

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Literacy is not just confined to reading and writing but encompasses listening, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking and numeracy. In today's world, literacy does not only refer to print texts alone but also multimodal texts, multimedia and semiotic codes.

My young learner Danial consumed texts of different genres such as informational texts, comic books, storybooks, newspapers, magazines and various types of notices as well as electronic texts and these texts contain elements such as visual images in the form of realistic photographs or illustrations, presentation of words in different fonts and sizes as well as the layout of the texts. Reading and writing for him were not just confined to the domain of school. He actively engaged with this variety of text types and forms in the home and community. And it was through the consumption of these multimodal texts and his meaning making of these texts that he went on to consolidate his learning by producing his own texts which I believe facilitated his literacy development in the English language.

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data of the study on the literacy development in English of a young learner through the reading-writing connection. This case study was driven by three research questions which focused on the literacy practices of a young learner in the domains of the home and the community as well as how significant persons in these domains influence his literacy practices. This chapter discusses Danial's day-to-day literacy practices foregrounding the texts he engaged in as well as the people involved in his life in the domains of the home and community.

4.1 Literacy Practices in the Domain of the Home

Danial's life at home is filled with engagement with literacy in various forms. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) write, "Literacy at home is tied in with daily activities . . . drawing upon spoken language, numeracy, [as well as] other media" (p. 149). Most of the texts that he produced were based on the texts that he consumed. I have identified some of the diversity in his home literacy practices focusing on the reading and writing connection. His home literacy practices consisted of his interactions with various forms of print texts, visual images on electronic media such as television and films on video compact discs, the Playstation and computer as well as during play.

4.1.1 Print Texts

Three types of texts under the category of print texts were predominantly present during different literacy events in Danial's daily life at home: books, comics and newspapers, school-based texts including textbooks and workbooks and other printed materials. He was an active reader as well as a writer and his writing was greatly influenced by his reading.

Books . . . Ever since Danial discovered that he could read the words he was spelling, he began to like reading. It was as if he had just realized that the words and the pictures in the books were connected. When I asked him what he saw in a book, he said:

I see . . . I'm watching the big letters . . . the title . . . the drawings and then
I open it . . . I find (the story).

Here he was referring to the book cover. The young reader recognises graphological features by way of how the letters were presented as well as the fact that images figured in the illustrations.

I was also interested in his conception of the process of reading, so I asked him why he liked to read and he said:

Because it's good and it teach everything. The stories, by making the stories, I don't know, I can bring some books to school and I can make the stories.

Danial the reader understood that books could teach him new things and provide new knowledge for him. In his school, every Tuesday was English Day and he had to bring an English language storybook from home to school. He would have to read the book and write or tell the story to his classmates. When he said, "I can make the story", he meant that he could retell the stories he had read orally or in the written form.

Even though he read a variety of books, his own writing and drawing always consisted of dinosaurs, dragons or monsters in some form or another. I asked him why he always drew dinosaurs and he said that he liked dinosaurs because they were "big, cool, (and have) sharp teeth". I commented that lions and crocodiles have sharp teeth too, so how come he did not draw these animals? He said that he did not know how to draw them and that he did not have any reference books on these animals. He made a distinction between "real" and "not-real" books when he said:

The animal book is not mine, it's Jazman's and Mikail's. (*But you can borrow those books*) . . . I don't want, I want the real book, the big book.

The animal books that belonged to his brothers were "not-real" books because they were meant for little children. The illustrations were child-like and not real in nature. The

animals had been given human-like qualities or characteristics where they could talk, drive, or play musical instruments. To him, an animal should be real, like the ones he saw in the zoo. The “real” books would portray these animals the way they were in real life, hence a realistic documentary style representation of these animals providing factual details rather than as fantasy creations having human-like lifestyles. In fact what he was displaying was a knowledge of genre and this illustrated the socioliterate view of schemata which is not only “the reader’s and writer’s prior knowledge of text content and form but of situations and communities for which texts from a genre serve identified purposes” (Johns, 1997, p.16).

After his father bought him *The Ultimate Book of Dinosaurs*, Danial started drawing pictures of dinosaurs that he liked based on the book. Figure 4.1 is a drawing of a Megalosaurus, which Danial had copied from his dinosaur book (Appendix A).



Figure 4.1 A drawing of a Megalosaurus

He was highly aware of the different textual features of this book. The book was very informative and contained different features of text. The main feature that stood out was the illustrations of the dinosaurs themselves with highlighted descriptions of body parts. These illustrations covered the length of two pages on each dinosaur. There was also a map that showed where that particular dinosaur was found. Besides that, there was

a timeline that informed the reader when the dinosaur lived and a picture showing a comparison of sizes between man and dinosaur. The book was expository in nature but the multimodality of the texts made it reader friendly and easy to digest. As he gradually grew more confident of his writing and drawing skills, he started incorporating other figures and texts in his drawing as well as “making the story” as Danial himself explained:

I make . . . I do the story I read and then I write and draw, I make the story. I just follow the books . . . I follow the book, writing.

Danial had used the books that he had read as an available design (New London Group, 2000) to write and draw his own stories. Here he had drawn on his available resources of books and comics in his home and made intertextual links when “making” his stories. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) posit that reading builds knowledge of various kinds to use in writing and writing consolidates knowledge in a way that builds schemata to read with. This is evident in Danial’s own text productions as in Figure 4.2.

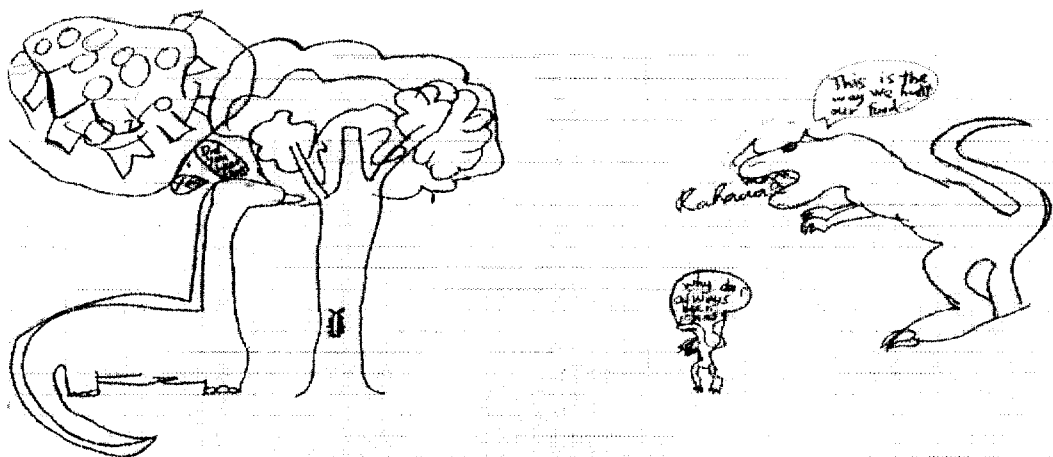


Figure 4.2 A story of the dinosaurs

He had used the information and models of dinosaurs from his dinosaur book and combined them with dialogues in speech bubbles based on his resources of comics. He was making a reading-writing connection when he remarked, “I follow the book, writing”. In order to “follow” the book, he had to read and understand the book and transformed what he had learnt from his book into his own writing.

