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# **The Impact of Parent Involvement on Preschool English Language Learners' Ability to Learn the English Language**

An Action Research Report

By: Ann Marie T. Torres and Tu Cam Tran

**The Impact of Parent Involvement on Preschool English  
Language Learners' Ability to Learn the English  
Language**

By: Ann Marie T. Torres and Tu Cam Tran

Submitted on May 19, 2014  
in fulfillment of final requirements for MAED Degree  
St Catherine University  
St Paul, Minnesota

Advisor \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

Montessori preschool children who are English Language Learners (ELL) age three to five, consisting of one female and six males. It was conducted in two different preschool classrooms, focusing on literacy skills as well as oral communication skills. The direct aim of the study was to help children successfully learn English as their second language while keeping their native language. Researchers also investigated whether parental involvement increased the ability of ELLs to learn the English language. Data collection procedures utilized were: (1) parent interviews, (2) observation and anecdotal records, (3) pretest, and (4) post-test. A take-home literacy kit was used to measure the effectiveness of parental involvement. Researchers also provided a take-home literacy kit for parents to work on with their child at home. Parents were given a total of four literacy kits, one new kit each week. Result of this research indicated an improvement in parent and child interaction. The take-home literacy kit fostered communication between parent and child because words were translated in their home language. Over the course of four weeks, children showed great interest in literacy and progress in their communication skills.

## **Introduction**

Children in California schools are diverse and come from multilingual families; they speak different languages and come from various cultures. London, Gurantz and Norman (2011) said, "In the 2008–09 school year, California public schools served 1.5 million children (24 percent of the student population) whose primary language was not English." English learners population increased over the past decades. The increase of English learners required the development of their literacy skills. Their literacy proficiency is essential so they will thrive in their school environment and in their community. Therefore, it is vital to explore how to support the needs of these English learners. By using literacy resources, such as a take-home literacy kit, to promote parent child interaction, the involvement of parents will increase the ability of English learners to learn the English language.

Foremost, it is important to define and understand the concept of literacy. Stroup said "in the Middle Ages, literacy was generally associated with the ability to speak, read, and write Latin, and only members of a few elite groups had access to formal education or to the Latin texts in which it was presented" (2011, pg. 2). The definition of literacy changed over the years. UNESCO defined it in 1978 as one's ability to "engage in all...activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for his own and community's development" (p. 2). The latest definition of literacy is not about the capability of a person to read and write. It is how a person speaks and uses language to understand the world and communicate with other people.

To improve the literacy skills of English learners will also improve their learning outcomes. Lan, Torr and Degotardi (2011) emphasized that studies show proficiency in English is closely interconnected with educational success. Asian families understand this interconnection. For them, it is important to teach children the English language at a very early age so they will become proficient in speaking and using English as their second language. (Lan, et al 2011).

Morrow highlighted “Research studies and syntheses conducted over the past decade have helped us understand the importance of young children’s experiences with oral and written language” (2005, pg. 8). He pointed out that oral language development is developed during the preschool years. Preschoolers’ early experiences with reading and writing will help children achieve favorable outcomes. Morrow stressed, “Children who have high quality preschool experiences with an emphasis on language and literacy are more likely to acquire strong language and literacy skills that translate into achievement in the early grades and throughout their schooling” (2005, pg. 8).

### **Importance of Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement is very crucial in attaining the desired literacy outcomes of English learners. Parents are a child’s first teacher; they are important in the language and literacy achievement of the child. The success of a school’s literacy program depends on how parents or family members extend it at home. They, therefore, provide an important role in achieving the purpose. Morrow recommends, “Parents of preschoolers must participate in home and in school activities that deal with their child’s literacy development and schools must assist parents with helping their children with language and literacy development (2005, pg. 16). Conteh and Kawashima likewise concluded,

“All families have power, and their experience and knowledge can play an important role in the learning processes of their children (2008, pg. 123).

### **Supporters of English Language Learners in Preschool**

Supporters such as teacher and parental involvement in English language learners play a vital role in a child’s success; oral language development is a critical component of various aspects in a child’s life (Magruder, Hayslip, Espinosa, & Matera, 2013). Many children enter school knowing either minimal English or even no English at all. This requires educators to create a more supportive and fun learning environment for children throughout their years of learning so that it is more meaningful as well as enjoyable (Konishi, 2007). Esmā and Ozkan (2012) state that in order for children to learn effectively, they must build a relationship of mutual trust and respect with their teacher- teachers play a key role in a child’s language development.

Studies have shown that in order for English language learners to grasp the language quickly and effectively, it is important that parents as well as teachers work together to create links between the home and school environment (Goren, 2003). Regardless of any barriers, it is important that teachers and parents make the effort to support children of English language learners beginning at a young age (Coppola, 2005; Lopez, Salas, & Flores, 2005).

Practices in the home environment are likewise significant in the promotion of language literacy. In 2011, Query, Ceglowski, Clark, and Li found “a strong connection between early home literacy practices that promote language and later school success.” They noted that home literacy practices should be “positive and effective for all families”

and gave emphasis on the importance of the home or native language of the family (pg. 7).

Similarly, in 2013, Huang found out “the positive effects of parental involvement in their children’s literacy development” (pg. 252). Her study showed that parental involvement nurtured the children’s English language development and improved their communication skills.

### **Description of Research Project**

In this study, the researcher chose to work with children ages three to five who are English language learners (ELL). Over a course of four weeks, two different preschool Montessori classrooms participated in this study. Data collection began on February 19, 2014 and concluded on March 21, 2014. Our data collection procedure utilized: (1) parent interviews, (2) observation and anecdotal records, (3) pretest, and (4) posttest. The pretest and posttest were used to determine the developmental level of the children. The research investigated this question: Does parent involvement increase the ability of ELLs to learn the English Language?

Prior to the study, parents were given a notification letter regarding an overview of the action plan and whether or not they were interested in participating. After the parents signed the consent forms, the families were asked to complete the demographic form to collect pertinent information about their background, educational level and income bracket for a general idea of their socio economic status. This gives researchers an idea of the types of children who are being measured.

Parents answered a set of six questions during the parent interview process (See Appendix A). They indicated the frequency of speaking English with their child at home,

such as how often English was spoken and what period of the day. The importance of the English language in their family dynamics was discussed. They were asked to share their various ways of engaging in literacy activities with their child at home, if any. The interview process was very casual, yet specific; any concerns about the study were addressed during the parent interview process.

