues that writing involves the intersection of multiple worlds. The texts are, in Bakhtin's terms, "heteroglossic" (1981, p. 293); they contain echoes of various language systems. In constructing their stories, children "draw on images and other

elements that are presented to them by their cultural environment and that shape their imagination and sensibility in profound and subtle ways" (Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994, p. 108). The formative effect of culture is, however, neither simple, unfettered, nor unidirectional. Children make metaphoric use of symbols that are available to them at any one time, and as such, invest these symbols with a variety of new meanings (Steedman, 1982). From a practical standpoint, this means that the various cultural materials to which children are exposed will never have a direct or uniform influence because children bring to these cultural materials their own unique interpretive framework, underlying concerns, and manner of appropriation (Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994). In composing her stories, Leticia draws on cultural material from her multiple worlds, engaging in a process that might be viewed as a parallel to writing.

Storying as Cultural Practice

"By entering into story worlds, and by being inserted into the storylines of their culture, children come to know what counts as being a woman, or being a man, in the culture to which the stories belong" (Gilbert, 1994, pp. 127-128). They begin to understand the range of cultural possibilities for femininity and masculinity—and the limits to that range. "Storying becomes increasingly a cultural, rather than a personal, practice" (Gilbert, 1994, p. 128). Through modelling, manipulating, and dialogically engaging with ideas of romance, motherhood, girlhood, family relationships, commerce, and possibilities for her future, Leticia communicates her understanding of what it means to be a female member in her family and society. Play serves as the mode of inquiry and expression for her to bring her invisible future life into view. Her words, as expressed by Metzger, "not only describe reality and communicate ideas and feelings but also bring

into being the hidden, invisible, or obscure" (1992, p. 3). Metzger goes on to say, "words can leave us in the known and familiar or transport us to the unfamiliar, incomprehensible, unknown, even the unknowable. Words, therefore, are the primary route toward knowing both the particular worlds we inhabit and our unique and individual selves" (1992, p. 3).

In learning language and learning through the use of that language in play, Leticia comes to understand how to position herself as someone with a recognizable social identity. In so doing, she necessarily becomes involved in positioning herself as a gendered being (Davies, 1989). Having a gendered identity means that children's images and evaluations of themselves are inextricably tied to their perceptions of themselves as male or female (Solsken, 1993). Gilbert points out that it is partly in response to the stories we hear and participate in that "we learn how to 'be' women or men, girls or boys, mothers or fathers, wives or husbands, sisters or brothers, aunts or uncles, grandmas or grandpas" (Gilbert, 1994, p. 131).

Within the cultural context of Leticia's family, she has learned that a woman's primary role is to provide children for her husband and a man's primary role is to provide material goods for his family. It therefore follows that, in play, she defines the roles of women and men in relatively traditional ways. Many of her family stories also have romantic elements in their scripts, which is a traditional aspect of the family narrative genre (Halldén, 1994). Gilbert (1994) explains that the romantic storyline provides a familiar and comfortable sequence for many young girls to follow. She emphasizes that this familiarity and comfort should not be surprising to us because it is well documented that young girls are prepared for their insertion into romantic storylines through comics

and early reading (Davies, 1989; Walkerdine, 1990) and romance fiction and television stories (Christian-Smith, 1990; Gilbert, 1993). Unique to Leticia's romantic stories, though, is love of children and family. Her interpretation of romantic love is a reflection of the relationship shared by her parents, who define romance as "spending time together as a family."

While surprisingly little systematic study of the relationship between gender and children's personal stories has been undertaken[2] (Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994), the distinctively "feminine" narrative style I have identified in Leticia's play appears to be broadly consistent with a number of studies on the gendered nature of girls' writing. For instance, an examination of the cultural material present in young girls' writing includes "primary territory" such as home, school, parents, and friends (e.g., Gilbert, 1994; Graves, 1973; Halldén, 1994; McAuliffe, 1994; Steedman, 1982), and a focus on joint action and protagonists who struggle to remain connected to the community (e.g., Halldén, 1994; McAuliffe). Steedman (1982) observed that when girls worked together in writing, they operated by a model of social life that demonstrated cohesion and co-operation between women. Similarly, Nicolopoulou, Scales, and Weintraub (1994) note young girls' written stories tend to have a coherent plot with a stable set of characters and a continuous plot line. Akin to girls' written stories, Leticia establishes this coherence by structuring the content of her play around stable sets of social relationships, especially family relationships. Another important element that often gives girls' stories their coherence and continuity is the depiction of the rhythmic, cyclical, and repeated patterns of everyday domestic family life: the family goes shopping and comes back home, the parents go to work and the children go to school, then they

come back home, have dinner and go to bed, wake up, have breakfast—and so the cycle is repeated.

Gilbert (1994) argues convincingly that the romantic storyline is a particularly powerful one and it dominates in stories that involve female and male characters. She also questions the value of being able to compose such stories outside of school contexts and highlights the problem of locating "a space from which to write stories that challenge dominant cultural meanings—that try to construct other versions of 'happy ever after' endings. Dwyer (1992) found that female writers draw upon different story paradigms, depending on whether they were in all-female or mixed writing groups. She suggests that the range of subject positionings available to young readers and writers is influenced by their peer groupings because the discursive networks brought into play by particular social groupings influence story production. From this perspective, it is interesting to consider how Leticia's play narratives might have been different had she been playing with a male researcher, male peers, or most especially, her father. Encouraging peer play in mixed groups and father-daughter play at home may help young girls move their play content beyond romantic storylines.

Leticia, like many young children, often seeks recognition by striving to master the skills and tasks that will prepare her for adult work roles (Erikson, 1963). She projects herself into the adult activities of her culture and rehearses her future roles and values (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 129). At her age, identity development is directly concerned with her relation to work (Solsken, 1993), and she appropriates not only her mother's role, but also her teacher's role as primary cultural material for play. And in the same way that she needed to put in order her house and her children, she orders life in the classroom

according to her own interpretations of classroom roles and routines. "Primary classrooms can suggest to little girls a purpose of activity, a kind of comprehensible system: rooms that need ordering, things have to be put away, the day needs to be planned around human needs, just as the tidy houses must be put in order and food got to the table" (Steedman, 1982, p. 135). An examination of the cultural content of play narratives provides insights into the multi-faceted relationship between culture and individual development. According to Nicolopoulou, Scales, and Weintraub (1994), the lesson to be learned from examining gender differences in young children's emerging cognitive modes and symbolic imagination is the need to take seriously the complexity of the relationship between culture and individual development.

Authoring Play

The relationship between play and writing has been investigated from a number of different perspectives. Pellegrini (1984b) studied the effect of dramatic play on children's generation of cohesive text. Schrader (1991) and others (see e.g., Roskos & Neuman, 1993) have been interested in the ways that children pretend to write as part of their dramatic play. Michaels (1981) examined children's sharing time narrative styles and differential access to literacy. Dyson (1997) studied the reciprocal relationship between children's writing and the "superhero" dramas and discussions that followed in the classroom and on the playground. For the children in Dyson's study, story began on paper and came to life in play. My exploration of Leticia's social and textual worlds contributes to understanding the relationship between writing and play from a different perspective; that is, from stories created in the here and now of play.