Comics . . . Currently, his favourite comic books are the *Pokemon* and *Digimon* series, *Action Man* and *Archie*. However, every drawing or game that he created would always be of a *Digimon* character. I wondered why he seemed to prefer *Digimon* above the others and he explained:

I like Digimon more than everything because the stunt is very great and the best part is I like to watch them fighting each other. Because it's just like real animals, like Gomamon is a sea lion, Agumon is a giant lizard . . . Angemon is like a human but is like an angel.

One of the reasons Danial liked Digimon was the “realness” of the characters. He was consistent in his reference to “real” and “not real” animals. He was fully aware of the different types of animals each character represented and at the same time he was also aware of the fantasy element of the characters.

Again, as with the dinosaurs, he started drawing *Digimon* characters according to his samples from his comic books. He first chose the ones which were easy to copy and he always made sure he wrote down their names for his future reference. Figure 4.3 shows an example of two Digimon characters called Mamemon and Patamon.

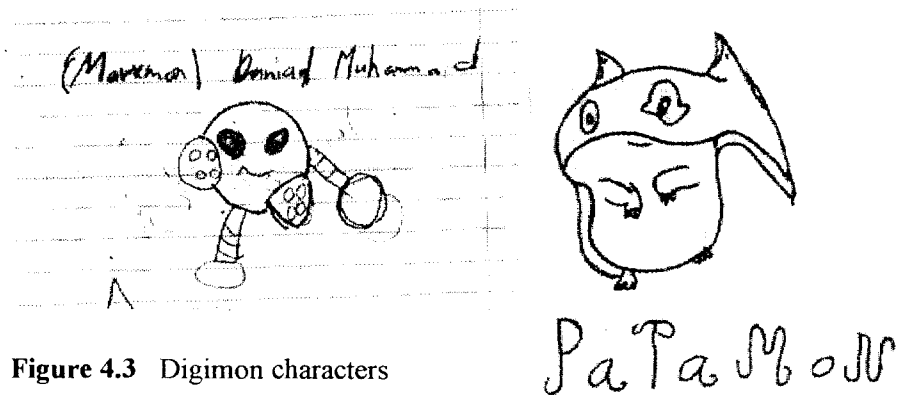


Figure 4.3 Digimon characters

Once he had acquainted himself with all the characters in his comic books, he started creating his own comic books, adding his own newly created *Digimon* characters to the existing ones. While his hands were busy doing the illustrations, his mouth was busy articulating the dialogue and these dialogues appear in the speech bubbles. It was interesting to hear the intonation and the voices of the characters coming from him while he was in the process of creating his story. He was externalising his “inner speech” when he was creating his story and developing the narrative and the storyline. This metanarrative is considered important in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978).

Although Danial had not been formally taught the format of a comic, he was able to produce one which contained the proper structure (Appendix B). He used three pieces of drawing blocks for his comic book. The first one was the title page and the other two were for the main body which he divided into eight panels each. He introduced his characters in the first four panels as well as the impending conflict which was to escalate later in the story. The next four panels were used to show the changes or evolution the digital monsters went through. The following four panels which represented the main action depicted the fight or conflict between good and evil. And finally, the last four panels showed the climax and the resolution of the story. His story structure was easy for readers to follow and he did not litter the panels with any unnecessary background

illustrations. He used each panel to introduce a new character so that his readers would not get too confused with too many characters in one panel. He had also made good use of the speech bubbles and kept his dialogue to a minimum as in a one sentence exchanges between characters.

Looking at his work, I needed to know where and how he learnt to construct the comic book. So, I sat down with him and got him to talk about his comic book. And this was what he said:

Because I memorize how to make comic . . . for example I read comics, is Digimon, Pokemon, Archie . . . and I know how to make boxes because I already know. I see in the comics many boxes and I follow them. But the drawing is not like them. I know how to make speak bubbles, I know how to create my own creatures and I know how to make them all. I make that story interesting is like I follow the comics, like I'm the director of the comic . . . (What is a director?) Director is some kind of, to, to, a person to make his people acting something like in *Monsters Inc.*, *Toy Story 2* and many, many of them”.

Once again Danial was making a reading-writing connection when he explained how he knew how to create his comic book. He was using all his comic books as his meaning resources in order to come up with his own.

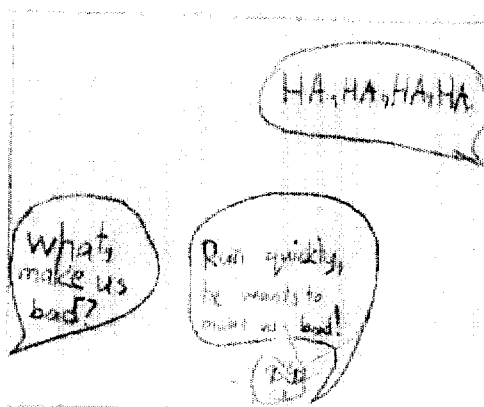


Figure 4.4 Foregrounding and backgrounding of characters

After that, I drew his attention to several panels and we discussed what he had done in each panel. In Figure 4.4, Danial had only drawn one character, a newly introduced character, while the others are somewhere outside the panel. Readers can “see” them only

through the speech bubbles. This was how he explained his choice of visual representation:

Because it's far from the new monster. And its behind from Wormmon. It must be like that.

He was showing an unconscious awareness of foregrounding and backgrounding of his characters. The main focus of this panel was the new character which he was introducing to the readers. This character was important here because it was providing new and vital information to the other characters. The evil character could not be seen in the panel because it was standing far from the new monster, but its evil voice could be heard loudly by the way it was written in capital letters – “HA, HA, HA, HA”. His awareness of graphological features was evident in this instance. Wormmon, the other character, had also been relegated to the obscure background because his position was somewhere behind the new character.

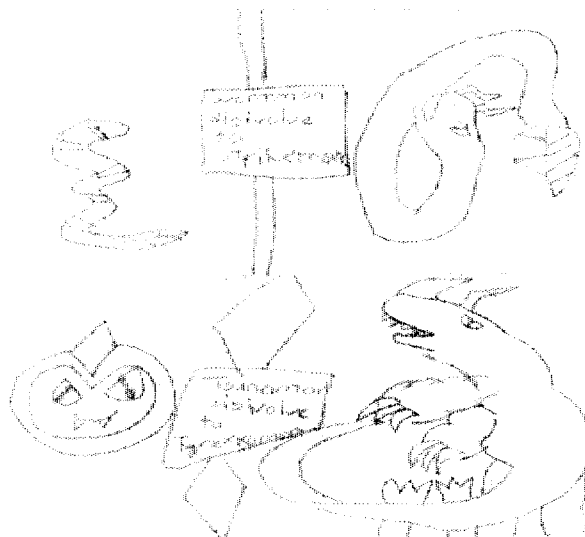


Figure 4.5 Caption functioning as narrator

In Figure 4.5, Danial had drawn two characters per panel, side by side but divided by double lines in various shapes. There was no dialogue here, but instead he had given a

caption functioning as narrator for each panel to inform his readers of the changes taking place in his monsters. The cute little monsters had digivolved into stronger monsters. He explained:

It must be like that. Because if people read it, it says like they're twins and they say this is wrong. It's not digivolving, it's just twins...it's not changing, something like Ekans become, changing to Arbok.

He seemed to have put himself in his readers' shoes here. He felt that he must show his readers the transformation that was taking place in his characters. His readers would feel cheated if this was not portrayed graphically and they would know that it was wrong if there were no divider to differentiate the digivolving monsters.

