

Children's Play as Everyday Literacy: Meaning-Making with Everyday Objects in Rural Indonesia

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to explore how children construct meaning and narratives through the use of everyday objects in play, to classify the types of meanings produced, and to explain the role of play in supporting early literacy development. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, the research involved six children aged 5–10 years and three parents across three play contexts in rural settings. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, focusing on natural play interactions. The findings reveal that children actively transform material objects into symbolic representations, enact social roles, and produce structured narratives through language use. Three main forms of meaning construction were identified: creative-innovative, symbolic, and social. These categories demonstrate that play is not merely recreational but functions as a semiotic space where children reinterpret experiences and negotiate meaning. The study also shows that play significantly supports language development, including vocabulary acquisition, sentence formation, comprehension, and early writing skills. In conclusion, children's play constitutes a form of everyday literacy practice embedded in social interaction and local context. This research contributes to expanding the conceptualization of literacy as a socially situated and meaning-making practice emerging organically from children's lived experiences.

Keywords: children's play, literacy practice, meaning construction, symbolic interaction, language development

INTRODUCTION

Children's play is not merely a form of entertainment, but also plays an important role in cognitive, social, and language development (Astuti et al., 2024; Dachi, 2024; Ramadhan et al., 2024; Riha Adatul'aisy et al., 2023). Through play, children can develop their abilities to create narratives and new meanings from objects around them (Jones, 2022; Rhyner, 2009). In the context of language education, children's play can be seen as a form of everyday literacy, as they use these objects to develop imagination, creativity, critical thinking, and symbolic abilities (Colliver et al., 2021). Play involving everyday objects, such as toys or household items, can create new worlds that positively influence the development of literacy skills, including speaking, listening, and imagination.

Technological advancement does not force children to continuously engage in or even transform traditional games into digital-based ones (Alamiyah et al., 2021; Lubis et al., 2023). However, digital technology as a multimodal medium acts as a persuasive force that influences children's imagination (Fasting & Schofield, 2023). This is reflected in play that is projected into real life, such as "Gordon"-themed play, using simple objects (Budiastuti, 2022; Halisah & Muthohar, 2024). One example of this implementation can be found among children in Tapelan Village, Ngraho District, and Sukorejo Village, Tambakrejo District, Bojonegoro Regency, East Java. Children in these villages are under strong parental control and supervision, with limited gadget use within specific time durations. Content viewed on gadgets, such as animated shows or cartoons, is then developed by children through role-playing activities with their peers, supported by various materials (Hairunisa & Abdurahman, 2024; Hariroh, 2023; Nur Maulida et al., 2023). The supporting materials referred to are everyday objects found in their surroundings.

Role-playing based on the multimodal content children watch, supported by objects from their surroundings, aligns with the ideas of Rowsell & Pahl (2015:548) who discuss the making and remaking of children's play. Through the implementation of role play, where children position themselves as characters from the animations they watch and adapt them to the resources available around them, new meanings and stories rooted in local wisdom can be created (Widiastuti et al., 2024). Indirectly, this process of meaning-making not only sharpens and develops children's imagination but also applies literacy in a tangible, real-life context.

The urgency of research on children's object-based play strengthens children's literacy by constructing meaning through viewing digital content, which then hones and develops children's imaginations to recreate stories in accordance with local wisdom around them (Roskos & Christie, 2009). Therefore, the main problem in this study focuses on how children's play uses simple objects that can serve as media for creating new meanings and stories as a form of everyday literacy in children's language development. Objects around children, such as toys or even objects that are not functional as toys, often become tools for constructing imaginative worlds and narratives in children's play (Aqilla's Diary, 2020; @cisjuandatv, 2022). This encourages further in-depth research into how children use these objects to develop stories and meanings in play. Moreover, the imagination involved in children's play produces various types of stories and meanings. The meanings created through this play process vary, ranging from simple to complex stories that demonstrate children's understanding of the social environment (Narey, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of play in children's literacy development, including 1) how children use objects around them to

create meaning and stories in play; 2) classifying the types of meaning and stories produced from children's imagination in play; and 3) explaining the role of play in supporting children's literacy development, especially in the context of language skills.