According to Bakhtin (1981), to compose a narrative, children must grapple with newly emergent inner speech, with those words saturated with shared experience. In other words, in composing her play narratives, Leticia reflects on, and consciously chooses, symbols that help her organize and articulate her inner thoughts. Some of narratives composed toward the end of her kindergarten year are particularly interesting because her reflections appeared to lead her to reorganize thoughts and the structure of her play to provide the audience (i.e., me) with important background information. Thus, similar to the process of composing on paper, when she composes play she also engages in editing and revising her original text. The most salient example of this composing process is Narrative 5, the longest and most complex of her stories. Into this family narrative, she weaves a variety of settings with the actions and voices of numerous characters. The couple introduced at the beginning of the narrative is expecting a baby, and the plot revolves around their anticipation of the baby's arrival. Following the birth of the baby, Leticia suddenly realizes that background information regarding the parents' wedding and the conception of the baby has not been provided. With a keen awareness of audience, she goes back into her narrative and suggests, "Let's start all over!" Her additions to the original script provide key details about how husbands choose wives and how daddies put babies inside mommies' tummies. Her revisions allow the play narrative to come together as a cohesive text. The symbolic reworking resonates strongly with the process that authors undertake when generating written texts. Composing play and composing writing are both about negotiating relationships. Both processes involve writing oneself into, or in some way against, taken-for-granted assumptions, including assumptions about relations between teacher and student, adult and child. Play is a

means by which Leticia organizes and presents her thoughts, and through play, she is learning how to author her own stories.

PLAY, LITERACY, AND CULTURE REVISITED

Christie (1991) accentuates that ethnographic methodology, such as that used in the present study, holds great promise for studying individual children's literacy and play behaviours in intricate detail, in both home and school settings. He writes of the possibilities as follows:

> Ethnographers may discover the different routes that children follow during the acquisition of literacy—routes that may be overlooked by quantitative studies. Such research may reveal that play has different roles in individual children's literacy development, being a primary means of growth for some and a pleasant diversion for others" (1991, p. 241).

Play clearly has a critical role in Leticia's literacy development. It allows her to create a comfortable learning place by weaving together literacy experiences from both home and school. "When literacy is interwoven through children's play and social lives, it becomes a meaningful, functional, and familiar pattern connected to the wider fabric of their lives" (Miller, Fernie, & Kantor, 1992, pp. 117-118). Her play is multi-layered and multi-voiced, and represents a mingling of literacies from home, school, and work domains. Play is an opportunity for Leticia to invent stories about everyday happenings; they are often autobiographical accounts of either real events in her life or events that could be real in the future. These play narratives provide a very rich base of experiences vital to her development of cultural knowledge as well as language and literacy skills. Through play, many of the core values and behaviours of Leticia's family and school are

practised and reinforced. As Yetta Goodman reminds us, "children in a literate society grow up with literacy as an integral part of their personal, familial, and social histories. Interacting with their literate environment, children invent their own literacies, and their inventions often parallel the inventions of literacy by society as a whole" (1984, p. 102).

Glancing sideways at literacy through play reveals the complex interplay between story, self, and play—constructs that when viewed together provide a unique window onto how Leticia constructs the world. When viewed separately, the constructs of play, literacy, and culture each offers a lens through which to view children's understandings of themselves as individuals, and as members of families, classrooms, and communities. This sideway perspective attempts to combine each of the three lenses to present a potentially valuable approach to studying and interpreting children's constructions of the world. The intersection of the three constructs offers a distinctive way for parents, educators, and researchers to understand how young children negotiate a sense of self and story across different times and places. This perspective also highlights the idea that literacy draws meaning from children's lives, not from analytic constructs that we create. As Taylor emphasizes, "to get close to children that we care so much about we must peel away misplaced abstractions and maintain allegiance to their world and a fervent, even fierce, relation with it" (1986, p. 156). Thus, to understand the relationship between play, literacy, and culture, is to understand the poetic phrase "the dancer cannot be distinguished from the dance."

[1] The term "actuality" is from Freud (1957). Erikson interprets it as follows: "'Actuality' is the world of participation, shared with the other particpants with a minimum of defensive maneuvering and a maximum of mutual activation" (1964, pp. 164-165).
[2] One major exception to this is Paley (1984, 1992).

6

New Beginnings

These resonances between the personal and the professional are the source of both insight and error. You avoid mistakes and distortions not so much by trying to build a wall between the observer and the observed as by observing the observer – observing yourself – as well, and bringing the personal issues to consciousness. You can do some of that at the time of the work and more in retrospect. You dream, you imagine, you superimpose and compare images, you allow yourself to feel and then try to put what you feel into words. Then you look at the record to understand the way in which observation and interpretation have been affected by personal factors.

—Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

GLANCING FORWARD, GLANCING BACK

This research project began with considerable trepidation on my part. Concerns and questions swirled around issues of access and privacy because I wanted to work within the context of a family home. Throughout the year that I spent visiting the Tsiu's on a weekly basis, I never took for granted that this family had so graciously invited me into, not only their home, but their lives as well. I still remember the feeling I had each time I parked my car across the street from their house. As I looked into the faces peering at me out the front window, I had knots in my stomach almost as though I was visiting for the first time. With each visit I wondered, would today be the day the Tsiu's would decide my presence in their home was too invasive, that I was interfering with their family time, or that their involvement in my research project was too time consuming? But each day that I arrived at the door, I was welcomed in like an old family friend.

Trust came quickly between Linda and me and we talked easily about family relationships, her children, and our selves. Howard, although I saw him somewhat infrequently, was always ready with a smile and joke. He was interested in my perceptions about his children and took the time to share his experiences and his knowledge. Both Linda and Howard took great pride in their family. Wilson, in his quiet, reserved way, shared what was most important to him: friends, television, computer games. He was my patient and encouraging Chinese printing teacher. Richmond, like his father, always had a smile and a laugh. He seemed to remember me, even when several months passed between my visits.

Leticia and I, in many ways, were the most unlikely of friends; we were from different cultures and different generations. At first, we were cautious in developing a relationship. It took time for her to figure out that this strange adult could be integrated into her play world, and it took me time to ensure that we were developing the kind of relationship that was mutually beneficial. I worked hard to earn her trust and to prove that I was a worthy playmate, one who would respect and accept the world as she created it. She slowly opened the door into her play world and I carefully stepped through, never knowing how long she would permit me to stay, but always grateful for the opportunity to visit. Our relationship moved forward and a close bond developed between us.

Knowing that I had become an important part of Leticia's life, I wanted to manage the transitions in our relationship in the most sensitive way. These were transitions that are an inevitable part of doing research involving human lives and emotions. My research project ended officially as she started grade one, but our friendship continued. I tried to visit after school when I could, hoping that she would understand that I no longer

visited in the afternoons because she was in school full time. I wondered, though, how much of this change she really understood. She still asked when I would be coming to play again and I knew that she missed telling stories with me as much as I missed spending time with her. Endings are an unavoidable part of human relationships and they are rarely easy. From endings, though, emerge new beginnings and new directions for exploring possibilities. From my perspective, the ending of this research creates an opportunity to reflect on what I have learned as part of the journey—a journey that produced more questions than it answered.

