

Play-Based Emergent Literacy Development in the Home Environment

By

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

When I step into my relatives house for a visit with my family, I am greeted by a three year old tapping on the window next to the door. As I take off my shoes, I add them to a pile of adult and child sized shoes on the mat. I look around the living room, and see signs of literacy all around me. I am surrounded by pictures, toys, books, music, and conversation.

Jen, my three year old relative grabs me by the hand and leads me into her bedroom. She wants to show me her new Barbie doll, and asks me to play with her. As we are in her room, she tells me about her all of her pre school friends, and I realize that she is making up some of them as she goes along. I go with it, and prompt her to tell me more. Jen goes on to tell me about one of her best friends, and all of the fun things that they do together such as playing games and reading books. Shortly after, she is ready to head back into the main part of the house and socialize with the rest of our family.

Jim, my five year old relative is content playing by himself on the families iPod touch. He loves to play many different games on the small touch screen device, and also use it to watch his own shows and movies from Netflix. Soon he gets bored and is ready for a snack. While eating his crackers, he asks me if I want to play with

him. Of course I agree to, and he asks me to play a game on the Wii. Jim loves the racing games, and ends up beating me in Super Mario Cart.

Jim and Jen are emergent literacy learners, and are constantly learning through their play. Reading and writing skills naturally surround different types of play. Emergent literacy is the natural occurring reading and writing behaviors of children beginning at birth, up until they learn to read and write conventionally. Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitude that are developmental precursors to reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). The most straightforward skills of emergent literacy include the ability to read and write. An emergent literacy learner is learning the basic knowledge of reading and writing. This often begins with language, and can expand to basic vocabulary. Conventions of print, knowledge of letters, and linguistic awareness are other aspects of emergent literacy.

Regarding emergent literacy development, play is something that children naturally learn to do. Play can have a strong emphasis on emergent literacy, especially in the home environment where play occurs often. There is a definite connection between play and emergent literacy. Children begin to develop their literacy skills at a very young age, which is all part of the emergent literacy process. A major contributor to children's literacy abilities can stem from playing. Play is such a natural process for children that reading and writing activities are embedded in play

naturally. It is important as teachers to understand the connection between play and literacy.

My focal children love to play in their home environment. They are a brother and a sister who live together with their parents. The boy just started kindergarten and is five years old. The three year old girl just began her first year of preschool. They enjoy playing outside and inside, playing games, watching television, and reading books. Based on my observation of children engaging in play, I have found that play is an essential part of children's language development. During my observations in their home environment I will be researching the connection between play and literacy.

### **Research Questions**

The main question of this study is to determine the connection between play and literacy. Based on this main focus question, the examination started with investigating how played based learning can help children with their emergent literacy in the home environment. The questions also center on what literacy activities are embedded in the natural aspect of play and how reading, writing, listening, speaking and viewing are also embedded. I asked the following questions:

- How does play based learning in the home environment help children with their emergent literacy development?
- What types of play are the children involved in?
- What kind of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing are embedded in the children's play?

### **Rationale/Significance of study**

It is critical to study play and emergent literacy since play is an essential part of learning, and can have a significant effect on a young child's reading and writing ability. Play is so essential to a child because it shapes children's learning, and it is important to know how to teach children as effectively as possible. We already know that students can learn through play, and now we need to focus on what types of literacy learning can occur through play. By observing young children's play in their home environment, I was able to see the connection between play and literacy. This provided beneficial information for teachers who want to manage an authentic and meaningful curriculum for your children.

### **Definitions**

Emergent Literacy- The natural occurring reading and writing behaviors of children beginning at birth, up until they learn to read and write conventionally

Family Literacy- What types of literacy the child's family is involved in

School based literacy- Reading and writing that is introduced in school yet can be practiced anywhere

Play based learning- Learning that naturally occurs through play in either the home or school environment.

## **Study Approach**

My study was primarily qualitative research. This methodology is appropriate for my study because I plan to observe and conduct interviews to collect data. I also conducted an attitude survey and took anecdotal notes to help me collect data for my research. I was both an inactive and active participant during this study. At first I wanted to mainly be an inactive participant, and observe the children playing on their own or with their family members. I then became more of an active participant, by suggesting different activities for the children to play that are specifically literacy learning oriented. My goal is to better understand the effects play has on emergent literacy development. I think that by being an active participant in my study, I was able to use my knowledge of play based emergent literacy the parents may not have. I provided ideas to share with the kids that the parents would normally not think of in ordinary circumstances.

## **Organization of Thesis**

This research paper is composed of five chapters. Chapter One is an introduction to my research study. Next, chapter Two consists of a literature review. This section focuses on the previous research that has been completed on emergent literacy and play based learning. Chapter Three is the research design where participants, data collection, procedures, and data analysis are discussed. Chapter Four addresses the research that will be completed and also analyze data collected throughout the research study. Chapter Five focuses on the implications of the study results.

## **Summary**

Play is a natural part of literacy and learning. This research study assesses the impact of play on emergent literacy in a home environment. I analyzed interviews, attitude surveys, observations, and field notes, to determine the impact of play on emergent literacy. The research focuses on the many uses of play and how it can promote emergent literacy. Through this study I was able to gain a better understanding of the connection between play and emergent literacy learning.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Play is a natural process for children that often embeds literacy activities into it. Play can have a strong emphasis on emergent literacy, especially in the home environment where play occurs often. There has been much research done about the relationship between play and emergent literacy. Some of this research focuses on play based learning in the home environment, the types of play that children are involved in, and also the types of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing are embedded in the children's play. In this chapter, I examine these categories of research within the area of play and emergent literacy.