Previous research has shown that children's play contributes to literacy development, both in digital and non-digital contexts (Swart et al., 2024). However, international studies still tend to place literacy within the framework of structured practices or specific media, thus underexplaining how the process of meaning creation occurs spontaneously through children's interactions with simple objects in their everyday environment. Furthermore, the mechanisms by which children transform material objects into literacy symbols and narratives remain underexplored. Based on this gap, this study seeks to explain the literacy process as a social practice that emerges from everyday play activities based on local contexts. Specifically, this research focuses on the following questions: 1. How do children construct meaning and narratives through the use of surrounding objects in play? 2. How is the process of categorizing meaning formed through symbolic interactions in children's play? 3. How do these play practices represent everyday forms of literacy in children's language development?

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on case studies to explore children's play practices as a form of everyday literacy in a natural context. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the experiences, interactions, and meaning construction that emerge spontaneously in children's play activities. A case study design is used to examine phenomena contextually and holistically within children's real-life situations, particularly within the local social and cultural environment (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). Each play practice is positioned as a case that is analysed in depth to uncover the relationship between the use of material objects, language interactions, and role enactment in the process of meaning construction.

The study was conducted in Tapelan Village (Ngraho District) and Sukorejo Village (Tambakrejo District), Bojonegoro Regency, from December 12–18, 2024. The study participants consisted of six children aged 5–10 years and three parents, organised into three case studies. Each case involved two children playing together and one parent as a supporting informant. Thus, there were three pairs of children from different contexts. The selection of participants was carried out through a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling, with the criteria being children aged 5–10 years who actively play using objects in the surrounding environment, and parents aged at least 24 years who are involved in caring for and observing the child's activities.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, semi-structured

interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly during children's play activities in natural environments, such as terraces and yards, with each session lasting approximately 60–90 minutes in each case. The focus of the observations included object use, verbal interaction patterns, and the roles played by the children. Interviews with parents lasted 20–30 minutes, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Documentation in the form of activity photographs, field notes, and audio recordings were used to strengthen the observation and interview data. All data were then organised into a text corpus for analysis.

This research also adhered to strict ethical standards, particularly as it involved children as participants. Informed consent was obtained from parents prior to data collection, and children's participation was voluntary and without coercion. Participants' identities were anonymized using codes to maintain confidentiality, and all data was used solely for academic purposes. Researchers also ensured that the data collection process did not interfere with the children's comfort and natural activities.

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach that included: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading of observation and interview transcripts; (2) initial coding of units of meaning relevant to play practices and language use; (3) grouping codes into initial categories based on pattern similarities; (4) developing themes through an interpretation process of the relationships between categories; and (5) reviewing and interpreting themes within the framework of literacy as a social practice. To increase auditability, the coding process was carried out in stages with documentation of a code matrix containing raw data, initial codes, categories, and final themes. The validity of the analysis was strengthened through triangulation of sources (children and parents) and discussions between researchers (peer debriefing). The data validity test used was a credibility test using triangulation as an examination technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Play Practices as Construction of Meaning: A Thematic Approach

Based on thematic analysis of observational, dialogue, and interview data, meaning in children's play is not formed randomly, but rather through a process of symbolic transformation, role enactment, and structured language interactions. The coding process yielded recurring patterns that were then abstracted into analytical themes.

Rather than presenting the findings as separate, object-based cases, the results of this study are organised into three main themes: (a) cardboard as an animal transport truck, (b) pencils and erasers as representations of house plans, and (c) dolls as representations of children in a medical context. These three forms demonstrate that material objects serve as semiotic media in constructing stories and meanings in play.

1. Cardboard as a Truck for Transporting Animals for Sale

Cardboard is considered to be less useful after being used to store something. Therefore, used cardboard is often sold to scrap dealers or reprocessed into valuable items. However, for children, used cardboard becomes a unique item used to support their creativity and imagination in play. This is evidenced by the following observational dialogue.

Dialogue 1. Game Dialogue Using Cardboard as a Truck to Transport Animals for Sale

Indonesian version

A1: Titt..titt...tit sebentar ya pak truknya parkir dulu

A2: Wahh truknya besar sekali pak

A1: Iyalah ngangkut hewan dinosaurus siap dibeli ini pak

A2: Saya mau dinosaurus yang besar pak, harganya berapa?

A1: Dinosaurus besar harganya 50 juta pak

A2: Oke pak ini duitnya

English version

A1: Wait... wait... wait, sir, let's park the truck.

A2: Wow, that's a really big truck, sir.

A1: Of course, it's transporting dinosaurs ready to be purchased, sir.

A2: I want a big dinosaur, sir. How much does it cost?