As a researcher studying a young child's social and textual life, I could not assume that because I had passed through childhood, I was knowledgeable about the world of a child. To understand Leticia and how she positioned herself in the world, I had to learn to relate to her on her terms and allow her to control her own destiny. The relationship that we developed has reinforced for me the notion that if teachers were to relate to their students from less of a position of "teacher as authority" and from more a position that merges the roles of friend and authority, children might become more willing to provide access to their hidden worlds, to worlds that represent who they are. Ultimately, such a relationship would greatly enhance children's learning, in general, and their language learning, in particular. For teachers to understand children and their learning needs, we need to spend time with them on their terms. Engaging in play with children, as they choose to define it, is one way for teachers and researchers alike to relate to children in the world as they construct it. In the world of play, whether in classrooms or on playgrounds, children need to identify with the words of Robert Louis Stevenson:

This was the world and I was king;

For me the bees came by to sing,

For me the swallows flew.[1]

As I reflect on my experience with the Tsiu family, I also think of the relevance of Turnbull's statement, "in doing qualitative research, we are likely to discover more about ourselves than about others, and in so doing discover unknown riches in our own lives" (1983, p. 16), and am reminded of what the Tsiu's have taught me about the significance of stories that originate in family. As I read the stories Leticia created in her play narratives, I find traces of my own life and my memories of childhood stories unravel. I remember my father's stories of growing up in a small Irish community in Ontario, the most memorable of which were his stories of boyhood pranks. My mother had stories, too; stories of growing up in a large immigrant family in a farmhouse that my grandfather built; stories of learning English and struggling to find her place among siblings and classmates. I especially remember elusive stories told to me about my grandparents' journey to Canada and what their lives had been like back in Ukraine.

As members of families, we grow to love stories—we hear them, we rehearse them, and we compose them, often long before we learn to read. From these stories we develop our own sense of story. Family stories provide us with a sense of belonging; they define us and feed our hearts and minds. They are our stories of becoming; they shape how we understand our past and how we see our future. For Leticia, play gives voice to her social and family stories. Yet, such stories rarely find their way into school curriculum. From both a pedagogical and a research perspective, I wonder how the inclusion of children's autobiographical play-narratives might enhance literacy learning in schools, particularly

for children whose family experiences and "ways with words" differ from the words and stories of schools. I also wonder about the extent to which other children, particularly children from diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds, might use the context of play to rehearse and compose their own stories of becoming. The extent to which boys compose play narratives that reflect their own identities is also a puzzle I am left with at the close of this study. Children's personal storytelling through play might help them respond to, and connect with, those around them, confirming who they are in the world. Play narratives may also assist language teachers to incorporate the lived experiences of their students into the formal curriculum.

Observing and interacting with Leticia in play also taught me the importance of "being seen." I became more aware of her literacy stance and how she defined herself in relation to literacy. Play provided a tool for me to assess and understand what she knew about the forms and functions of literacy at home and at school. Detailed observations of children's pretend play, particularly for children like Leticia who tend to be reluctant to take learning risks in interactions with teachers and parents, may contribute to current assessment practices in early childhood. Engaging with children in play, in a world of *their* making rather than our own, may also bring them into closer view, and reveal hidden stories and knowledge that may contribute to what we know about research practices, and language and literacy education.

It has been over two years since I first met Leticia and her family. We no longer live in the same city and it is likely that we will lose touch as the years pass. I can't help but wonder, though, years from now how Leticia will remember the time we spent together.

How will she read the stories written on these pages? Perhaps the stories will awaken in her memories of a friendship founded in play:

> O childhood hours, behind whose
> make-believe
> Was hid more than the past and before
> us lay
> No future to contend. Though we dreamed,
> 'tis true
> Of growing up and were perhaps in haste to be
> well grown,
> More was it for the love of being those
> Who had no other merit than being grown.
> While yet not hid from life, we tasted joy
> Which gives repose and were suspended
> thence
> In an interval between the universe and play,
> a place,
> From all eternity, chosen for the pure event.[2]

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[1] From "My Kingdom", *A Child's Garden of Verses* (London, 1885).
[2] From R. M. Rilke's *Duineser Elegien—Vierte Elegie.*

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Appendices

Appendix A:
Linda's Record of Books and Videos Signed Out from the Public Librkary

The wind in the Willows
Babar the little elephant
The boy in the drawer
Best silly stories
Paper bag princess
videos due July 24

Due Aug 7

~~The flying dragon room~~
(2) ~~Sleep tight, move on~~
~~Hungry baby~~
(5) ~~Surprise, surprise~~ Aug 10
~~Martha, Mark~~
(6) ~~Will you give me a dream~~
~~Mr. Impossible~~
(9) ~~Little Miss naughty~~
~~Mr Snow~~
10 ~~There by the sea~~

12 ~~[illegible]~~
Magic School Bus
14 ~~God and Sons~~
~~Little Miss Sunshine~~
16 ~~Mr. Noisy~~
Snow white and 7 dwarfs ✓ Sep 21
18 ~~The Little Tim Sisters~~
The Elves + Shoes maker ✓
20 ~~[illegible]~~

~~Peek a Boo~~
~~[illegible]~~
~~up and for the tea~~
(3) Cassette. Aug 7

~~The hop open~~
~~The greatest hits~~
~~[illegible]~~
~~[illegible]~~
(4) CD Aug 7 Aug 31

Time Seasons + Weather.
~~The Berenstain + too much vacation~~ Sep 22
Magic School Bus Shows & tells (& builds)
" " Out of this World 4
Clifford's first Snow Day
Magic School Bus makes a rainbow
Spi's Birthday Party
Clifford & the Circus
The school Imp
Grandma + the Pirates
William + the Big Knock
In time of The Dinosaurs
Are you Sleep, Rabbit?
Story of A Fierce bad Rabbit
The Tale of the Flopsy bunnies

Due Oct 1
16

Mother Goose (cassette)
~~[illegible]~~
The Bear who Did not like honey
Each Orange had 8 slices
Tom + Pippo + the Bicycle
Weslet
~~[illegible]~~
Good Bye book
Grandma + The Pirates
Mighty Spiders!
Jillian Jiggs
Arnold
Best Friends
~~Hello Stars of the Sea~~
Red Riding Hood 3 little Pigs