In Figure 4.6, again he was playing around with foregrounding and backgrounding the main focus of the panel. He was also playing with "camera angles". He used extreme close-up shots where only the legs could be seen by the

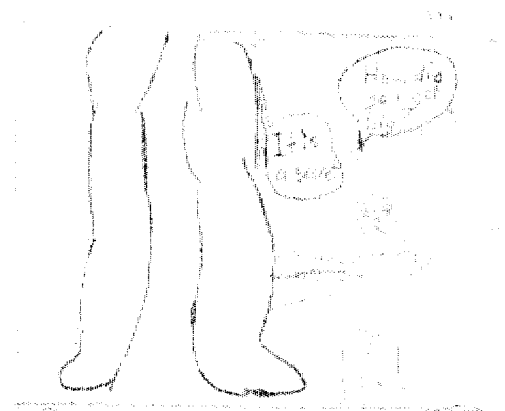


Figure 4.6 Playing with "camera angles"

readers as well as point-of-view shots which actually showed what the character in the background saw. He had done it this way because "I can only show its legs because that is giant and biggg, so big to the sky".

In Figure 4.7, Danial easily portrayed a character in confusion but who finally managed to find answers to his question through the facial expression and the question marks surrounding its head. This was what Danial said about his character:

He is trying to think how he can get big and he doesn't get big. He is confuse.

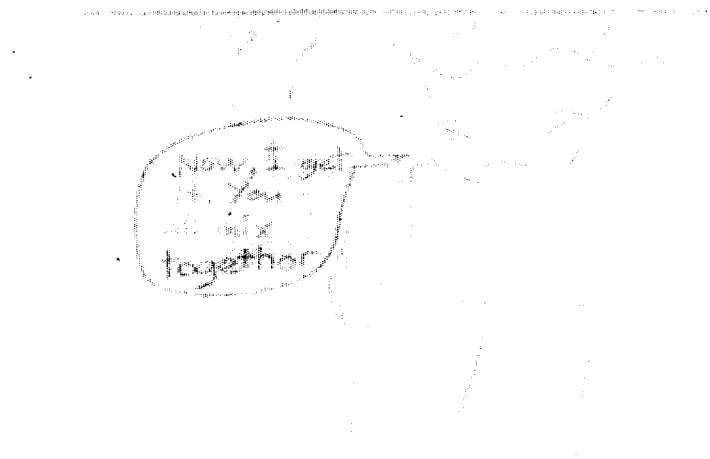


Figure 4.7 A character in confusion

This character was referring to the scene from the previous panel (Figure 4.6) and Danial had used the close-up shots portraying the character's emotions through facial expressions.

From the information I gleaned from my conversation with Danial, I could see the reading and writing connection coming into play here. He was displaying his attempts at producing text on his own through his encounters with texts and other visual experiences in his environment. Nelson and Calfee (1998) state that through such experiences, children begin learning literate forms of language that they will use in reading and writing. Danial had “natural” models from his own repertoire of comic books and these materials connected his reading and writing, and he learned through his own reading, the conventions and styles of writing which comic writers use.

School-based Texts . . . Danial had to do either his homework or revision every evening for an hour. When he did not have any homework from school, he had to do some exercises in his revision books. As a mother, I felt that he needed to do some school related reading and writing exercises at home in order to compete academically with his

peers in school. What I discovered during my research was a surprise to me. His “school related reading and writing exercises” had spilled over into his leisure literacy practices. Below are two examples of this spill over. Figure 4.8 shows Danial’s version of a comprehension text along with the comprehension questions. He had been doing comprehension exercises in his English workbook but according to him the comprehension passages were “boring” because they were not relevant in his life. So he decided to try writing out his own text in line with his own interest. Reading and answering questions about dragons were more exciting and pertinent to his life than reading and answering questions about “Aishah the Nurse” (Appendix C). Even though dragons were fantasy creatures, they were more significant in Danial’s lifeworlds in terms of characters in his books, television shows and films. He had very little contact with nurses in his life and therefore they were very insignificant to him.

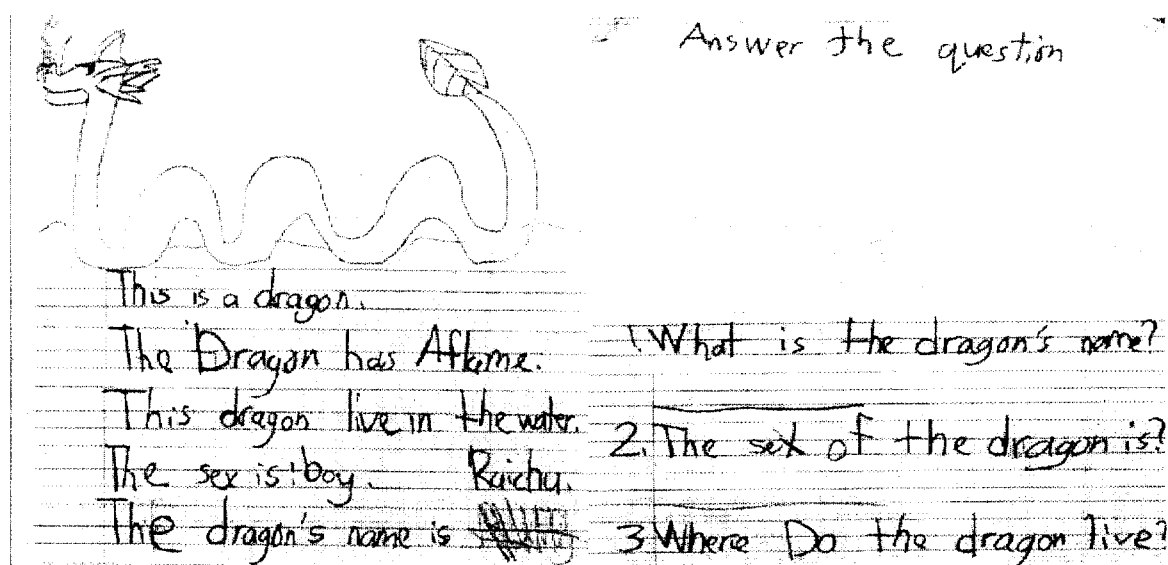


Figure 4.8 Danial’s comprehension passage and questions

Figure 4.9 displays Danial's composition about his Digimon characters. He had started writing compositions accompanied by pictures to depict the stories in school. And this is his composition on his favourite topic, *Digimon*, done at home but not for his English teacher. Describing *Digimon* characters was also more interesting than describing "A Pail" (Appendix D). *Digimon* was very relevant in Danial's lifeworld because of the cartoon show on television which he watched, the comic books he read, the Playstation games he played, as well as the stickers and figurines which he collected, unlike the pail which he never used at home.