A1: A big dinosaur costs 50 million, sir.

A2: Okay, sir, here's the money.

Dialogue 1 above presents a conversation about a cardboard truck used to transport animals for sale. The cardboard contains toy animals, such as various types of dinosaurs, cows, goats, and fish. The dialogue is told by two boys who are playing together on the porch of a house. A1 imagines that he plays the role of the truck driver described in the first utterance and becomes an animal trader in the third utterance. In contrast, A2 plays the role of a buyer waiting for the seller to unload his goods and buy a dinosaur, then a sale and purchase transaction occurs between the two. Supported by the results of the documentation in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Two Children Playing Using a Cardboard Box as an Animal Transport Truck During a Trading Activity (Personal Doc.)

The meanings emerging from the game demonstrate that children are not simply imitating buying and selling practices, but are reconstructing social experiences through role-playing and dialogue. The interaction between A1 and A2 represents the structure of an economic transaction simplified into a game narrative. This process demonstrates that the cardboard objects function not only as physical objects but have been transformed into symbols, enabling the formation of literacy practices as meaning-making activities.

This finding aligns with the view of literacy as a social practice (Rowse & Pahl, 2015), where meaning is constructed through interactions between individuals, language, and the environment. Thus, play can be understood as a semiotic space where children connect empirical experiences with symbolic representations in narrative form.

2. Pencils and Erasers Arranged into an Aesthetic House Plan

Pencils and erasers are common writing tools used by everyone for writing, whether in educational settings or otherwise. However, pencils and erasers in children's hands serve more than just writing tools. They can be assembled into an aesthetic house plan imagined by children. The pencils and erasers used are often collective; it's not uncommon for children to also use multiple colored pencils in various colors. The more pencils and erasers used, the larger the house plan the children create. This is demonstrated by the following dialogue.

Dialogue 2. Dialogue of the Game Using a Pencil and Eraser to Create an Aesthetic House Plan

Indonesian version

B1: Mas rumahku mau tak kasih ruang bermain

B2: Aku juga ini ruangan bermainku, punyaku mau aku kasih kolam renang

B1: Nanti aku renang di rumahmu ya?

B2: Iya kalau renang di rumahku kalau bermain di rumahmu ya kan kita tetangga

B1: Iya mbak, rumahku tak bikin seperti rumahnya Raffi Ahmad

B2: Punyaku kayak rumahnya Atta Halilintar

English version

B1: Sir, would you like to have a playroom at my house?

B2: This is my playroom too. I'd like to have a swimming pool at mine.

B1: I'll swim at your house, okay?

B2: Yes, if I swim at my house, if I play at your house, we're neighbors, right?

B1: Yes, sis, my house isn't like Raffi Ahmad's house.

B2: Mine is like Atta Halilintar's house.

Dialogue 2 above contains a conversation between two boys playing house using pencils and erasers. The two boys arrange the pencils and erasers into an aesthetic house plan with various desired rooms. For example, B1 designed his house equipped with a playroom while B2 chose to design his house with a swimming pool. The house arranged

horizontally from pencils and erasers is imagined to be like the house of Raffi Ahmad and Atta Halilintar. The results of the house design that has been arranged using pencils and erasers are in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2. Two Children Playing with a Pencil and Eraser Creates an Aesthetic House Plan (Personal Doc.)

These findings indicate that play functions as a symbolic representational space where children construct meaning through material objects. Pencils and erasers are no longer understood as writing tools, but as spatial representations of the structure of a house, interpreted through children's imaginations. This process demonstrates that children transform objects into symbols that represent the social experiences and cultural references they access.

From the perspective of literacy as a social practice, this activity demonstrates that literacy develops through the process of interpretation and reconstruction of meaning, not simply through formal language use. Thus, this play reflects how children construct literacy based on experiences and everyday contexts.

3. A Doll as a Child Being Examined by a Doctor

A puppet is a living prop that provides 3D visualization. It is typically used for role-playing, portraying characters such as animals, people, vehicles, plants, and more. In a child's imagination, all forms of puppets can become instruments in role-play, helping to project their imaginations onto the interlocutor. This activity can create new stories and meanings, as in dialogue 3 below.

Dialogue 3. Role-Play Dialogue Using a Doll as a Baby Being Examined by a Doctor

Indonesian version

C1: Assalamualaikum dokter saya mau memeriksakan anak saya dok mulai tadi malam badannya panas

C2: Oh iya pak, silahkan anaknya ditidurkan di sini dan bapak boleh duduk di sini, saya priksa ya bapak

C1: Iya dok, batuk juga dok

C2: Hmm, anak bapak sedang flu ini. Kebanyakan minum es dan makan jajan ciki ya?