#### **Emergent Literacy**

Emergent literacy is the natural occurring reading and writing behaviors of children beginning at birth, up until they learn to read and write conventionally. Saracho and Spodek (2006) believe that children's cognitive development of literacy skills starts to take shape before obtaining organized reading and writing instruction because children are constantly being exposed to print in their everyday lives. Also, since literacy also includes viewing, listening, and speaking, children are exposed to literacy from the day they are born. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) state that emergent literacy skills occur during the early childhood period and define "emergent literacy" as "the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are presumed to be developmental precursors to the conventional forms of reading and writing" (p. 849). With emergent reading, Whitehurst and Lonigan report that children may be

pretending to read books or are reading print that exists within their environment, which strengthens the concept that meaning exists within a text. Some people may view this type of pretending to be simply playing, however there is literacy learning occurring at the same time. It is amazing how much children learn at such young ages. It is important to be very careful with what you say while around young children because they are just like sponges, soaking up everything you say and do.

An important aspect of literacy learning, especially emergent literacy, is family literacy. Family literacy is known as the types of literacy the child's family is involved in. It is important for teachers to engage families in ways that develop a positive link between home and school (Hammack, 2012). It has been proven that if there is a positive connection between school and home environment, students will be more successful in literacy. Students who are exposed to literacy before entering kindergarten are often set up to be more successful with their literacy learning. A simple way for parents to incorporate literacy with their children is by through reading together. According to Soundy (2009) "pathways into play are often influenced by early exposure to picture books. When interests in real experiences combine with storybook events, conditions are ripe for imaginary thinking." When children use their imagination, it means that they are thinking, and in turn, they are learning from what they read. There are many positive effects that being read to as a young child can have on children's reading abilities as students in school. It is important that teachers consider the home life of their students because it can really effect the students' performance in school. There is a clear connection between the

effects of home environment and school environment.

### **Play based learning in the home environment**

Before beginning to write all about play, a basic definition should be given. A definition of “play” given by Saracho (2001) states that "through play, young children engage in a diverse set of play experiences such as imitative experiences, communication of ideas, concrete objects and several socialization levels. When children play, they acquire information about their intellectual and social world" (p. 402). There is much more to play than children running about doing whatever they please, wherever they want. Play can be structured or unstructured, and is often a great opportunity for learning to naturally occur. There is a vital role of socio-dramatic play in the development of emergent literacy.

Play is essential to a child because it shapes children’s learning. Now more than ever schools are focusing on strict curriculum and standards that they need to follow throughout a school year. This often results in a busy structured school day, with less time for students to free play. Play based learning in the home environment is extremely important because in some cases, it may be one of the only chances children get to choose their own activities and let learning occur naturally through this method.

Personal interest often has a strong impact on children’s learning and playing. If a child is interested in something, they will be more likely to have a desire to participate or be involved in the activity that is interesting to them. In a study by Row

and Neitzel (2010) children's interest in emergent writing experiences was examined. It was found that children's personal interests help shape their transactions with people, materials, and activities, resulting in different profiles of early writing experiences.

Play often involves movement, yet children traditionally have been expected to limit their movement by sitting still and moving in regulated and practiced ways in environments such as school (McLaren 2011). Moving about and playing freely in indoor and outdoor environments is an important pre-requisite for children's physical, psychological and social well being. Children can have many opportunities for learning in both of these environments, and in the home setting they have the chance to explore both. There has been much research conducted involving outdoor play environments. Since my study will take place during the winter season, majority, of my research will be conducted indoors. The relationship between a child's physical environment and movement can have a strong effect on learning.

Early literacy learning is a social, constructive process that begins much earlier in life than was previously believed. Starting in infancy, children develop literacy concepts and skills through everyday experience with others (Roskos, 2011). Children's homes are their first learning environments, so what they are reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing can affect their literacy skills sooner than parents may think. Something as simple as what is on the television, whether the child hears it playing in the background, or is viewing it in front of them, the child is being

affected. Some research on children's television suggests that preschool programs can facilitate literacy and language development (Jennings, 2009). More important and effect than television, the amount of speech parents direct to their children before the age of 3 years can strongly impact them up to nine years old.

Parents are children's first and most important teachers. They promote children's learning and development by structuring multiple aspects of the environment, which can include participation in routine literacy activities, supportive parent engagements, and availability of age appropriate learning materials(Rodriguez, 2011). These learning materials are often seen as toys and fun things to play with to children.

### **Play based learning in school**

In today's society it not uncommon for schools and educators to be more focused on performance and assessment rather than student needs. Due to the increased demands of standards and strict curriculums, today's school runs on accountability. In turn, many teachers have no choice but to move away from a child-centered classroom that promotes play and exploration. Instead, teachers are basing their instruction on standardized tests leaving little time for students to develop naturally.

The processes of reading and writing do not emerge as an individual process. Instead they develop through multiple modes that come together. Play allows children to explore their world through multiple modes, play. Children are offered multiple

ways to expand meanings of the messages they produce through multi-modal play.

Through play children's reading abilities, classroom identity and social positioning are shaped. Play motivates and gets children involved with a variety of different types of literature. This literature often involves aspects of unique cultures. "Incorporation of themes from popular culture into the curriculum can motivate children whose interests are usually excluded from classroom (Marsh 1999, p. 117)". By playing, children from different cultural backgrounds are given more opportunities to express themselves and interests and are more likely to contribute to interactive activities using their cultural beliefs and experiences.

Play can also assist in bridging the gap amongst gender roles. For example boys can get involved w/girl themes and girls can get involved with boy themes. Girls can also be the heroines and not always the damsels in distress. Girls are constructed as passive literacy learners who read and write about school appropriate topics and boys are constructed as active learners who need special encouragement to engage in literacy.

Encounters with literacy in a non threatening situation can lead to an increased confidence in literacy skills and willingness to volunteer to undertake writing tasks in the classroom. Becoming more confident in relation to writing and volunteering for activities in the classroom can provide opportunities to extend these skills.

## **Types of Play**

It is often a goal of any teacher to turn the classroom into a learning community. Parents can also have a similar goal, to turn their homes into a learning community for their children. The idea of a learning community stems from Vygotsky's social-historical approach and on other related psycho-pedagogical proposals (Culture and Education 2007) that involve social development. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development, therefore as children play with one another there is learning involved. Play is complex and takes many forms, ranging from unstructured to high-level sociodramatic play. All types of play appear to be important in human development. Many children naturally choose to participate in high levels of play. Sociodramatic play is characterized by symbolic representation, imaginative use of language, role-taking, social interaction, and sustained play activity (Roskos, 2011).