Appendix B:
Leticia's Number Writing Homework

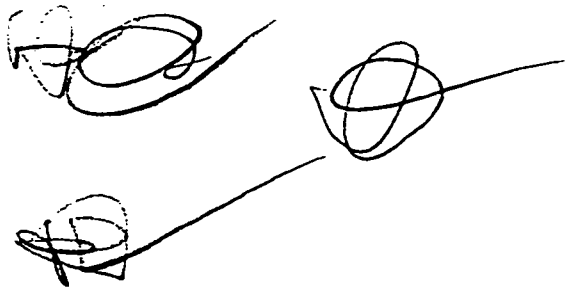
Jan. 22/99

4EE4017

1	一	一	2
2	二	二	3
3	三	三	4
4	四	四	5
5	五		7
6	六		8
7	七		9
			11

Appendix C:
Signed Receipt from Store

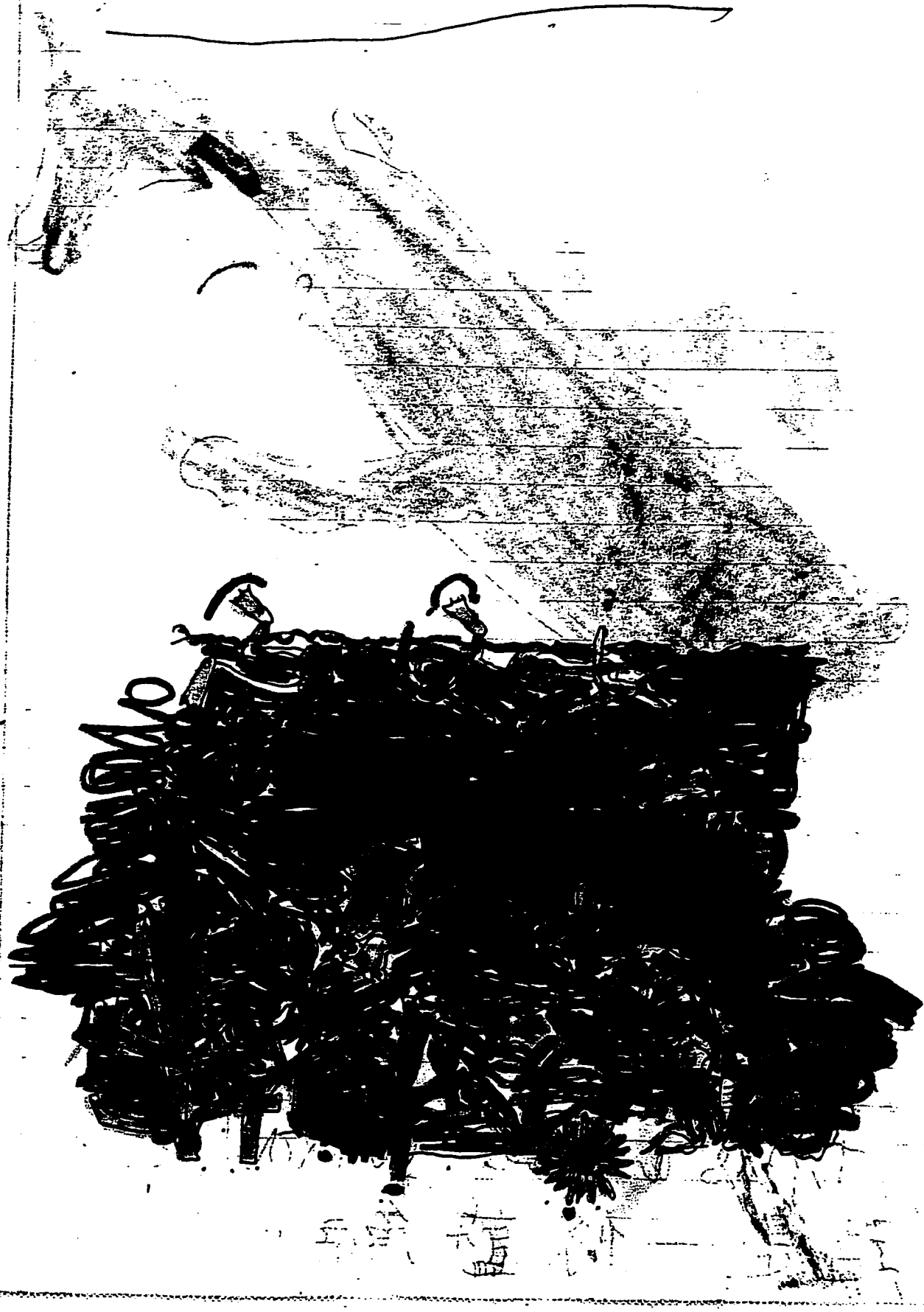
433-4017



Appendix D:
Leticia's Sea Animal Big Book

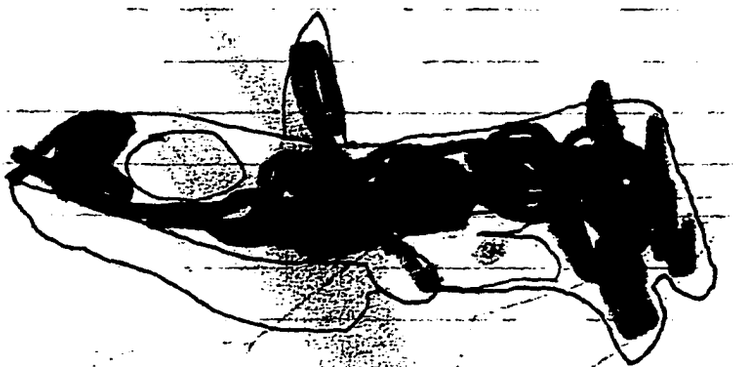
海洋生物

name



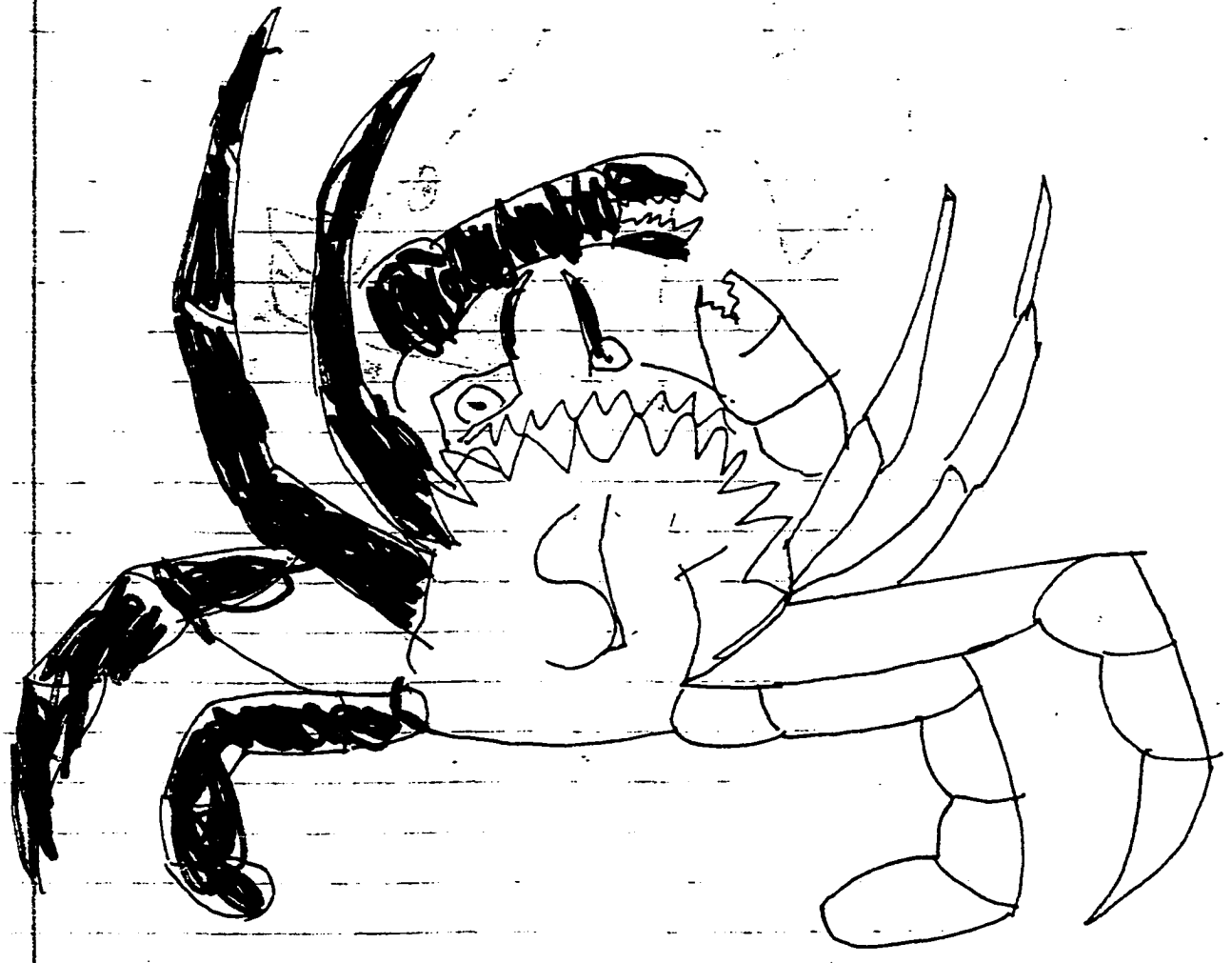
This is the whale.