C1: Iya Dok, setiap hari minum es dan jajan ciki susah dibilangin dok

C2: Nah itu yang perlu dihindari ya Ayaka, ini obatnya ya diminum 3x1 hari setelah makan

C1: Terima Kasih dok

English version

C1: Assalamualaikum, Doctor, I want to examine my child since last night. He has a fever.

C2: Oh yes, sir, please put him to bed here, and you can sit here while I examine him.

C1: Yes, Doctor. He's coughing too.

C2: Hmm, your child has a cold. He drinks a lot of iced drinks and eats snacks, right?

C1: Yes, Doctor. He drinks iced drinks and eats snacks every day, it's hard to tell.

C2: Well, that's what you need to avoid, Ayaka. Take this medicine three times a day after meals.

C1: Thank you, Doctor.

Dialogue 3 contains a conversation between two boys who act as a doctor and a father. The dialogue tells of a father who took his son to the doctor for a checkup. After being examined, it turned out that the son had the flu due to drinking too much iced drinks and eating Ciki snacks. The father confirmed the doctor's statement that his son, Ayaka, was lying weakly on the bed in the doctor's examination room and often drank iced drinks and Ciki snacks. Due to being difficult to advise by his parents, Ayaka fell ill and had to take medicine 3x1 a day after eating. This new story is supported by the documentation in the following figure 3.



Figure 3. Two children playing with dolls as children are examined by a doctor (Personal Doc)

The meanings constructed in this game demonstrate that children represent social relations through the role structures of doctors and parents. The dialogues they construct demonstrate an understanding of institutional (medical) practices, reproduced in a simplified form. Children not only imitate conversations but also organize narratives based on familiar patterns of social interaction.

Based on these findings, it can be understood that children's play practices represent a dynamic process of constructing meaning through the interaction of objects, roles, and language. Children not only reproduce experiences gained from media or the environment but also reinterpret them in the form of contextual narratives.

This process demonstrates that objects used in play function as signs that are reinterpreted within the context of interaction, enabling the formation of coherent meaning structures, even though they do not always refer to empirical reality. Thus, play can be understood as a semiotic space that facilitates the production and negotiation of meaning through naturally occurring social practices.

Furthermore, these findings reinforce the view that literacy is not limited to reading and writing skills, but rather is a social practice involving the production, distribution, and interpretation of meaning in everyday situations.

Classification of Meaning as a Result of Thematic Coding

Based on an analysis of object use practices in play, the resulting meaning constructions can be classified into three main categories: creative-innovative, symbolic, and social meaning. This classification is based on narrative patterns, types of object representation, and the forms of interaction that emerge in play. Thus, the stories children construct not only function as imaginative activities but also as forms of meaning production in everyday literacy practices.

Table 1. Types of Meaning from Stories Resulting from Children's Imagination Processes in Play

No.	New Story	Type Meaning	Conclusion
1.	Buying and selling dinosaurs transported using cardboard trucks	Creative and Innovative	These findings suggest that play practices allow for the emergence of creative and innovative meaning constructions through deviations from empirical reality. The use of cardboard boxes as trucks and dinosaurs as commodities demonstrates that children develop narratives that are not tied to reality, yet still possess a coherent meaning structure within the context of play
2.	Designing an aesthetic house plan that includes a playroom and swimming pool using a pencil and eraser	Symbolic	These findings indicate that children transform material objects into symbolic representations. Pencils and erasers serve as media to represent the spatial structure of the house, which is interpreted through imagination and social references, thus demonstrating the process of symbol-based meaning construction in everyday literacy practices.

Table 1 (Continued)

No.	New Story	Type Meaning	Conclusion
3.	Checking a child who has the flu due to drinking too much ice and eating ciki (the child is demonstrated using a doll)	Social	These findings suggest that play serves as a representational space for social interaction, where children reproduce and reconstruct institutional practices through dialogue and role-playing. The resulting conversational structures reflect children's understanding of social relations, communication, and norms internalized in everyday contexts.