Naturalistic version of play occurs very often in the home setting. Book related play can be very natural, and can easily occur in the home environment. Children often enjoy connecting books to the world of objects by locating and holding book related toys and props (Rowe, 2007). This can be a great activity for children and their parents. They can read a book together, and then often children end up engaging in dramatic play based off of the books that were read to them.

In “Listening to What Children Say” written by Vivian Paley, a high school science teacher visits a kindergarten class. During these visits with kindergartners, the high school teacher would have genuine conversations with the kindergartners based

off of show and tell that he brought to share with the class. The high school teacher would ask open ended questions or make a general observation, and stick with that idea until a kindergartener made a connection to that idea. This process continued until there were constant links being made to each other's ideas. These conversations prompted the kindergarten teacher, Vivian Paley, to evaluate her teaching practices and wait time while teaching. From there, Vivian Paley became interest in children's conversations while playing. It was found that children learn to understand the world through storytelling and imaginative play. Teachers can learn a lot about children from simply observing them play. Natural curiosity about children can be answered by watching them while they play, and listening to their conversations. If teachers listen carefully to their students, they will be able to learn many ways to connect play to learning.

Another article by Vivian Paley, *Goldilocks and Her Sister: An Anecdotal Guide to the Doll Corner*, is based off of the idea that children are able to learn inside and outside of the classroom through imaginative play and storytelling. This article is directly related to my focal child Jen, because one of her favorite activities is to play pretend with her dolls. To young children "the doll corner", or idea of telling a story by pretending to be someone else in a different place, is a way of life. Imaginative play and storytelling promote learning both inside and outside of the classroom through fantasy, fairness, and friendship. The fantasy is children's role play in acting out different stories. While role playing, children learn how to be fair with one another, which can lead to friendship between one another. The great part of

imaginative play is that it can take place almost anywhere. Children do not need to be in a school setting in order to learn from their play experiences. Imaginative play can strengthen relationships and create opportunities for learning socially and cognitively.

### **Reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing embedded in children's play**

Play is beneficial to students with and without special needs. Lifter(2011) states that play is important for three major reasons. First, play increases the likelihood of placement and learning in natural, inclusive, less restrictive settings. Next, because it is adaptable and can be used in multiple settings as a context for embedding intervention, practicing new skills such as symbolic thinking or motor planning, and also conducting authentic assessments. Lastly, play provides opportunities for social and communicative interactions with peers and adults. Children naturally embed reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing into play.

Play increases the likelihood of placement and learning in natural, inclusive, less restrictive settings. It is adaptable and can be used in multiple settings as a context for embedding intervention, practicing new, and it provides opportunities for social and communicative interactions with peers and adults (Lifter,2011). Children love to look at books on their own, by looking at the pictures and coming up with their own story, or recalling the actual one. Children always love to be read to, which can be done at any age, and listening and viewing is occurring. All aspects of literacy naturally occur through play. Play is such an ordinary process for children that reading and writing activities are embedded in play naturally.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

#### **Introduction**

The goal of the research study was to evaluate the connection between emergent literacy and play.

There are a few different research questions that this study aimed to answer. The questions included what connections exist between play and literacy; how play based learning in the home environment helps children with their emergent literacy; what different types of play the children are involved in; and, how play supports the children's emergent literacy activities? In the following section I will discuss the context and participants, data collection instruments, procedures, and lastly the data analysis.

#### **Context and participants**

The study took place in a home setting in Western New York. The home is located in a suburb with a population around 96,095 people, according to the 2010 Census. The suburb borders Lake Ontario, and has a total area of 51.4 square miles. There are three different school districts that serve this suburb, and in the actual suburb there are twelve elementary schools, four middle schools, and four high schools, educating approximately 13,000 students.

The children in this study go to nearby public schools located in this same

suburb. The children who are 5 and 3 years old are both emergent literacy learners. Like both of their parents, they are white English speaking Americans. They are both healthy physically active children. The children live in a basic two story house with their parents, and baby sister. They also have two dogs and two cats. The two youngest children, the girls share a bedroom, and the little boy has his own room. Their rooms and house are filled with age appropriate toys and books that they use on a regular basis.

The researcher, Kelly Day, identifies herself as a middle class Caucasian. I am NYS certified to teach early childhood, childhood, and students with disabilities. I am currently working on my master's degree in Childhood Literacy at The College of Brockport and intend to complete my degree in May 2013. I am currently a substitute teacher at a variety of school districts in Monroe Country.

My role as the researcher was both an inactive and active participant during this study. At first I wanted to mainly be an inactive participant, and observe the children playing on their own or with their family members. I then became more of an active participant, because I suggested different things for the children to play that are specifically literacy learning oriented. I wanted to first observe to see the children under normal circumstances, and what they choose to play with on their own. During observations I noted the different types of play the focal children engaging in. Also, I looked for and noted any reading and writing activities embedded in the focal children's play. I then choose to become more of an active participant because I was

able to bring another perspective to their home environment, and share different play based learning and literacy ideas that they may not participate in. I wanted to see if the focal children enjoy these new play experiences, and if they seem to be improving their emergent literacy.

Since this is a home based study, the focus group students are the only children in the household. These children will not be aware that they are focal students, because I am family and they are used to seeing me around. They are most comfortable in their familiar home environment, and do not really think anything of me being there. I chose to use my two young relatives for this study because they are both emergent readers and writers who enjoy playing, which is the focus of my research study.

Parental permission was secured. A copy of a letter to the parents is included in the appendix. Confidentiality of the participants is ensured through the use of pseudo names.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection instruments that were used for this study are observations of participants and interviews and surveys of the children and parents.