Participating children were pretested using the Desired Results Development profile, DRDP (see appendix B). The researchers used the DRDP because the validity and reliability of the DRDP as an assessment tool has been determined over the years (CDI, 2010). The two domains in the DRDP which represents the key areas of learning and development for ELLs are Language and Literacy Development (LLD) and English Language Development (ELD). The measures for LLD are measures 13 to 22 and for ELD are measures 23 to 26. The developmental levels of the participating children were assessed on each developmental domain. The researchers rated the students according to their abilities using a set of ten questions for LLD. These questions focused on their comprehension of meaning, following increasingly complex instructions, expression of self through language, language conversion, interest in literacy, comprehension of age-appropriate text presented by adults, concepts about print, phonological awareness, letter and word knowledge, and emergent writing. After LLD was assessed, four questions were used to assess their English language development (ELD). The questions concentrated on comprehension of English (receptive English), self-expression in English (expressive English), understanding and response to English literacy activities, and symbol, letter and print knowledge in English. The developmental level of children were determined through observations and documentation and rating their present levels as not

yet at first level, exploring, developing building, integrating, emerging to the next level. If the researcher is unable to rate, the reason was recorded.

For four consecutive weeks, the participating children were observed weekly. Anecdotal observation forms were completed for each child (see appendix C). The researchers observed every child throughout the day and specifically followed each child for at least 10-20 minutes once a week, for four weeks. The researchers observed and recorded each child's progress and recorded anecdotes. Significant conversations using the English language were recorded throughout the day.

A take-home literacy kit was provided to parents so they could work with their child at home (sample of the literacy kit is found in Appendix D). A different literacy kit was provided weekly. Every Thursday, a new kit was given to the child and the kit was returned every Wednesday. The purpose of the contents of the literacy kit was to help children learn basic English words. The kit included sight words and various bilingual books in English and Chinese, were also included. Both English and Chinese versions of the same books were incorporated to help children familiarize themselves with a story in multiple languages. Parents were instructed to read books with their children each night. After reading stories, parents practiced with their child to retell the story using his/her own words. The kit also contained picture flash cards with both the English and Chinese words written; this helps with literacy development. The words in the flashcards were divided into four different categories, consisting of simple words to help children with everyday conversations. The children learn to use the words to express themselves more appropriately, thus helping teachers meet the children's basic needs. The first set is composed of words naming the basic body parts: eye, nose, mouth, ear, neck, stomach,

knees, legs, feet, and toes. The second set is about feelings, so children learn how to express their own emotions: happy, sad, angry, confused, surprised, and excited. The third set contains words related to personal hygiene. Mastering these words will help children verbalize their personal needs such as wash your hands, go to the toilet, cover your nose when you sneeze, cover your mouth when you cough, brush your teeth, and blow your nose. Finally, the fourth set of flashcards is about the different objects and areas inside the classroom: door, table, chair, sink, drinking fountain, circle rug, shelf, student cubby, and toilet. By learning the names of various objects around the classroom, it will help children to verbalize their special needs as they feel more comfortable in their environment. The literacy kits were rotated to each child weekly.

At the end of the study, participating children were given a post-test using the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP). The post-test consisted of the same questions as in DRDP pretest. Post assessment is necessary to show if the developmental level of the child has improved to the next level. Over the course of four weeks, the researchers used the observation notes and anecdotal records gathered as evidence to rate the participating child. The rating was on different areas of language development. Both the pretest and post-test will help indicate areas of progression, regression, or no effects. It will also show if the children's experience with the take home literacy kit has improved their English learning.

The study concluded by asking parents for another interview. Their personal experiences and observations were consolidated and analyzed. Parents shared their perspective on their child's progress over the course of four weeks. Their experiences with the take home literacy kit were recorded. Researchers conferred with parents to

update them on their child’s development. Observation notes and anecdotal records were shared with the parents during the study. The researchers also discussed any complications or successes of the study.

### Analysis of Data

The researchers used four data sources: (1) parent interviews, (2) observation and anecdotal records, (3) pretest, and (4) posttest. The pretest and posttest used the Desired Results Development profile (DRDP) particularly the Language Literacy Development (LLD) and the English Language Development (ELD) measures.

At the start of the study, the researchers assessed the participating children using the LLD and ELD measures of the DRDP, to measure the children’s progress towards the desired results.

It is desirable that children improve their ability to learn and communicate using the English language, as well as improve their literacy skills.

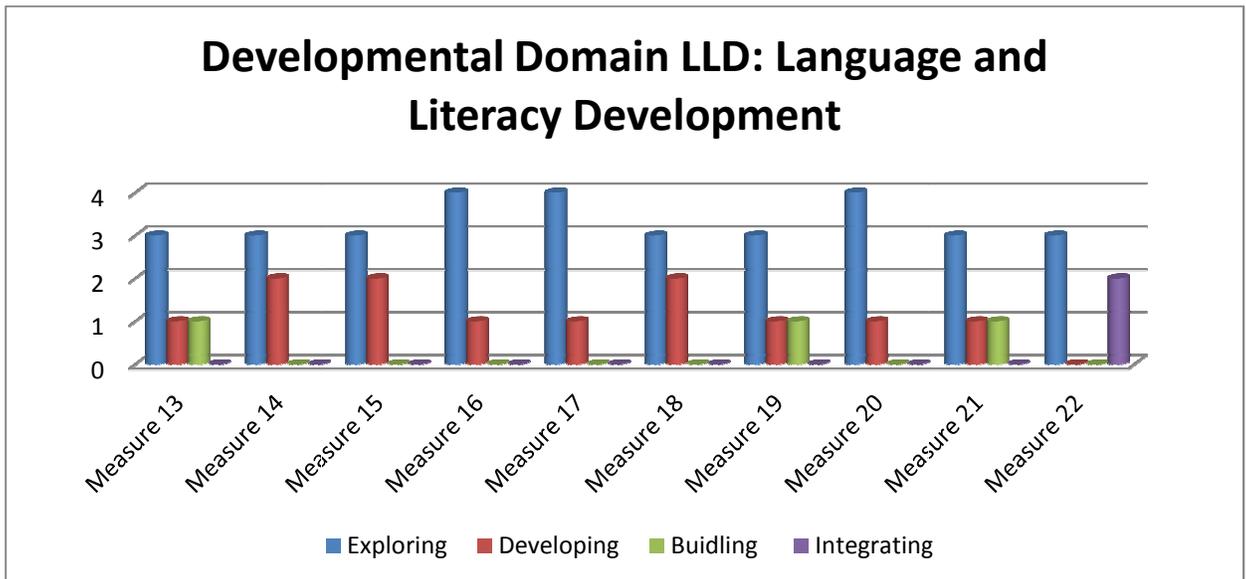


Figure 1 Language and Literacy Development

Figure 1 shows the developmental levels of the participating children in the domain of language and literacy. Three of the participating children understood the simple meaning of English words. The other three understood more complex English words and phrases. However, one of them is not yet at the first level of simple English. This child needs physical guidance when being instructed. Most of the children followed instructions using the English words when routines were familiar. Majority of them also used English to communicate basic intentions such as refusals, denials, requests and rejections; their interest in books was notable. Some children brought books so teachers could read to them. Most children listened to the stories read and some of them showed interest by asking who, what and where questions. Their awareness of sounds was also tested. Children recognized symbols and knew some letter sounds. Three of the children could recognize and write their names while three children could only recognize the initial letters of their names and make scribbles as a way to write their names. One child was still exploring and does not have letter recognition; the child uses pictures for identification.