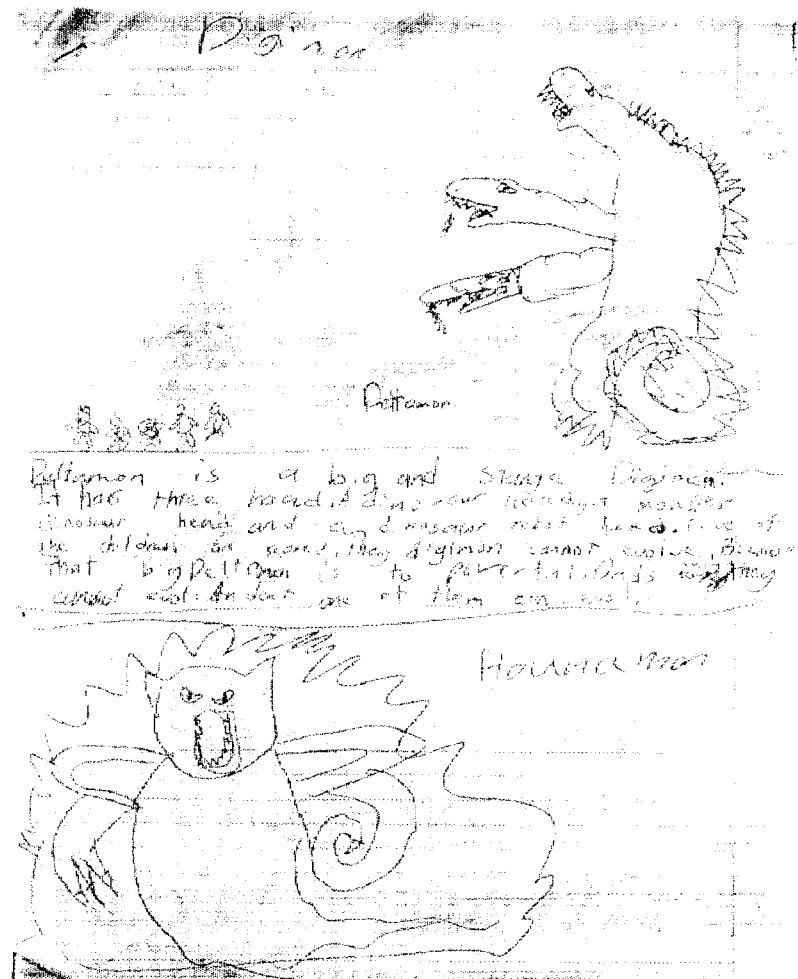


Figure 4.9 Danial's composition on the Digimon characters

I asked him why he did the comprehension passage and composition and he said:

“*Saja suka-suka*” (Just for fun). I follow like the school book. But the story I write myself. And also the question I write myself”.

Once again I could see the reading-writing connection come into play here. He had discovered new and exciting knowledge about texts and he wanted to test out his ability at this new form of writing. He made intertextual links by using his knowledge of dinosaurs and *Digimon* to create his stories and the comprehension question format to form his questions. Danial is building a bridge between what he had learnt in school to what he had learnt at home. Vygotsky’s idea of scaffolding to support learners in building new learning on old, is a classic constructivist interpretations of the impact that prior knowledge has on new learning.

Other Printed Materials . . . Danial always helped me write out shopping lists or ‘things to do’ lists. Every time I told the children that we were going grocery shopping, he would volunteer to make out my shopping list for me (Appendix E). I asked him what he had learnt from writing out my lists for me and he said that he had “learn the words, the names . . . in English. I know the names in Malay and what my mum says I try to spell it”. I also wanted to know whether this literacy practice helped him in school and he said:

Yes My teacher said I try to spell it. But sometimes I get right sometimes I get wrong. But the one that I always get is right. In English I never get wrong. Just sometime only.

When I looked at Danial’s spelling of words, I noticed that he had practiced invented spelling, for example the word onion was spelled O. N. I. E. N., shallots was spelled S. H. E. L. O. T. S., condensed was spelled C. O. N. D. E. N. S. and oyster was spelled

O. I. S. T. E. R. I wanted to find out the process that he went through while spelling and the following conversation ensued:

R: Which is easier to spell, Bahasa Malaysia or English?

D: Bahasa Malaysia.

R: Why?

D: Because the words that are said is easy to find.

R: I don't understand.

D: What words that I heard I find, eh, I look for the words in A, B, C. In Malay, *buku* B. U. K. U. In English it's not easy to find because like this R. E. A. D. read is not the same like the words R. I. D. that's read too, the same. Because the spelling is like the sound.

(Note: R – Researcher, D – Danial)

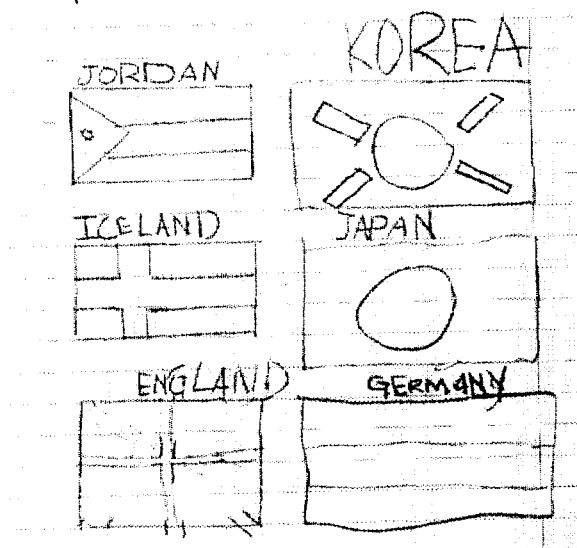
It was interesting to see that Danial had actually used the strategy of “phonetic spelling” (Bean & Bouffler, 1997, p.15) or spelling as the word sound. According to Bean and Bouffler (1997) “writers who are uncertain of spelling will often turn to articulation (the way the sound is made) for clue” (p. 15). Bean and Bouffler (1997) also state that for one to be a writer, it is necessary to be a reader, and that spelling depends as much on oral language as it does on reading.

4.1.2 Television

Watching television and films on video compact discs is a favourite past time with Danial. This is the only time I could see Danial sitting down quietly doing nothing but watch the television. Before I embarked on my research, I had never quite realized how much television had impacted his literacy development in English. One of Danial's favourite cartoon shows is *Dexter's Laboratory*. This is a story about a boy genius who has a state of the art secret science laboratory in his room. The story revolves around his

ability to overcome whatever problems he faces through the use of science and technology. He would build robots to fight the school bullies, build remote controlled superhero figurines for his friends in order to be accepted into their group and so on and so forth. However, Dexter speaks with a terrible accent unlike his All-American family members. And unconsciously Danial seemed to have picked Dexter's incorrect grammar where he combines 'must' and 'to' in his sentence for example, "I **must to** go to the bookshop today because my BM 3 finish". I have tried to correct him several times but he keeps on making the same mistake. Nonetheless, I am optimistic that he would come out of this phase as he grows older.

However, during the World Cup soccer matches, Danial became interested in the game because everyone around him was talking about his or her favourite teams and players. Everyone in school wanted to play soccer during Physical Education and Danial made us take him to the playing field every weekend to play soccer. At home, he would watch some of the reruns of the games because he was not allowed to watch the live shows. What surprised me about this whole event was that he had drawn the flags of different countries that took part in the World Cup (Figure 4.10).



He had also drawn matchstick figures playing soccer and the pencil marks showed the movement of the ball (Figure 4.11). His drawing was a graphic representation of how soccer was played. He had drawn lines to represent the football field and the D section where the goalposts should be. He was aware that two teams play against each other. However he had only drawn seven players for each team. He knew that each team consisted of a number of players but did not know the exact number. What was interesting was that he had drawn lines to represent the movement of the ball instead of moving the figures around. He was portraying knowledge of game strategy and planning of how to score a goal. This was a schematic diagram which a soccer coach would draw to illustrate the strategy to his players. The matchstick figures were symbols of the players and the lines were symbols of the progression of the ball. These symbols are universal and Danial was aware that other people would also understand what he was trying to depict in his illustration.