Table 3.1 Data Collection and Methods

<b>Data Instrument or Method</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Informal Observation	To observe children playing naturally.
Anecdotal/Field Notes	Reflection on children’s play, emergent literacy, and play based literacy learning
Interview	First hand information from parents and children
Attitude survey	Children’s opinions of play, reading, and writing

**Interview**

Prior to starting my observations I performed an interview (see appendix) with the parents of the focal children. Through the interview I asked questions related to what types of play the children are engaged in. Also, I asked questions about their children’s emergent literacy development and get an opinion on how they view play for their children in literacy development. The interview gave me information for answering my research question about what types of play the children are involved with in their home environment.

## **Observations**

During each session I carefully observed the focal children. I informally observed them, so that they go about their activities as if I am not there. After I introduced some literacy related activities, I also carefully observed their reactions and interest in the activities.

## **Anecdotal Notes**

During the observations I took field notes of what occurred. I documented anything that relates to the research topic. The observations were used to answer all four research questions.

## **Procedures**

In order to conduct my instructional and research activities, I needed to begin by interviewing and surveying the children and parents of my participants for the study. I then observed the children in their home environment two to three times per week, for four weeks. During this time I observed what the children were doing while they played. After I had enough observations, I began to introduce different types of literacy related play, to see if the children were interested. If they were, I would observe them participating in this new type of play. After the four weeks of observations, I then conducted more interviews and surveys to the children and parents. A four-week study is planned that minimally takes place 2-3 days per week, for at least 5 hours per week . Procedures are linked to literature review.

Table 3.2 Procedure of Data Collection

<b>Week 1</b>	Informal observation and interviews
<b>Week 2</b>	Informal observation
<b>Week 3</b>	Introduce different types of literacy play
<b>Week 4</b>	More interviews and interaction with children ,Informal observation and field notes

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed and interpreted the data in order to answer each research question by making field notes from my observations. Field notes, surveys, and interviews were used to provide data for each question. My research questions were answered through observational field notes and interviews.

This study was conducted in between February and March of 2013 and lasted for 4 weeks. Each week will consist of two observations. This study looked at how play supports emergent literacy development. The data were analyzed to answer the research questions. Student’s connection between play and literacy in the home environment was analyzed through all the means of data collection. How play based learning in the home environment help children with their emergent literacy development, and the kind of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing are embedded in the children’s play were analyzed by using field notes from observations and informal talk from the children. The types of play that the children are involved in were analyzed through the parent interview and observations. To increase validity and reliability of the study, I used triangulation across the domains.

## **Summary**

This chapter describes the context and participants of this research study. It also labeled the data collection method that were used. The procedures that were used to conduct the research study are described in detail. Lastly, there is a data analysis which explains how each research question was answered.

A five year old boy and three year old girl have been chosen as the focal students to study and examine play. In order to acquire the necessary information data was collected by means of observations, and interviews. At each observation meticulous field notes were taken based on my observations. These interviews also gave me more of an idea of what the children like to do during their free time, where their literacy levels are, and also the parent's perspective and how they view play in their child's life. The overall time for the research included four weeks with two to three observations a week. Validity and reliability of the data collected were maintained through triangulation of data.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Research Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and determine the connection between play and literacy. During the first week of this study, I was strictly an observer. After observing the play behaviors of my focal children, I introduced a literacy related activity to see if they had interest in it. The following weeks I continued to observe their play behaviors to see if they would incorporate the new literacy related play activity on their own. The two focal children that I observed and worked with are relatives of mine. Jim is five years old and in kindergarten, and Jen is a three year old preschooler.

The main inquiry of this study is to determine the connection between play and literacy. Based on this, my other questions were as follows:

- How does play based learning in the home environment help children with their emergent literacy development?
- What types of play are the children involved in?
- What kind of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing are embedded in the children's play?

To assist in answering these questions, observations, interviews, and an interest survey were conducted.

## **How does play based learning in the home environment help children with their emergent literacy development?**

In the following section, I have included my interview with Jim and Jen. This interview was given to give me an idea of what the children personally enjoy doing for fun in their home environment. This first research question is most related to my main inquiry of the connection between play and literacy. The interview shows evidence of an association between these two things.

I have also included an interest survey that was conducted with Jim and Jen. This interest survey included many toys and activities found in the children's home. The children had to tell me whether or not they liked to play with the items listed on the survey. This gave me evidence for specific toys and activities my children choose to play with.

The last aspect of this question is a write up of my observation of Jim and Jen. I found that my field notes from my observations were my most helpful tool because they were based on my own first hand experiences and interpretations.

### **Jim**

I chose to use the following interview data from Jim because it tells me exactly how Jim feels about play and literacy in his own words. It also supports the connection between play and literacy by showing that Jim's interests are built off of play based learning. Jim is a curious young boy, and always interested in trying out

something new to do for fun. He is able to play on his own and well as with others. He seems to enjoy learning activities the most when it is less obvious to him that he is actually learning. For example, if I or someone was to suggest that he write his name or read a book, he would be more inclined to say no. However, if Jim was playing school with his sister, he would willingly read and write because it is incorporated through play. Also, Jim is constantly reading off of the T.V while watching different shows and movies, and also playing games such as on the Wii.

The interview with Jim gave me the chance to talk first hand with Jim about his interests and favorite toys in his home. The first interview question was based off of what Jim likes to do for fun at home. I wanted to find out from him first hand what he prefers to play with at home. I also wanted to know what his favorite toy and book are. The next question asked how often he reads and writes at home. I asked this question because I wanted to hear his opinion on reading and writing at home. I also asked about learning to read and write in school, and if he would like to practice more at home. Lastly, I asked if Jim enjoys reading and writing. I asked this question because I wanted to find out his personal opinion of literacy.

Based off of this interview, I was able to see that Jim's preferred activity at home is to play with his action figures. He enjoys interactive books such as his Toy Story look and find book that he mentioned as his favorite. Jim does not mind reading books at home, and he likes to at school. He prefers to color at home rather than write.

I chose to include the interview data from my conversations with Jim and Jen because they include first-hand information from these children that supports the play literacy connection. In each interview with Jim and Jen, I ask them the same questions. The questions include answers to the following; what they like to do for fun at home, what they like to play with, what their favorite toy is, what their favorite book is, whether or not they like to write, how often they read and write, if they are learning to read and write in school and lastly whether or not they would like to practice more reading and writing at home. All of the answers from the interview support the idea that Jim and Jen both enjoy participating in play based activities that are related to reading and writing. This data help to answer my research questions because it supports the connection between play and literacy.