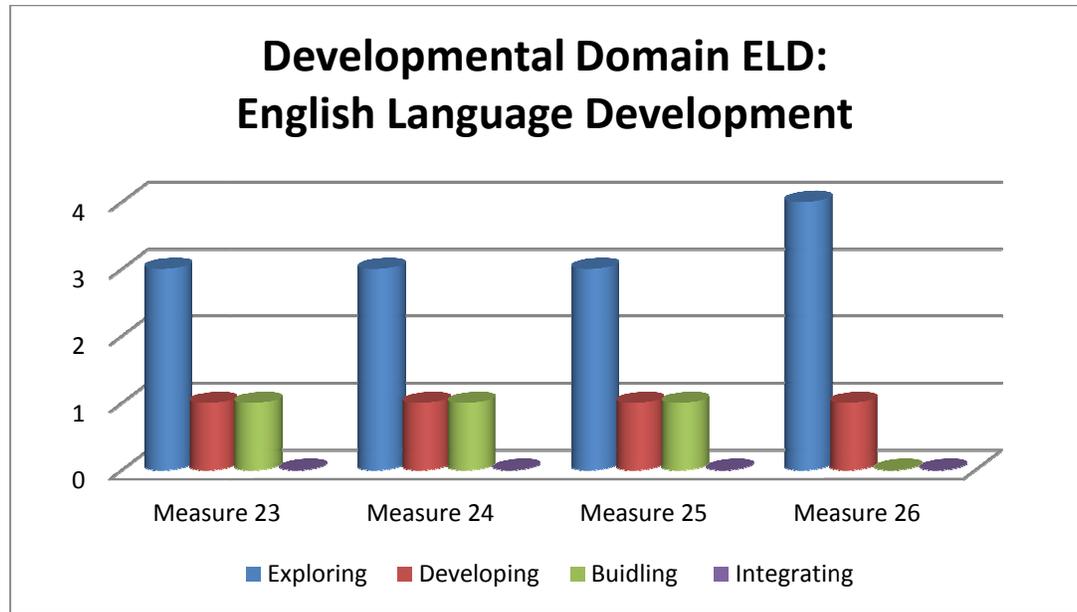


Figure 2 English Language Development

Figure 2 shows the developmental levels of the children on English Language.

The progression of the children towards fluency in understanding English language was determined by observing how they interact with other children and how they reacted to activities. Most of them were able to participate in activities because communication was supplemented with their native language. Some of the children translated the English words to their native language. Teachers also used verbal cues to facilitate understanding of English words used or instructions. When their fluency to speak the English language was assessed, the researchers observed that most of the children responded to simple questions by nodding their heads. Most of them used simple words that were routinely used in the classroom. Only three of the children were able to use simple phrases or incomplete sentences to communicate their needs and wants.

When it comes to literary activities such as reading books and storytelling, the children showed interest by listening to the stories and pointing to pictures as the story

was being told. Some child even named the objects in the story as they saw pictures. Two of the children participated in answering simple questions after stories were read while one of them asked simple why questions.

For four consecutive weeks, the participating children were closely observed weekly for at least 10-20 minutes. Researchers paid close attention to their language development through circle time participation and in conversations with their friends as well as teachers. Anecdotal observation forms were completed for each child. Carefully focusing on Language and Literacy Development (LLD) and English Language Development (ELD), researchers recorded significant conversations or phrases in English to track the growth and progress of each child.

Data gathered from the pretest and posted were recorded using the DRDP. After analyzing the records, the researchers came out with these results.

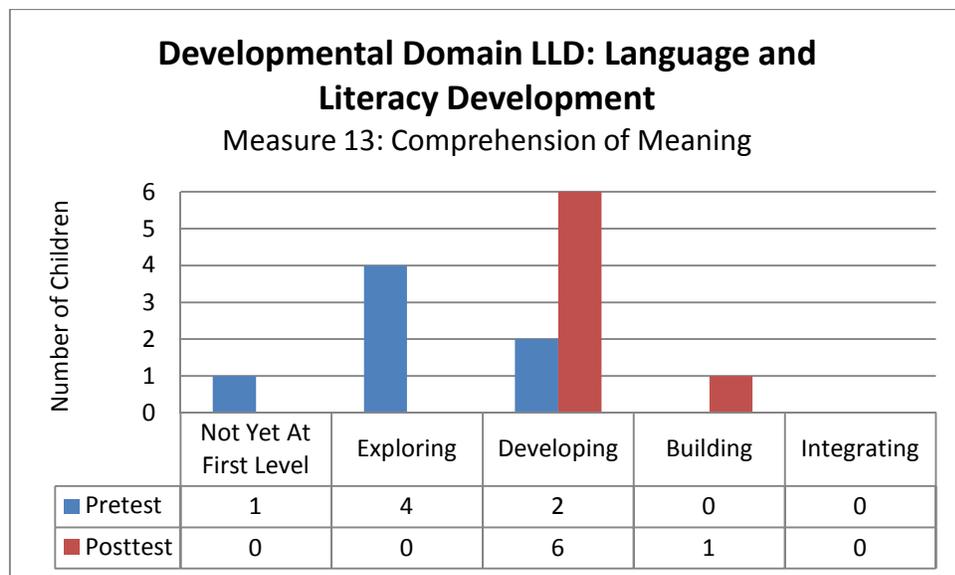


Figure 3 LLD Measure 13: Comprehension of Meaning

Figure 3 shows that the children moved to the next level of development. The graph shows that children understood and responded to increasingly complex English words. 15% settled at developing level while the 85% improved.