First, the creative-innovative meaning is reflected through deviations from empirical reality in the construction of play narratives. The use of cardboard as trucks and dinosaurs as commodities demonstrates that children construct narrative worlds that are not bound by the logic of reality, but still possess a coherent internal structure. This transformation indicates children's ability to combine empirical experience with imagination to produce new meanings. In this context, creativity is not simply understood as a novelty of form, but as a process of reconstructing reality through symbols.

Second, symbolic meaning is demonstrated through the transformation of material objects into spatial and conceptual representations. The pencil and eraser arranged as a house plan reflect a process of meaning-making in which objects are no longer understood based on their original function, but rather as symbols representing specific social structures, such as living spaces. References to public figures accessed through the media indicate that the construction of meaning is also influenced by mediatic experiences. This indicates that children's literacy practices occur through a process of intertextuality between direct experience and representations obtained from the social environment.

Third, social meaning emerges through the reproduction and reconstruction of interaction practices within institutional contexts. Role-playing as a doctor and a parent demonstrates that children organize dialogue based on communication patterns recognized in everyday life. The resulting conversational structures reflect understandings of social relations, authority, and interactional norms. In this sense, play serves as a medium for representing and negotiating social positions through language.

Taken together, these three types of meaning demonstrate that children's play is a semiotic practice involving the processes of representation, transformation, and interpretation of meaning. The resulting construction of meaning does not stand alone but is interconnected with empirical experiences, media exposure, and social interactions that shape children's frameworks for understanding the world.

Synthesis: Play as a Social Literacy Practice

Play plays a crucial role in supporting children's literacy, particularly language development. Through play, children have the opportunity to explore their language skills through enjoyable interactions with peers and adults. These activities indirectly introduce vocabulary, sentence structure, and effective communication skills. Objects around children, used as props, encourage them to ask questions, answer questions, and tell stories, constructing meaning using language as a means of communication. This is evidenced by the transcription of an interview with a mother who directly monitored her child's development.

Dialogue 4. Children's Play Supports the Development of Vocabulary and Sentence Structure in Children

Indonesian version

D1: Anak saya bisa berbicara terbata itu pas umur satu tahun kak. Terus umur 4-5 tahun dia berani berbicara menggunakan banyak kata itu hanya sebatas dengan mamah dan papahnya saja. Setelah itu saya bebaskan dia bermain dengan teman-temannya seperti tadi itu, alhamdulillahnya anak saya lebih cerewat kak kata-kata yang ducapkan jelas dan bisa dipahami terus juga anak saya sekarang lebih percaya diri berinteraksi dengan banyak orang

D2: Berarti dari permainan sederhana ini menjadikan anak lebih aktif dan mampu berbicara dengan kalimat yang utuh ya bu

English version

D1: My child started to stutter when he was one year old. Then, when he was 4-5 years old, he dared to speak using many words, but only with his mom and dad. After that, I let him play with his friends like I said before. Thankfully, my child is more talkative, his words are clear and understandable. He is also more confident interacting with many people now.

D2: So, this simple game makes your child more active and able to speak in complete sentences, right?

Dialogue 4 contains a conversation between a mother supervising her child's play and a researcher. The conversation discusses the impact of simple games played by children on supporting their language development. D1 confirmed that, based on his observations, children who initially lacked confidence when interacting with others, even in communities with limited language skills, after being given the freedom to play and interact with many friends, they became confident individuals because their language skills had developed optimally. The children were able to speak complete sentences and were understood by their conversation partners. This context indicates that children's language skills gained through interactions in play include a rich vocabulary, and the habit of asking, answering, and telling stories encourages children to develop skills in constructing well-formed sentences that are easily understood by their interlocutors.

It is understandable that games that position children as imaginary characters and have appropriate conversation partners can develop children's language skills. The interactions that occur demonstrate the process of exchanging new vocabulary, initially unfamiliar to children, into words that cumulatively lead to new vocabulary acquisition. These new words are then used by children in responding to repeated interactions, indirectly accustoming them to effective sentence structure using the newly acquired vocabulary. Repeated use of sentences will familiarize children with the language, resulting in meanings that are easily understood by their conversation partners. This process encourages children to continue literacy, developing their language skills through simple activities, one of which is playing with objects around them.

Dialogue 5. Children's Play Supports the Development of Understanding Instructions and Writing Skills in Children

Indonesian version

DP1: Kebiasaan bermain menggunakan beberapa bahasa, seperti bahasa Indonesia, Jawa, dan Inggris menjadikan anak saya memiliki pemahaman saat diajak komunikasi. Malah dia saat ini setelah lancar berbicara kalau main ada ketaas dan bolpoin pasti sambil menulis huruf dirangkai jadi nama-nama hewan, mobil, dan tanaman

DQ2: Kemampuan memahami bahasanya bagus ya bu.