**Interview:**

Based off of this interview, I found that Jim's favorite toy to play with at home is his action figures. Jim is an active young boy who enjoys many different activities such as sports, television, and video games. Jim also enjoys interactive books such as his Toy Story look and find book. Jim does enjoy reading at home and at school, and prefers to have a choice in book selection.

1.) What do you like to do for fun at home? What do you like to play with?

*I like my WWE guys, the wii, playing with legos, and coloring.*

*I like to play with my cars and with mom's tablet.*

a. What's your favorite toy? Why?

*My action figures, I like to make them fight.. and my new truck!*

b. What's your favorite book?

*My Toy Story look and find book, and this big book from the Circus. It has real pictures in it.*

c. Do you like to write?

*Sometimes, usually only when I have to at school. I like coloring more.*

2.) How often do you read and write at home?

*Sometimes when I feel like it.*

a. Are you learning to read and write at school? Would you like to practice at home?

*I learned how to write my name, and the ABC's. I can write sentences with my pictures not too.*

3.) Do you like to read or write? Is it fun?

*It's okay but not my favorite. I think I'm pretty good though.*

## **Survey**

I chose to use the following survey data because the responses came directly from Jim, so they are based off of his opinion and preference. Jim's responses tell me that he is a typical boy, and enjoys many common activities that other boys his age

are involved with. I read a list of activities or toys that Jim may be interested in, and asked him to indicate whether or not he enjoyed playing with each item. The items that Jim indicated yes to are shown in italics.

**Which of these do you like to play with?**

Table 4.1 Survey With Jim

<i>TV</i>	Cell phones	dolls	Dance	Being read to
Books	<i>tablets</i>	Coloring	Music	Reading to someone
Games	<i>wii</i>	Blocks	<i>Movies</i>	Crafts
<i>Sports</i>	reading	<i>Legos</i>	<i>Playdoe</i>	<i>Playing outside</i>
<i>Cars</i>	writing	Puzzles	Stuffed animals	<i>Playing inside</i>
<i>Computer</i>	Playing pretend	food	Magnadoodle	<i>Playing in my room</i>
<i>iPod</i>	<i>Action figures</i>	kitchen	<i>Cartoons</i>	<i>Playing with a friend or someone else</i>

From this survey, I was able to get more detail on the children’s opinions of play, reading, and writing. I found that Jim enjoys playing very much. He is a very active young boy, and enjoys many different types of play. When I asked about reading and writing, Jim explained that he likes reading more than writing. If he had to pick between reading or writing at home or school, he would choose to read more at home, and write more in school. Since Jim is only in kindergarten, he would not choose to sit down at home and write just for something to do. He doesn’t mind his

parents or other adults reading him stories, and sometimes he likes to read along with them.

## **Jen**

I chose to use the following interview data from Jen because it tells me exactly how Jen feels about play and literacy in her own words. It also supports the connection between play and literacy by showing that Jen's interests are built off of play based learning.

### **Interview**

Jen is a curious young girl who loves to play. She is very outgoing and is willing to play by herself and with others, which includes adults and other children. The interview with Jen gave me the chance to talk first hand with Jen about her interests and favorite toys in her home. The first interview question was based off of what Jen likes to do for fun at home. I wanted to find out from her first hand what she prefers to play with at home. I also wanted to know what her favorite toy and book are. The next question asked how often she reads and writes at home. I asked this question because I wanted to hear her opinion on reading and writing at home. I also asked about learning to read and write in school, and if she would like to practice more at home. Lastly, I asked if Jen enjoys reading and writing. I asked this question because I wanted to find out her personal opinion of literacy.

Based off of this interview, I was able to see that Jen is an all American girl. Jens preferred activity at home is playing with her dolls and Barbies. She loves the typical girly toys and activities, but she also loves her music and sport related activities that her brother is also interested in. Jen loves to read and be read to at home, and is willing to read a variety of different books.

1.) What do you like to do for fun at home? What do you like to play with?

*I like to play with my dolls and Barbie's, color, playdoh ,and I like dancing to music.*

a. What's your favorite toy? Why?

*My Barbie because she has pretty hair. I like my Barbie's to talk and play together in their doll house.*

b. What's your favorite book?

*I like all my books. Today I like my church poem book with pop up pictures.*

c. Do you like to write?

*Yes I can write my name. I am learning the letters at school.*

2.) How often do you read and write at home?

*Sometimes*

a. Are you learning to read and write at school? Would you like to practice at home?

*I am learning my letters and school, I like to practice at school.*

3.) Do you like to read or write? Is it fun?

*Yes especially reading. Sometimes I read to myself but I like when my friends read to me.*

## **Survey**

I chose to use the following survey data because the responses came directly from Jen, so they are based off of her opinion and preference. Jen’s responses tell me that she is a typical girl, and enjoys many common activities that other girls her age are involved with. I read a list of activities or toys that Jen may be interested in, the same list that was previously asked to her brother. I asked her to indicate whether or not she enjoyed playing with each item. The items that Jen indicated yes to are shown in italics.

### **Which of these do you like to play with?**

Table 4.2 Survey With Jen

<i>TV</i>	<i>Cell phones</i>	<i>dolls</i>	<i>Dance</i>	<i>Being read to</i>
<i>Books</i>	tablets	<i>Coloring</i>	<i>Music</i>	<i>Reading to someone</i>
<i>Games</i>	wii	Blocks	<i>Movies</i>	<i>Crafts</i>
Sports	<i>reading</i>	Legos	Playdoe	<i>Playing outside</i>
Cars	<i>writing</i>	Puzzles	<i>Stuffed animals</i>	<i>Playing inside</i>
Computer	<i>Playing pretend</i>	<i>food</i>	Magnadoodle	<i>Playing in my room</i>
<i>iPod</i>	Action figures	<i>kitchen</i>	<i>Cartoons</i>	<i>Playing with a friend or someone else</i>

From this survey, I was able to get more detail on the children's opinions of play, reading, and writing. I found that Jen enjoys all types of play. Jen is in preschool and is younger than Jim. She often wants to play with the same things as Jim. It is evident that she looks up to her older brother, and admires him. When the two of them are playing together, Jen will do what Jim wants, and is fine with his suggestion of play.

When Jen is playing alone, she always enjoys playing with her dolls. She also loves dancing and cheerleading, and enjoys dancing with her mom to music. When Jim is alone he is more likely to play with his action figures, on one of the touch screen devices, or use the Wii.

### **Observations**

The following section includes my observations of Jim and Jen based on the question of how play based learning in the home environment helps children with their emergent literacy development. These observations and field notes based on my first hand observations gave evidence of many opportunities for play to assist with the children's emergent literacy development.

I was able to learn much about play based learning in the home environment from observing Jim and Jen play in their home environment. The main thing that I learned from observations, is that literacy is so naturally embedded in play, that in the home environment there is no need to force it upon children. There is a difference between playing and being taught. If my main goal was to teach literacy in the home

environment, I would be needing to create much more literacy based activities for the children to do. However, since my main goal was to see how play based learning in the home environment helps children with their emergent literacy development, all I really had to do was carefully observe their playing.

Play based learning in the home environment certainly helps children with their emergent literacy development. The children naturally are developing their literacy through play. There is always some type of conversation, they listen to each other and their parents, they speak to one another, and watch what everyone is doing. My focal children did not even realize that they were participating in a literacy activity that could help their emergent literacy development, because play makes literacy learning fun and enjoyable. It was amazing to see how much these children could teach themselves and discover without any adult assistance, simply through their play.

### **What types of play are the children involved in?**

The following section includes my observations of Jim and Jen based off of the types of play they are involved with. Information from the interview and survey also helped to answer this research question. Both children are involved with a variety of literacy related play.

#### **Jim**

I have included the following observation data based off of Jim because it

shows evidence of many different types of play that he is involved with in his home environment. Almost all of his play activities can be associated with literacy and learning.

### **Observations**

Jim is involved in a variety of different types of play. While playing indoors in his home environment, Jim is most often found playing in one of three places; his bedroom, the living, or the upstairs playroom. In nicer weather he always loves to play outside in his backyard. When in his bedroom, Jim enjoys playing with his toy cars and toy action figures, his WWE guys. While playing with these toys, Jim often simulates real life scenarios. For example, he will make his own car racing noises, sounds for collisions, etc. When playing with his action figures, he usually has two of them fighting against each other. He uses similar language heard during a wrestling match, such as certain moves being done, punches, kicks, and other wrestling terminology that he knows.

In the living room, Jim enjoys watching television and movies, playing on his mother's tablet, and coloring at the table. He has coloring books that he enjoys coloring out of, but he also will draw on a blank piece of paper. Jim does very well using his mother's tablet. He knows how to use all of the applications on it, and even knows how to go into iTunes to buy new games, applications, music, and videos. When he is not playing a game on the tablet, he will often watch Netflix off of it. One of his favorite television shows to watch is Power Rangers. He often uses what he

sees on this show for his play with the WWE action figures.

In the upstairs playroom, Jim enjoys playing with Legos, playing pretend, and using the Wii. Jim has a fairly large container filled with his Legos. He enjoys using the Legos to create streets and paths for his toy cars, create buildings and towers, and also to build houses. He will sit independently to play with the Legos, but also allows his sister to play with them as well. Jim also enjoys using the toy kitchen to play pretend and make believe with his sister. They will make food, do the dishes, serve any customers, etc. Jim has a few games for his Wii, and prefers to play it alone rather than with his sister. He really enjoys Mario Kart racing, and demonstrates very good hand eye coordination with this game. He also enjoys playing the classic Wii Sports, where he can bowl, play tennis, and golf. Jim also enjoys playing with Playdoh with his sister. He likes to make different shapes, and also to use it to play his Playdoh board game.

This observation data tell me that Jim is involved in a variety of different types of play. He enjoys acting out scenarios with his toy cars and action figures, which shows that he is aware of his surroundings, and is reenacting situations that he has seen either on television, a game, or real life. Jim also enjoys building things with his Legos and Play-doh, coloring, watching television, playing on the tablet or iPod touch, and playing games. Jim is willing to play in different areas of his household, which demonstrates that he is comfortable in all areas of his household environment.

## **Jen**

I have included the following observation data based off of Jen because it shows evidence of many different types of play that she is involved with in her home environment. Almost all of her play activities can be associated with literacy and learning.

### **Observations**

Jen is also involved in a variety of different types of play, and most often plays in the same three areas as her brother; her bedroom, the living, and the upstairs playroom. When it is nice outside, Jen also enjoys to play in the backyard. When playing in her bedroom, Jen enjoys playing with her dolls, and playing dress up. Jen's room is filled with many different dolls, but her favorites are her Barbies. She enjoys changing their outfits, and playing with their hair. While playing with her Barbies, Jen likes to act out different scenarios. She has conversations with her Barbies, and makes them speak to each other as well.

In the living room, Jen also enjoys watching television and movies, as well as dancing to music with her mother. Jen is very interested in dance and cheerleading, and enjoys making up dance routines to different songs. She also sings along to the songs played on the radio and C.D's that she listens to. Jen will start to dance and perform in her own way just for fun, so it is evident that she enjoys music and dance very much. She also enjoys coloring with her brother. She has her own coloring books, and sometimes shares the same ones that her brother uses. Jen will also draw

and color on a blank piece of paper, and seems to enjoy experimenting with random letters and lines. She is just learning how to write her name, and was eager to play school with me. Jen allowed me to help her write her name by me writing her name first, and then having her trace it, and then write it herself underneath. I also showed her magnet letters, and gave her the letters needed to correctly spell her first name. She enjoyed feeling each letter, and arranging them to match the spelling on the paper. Jen also enjoyed looking at and listening to different story books with me.

In the upstairs playroom Jen enjoys playing with playdoh with her brother, and playing pretend. She is still too young to control the Wii remote properly, so she becomes frustrated when trying to play it with her brother. Jen enjoys using the Playdoh, and makes different shapes and characters from it. She also really enjoys playing pretend and make believe with her brother. Her favorite is being a waitress in a restaurant. She will take your order, pick the food out from the you kitchen, and serve it to you. She also helps do the dishes and organize the kitchen toys.

This observation data tells me that Jen is involved in a variety of different types of play. She enjoys acting out scenarios with her Barbie's and dolls, which shows that she is aware of her surroundings, and is reenacting situations that she has seen either on television, a game, or real life. Jen loves to have people participate in these scenarios with her, and is able to make up different stories and situations as she goes along. Jen also enjoys using Play-doh, coloring, watching television, playing on the iPod touch, singing, dancing, and playing games. Jen is willing to play in

different areas of her household, which demonstrates that she is comfortable in all areas of her household environment.

**What kind of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing are embedded in the children's play?**

The following section includes my observations of Jim and Jen based off of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing that is naturally embedded in their play. The children have many similarities in the five aspects of literacy, but they also have their differences.

**Jim**

I have included the following observation data based off of Jim because it shows evidence of many different types of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing that is embedded in his play. It is evident that when Jim plays, he is naturally participating in the five aspects of literacy.

**Observations**

**Reading:**

Reading is embedded in Jim's play in many different ways. Two of Jim's favorite activities involve reading, and I am sure that he does not even think twice about the fact that he has to read in order to fully enjoy the full experience. For example, Jim has to read the directions for his Wii games in order to know how to play, what buttons to push, what he needs to do next, etc. In order to watch television and know

what he is watching, he must read the titles to these televisions shows or movies. Another preferred activity is using his mother's touch screen tablet. In order to properly use this device, Jim needs to read the application titles and names, and everything that he comes across while using this device whether it is the directions to a game, title of a song or movie, or reading his last name off of the home screen. Jim is learning to read in school, and enjoys being read to at home. He likes being able to choose the book himself, and is more likely to read with someone if he is the one choosing. He will occasionally want to read a book on his own.

### **Writing:**

Writing is embedded in Jim's play in a few different ways. While coloring Jim will write on the paper he is using. Sometimes he will write his name, other times a word or two, and sometimes he will even write a whole sentence. While using his mother's tablet, Jim will sometimes choose to bring up a blank screen, where he can write and draw by using his fingers, or the special pen designed for use with the touch screen. When Jim is playing school or restaurant with his sister, he will write things on the chalkboard. Most of the time he will write her name, but other times he will write down the name of food items if he has them in front of him so that he can spell them correctly.

### **Listening:**

Listening is naturally embedded into Jim's play throughout the day. Jim is constantly listening to his parents and siblings because that is who is always around. He may be

listening to them speaking to each other, or directly to him. Jim seems to be a good listener, his body language of looking into your eyes and immediately responding shows that he is listening and understands what is being said. There is often a background noise of music or television, so Jim listens to that as well. When Jim chooses to watch television of a movie himself, or play on the Wii or tablet, he has to listen to whatever is being said.

**Speaking:**

Jim has many opportunities to speak at home. Jim can be shy at first, but in his home environment he is very sociable. He speaks often with his parents and siblings. He is willing to have conversations with both his parents and siblings, and speaks in a way that he can be understood. Jim sometimes speaks to himself, especially when he is playing with his toy cars and action figures. He will speak for the action figures, and create dialogue between his toys.

**Viewing:**

Jim is constantly viewing everything in his home environment. Jim has good eyesight, and is always observing and viewing the behaviors of his parents and siblings in his home. Jim also views all of his toys, the television, tablet, and games. When Jim watches television, he is observing the behaviors of the television characters. When he plays games on the tablet or Wii, Jim is viewing the behaviors

or these characters as well, and he demonstrates these learned behaviors through his play.

This observation data tell me that Jim is continuously reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing in his home environment. Each of these aspects of literacy are naturally embedded into his play. None of his daily play activities are forced upon him, yet they are still directly connected to literacy. Play and literacy are naturally connected in children's daily lives.

### **Jen**

I have included the following observation data based off of Jen because it shows evidence of many different types of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing that is embedded in her play. It is evident that when Jen plays, she is naturally participating in the five aspects of literacy.

### **Observations:**

#### **Reading:**

Reading is definitely embedded into Jen's life. Jen loves being read to, and is beginning to recognize the letters from her name. She will open a book or a magazine, and search for the letters that she is able to recognize on her own. If she does not know a letter that she is curious about, she is not afraid to ask for help from either an adult in the house, or her older brother. Jen looks up to her brother, and because he has learned to read, she is very anxious to learn also. She will also read on

her own by looking at the pictures in a book. Like her brother, Jen also prefers to be read books that he gets to choose on her own. However, if an adult has a good book that looks interesting to Jen, she is willing to have it read to her.

### **Writing:**

Writing is beginning to become more embedded into Jen's life. Jen has been practicing writing her first name, so she sometimes enjoys working on this at home. She loves writing the first letter of her name, the "J". Jen writes her name on paper with pencil, pen, marker, and crayon. She also has magnet letters, and when given the correct letters needed to spell her first name, she is able to look at her name written down, and put the magnet letters in the exact order to make her name. Jen will also write random letters and lines while coloring. Recently Jen has seen her brother using the touch screen tablet, and has shown an interest in drawing and writing on the blank screen page. When writing on the tablet, she usually just writes her "J".

### **Listening:**

Listening is naturally embedded into Jen's play throughout the day. Jen is constantly listening to her parents and siblings because that is who is always around. She may be listening to them speaking to each other, or directly to her. Jen seems to be a good listener, her body language of looking into your eyes and immediately responding shows that she is listening and understands what is being said. There is often a background noise of music or television, so Jen listens to that as well. When Jen chooses to watch television of a movie herself, she has to listen to whatever is being

said. Jen is also very interested in music, and listens carefully to the lyrics and rhythm.

**Speaking:**

Jen has many opportunities to speak and home. She speaks very well, and is quite the chatterbox. She loves to speak with her parents and siblings. Jen is able to carry on a conversation with her parents and brother, who are all older than her. Jen will also talk to her baby sister, and loves making her laugh and smile. Jen will also speak to herself and with her dolls. She loves to play pretend and come up with different scenarios for her dolls. When she is playing with her dolls, Jen will speak for them and come up with different conversations between them and with her and the dolls as well. Jen also enjoys singing different songs with music. She has many popular songs memorized that play on the radio, and will sing along to these songs. Jen also sings popular child orientated songs, either to herself or whoever is willing to listen.

**Viewing:**

Jen is constantly viewing everything in her home environment. Jen has good eyesight, and is always observing and viewing the behaviors of her parents and siblings in her home. Jen also views all of her toys, the television, tablet, iPod touch, and games. When Jen watches television or movies, she is observing the behaviors of these characters. When she plays games on the tablet Jen is viewing the behaviors of these characters as well, and she demonstrates these learned behaviors through her play.

This observation data tells me that Jen is continuously reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing in her home environment. Each of these aspects of literacy is naturally embedded into her play. These daily play activities are not forced upon Jen, yet they are still directly connected to literacy.

**Summary:**

In this chapter I was able to triangulate my data through interviews, interest surveys, and observations. I was able to see many connections between play and literacy. I found that play based learning in the home environment definitely helps children with their emergent literacy development. Through play, children are constantly exposed to language, sounds, and behaviors that can help with their emergent literacy skills. The children are involved in many different types of play such as coloring, dolls and action figures, Legos, Playdoh, Wii, books, music, and make believe, to just name a few. Reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing, are all the aspects of literacy that are naturally embedded in the children's play. While playing one activity, the children could be experiencing all five aspects of literacy in only a few minutes. There is always a connection between play and literacy.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Overview and summary of findings**

This study examined the connection between play and literacy of two emergent literacy learners in their home environment in a suburb of Western New York. The study looked at how play based learning in the home environment helps children with their emergent literacy development, the types of play children are involved in, as well as the types of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing that are embedded in the children's play.

It was found that there is a definite connection between play and literacy. This connection is especially evident in emergent literacy learners such as the two focal children that I studied. No matter what play based activity children are engaged in, there is always some type of reading, writing, listening, speaking, or viewing taking place which leads back to an aspect of literacy.

#### **Conclusion**

When children are in their home environment, there is always going to be some type of connection between play and literacy. This connection can be as simple as watching television, where children are viewing the screen, and listening to the audio. On the other hand, this connection can be as complex as children reading a book either to themselves or with a family member, and then writing or drawing about it afterwards. In this case, children are demonstrating all aspects of literacy.

They would be listening to the story and to their family member, speaking to their family member about the book, viewing the illustrations from the book, reading the book to themselves or along with their family member, and lastly writing about the story afterwards, through a picture or with words or letters. No matter what type of play children are participating in, there will always be a connection to literacy involved.

### **Implications of the study**

The basic study of the connection between play and literacy has recently begun to decrease. It is still important to continue studying and researching this play-literacy connection. For educators, the importance of play is generally agreed upon, as well as the fact that there is an essential connection between play and literacy. There are many different types of play, ranging from unstructured to high level sociodramatic play. All types of play are equally significant, and it is imperative that research continues to be conducted on this topic. There are still people out there who want more proof of play making a difference in early childhood development, and the only way to obtain that proof is to continue investigating the topic.

### **Resources for teachers in managing play-based instruction**

Managing play based instruction should be an easy and stress free task for teachers. It is important to create an environment where children will feel comfortable and safe. Students should be expected to play in a friendly and fair manner with one

another. This will lead to spontaneous and enjoyable play for all students. Students should feel free to be actively engaged through pretend play or any type of play that they choose. If children are allowed to explore in open ended ways they may surprise you with their creations and connections to learning. A great way for teachers to learn from their students play based instruction is to carefully observe or kid watch. Taking notes to document kid watching can be helpful to connect the many different types of influence on students literacy. The purpose of observing is to help children build their capabilities to use language to communicate and learn. Talk is a very important aspect of learning. Play based instruction can help facilitate children talk, and create a rich environment for learning and conversation between students.

### **Suggestions for other literacy educators**

Although my study was conducted in the home environment, the play-literacy connection is very much associated to school and literacy educators. From this study I have seen children have fun learning on their own through play. If children are enjoying themselves and what they are doing, they will want to continue doing it. My suggestion to literacy educators is to make learning as enjoyable as possible. Find ways to incorporate learning games and activities that students will view as play instead of as strictly learning or work, and in turn they will be able to learn even more.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Fieldnotes Form

Date:

Teacher Name:

Observer:

School:

Time Start: Time Stop:

Subject:

Grade Level:

### Observation Field Notes

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Interpretations</b>

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions**

For parents:

- 1.) What do you your children like to do for fun at home? What do they like to play with?
  - a. What's their favorite toy? Why?
  - b. What's their favorite book?
  - c. Do they like to write?
- 2.) How often do the children read and write at home?

Interview Questions

For Children

- 1.) What do you like to do for fun at home? What do you like to play with?
  - a. What's your favorite toy? Why?
  - b. What's your favorite book?
  - c. Do you like to write?
- 2.) How often do you read and write at home?
  - a. Are you learning to read and write at school? Would you like to practice at home?
- 3.) Do you like to read or write? Is it fun?

### Appendix C: Survey

Which of these do you like to play with?

TV	Cell phones	dolls	Dance	Being read to
Books	tablets	Coloring	Music	Reading to someone
Games	wii	Blocks	Movies	Crafts
Sports	reading	Legos	Playdoe	Playing outside
Cars	writing	Puzzles	Stuffed animals	Playing inside
Computer	Playing pretend	food	Magnadoodle	Playing in my room
iPod	Action figures	kitchen	Cartoons	Playing with a friend or someone else