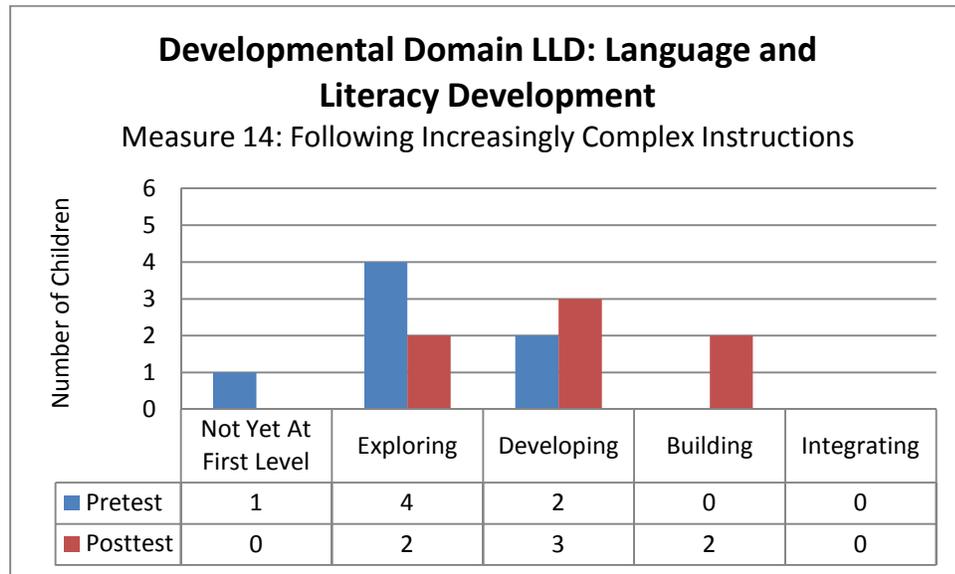


Figure 4 LLD Measure 14: Following Increasingly Complex Instructions

Figure 4 shows 28% of the children moved to the building level of development while 61% moved up but below building. The graph indicates that children understood and responded to increasingly complex directions and requests in English.

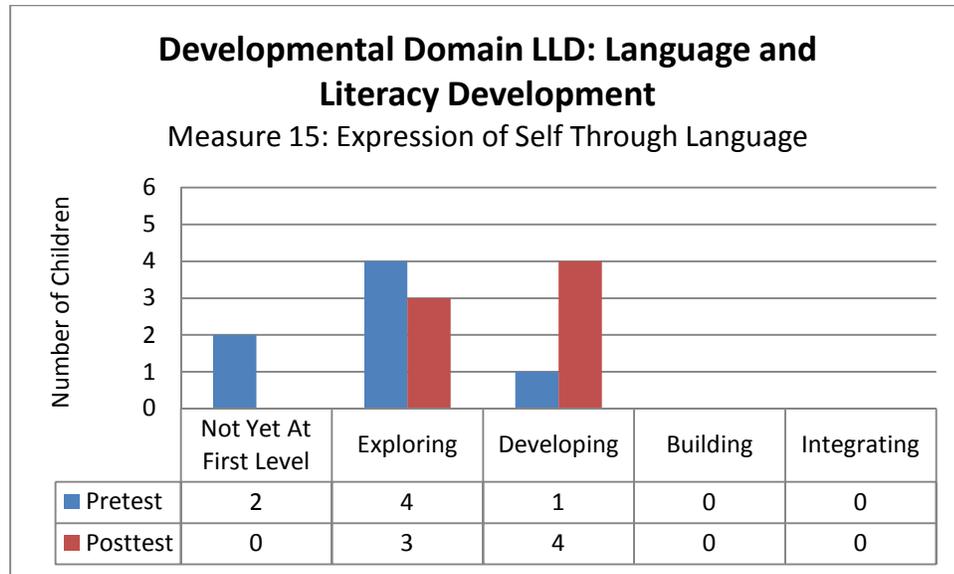


Figure 5 LLD Measure 15: Expression of Self Through Language

Figure 5 shows 28% of the children moved to the building level of development while 61% moved up but below building. The graph illustrates that the children used English sentences to communicate their ideas and needs.

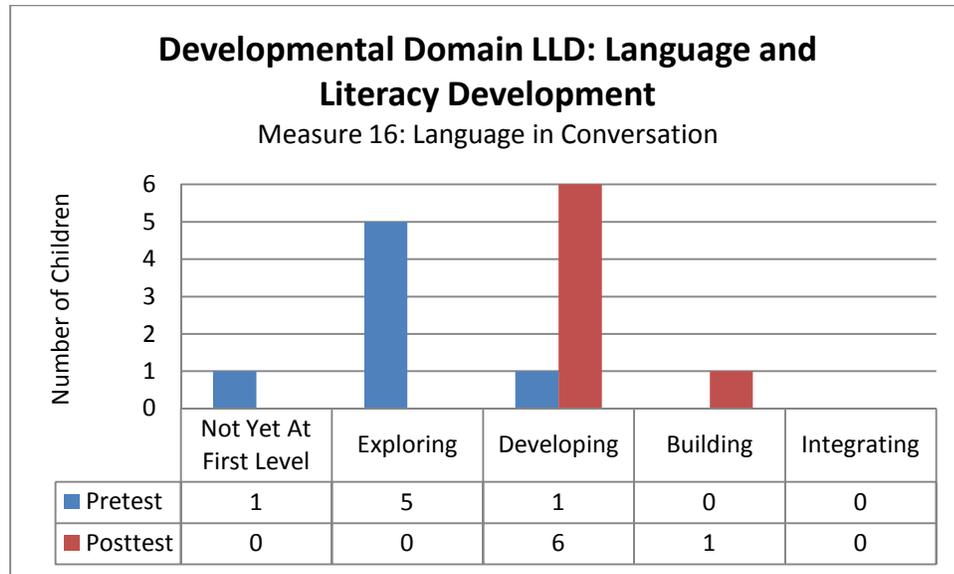


Figure 6 LLD Measure 16: Language in Conversation

Figure 6 shows 100% of the children moved up to the next level of development.

It is evident in the graph that all the children engaged in lengthy conversations using in the English language.