The flags and the matchstick figures he had drawn were visual semiotic systems which have been conventionalized and internationally accepted (Goodman, 1996). His use of this semiotic system is evident that he has clear ideas about visual representations and shows his development of perception and visual literacy.

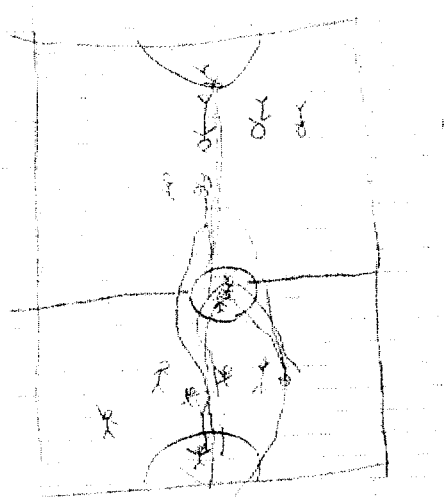


Figure 4.11 Matchstick figures playing soccer

4.1.3 Playstation and Computer Games

The 1990s saw the entry of video game arcades into the homes in the forms of games consoles known as Nintendo, Sony Playstation or Dreamcast and the personal computer (PC) games. These are interactive multimodal electronic games and they are “potent computers that are oriented solely towards the playing of games, to the extent that the more powerful aspects of the computers inside them are disguised (Flemming, 1996 in Marsh & Millard, 2000). Both the Playstation and computer games entail that children are able to read visual images as well as print. The ability to process visual information from a number of sources and work out their relationship to one another appears to be a key skill required by most games. Gagnon (1985) in Marsh & Millard (2000) argues that games also improve spatial skills when children have to navigate objects in relation to other features on the screen.

Danial started playing the Playstation when he was four years old and PC games when he was five. Like all other children, he seemed to be able to master the use of the remote controller and mouse after being shown once or twice only. Even though he could not read then, he was able to play the games well because the Playstation and the computer games are multimodal texts. Although he could not understand the linguistic designs, the visual and audio designs helped him understand what he needed to do in order to play the game as he said “Somebody said in the screen . . . also write”. But now that he is able to read, he has become a better player because he is able to follow the instructions on the screen. He said:

I just try, try, try and then I can see. Nobody teach me, Papa a little bit but Mami don't because Mami don't know how. Before I don't know how to read, I try, try to push the button, and then I can do it. Now I can read and

then I play until I know how and then I practice every day, I can play, I can understand it.

Instead of playing on a “trial and error” mode, he now plays as an informed player. Every game features written instructions within its narrative and also demands print reading skills. Visual imagery is paramount in these games and presents particular challenges to Danial as he is required to decipher the meanings of specific signs, symbols and images which are integral to each game.

The Playstation has helped him with his hand-eye coordination and he has increased his power of concentration. He needs to have a sharp and watchful eye in order to see the whole environment in the game. And at the same time, he has to move his fingers on the remote controller to manipulate his man or figure or vehicle in the game. His eyes provide the input to his brain and his brain sends reflexes to his fingers that informs his fingers what to do to confront the situations in the game. This is a constant and on going process and it trains him to be sharp and responsive to different situations. How successfully he plays the game depends on how well he manages his senses and eye-hand coordination and his sense making of the intertextuality of the game. Greenfield (1984) in Marsh and Millard (2000) argues that the multiple levels of difficulty presented in most games are important for scaffolding children’s learning as they move from easier levels to more difficult ones. They can choose to attempt a more difficult level which contains the elements and features from the previous level. This provides them with some degree of confidence and recognition of prior learning but at the same time presents new challenges as they move from an easier level to a more difficult one.

When it came to buying new games, Danial spent quite some time choosing his games carefully because he was only allowed to get one game per month. He explained his method of choosing his games:

I read the cover. I look at the picture also. Instruction is in the plastic game, in the plastic of the game, outside is the picture of the game and then behind of the picture is in the CD and then behind of the CD is another picture and the picture also have a writing to read how to play it.

He is displaying an awareness of advertising here. He recognizes which visual codes are meaningful and significant (Goodman, 2001). He knows what to look at and what to look for in a game. He knows that there are two pieces of paper in the plastic cover and the compact disc lies in between these papers. First he would look at the cover, which contains the pictures, graphics or visuals and then he would turn to the back to read the synopsis and instructions on how to play the game. If the graphics, the visual texts and the instructions appeal to him, he would choose that game.

Most of the games that he buys are within the intertextual world of related products such as books, comics and films which provides rich opportunities for reading experiences. For example, the games *Pokemon* and *Digimon* are also cartoon series, movies, magazines, comic books, trading cards, stickers and figurines. Playing the games triggered the desire to know more about the characters, which led to the need to read the comic books and magazines as well as to watch the cartoon shows and the movies.

4.1.4 Play

At home Danial played with his brothers most of the time. They liked playing with their action hero figurines like the *X-Men*, *Batman* or *Spiderman* and *Hot Wheel* cars. Sometimes they also liked to role play. There were times when they became soldiers

shooting at each other with their guns and rifles, there were times when they became Ninja warriors, and there were also times when they became wizards flying around on broomsticks brandishing their magic wands putting spells on each other. But what I found most interest was when they played “shop”. Danial and Mikail took turns becoming the shopkeeper and each one sold different items. Mikail had cut pieces of papers to make money and Danial wrote the amount on these papers. He had also made the ‘Closed’ and ‘Open’ sign on a paper bag which they hung on the doorknob of their bedroom (Figure 4.12).

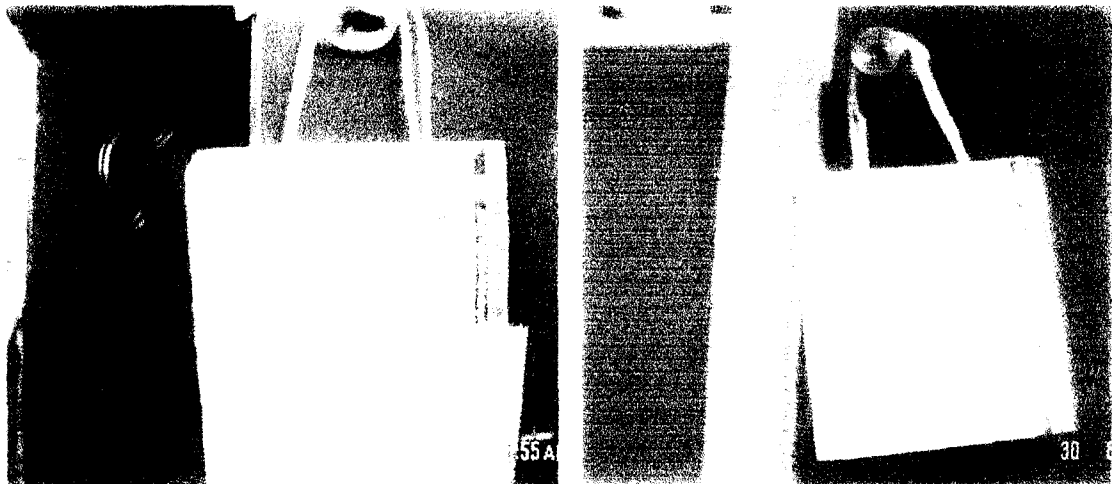


Figure 4.12 The ‘open’ and ‘closed’ signs used during the “shop” play

They started playing “shop” after I began sending Danial to the sundry shop at the condominium’s Club House to buy the newspapers or one or two items I needed in the kitchen. Below is an observation made during a particular role play. Danial acted as the ‘director’ of this play and he seemed to have reenacted some instances he had experienced at the shop.