這是一條藍鯨。



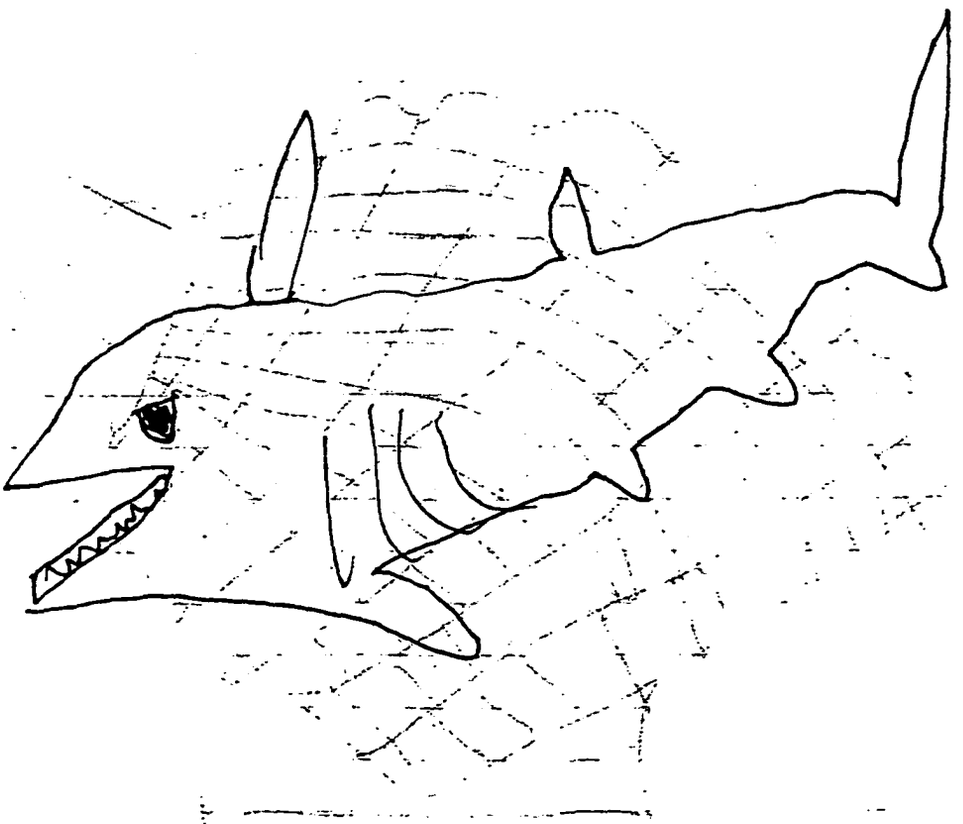
This is a killer whale.

這是一條殺人鯨。



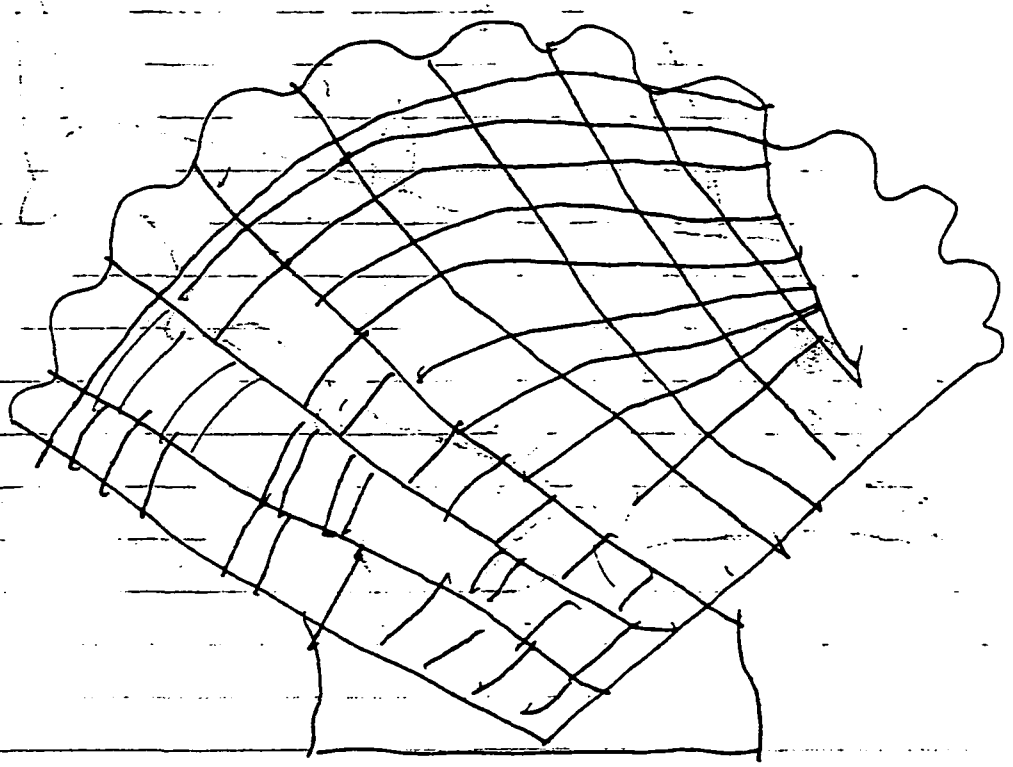
This is a horseshoe crab.