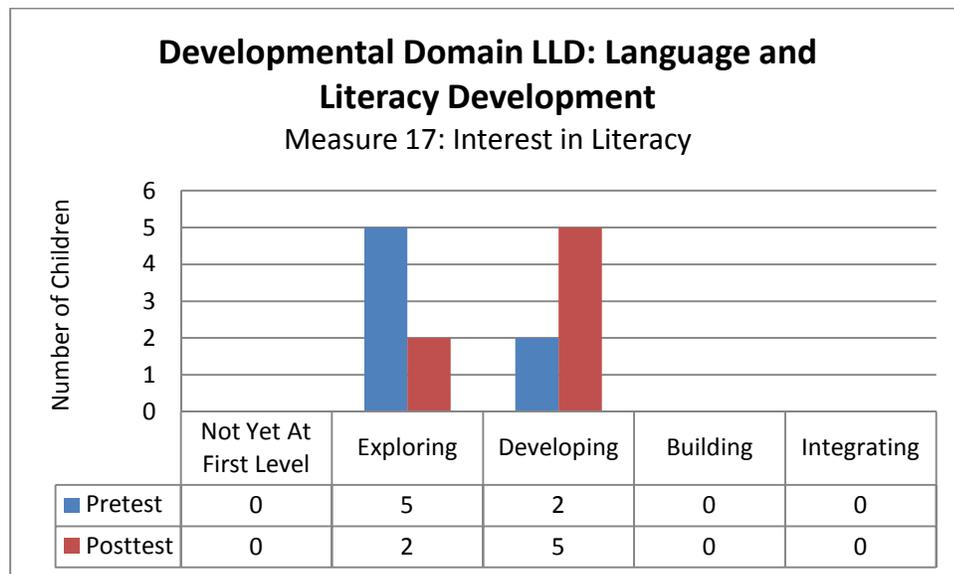


Figure 7 LLD Measure 17: Interest in Literacy

Figure 7 shows 28% of the children stayed at exploring level while 72% moved up to the next level of development. Most of the children demonstrated increased interest in literacy activities like stories, books, songs, rhymes.

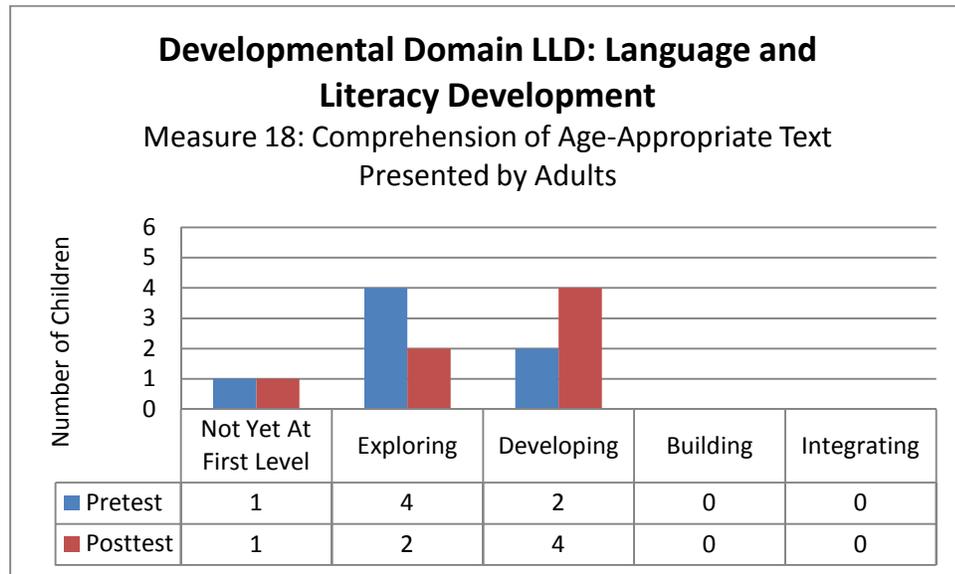


Figure 8 LLD Measure 18: Comprehension of Age-Appropriate Text Presented by Adults

Figure 8 shows only 28% of the children moved up to developing while 72% is mastering their understanding and response to age-appropriate text presented by adults such as books.

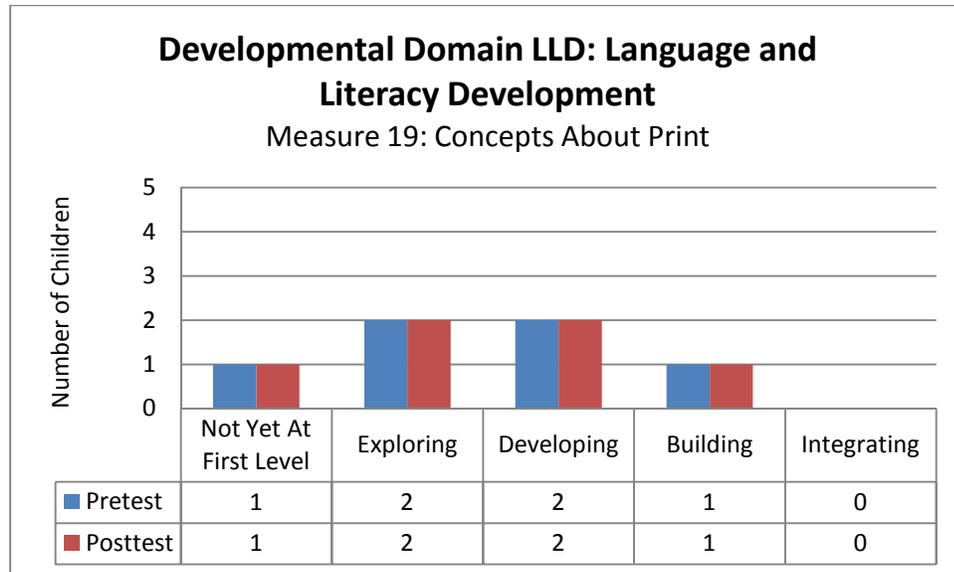


Figure 9 LLD Measure 19: Concepts about print

Figure 9 shows 100% of the children are mastering their understanding of the conventions and physical organization of print materials.

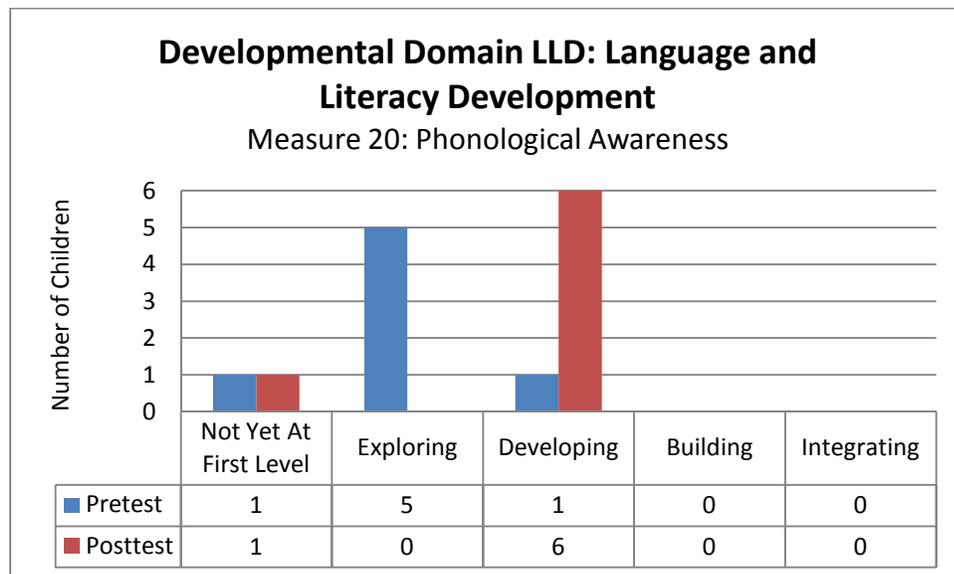


Figure 10 LLD Measure 20: Phonological Awareness

Figure 10 shows 72% of the children moved from exploring to developing while 28% remained at their previous levels. It illustrates that they are still mastering sounds of the English language.