D: O.K. Mikail, you take this (gives a list). You go and say you want this. You go out first. After I turn this (the closed/open sign), *baru boleh masuk* (then only you can come in).

D: Good morning, *adik*.

M: I want this. (Extending the hand holding the list to Danial)

D: *Jawablah dulu* (Answer first).

M: O.K. Good morning uncle. I want, *apa ni?* (What's this?). I don't know how to read.

D: Alahhh, just say anything*lah*, newspaper *ke*, sugar *ke*, ten eggs *ke*.

M: *Yelah, yelah*. Hello uncle, can you give me one sugus, lollipop, emm this ice cream paddle pop.

D: Here. Any more? *Untuk Mak* (For your mother) nothing? Newspaper?

M: Oh yah. One New Strait Time.

D: *Cakap* (Say) "How Much?"

M: How much?

D: Ten ringgit twenty sen.

M: *Yang mana satu duit?* (Which is the money?). (Shows the paper money)

D: This and this (Picks the paper money).

M: *Nah* (Here).

D: Thank you. Bye. *Datang lagi* (Come again).

M: O. K. Bye.

D: Now I turn this, the shop is close.

(Note: D - Danial, M - Mikail)

When Danial and Mikail decided to play "shop", they knew that they needed money to buy the things in the shop as in real life situations. So, they made their money and transformed their toys into items found in a sundry shop just like the ones in the sundry shop downstairs. Danial was also aware that most shops have the closed and open signs hung on the door and he included this in his shop. Writing was done prior to the play. However, the use of talk was important during the role play in terms of the dialogue of the characters and also in terms of regulating the play. In the talk which constitutes the dialogue, the boys acted their characters and followed the agreed "script". In the talk which regulates the play, the boys stepped out of the characters and Danial stepped into

the role of mother ('O.K Mikail, you take this . . .') and director ('After I turn this . . ., *Cakap* "How much?") to keep characters on task ('Alahh, just say anythinglah . . .').

When children start to play, they have to make certain decisions. These decisions may have to be made from scratch, or may have been influenced by particular events, resources, places experiences or stories. Danial's play was influenced by the event of going to the shop by himself, writing and reading a shopping list as well as using real money in the business transaction.

According to Hall and Robinson (1988) children use play simply to denote a physical activity which provides concrete experience and that there is a relationship between play and the content of literacy. Isenberg and Jacob (1983) in Hall and Robinson (1988) claim that "Symbolic play, the process of transforming an object or oneself into another object, person, situation, or event through the use of motor and verbal actions in a make-believe activity, provides an important source for literacy development" (p. 272). I see that the role play my children were engaged in offered them the opportunity to develop a wider understanding of literacy and enhanced their cognitive development and allowed them the chance to explore literacy in contextualised situation. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that during play, children could achieve higher levels of cognition than at other times:

Thus, play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development (p 102).

4.2 Literacy Practices in the Domain of the Community

One of the richest source of print for children is the local community in which the child lives in. The local environment is replete with semiotic codes and messages such as house numbers, road names, billboards, advertising displays and posters or banners, shop fronts as well as the prints and visual images in the doctor's waiting room, the local barber shop or the local supermarkets. Literacy is a social phenomenon and as Luke and Elkins (2000) write, literacy is people's everyday "ways with words" and literacy is presented in a variety of modes that serve different purposes. Children are aware of the social interactions and practices in their surroundings and can draw on a wide range of experiences with the semiotic codes and texts of all kinds when making sense of their daily routine. They are constantly engaged in decoding the reality represented in the world around them, interpreting it according to their own sociocultural practices and encoding it using whatever range of materials are available to them (Marsh & Millard, 2000).

4.2.1 At the Mall

The shopping mall is a centre of multimodality and is littered with semiotic codes and logographic symbols such as P for parking, B for basement, M for McDonalds, the signs for male and female washrooms, lifts, stairs and many others. Danial loved going to the shopping mall near our home because all his favourite shops were there. Normally the reason why we went to the mall was to do our grocery shopping at the *TOPS* supermarket and Danial never missed the chance to visit his favourite shops. The first place he would stop at would be *SPEEDY* the video and music shop (Figure 4.13) because we would have to walk past it to get to *TOPS*. Before he entered the shop, he would stop by the

entrance to watch the film that was shown on the television screen. Most of the time, these films were new releases on Digital Compact Discs (DVDs) or Video Compact Discs (VCDs). Then he would enter the shop and go to the children's section and the "value buy" section to look at the selection of VCDs there.

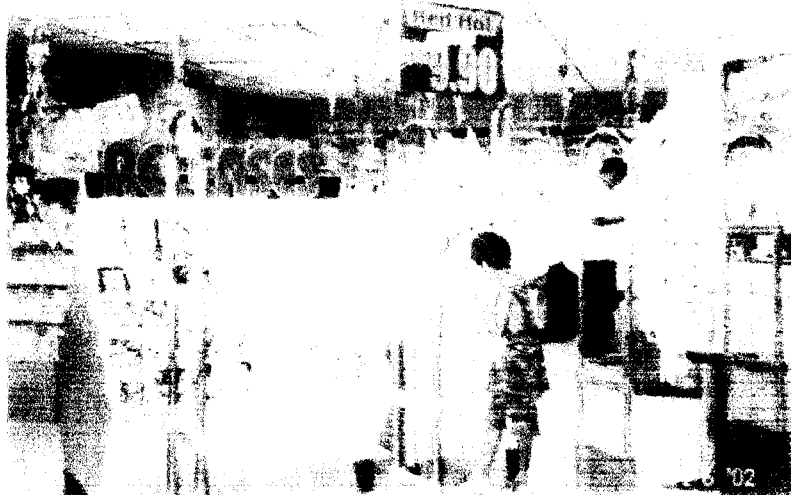


Figure 4.13
SPEEDY the video
and music shop
Danial frequents

Danial was exposed to a wide range of linguistic and visual designs (New London Group, 2000) when he saw the print texts and visual images on the posters, price tags, signs for different sections and film titles, names of actors and synopsis of films on the covers of VCDs or DVDs. He was also exposed to audio design (New London Group, 2000) when he heard the songs and music or the sound effects from the films played in the shop. And the spatial design (New London Group, 2000) was played out in the layout of the shop in terms of the positioning of different sections and shelves and the ways the items were displayed.

At the next stop, which is the supermarket, there are more print texts and visual images displayed in the forms of the packaging of products sold, names and prices of the products as well as the types or categories of products or items in each aisle. Danial would read the shopping list he had written and we would go from aisle to aisle to get

everything on the list. Danial and Mikail get to choose their cereal alternately and they always look forward to their turn to choose. This was what Danial said about his choices:

The thing that I look at is . . . I look at behind to get something . . . like a pencil topper, like a card, a three D card^{lah} and questions, stickers, books. I look at it and it's like delicious . . . I look at the picture, I didn't read the cereal box name like *Coco Crunch*, *Honey Star* . . . The toy is not so important, the important thing is the food is delicious.

The main thing Danial looked for in his breakfast cereal was the “prize” (free gift) that came with it. He was not very particular about the brand or the type of cereal. He would read the front of the box to find out what “prize” was offered inside and then turn to the back of the box and read the games or puzzles or jokes there. These would determine whether he would pick that cereal or not.