English version

DP1: The habit of playing in multiple languages, such as Indonesian, Javanese, and English, has enabled my child to understand communication. In fact, now that he's fluent in speaking, when he plays with paper and a pen, he'll always write letters together to form the names of animals, cars, and plants.

DQ2: His language comprehension is good, isn't it, ma'am?

Dialogue 5 depicts a conversation between a mother supervising her child's daily play activities and a researcher. DP1, a mother, explains that children's play stimulates the development of their language skills. After understanding a large vocabulary and being able to derive meaning from sentences constructed or spoken by others, children further develop their language skills, namely writing. The resulting writing is still relatively simple, such as writing the names of animals, cars, and plants, which serve as instruments to support children's imagination in play.

Children's play can also stimulate and strengthen children's listening skills, which is a fundamental aspect of literacy. Games that include instructions, directions, or procedures teach children to carry out these commands and process information verbally. For example, when writing utensils are available, parents guide their children to recognize the letters that make up words from simple objects used for play. Children who previously didn't know the alphabet become familiar with them, and children who already memorized the letters of the alphabet can write complete words. Therefore, it is

understandable that play using objects around them can serve as a foundation for education that can support children's language development.

Dialogue 6. Children's Games as an Effective Means for the Development of Future Literacy

Indonesian version

DV1: Menurut saya permainan sangat berperan penting ya dalam mendukung perkembangan literasi di masa depan. Untuk mengembangkan kemampuan anak dalam berbahasa saja efektif terlebih lagi saat ini kalau saya pantau ya bidang pendidikan juga sudah mengintegrasikan permainan sebagai media permainan dalam proses pengajaran. Tentunya permainan dapat menjadi sarana efektif dalam mendukung perkembangan literasi pada masa selanjutnya

DQ2: Apakah ibu mendukung permainan anak menjadi basis dalam proses pendidikan yang nantinya berinovasi sesuai perkembangan zaman?

DV1: Sangat mendukung kak, tapi sebagai orang tua juga perlu lebih intens dalam memantau anak dalam bermain

English version

DV1: I think games play a very important role in supporting future literacy development. It's effective for developing children's language skills, and even more so now, as I've observed, the education sector has integrated games as a medium into the teaching process. Certainly, games can be an effective tool in supporting future literacy development.

DQ2: Do you support children's games as a foundation for the educational process, which will innovate with the times?

DV1: I totally support that, but as parents, we also need to be more diligent in monitoring our children's play.

Dialogue 6 depicts a conversation between a mother who wants her child to play with objects around her and a researcher. The conversation discusses the importance of play in developing children's literacy skills. This statement is supported by the opinion of DV1, a mother who supervises her child's play, who believes that play can support children's literacy skills. DV1 also believes that children's play is simply an effective means of equipping them with literacy skills to meet future challenges. Play is not merely a form of entertainment but also an effective means of developing children's overall language skills. Children's language skills are fundamental to developing meaning in literacy, which is reflected in everyday life. By engaging and stimulating children's cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and conative skills, play can support future literacy development. Play also challenges children to think creatively and communicate effectively, implicitly preparing them for further literacy development in everyday life.

It can be concluded that play is an effective, enjoyable tool that strengthens children's foundation for early literacy development. This development can be seen from the literacy process, starting from acquiring new vocabulary, stringing words together into

sentences, understanding the meaning of spoken sentences and sentences spoken by interlocutors, encouraging children to write, honing children's listening skills, training children in effective communication, and more. These basic literacy skills, if implemented and practiced from an early age, can strengthen children's cognitive, affective, and conative skills in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that children's play is a daily literacy practice based on the process of constructing meaning through interactions with material objects in their environment. Children do not simply use objects as play tools, but transform them into symbols that shape narratives, social roles, and specific meaning structures. Through thematic analysis, it was found that these practices produce three main forms of meaning construction: creative-innovative, symbolic, and social. These three forms represent how literacy develops as a contextual social practice, not simply as a linguistic skill. These findings broaden the perspective on literacy by demonstrating that literacy processes can emerge organically in play activities, particularly in local contexts with minimal technological intervention. Thus, this research contributes to strengthening the approach to literacy as a social practice based on everyday experiences and interactions.

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