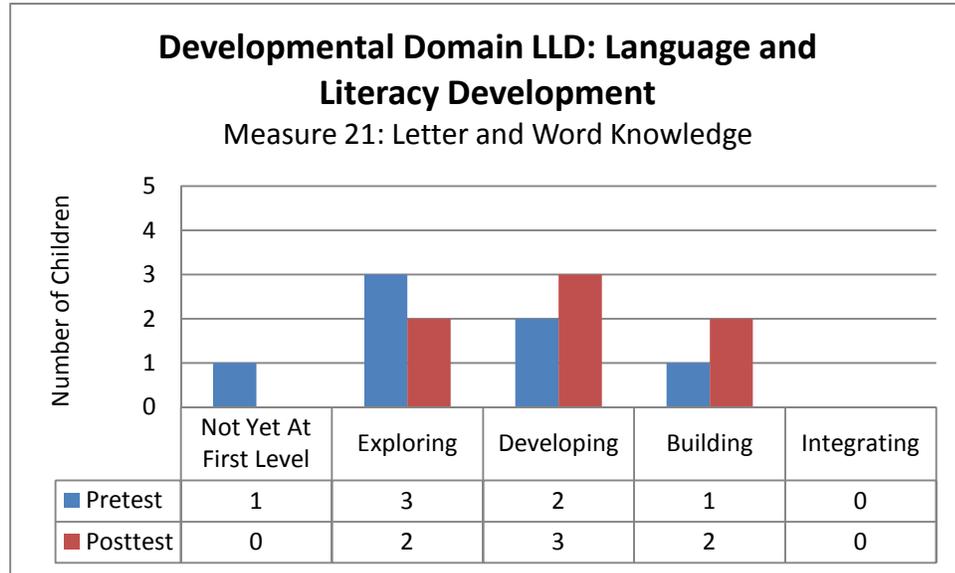


Figure 11 LLD Measure 21: Letter and Word Knowledge

Figure 11 shows that most of the children moved from their previous levels while the rest are still mastering sounds of the English letters.

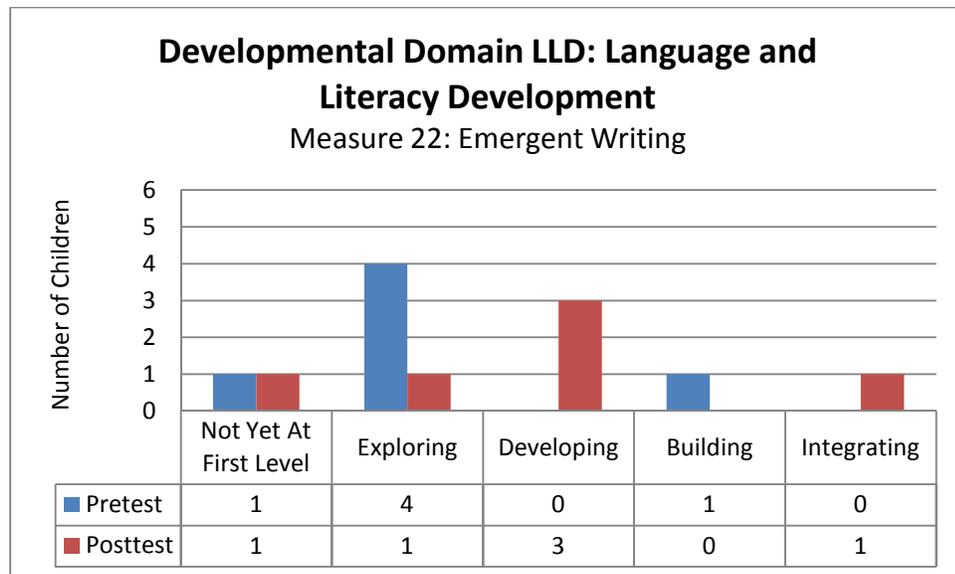


Figure 12 LLD Measure 22: Emergent Writing

Figure 12 shows 72% of the children moved from their previous levels while 28% are practicing to write or makes scribbles.

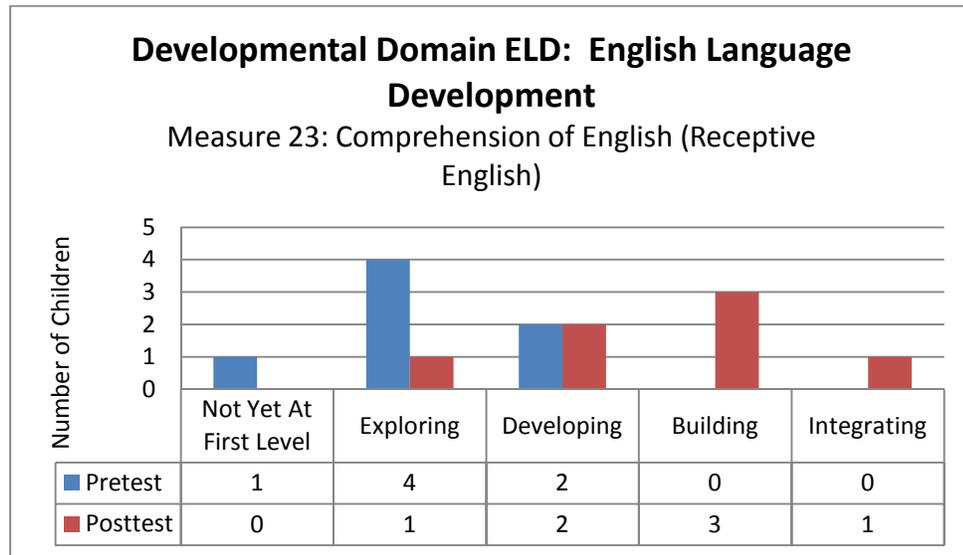


Figure 13 LLD Measure 23: Comprehension of English (Receptive English)

Figure 13 shows 100% of the children moved from their previous levels. They have shown progress in becoming fluent in understanding English and with limited use of visual cues.