While his parents are paying for the groceries, Danial would visit the *Tamiya* shop to look at the toys there. Below is a conversation about his sojourns into the shop:

R: What do you do in the *Tamiya* shop?

D: I look around for my birthdays.

R: Do you have a favourite toy in the *Tamiya* shop?

D: Yes. The *Tamiya* small car, the racing car and the Gundam.

R: What is a Gundam?

D: A Japanese robot.

R: How do you know it's a Japanese robot?

D: Because the box got writing in Japanese. Because I see it at home. It have in the CD like *Vandread*, story of robot fighting on AXN but Japanese not English. Speaking in Japanese. I only read the English writing down there.

R: Down where?

D: On the TV, on the screen, down.

R: At the bottom of the screen?

D: Yes, bottom.

(Note: R – Researcher, D – Danial)

Danial's interest in the robots was linked to his interest in watching the Japanese anime (animation) on television and video. Although he could not understand the language, he could still understand the storyline by reading the English subtitles at the bottom of the television screen.

Another stopover that Danial and his family would make is at one of the restaurants there (Figure 4.14). Danial knows the normal procedure that goes into eating at a restaurant:

I must find the seat, and then I get a menu, I read the menu, then my mum order it. In the menu has food, beverage (*What's a beverage?*) drinks. Then we eat. After we eat my mum call the waiter with a writing sign and order the bill. Then my mum pay.

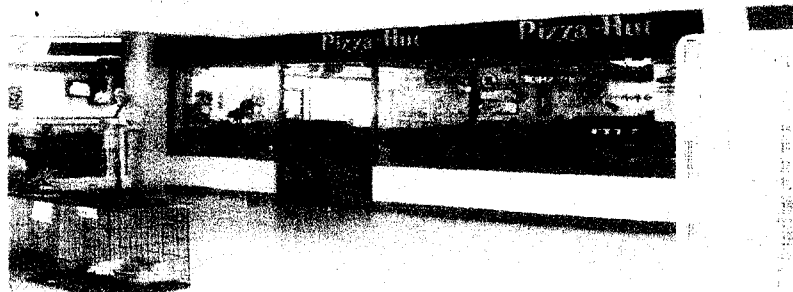


Figure 4.14 One of Danial's favourite restaurants

The menu that he read contained a lot of information on the food and beverages provided in the restaurant in the form of print texts as well as visual images. He was also aware of the hand gestures which symbolises the call for the waiter and for the bill after a meal.

4.2.2 At the Theatre

Going to the theatre to watch a film show is a real treat for Danial. His parents love going to theatres and have been taking their children to film shows ever since they were babies. The theatre like the video shop is filled with print texts, visual images, sounds and semiotic messages. Danial is aware of all the different signs that he sees around him. The conversation below allows us some insights into this awareness.

R: What signs do you see in the cinema in English?

D: Like TGV, Now Showing, Coming Soon, pictures, date, rating on, where the foods, toilet, computer show movie and time at the ticket counter.

R: Have you ever bought any tickets before?

D: No.

R: Who buys the tickets?

D: Mami or Papa.

R: Have you seen the tickets before?

D: Yes.

R: Can you describe the tickets to me?

D: Yes. In the ticket movie has time, seat numbers, cinema number, price, the movie that we watch, and the date.

R: Are these in English or Bahasa Malaysia?

D: In English.

(Note: R - Researcher, D - Danial)

The movie theatre is a place where English is used extensively. The tickets, signs, movie posters, the menu at the concessionaire and advertisements screened were all in English. Like the video and music store, the theatre was also multimodal and Danial was exposed to all forms of linguistic, visual, audio and spatial designs here.

4.2.3 The Neighbourhood

The condominium Danial lived in comprised a multiracial community. Even though the majority of the residents were Malay, English played an important role as a medium of communication especially in terms of notices and community newsletters. The condominium consisted of three fifteen storey apartment blocks and sixteen blocks of townhouses. However, most of the social activities were done at the Club House which was situated in the middle of all the blocks. Danial spent a lot of time at the Club House during weekends and school holidays because the swimming pool, the playground, the badminton and tennis courts as well as the restaurant and the sundry shop were located here. There were several glass covered notice boards here where notices from the management team as well as newsletters and minutes of meetings from the Residents' Association were posted (Figure 4.15). There were also signboards placed near the swimming pool informing the residents the correct attire for swimming and that there were no lifeguards on duty (Figure 4.16).

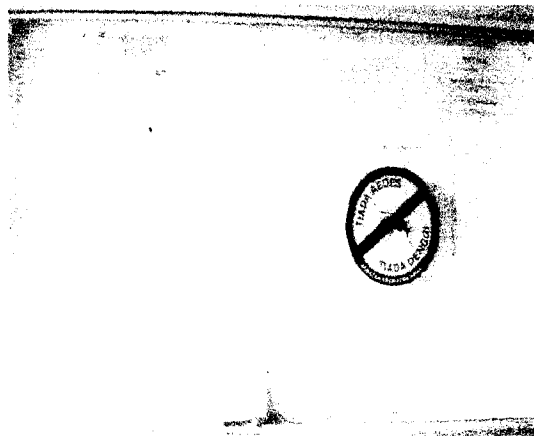


Figure 4.15 Notices for the residents

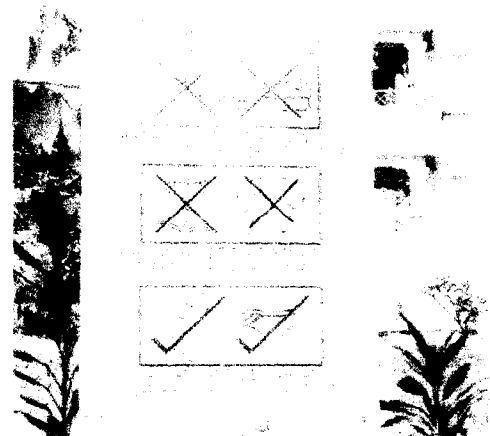


Figure 4.16 Swimming pool rules

Although the public takes these signs for granted, educators must see this as a form of literacy which support literacy development in social settings. Danial encounters the use of print within meaningful real world context and this learning of texts is not

necessarily taught but acquired through daily routines and activities. This was what Danial said about the signs and notices he saw:

Beside the swimming pool and beside the shop . . . not to wear shirts and shorts, no food allowed, only swimming things can . . . do not throw rubbish around, do not hang clothes at the balcony, telephone numbers.

Vygotsky (1978) explained that semiotic mediation is another source of assistance in the ZPD, in addition to deliberate instruction or the assistance of others who are physically present in the situation. These semiotic codes and texts that Danial encounters provide a powerful means of self-instruction, as he appropriates the thoughts of others and makes them his own.

4.3 Significant Persons and the Learner's Literacy Practices

Children learn a great deal during their school years but researchers have shown that not all their learning occurs in school. Children's literacy is shaped by out-of-school factors, particularly learning in the home and community. Besides the teachers in schools who formally teach children, there are other significant people in the children's lives who directly or indirectly influence and facilitate their literacy development.