這是一隻鱟蟹。



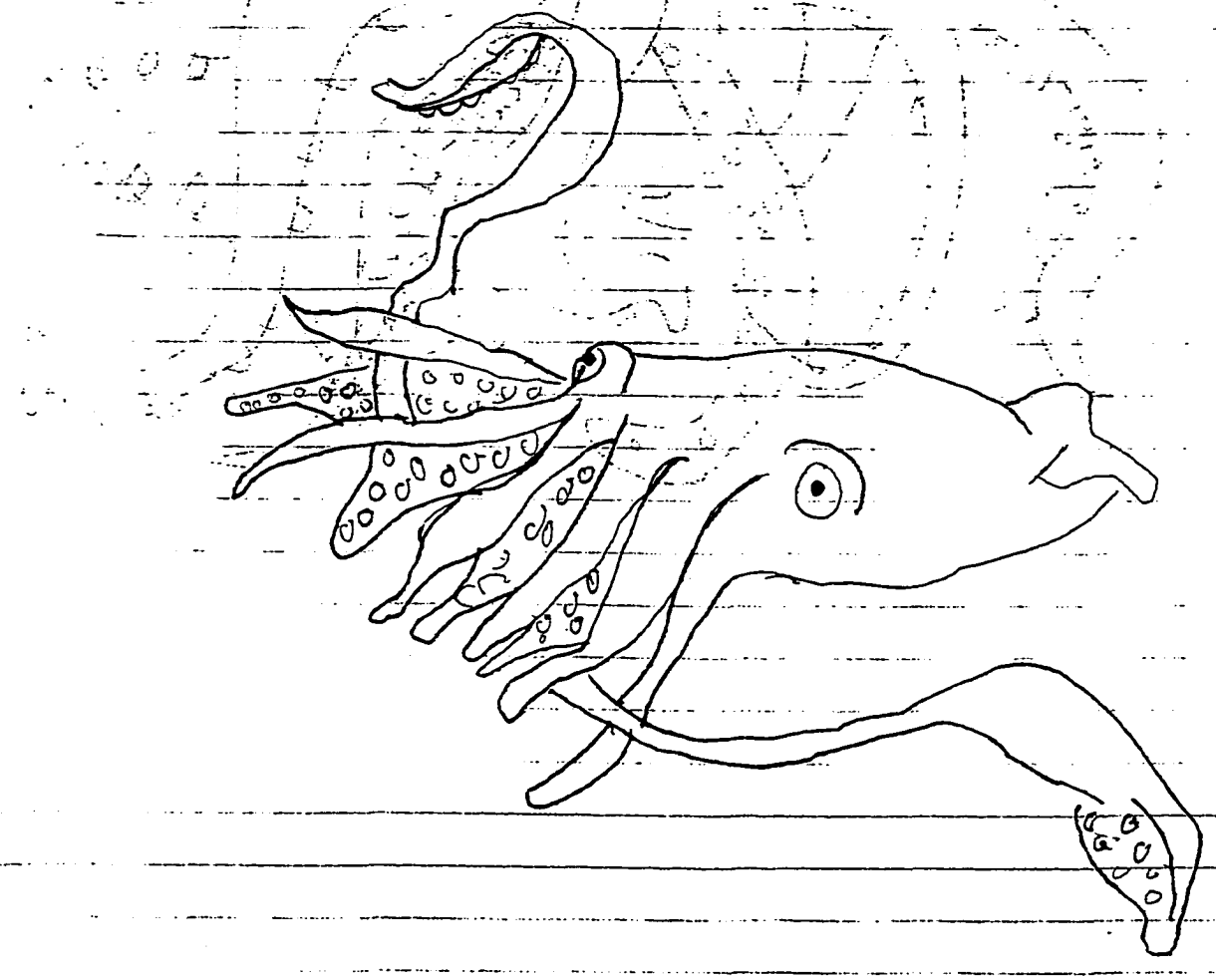
This is a shark

這是一條鯊魚。



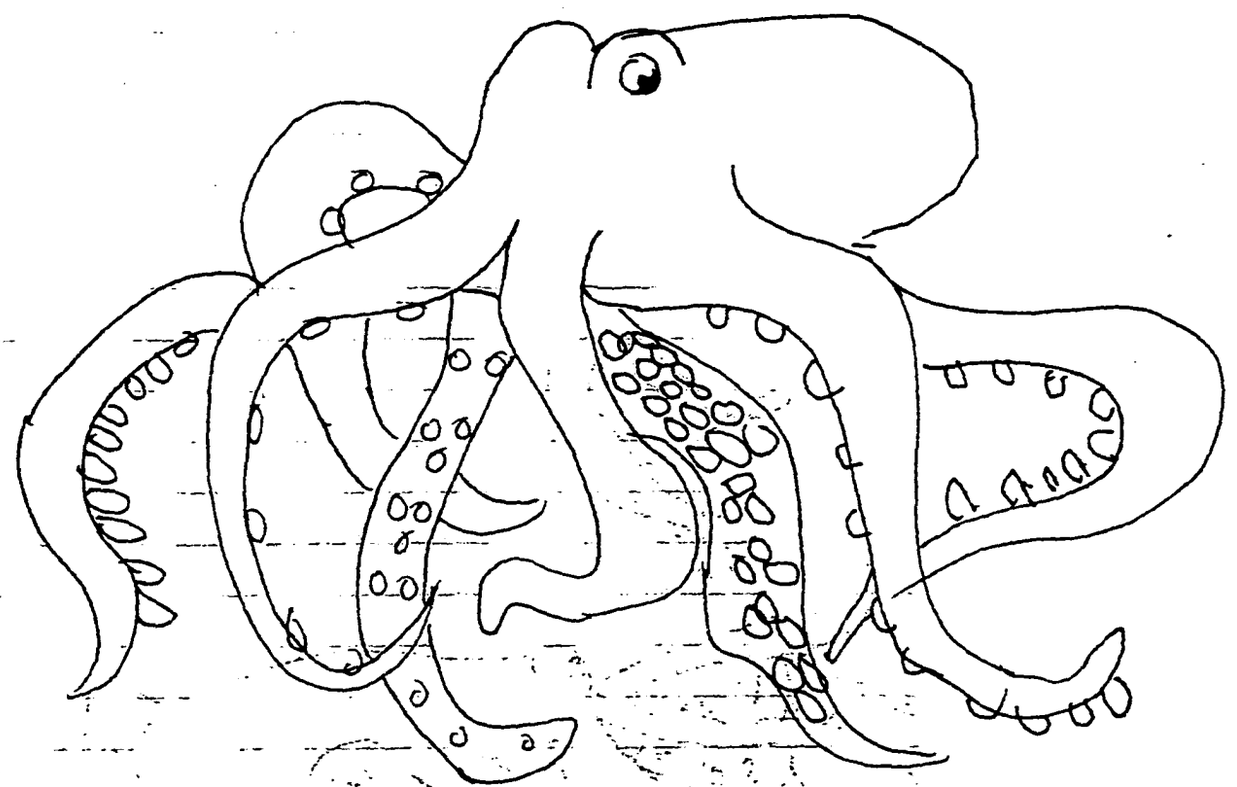
This is a seashell.

這是一個貝殼。

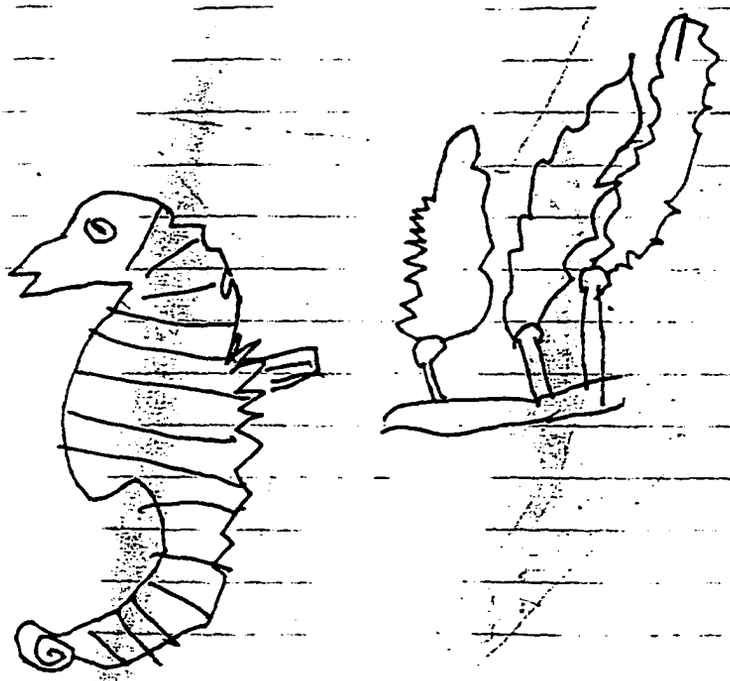


This is a squid.

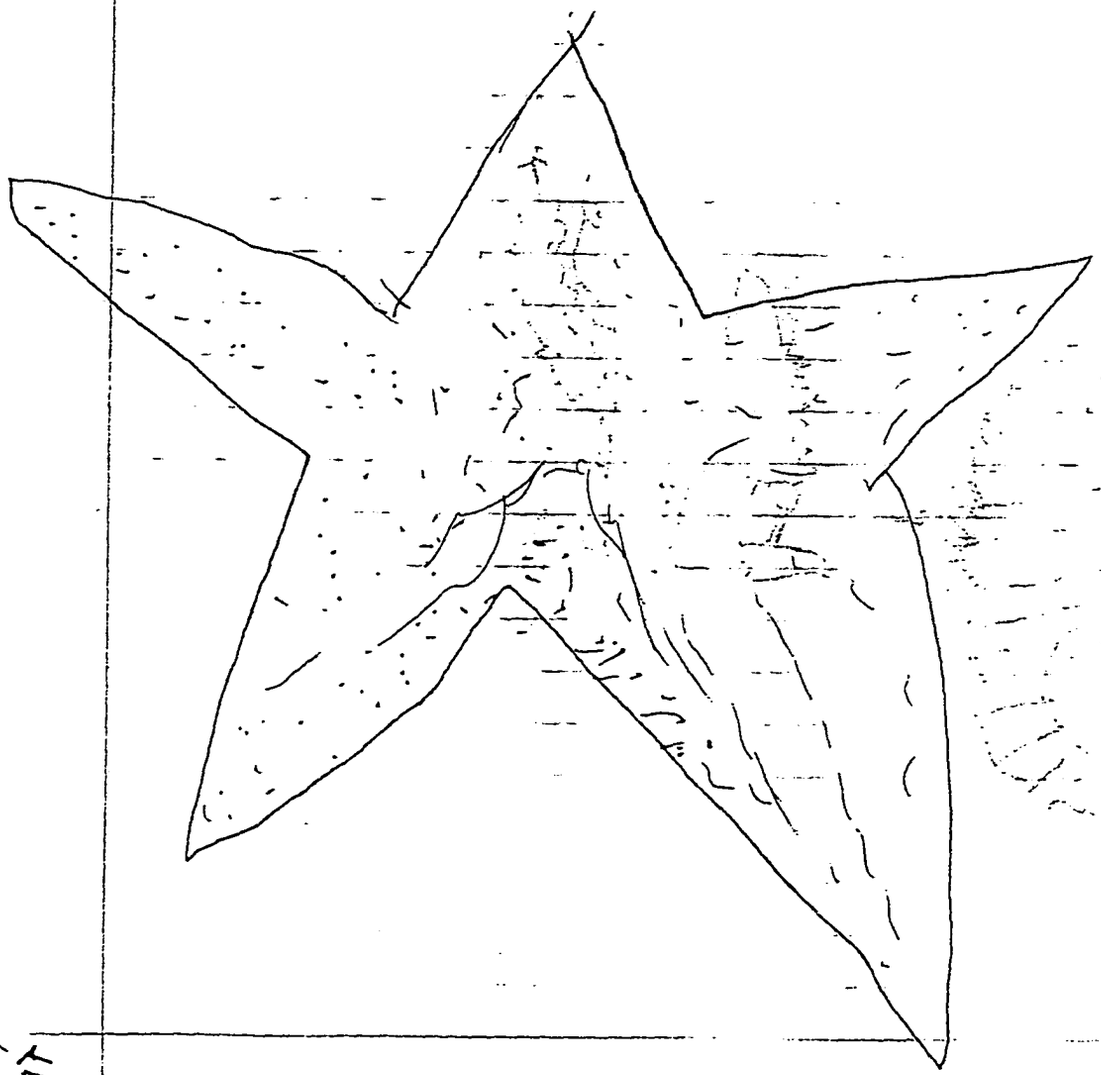
這是一條烏賊。



This is an octopus.
這是一條章魚。

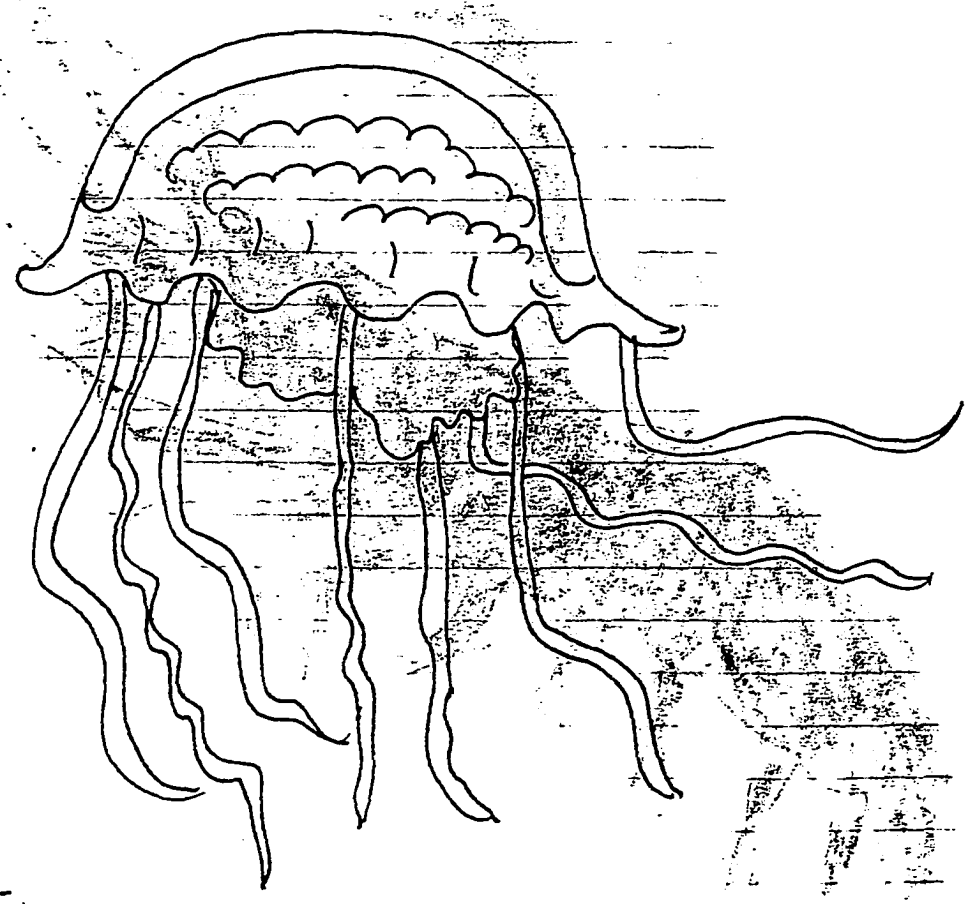


This is a seahorse.
這是一個海馬。



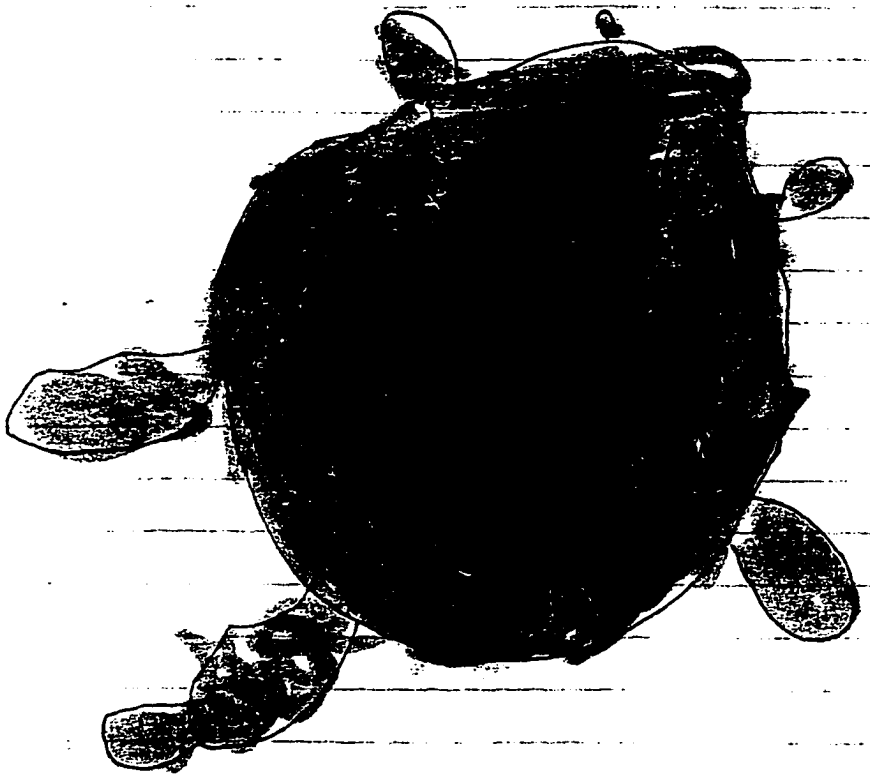
This is a star fish.

這是一隻海星。



This ~~is~~ is a jelly fish

這是一隻水母。



這是一隻海龜。

This is a dolphin.

這是一條海豚。

This is a fish.

這是一條魚。

Appendix E:
Letter of Consent and Release Forms

Letter of Consent

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research on literacy learning and children's play. I appreciate your willingness to share your ideas and experiences, and to allow me to observe your child. I hope that together we can learn more about the educational implications of children's literacy development in different contexts. If there is anyway that I can be of assistance to you, please let me know. I can be contacted at 433-4017 (home), 492-4273, ext. 281 (University), or 424-1660 (on Tuesdays).

We agree to participate in Maureen Kendrick's research project that explores the connections between children's literacy learning and play within the context of the family. The research will involve home-, neighbourhood-, and school-based observations and informal interviews. We understand by this agreement that:

1. the researcher will respect our child's and family's confidentiality by keeping strictly confidential our identities. In the transcripts and final report, all of our family members and any people that they name during interviews or observations will be given pseudonyms. In the final report, details of our community and all other information collected will be modified to preserve my child's and family's anonymity.
2. the study will take place within my child's daily routine at home, in the community, and at school. There will be no harm or stress for her or my family.
3. all audiotapes will be transcribed verbatim and we will be given the opportunity to read the transcripts and may add, delete, or augment any information so that it represents what we want to share. Anyone who assists in transcribing the audiotapes or data analysis will not have access to the identity of my child or family.
4. in accordance with FOIP guidelines, any material that would identify our child or family (audiotapes, videotapes, etc,) will be destroyed when the dissertation is complete (convocation). All collected artifacts (examples of our child's writings and drawings) will be returned to us.
5. every effort will be made to present the results in a way that is sensitive to our family, history, culture, and community.
6. at our request, we may withdraw our child from the study at any point without prejudice or penalty. If we choose to withdraw, all data (audiotapes, videotapes, transcripts, field notes, etc.) will be destroyed and collected artifacts (our child's writings, drawings, and photographs) will be returned to us.
7. we will receive a written copy and oral account of the final report.

We authorize Maureen Kendrick to use the information that we provide, or that our child provides, in books, book chapters, written reports, articles, and conference presentations. Please sign the consent form below.

Date: _____

Names (print): _____

Address: _____

Signature: _____

Release Form

As the kindergarten teacher of _____, I give permission for the use of information from classroom observations and informal interviews in the dissertation and any subsequent publications and presentations of Maureen E. Kendrick. I understand that the purpose of this research is to explore the relationships between play, literacy, and culture in the life of one young girl. I also understand that observations of me and examples of my interactions with the primary research participant, _____, may be used to help describe this young girl's literacy development.

I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read draft copies of the dissertation chapters that include classroom observations and informal interviews with me, and that I may add, delete, or augment any information so that it represents what I want to share.

I have chosen the name Miss Grace Lee as a pseudonym and prefer that this name be used in the dissertation and subsequent publications and presentations.

_____

Signature

_____

Date

Release Form

As the kindergarten teacher aide of _____, I give permission for the use of information from classroom observations and informal interviews in the dissertation and any subsequent publications and presentations of Maureen E. Kendrick. I understand that the purpose of this research is to explore the relationships between play, literacy, and culture in the life of one young girl. I also understand that observations of me and examples of my interactions with the primary research participant, _____ _____, may be used to help describe this young girl's literacy development.

I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read the dissertation chapters that include classroom observations and informal interviews with me, and that I may add, delete, or augment any information so that it represents what I want to share.

I have chosen the name Mrs. Teresa Hai as a pseudonym and prefer that this name be used in the dissertation and subsequent publications and presentations.

_____
Signature

_____
Date