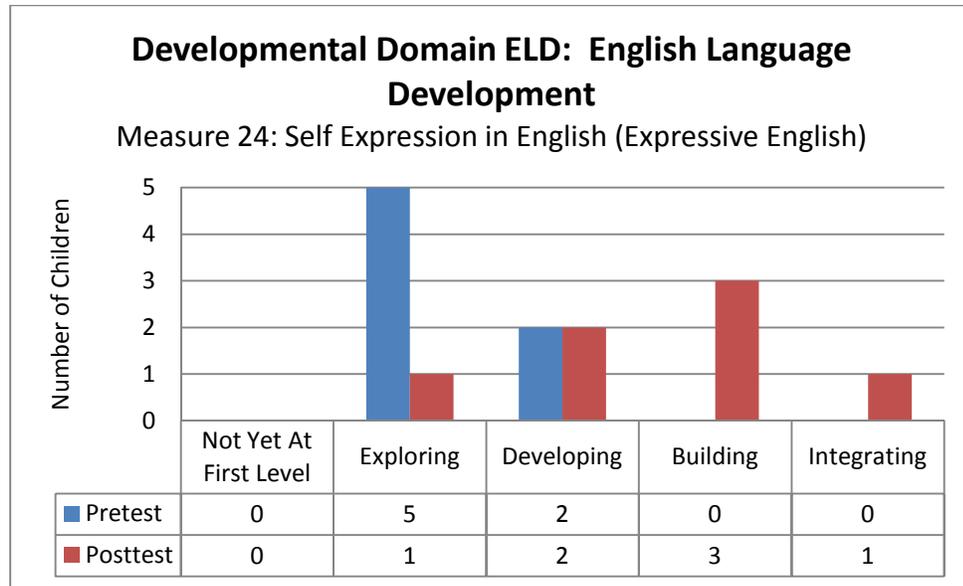


Figure 14 LLD Measure 24: Self Expression in English (Expressive English)

Figure 14 shows movement of children to the next level of development which means that they are progressing to become fluent in speaking the English language.

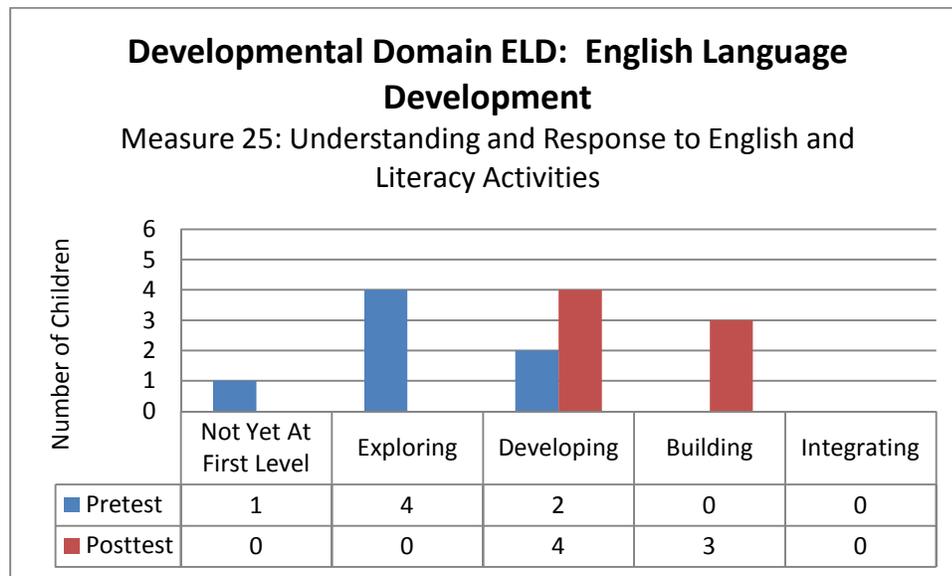


Figure 15 LLD Measure 25: Understanding and Response to English and Literacy Activities

Figure 15 shows 28% of the children are mastering their understanding of books, stories, songs in English while 78% demonstrated increased understanding of English literacy activities.

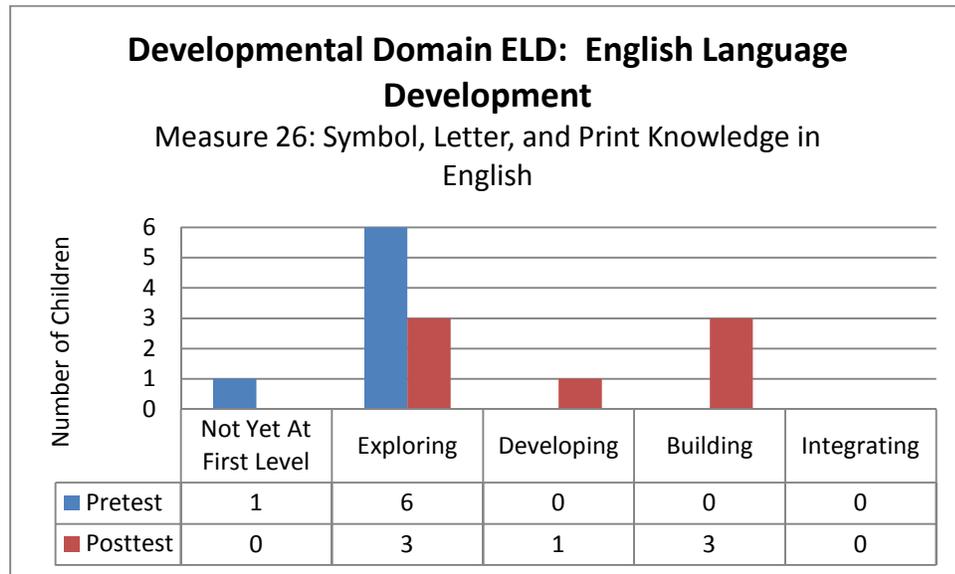


Figure 16 LLD Measure 26: Letter and Word Knowledge

Figure 16 shows 72% of the children demonstrated that print in English language carry meaning while 28% are mastering their understanding of the meaning of English prints.