4.3.1 Parents

Literacy learning begins in the home and children's first experiences with literacy are mediated by the ways in which parents and other caregivers use reading and writing in their lives (Purcell-Gates, 1996 in McGee & Richgels, 2000). The most significant persons in Danial's lifeworld since the day he was born have been his parents. They have contributed to his literacy development in the home and in the early years have provided

vital learning opportunities in various ways and forms. They are the principal teachers in Danial's life in the home. Literacy is embedded in their everyday living activities. Thus, it is acquired through modeling and purposeful use. Danial's parents value literacy and reading and writing are an important part of their personal and professional lives. As a result, Danial was included in every literacy event and was expected to learn to read and write and to participate in the same kinds of literacy activities. Danial's parents played different roles in his life and subconsciously Danial associated fun and games with his father while comfort, discipline and formal education was with his mother. This could be attributed to the different parenting styles of his parents.

Being an English language teacher, Danial's mother puts more emphasis on education in her parenting. She considers every situation that involves reading and writing in whatever form as a literacy event which promotes her children's literacy development. When she was expecting Danial, she used to read aloud to the baby. Danial was read to even when he was in the womb. Danial's mother describes her approach to parenting as being very "textbook" based. She does a lot of reading on parenting and refers to the "experts" in the field in books, magazines and newspapers whenever possible. She finds that her dual roles as mother and teacher are interconnected and sometimes she cannot separate these roles when dealing with her children. Her teaching of reading and writing is often deliberate with the aim to facilitate her children's literacy development in the English language.

There were many instances where Danial's mother models how to read and write to her children. She reads and writes in front of them as part of their daily routine. In order to encourage Danial to read, she would sit down with him with a book of his choice and they would take turns to read either alternate sentences or alternate paragraphs aloud.

Before going grocery shopping she would request for Danial's assistance with writing out the shopping list. She also got Danial to write down telephone messages when she could not answer the telephone. Besides that she also made out Danial's weekday (Appendix F) and weekend timetables for him (Appendix G). These timetables were meant to help Danial develop time management skills. In addition to the timetables, she also wrote instructions on how to take a shower for Danial. Danial hates bathing and always needs reminding on what to do in the bathroom. Therefore, the notice posted on the bathroom door acts as a reminder for him (Appendix H). All these acts of writing and reading behaviours encourage children to become literate. They learn that print can be informational and that it holds meaning. By integrating literacy in daily routines, Danial's mother was communicating the value of reading in utilitarian and functional ways.

As mentioned earlier, Danial associates his father with fun and play. They share a lot of common interest in their hobbies and games. Both love playing the Playstation and computer games, remote controlled cars, building model kits, watching films, reading informational texts as well as swimming. When Danial first started playing the Playstation, his father guided him through the instructions. Danial learned to associate the buttons with the icons or words displayed on the screen. He also assisted in putting together his father's model kit Formula One cars, submarines and Gundam robots as well as their remote controlled cars. They would read the instruction manuals together and his father would instruct him on what to do. Besides playing together, they would also visit the public library together. His father says that he does not contribute to Danial's literacy development and claims that he is only building a good relationship with his son and being a responsible parent. However, indirectly, through his bonding activities he actively facilitates Danial's literacy development through talking, playing and reading.

Daniāl was becoming aware of print as part of the environment, becoming aware of written language on its own, grasping the functions and forms of writing, talking about written language and learning to analyse and explain it. Goodman (1986) points out the importance of print in the home environment, “I believe that the development of knowledge about print embedded in environmental settings is the beginning of reading development, which in most cases goes unnoticed” (p.7).

4.3.2 Siblings

At home Daniāl plays a lot with his brothers especially Mikail. They would either role play or play with their action figures, *Lego* or *Plasticine*. When they play with their action figures, they would normally make up the stories and commentaries and dialogues that accompany the play. They would act out scenes and most amazingly they would converse in English because these action figures are from English speaking films or television shows like the *X-Men*, *Spiderman*, *Batman* and *Buzz Lightyear*, so they have to have to act it out in English. Daniāl would use words or phrase that are not common in everyday speech such as “Unhand her, you vermin”, “ Super Giga blast”, “That’ll be great. We’ll be together forever” or “To infinity and beyond”. The ability to imagine the language a particular character might use is very important both to the composition of believable stories and to the ability to address a variety of audiences (Johnston, 1997). Imaginative story telling and role playing are important signs of the development of the ability to create alternative realities, separate from the here and now, which is central to reading and writing. In these games, Daniāl and his brother develop and exhibit their ability to identify with various characters, speak in their voices, and notice behavioural affect and motive.

In addition, in playing with his younger brother, Danial assumes the role of the more “capable peer”. In the play-shopping episode reported earlier, for example, Danial directed the activities giving his brother instructions and supplying the lines he wanted Mikail to say. In facilitating the learning of his younger brother, he was consolidating his own learning.

4.3.3 Peers

Danial’s friends play an important role in facilitating his literacy development. He has his own *Pokemon* and *Digimon* discourse community in school. This is a small group of children who share the same interest in *Pokemon* and *Digimon* and they are always talking about the books they have read, the cartoon show on television, as well as learning the names of new characters and drawing some of their favourite characters in addition to making up stories and games. Sometimes, they print pictures of these characters from the Internet and exchange them among themselves. They each have an exercise book, which they named “*Buku Conteng*” (scribble book) and they draw their games or comic strips in it (Appendix I). Danial’s teachers have confiscated several of these books, but the boys will always replace them with new ones.

He has also formed a discourse community of Playstation game players with his peers. They talk about the latest games and how to play these games. He has become somewhat of an expert since the games are in English and he understands English slightly better than his friends. They discuss the games they have played in school and sometimes telephone each other in the midst of playing to find out how to make certain moves.

Danial explained:

We talk how to play hunting the last stage, how to open, get the robot, how

to get it and I said to them how to read, how to read the instruction. If there's any Malay they can read, if there's much of English, they can read a little bit.

Children need frequent opportunities to formulate their thoughts in spoken language. They need to ask questions, explain things to other children and to negotiate meanings between themselves. Clay (1998) states that peers can be active partners in conversation where they can recognize when the message has been lost, make this known to the speaker, and ask for further information.

Besides discussing the games they have played, Danial and his friends also created their own "board game" based on the Playstation games. Friends who are not familiar with the Playstation games have difficulty following the verbal or oral instructions and therefore have difficulty playing the game. However, friends who are part of this discourse community would enjoy playing the "board game" (Appendix J). Danial had used the Playstation as his available design (Kern, 2000) and had recreated and redesigned meaning strategies and transferred this from one context to another (NLG, p.36). He had transferred his knowledge of the Playstation games and redesigned his "board game" to contain features of the Playstation game.

Pelligrini and Galda (1996) in Soderman, et al. (1999) suggest that friendships serve to strengthen oral language and to enhance literacy development through the cognitive problems that friendships can stimulate. In friendships, children disagree and work to solve their conflicts. They express and share ideas or talk through difficult problems and oftentimes are engaged in meaningful conversation with each other. This process involves the cognitive manipulation of thoughts and the careful use of language.

4.4 Conclusion

Recent studies (Snow, 1998) have indicated that how much children are read to, have access to books, see literacy models and have opportunities to talk with adults and other children predicts how well they do in school-based literacy tasks. The social contact is very important in children's intellectual growth. Children pay attention to what is going on around them and are motivated to learn what they feel they need in order to function well in their lifeworlds. Through guidance from others and practice, they then incorporate the new skills into their own behavioural repertoires.

In my concluding chapter, I will draw together the key findings that emerged in this study, discuss their implications for the teaching of ESL and bring this study to a close.