The measures are used to assess development in learning language and literacy skills. (CDI, 2010).ELD measures document and assess improvement in learning how to communicate in English while the LLD

The other source of data was parent interviews. Parents indicated that they use their native language at home when communicating with their children most of the time. Most parents shared that they read English books before their child's bedtime. It is very seldom that they speak English with their child at home throughout the day. Parents

approximated only about two to three times a day that they speak English to their children. They used about one to two sentences spoken each time and parents said that sometimes they would get simple gestures as responses or Chinese responses rather than a verbal answer in English. Many parents indicated that they were not very strict on their child having to use English at home as they focused more on their primary language. Two parents did not want to use both languages at home with their child because they were afraid that their child would be confused with the two different languages spoken. Parents believed that their child should focus only on one language at a time until they become fluent. Then they can start learning the second language.

The take-home literacy kit was designed for parents to use as a resource at home with their child to help improve on their language and literacy skills. The content of the literacy kit was intended to help children learn more basic English words. The literacy kits had four sets of different sight words, flash cards of various objects in the classroom and bilingual books. Parents and their children worked together using the literacy kits each week for four consecutive weeks. Parents shared that them and their children spend an average of an hour each day using the literacy kit. The parents said they sat down with their child and read the flash cards aloud, repeating words several times. Another way of using the flashcards, parents read the words and requested their children to find and touch object as they say the words together. Parents would also read sight words to their child and using these in different sentences. Parents read books to their child each night both in English and in their native language. They talked about the story. Parent's feedbacks on the literacy kit were gathered through informal conversations on a daily basis. Parents concluded that the literacy kit was very enjoyable for both themselves and their child. It

helped their child become more aware of his/her surroundings, relating the objects with their names. The study also found out that children communicated more verbally both at home and in the classroom.

### **Action Plan**

The research demonstrated positive outcomes for all participants. Children showed more awareness in literacy as well as being more eager to verbally express their emotions to peers as well as teachers when they were in need. In one observation, a child was angry at his friend for taking his toys away, that child came to the teacher, pointed to his friend, and said "My toy, sad me!" Children also expressed more interest during circle time when stories were told. They were more familiar with books and simple vocabulary words as they were able to make connections. One of the literacy kits contained the book *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, by Eric Carl. When the teacher read the book at circle, one of the children who participated in the research became very fascinated. He focused his full attention into the book. As he heard familiar vocabularies or saw recognizable pictures, he shouted out the name of the pictures. For example, as the book talks about the caterpillar munching through various foods, the child will say "apple!" or "ice cream!"

The result of the study indicated that the take-home literacy kit fostered communication between parent and child because words were translated in their home language, example Chinese. Parents became more interested to spend more time in doing literacy activities with their children at home. The kit was also very beneficial because it reinforced the same vocabulary words that children often hear at school and at home.

Children were able to verbalize better their personal needs during class by utilizing the vocabulary introduced in the take-home literacy kit. For instance, a few children would say “tissue” or “wash hands” rather than pointing to the tissue box or sink as they have done prior to the study. Furthermore, children were using common words in various ways such as singing and role-playing with their peers. When the class sings certain songs such as “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” some of the children were not able to keep up with all the lyrics, but they were at least able to shout out the names of their body parts as introduced in their flashcards. As we get to certain parts of the body in that song, the children shouts along and points to that particular body part.

At any age, literacy is an important factor in a child’s lifelong learning at school and at home. English language learners often struggle through school as they try to balance their native language as well as a second language. It is important that children grasp a basic understanding of language and receives adequate help from their parents and teachers at a young age as it helps them build their education in various areas. Children who are ELL learn the language better when parents are involved because they participated together as co-learners of the language. Therefore, when early childhood educators plan to provide home intervention, it is important to value the home language of families.

Action research offers fast results to help educators offer different ways to present literacy to children in quick and effective ways. The study was limited in terms of population size and time. The results then warrants further investigation. The researchers believe that future action researches should conduct longer investigation to achieve results that are more accurate. Instead of a four-week analysis, the study should last at

least three to six months to verify significant language and literacy progress in children.

This will also help educators understand their students' needs and learning styles.

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Appendix A

# Parent Interview Form

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

1. During what times of the day do you speak English with your child?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

a. How long?

\_\_\_\_\_

b. About what?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you ever read signs and labels to your child?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

a. Anything other than books?

\_\_\_\_\_

b. Do you find those tools useful?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you think it is important to promote vocabulary development with young children?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_ Why:

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you think it is important to talk to your children about things they see in their environment? Yes\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

5. What do you believe is most important activity in improving your child's vocabulary and language development and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What do you believe will benefit your child's vocabulary development more, picture labels, accompanied by verbal definitions, or conversations accompanied by verbal definitions?

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## Appendix B

The Pre and Post Rating Record in LLD can be used to assess all children's progress in developing foundational language and literacy skills.. The Pre and Post Rating Record in ELD

can be used to document and assess the progress of children who speak a language other than English at home and are learning English .The observer watches the targeted students and makes note of their actions and conversations. The ratings are based on **Desired Results Developmental Profile—Preschool(2010) DRDP-PS 2010.**

### Pre and Post Rating Record

Name :
Date and Time:
Observer:
Site:

Developmental Domain: Language and Literacy Development (LLD)

1. Comprehension of meaning
  - Not yet at first level
  - Exploring
  - Developing
  - Building
  - Integrating
  - Emerging to the next level
  - Unable to rate Why?
  
2. Following increasingly complex instructions
  - Not yet at first level
  - Exploring
  - Developing
  - Building
  - Integrating
  - Emerging to the next level
  - Unable to rate Why?
  
3. Expression of self through language
  - Not yet at first level
  - Exploring

- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

4. Language Conversion

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

5. Interest in literacy

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

6. Comprehension of age-appropriate text presented by adults

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

7. Concepts about print

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level

- Unable to rate Why?

8. Phonological awareness

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

9. Letter and word knowledge

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

10. Emergent writing

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

Developmental Domain: English Language Development (ELD)

1. Comprehension of English (receptive English)

- Not yet at first level
- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating
- Emerging to the next level
- Unable to rate Why?

2. Self-expression in English (expressive English)
  - Not yet at first level
  - Exploring
  - Developing
  - Building
  - Integrating
  - Emerging to the next level
  - Unable to rate Why?
  
3. Understanding and response to English literacy activities
  - Not yet at first level
  - Exploring
  - Developing
  - Building
  - Integrating
  - Emerging to the next level
  - Unable to rate Why?
  
4. Symbol, letter and print knowledge in English
  - Not yet at first level
  - Exploring
  - Developing
  - Building
  - Integrating
  - Emerging to the next level
  - Unable to rate Why?

## Appendix C

The anecdotal observation form can be used to evaluate the student growth and development. The observer watches the targeted students and makes note of their actions and conversations.

### **ANECDOTAL OBSERVATION RECORD**

Name :
Date and Time:
Observer:
Site:
Event:
Observation of Behaviors and Conversations:

Comments/Summary: