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## Vocabulary Learning and Pre-school English Language Learners An Action Research Report

Meghan Anne Hinds  
*St. Catherine University*

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Vocabulary Learning and Pre-school English Language Learners

An Action Research Report

By Meghan Hinds

Vocabulary Learning and Pre-school English Language Learners

By Meghan Hinds

Submitted on July 20, 2014

In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

St. Catherine University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine if parent participation outside of school could improve their child's knowledge of key curriculum words when shared in their first language. Six pre-school English Language Learners (ELL) and their families participated in the study. Data was collected through two parent surveys, participation in class website and an online tool called VoiceThread which provided supports in the first languages of the students, and a pre and posttest of student knowledge of curriculum vocabulary words. Overall this experience had a positive impact or neutral on student learning; the results indicated that all students' ability to describe and identify the vocabulary objects increased, but the results were mixed with their acquisition of the new vocabulary, however, it is unclear if this is due to the implementation of VoiceThread. All families indicated that they had access to technology at home, but only two of the six families frequented VoiceThread. It is also unknown why all families didn't access the class website. Because of the potential, it is worth continuing to explore the value of using technology to support parent engagement. The ELL parents may benefit from repeated explanations of school expectations throughout the year and exploration of a variety of means of communication with their child's teacher.

The population of children from immigrant families is growing faster than any other group of children in the United States (Vera et al., 2012), yet the majority of teachers across the nation are white, female, native English speakers. This combined with increasing immigrant children sets up the potential of language and cultural difficulties between teacher-family. Not only are educators instructing a diverse group of students, but they are also establishing relationships with parents who may hold a variety of cultural beliefs and values that differ from one another.

Multiple studies have investigated the involvement of parents with English Language Learner (ELL) students (Arnold, Zelji, Doctorff & Ortiz, 2008; Knopf & Swick, 2008; Olmstead, 2013; Ortega & Ramirez, 2002; Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, De Pedro, 2001; St. Claire & Jackson, 2006; Tellez & Waxman, 2010; Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross & Knight-Lynn, 2012). Multiple barriers exist that families and educators need to overcome together in order to provide the best educational experience for each child and their family, but three concepts could provide increased support as children begin their educational journey to improve a child's academic success: getting to know families on a personal level, utilizing technology, and creating parent programs.

Parental involvement in the physical school environment may be limited due to a busy schedule, comfort level in the school from the lack of the English language and transportation. Offering differentiated opportunities for parental involvement can increase a family's ability to support their child's education. By fostering parental knowledge and educational beliefs through early practice of school work completed at home, answering general or developmental questions and modeling teaching opportunities – from a child's early years, these patterns may

instill positive behavioral habits to education and overall child development. This study will explore student acquisition of curriculum vocabulary words when parents are provided with an online resource tool as words are shared in their first spoken language. A review of relevant literature will help to provide background and context, particularly the importance of establishing positive relationships, incorporating technology, and creating programs.

### **Establishing positive relationships**

As parents gain trust in the educator, the educator has strong influences to offer parents so they can promote stimulating learning environments at home. By participating in early childhood education, parents have the first exposure to school and the classroom right along with their child. Early childhood professionals have the opportunity to set the tone for what parents can expect from their child's teacher in years to come. In order to best, serve a student, the teacher needs to understand whom the child is, who lives in the residence of the child, and any overall family stressors that may impact the family. Building open communication with a family is important. This wealth of knowledge sets the framework as to what the child and family may need to benefit from the early childhood program. By listening to families and caring about their concerns, teachers can provide supports that may increase parents' comfort with the program and the likelihood that they will become more involved (Knopf & Swick, 2008). Resources throughout each school district may be available, but without knowing what the family needs, the teacher may have difficulty deciphering what is best. Expectations should be stated early for how teachers communicate with parents, skills to be worked on, overall growth for the year, goals, and what parent participation will look like for the duration of time the teacher, student and family is together. That way, parents will know what the teacher

expects of the family, but also what the family can expect from the teacher. Parents are powerfully impacted by how early childhood professionals relate to their children (Knopf & Swick, 2008).

### **Incorporating Technology**

According to Olmstead's study (2013), the lack of parent involvement continues to be an obstacle to increase student achievement at school, but technology offers promise. As access to technology continues to expand, the capabilities for connecting parents to schools will continue to grow. Although communicating easily may be limited for some families and a teacher due to language barriers, technology provides a direct route into a family's home that allows them to learn together. Olmstead (2013) studied the use of technology to promote parent involvement in children's academic life. The study also looked at the perceptions of parents regarding the effectiveness of technology to connect with a child's teacher and school. Olmstead collected information from parents and educators to research how educators communicated with parents focusing on 204 parents with elementary students in grades fourth through sixth. Twenty percent spoke English as a second language. The study revealed that parents and teachers both place a high value on proactive parent involvement. Because proactive involvement does not require parents to be physically at their children's school, the question of how technology can be used to keep parents involved in their children's academic lives becomes important (Olmstead, 2013). The educator should be aware of access the family will have to technology, what means of communication will work best, and if the parent will know how to manipulate technology related to homework. With these conditions in place, a teacher

can provide access to enriching resources for a child to experience through technology at home.

### **Creating parent programs**

So how are families supposed to use the technology available for their child's education and use strategies to best work with their child? There is much to consider. We know that parental involvement is optimized when parents are given guidance and support in understanding child development and learning (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). We also know that connecting EL families is critical and creating program opportunities that welcome all families no matter their cultural beliefs, educational level, or acquisition of the English language is vital to enable parental involvement as they enter early childhood programming (Vera, et al., 2012). This relationship should continue to grow and strengthen as the child advances throughout his or her schooling. Programs that validate social and cultural experiences, recognize parental beliefs and expectations, and train parents in specific skills can empower parents to become proactive teachers and advocates for their children (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). An important factor to consider is that ELLs are more likely to have parents with lower formal education levels than their non-ELL counterparts (Vera et al., 2012).

Technology offers promise in multiple ways to connect to parents and families. A teacher that incorporates early literacy and reading opportunities through technology in the early childhood program not only benefits the child, but his or her parents, as well. At the beginning of the school year, if the educator plans on using a classroom website or other mode of instruction using technology, a short parent seminar could be conducted in the school computer lab. Parents can be instructed how to access the site, how to manipulate the site, and

teachers can be available to answer any questions the parent may have. In addition, it is important to have interpreters for families who might need additional language support. The interpreter may be able to understand the topics covered and answer any questions the parents may have. Parent involvement training is a worthwhile approach school districts may wish to utilize in order to meet ever-increasing expectations for student performance (St. Claire & Jackson, 2006).

Educators may benefit from a parent survey given after the first term. The survey can provide information about how parents like the website, any improvements they may have, and access to information of their choice. Future parent programs or parent opportunities could be individualized based on parent survey responses. Parents may gain confidence in their ability to help their child with homework and communicate more easily with the teacher. This partnership between parents and educators could improve a program in positive ways (Knopf & Swick, 2008).

Although communication may be limited with ELL families, the teacher in the classroom is not at a loss. As the teacher takes time in the beginning to establish a positive relationship, that relationship will continue to grow as parents and the teacher work as a team to support the child. Technology offers opportunities for the teacher to provide access to resources that the family can look at together in their home. Practice using technology can be more interactive and interesting than just doing worksheets. This could help foster meaningful engagement with parents and children around learning. School districts can create parent learning opportunities within the school setting to increase parental knowledge while using technology, but also to learn foster learning in all areas of development at home. These strategies can strengthen each

student's academic success. Research has found that parent involvement is related to a host of student achievement indicators, including better grades, attendance, attitudes, expectations, homework completion, and state test results (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin & De Pedro, 2011). Teachers not only teach the child, but have the ability to involve the entire family so that they are learning together.

This study will seek to engage parents of pre-school children learning English vocabulary by exploring the use of technology and curriculum vocabulary shared in the home language to see if this encourages parent participation and what difference this could make for learners. Research was gathered in a large suburb of a metropolitan area. The classroom was a center based preschool classroom, meaning that all students in the classroom are on Individualized Education Plans. Students had a variety of special educational needs. Students were in a range from three to five years old. There were six families with students that are considered to be an English Language Learner (ELL) that participated in the study.

Research and data collection began in the first week of May and was collected through the first week of June (six weeks). *Garden* was the last reading and early literacy unit the classroom was scheduled to cover. For example, what tools do you need to garden, how does a seed grow, and different kinds of vegetables were topics covered. The data collected in the study included pre and post test data based on vocabulary knowledge for each student in regards to the current curriculum unit at the beginning and end of the unit. Because practice with the vocabulary at home involved technology, a two question parent survey was sent home at the beginning of the unit to determine what type of technology parents have access to and if they have used an online program called VoiceThread. VoiceThread is an online web tool that

allows users to listen and share feedback with other users. During the third week of the study, parents completed a second questionnaire while at Parent Day held at school. The second survey was sent home for those families that were not able to attend. Other materials used as part of the study were the classroom website and VoiceThread program.

### **Methodology**

At the beginning of the school year, a classroom website was introduced to families during Welcome Night. This website was created through a Wiki. Announcements, classroom updates, weekly newsletters, weekly songs/videos, and the school calendar were a few of the things shared with families through the website. Per the supervisor's rules and policies for the program, the classroom website was classified as private so only families with approval were allowed access. Each parent was emailed a link to the site so they could be approved by the website administrator and granted access. The website has been used in the classroom continuously and updated weekly since September.

The reading and literacy curriculum vocabulary used in this research study was a unit entitled *Garden*. There are eight vocabulary words per unit. The vocabulary words are shovel, basket, carrots, peas, asparagus, tomato, potato, and broccoli. In addition to the website, this project explored the use of other online tools to encourage parent support with the vocabulary from the *Garden* unit. For this, a Power point presentation was created and for each word, three slides were created. On the first slide, the vocabulary picture taken from the sheet sent home was enlarged with the vocabulary word written again across the top of the slide. On the second slide, the vocabulary word was used in a sentence that corresponded with the picture. On the third slide, the vocabulary word was used in a different sentence that corresponded

with the picture. The completed presentation was uploaded into an online program, called VoiceThread, which could be used to assist in reaching all types of learners in my classroom when presenting vocabulary words by the fact that participants could listen to the vocabulary being read in multiple languages. VoiceThread was simple to create a presentation with, yet this program allowed the opportunity for interaction amongst users. Each slide is recorded in English (ex. the vocabulary word, then the sentence corresponding with the vocabulary word). A separate identity was created for each language used; in this study, the *Garden* unit vocabulary words were interpreted into Spanish, Hmong and Nepali. The link to the VoiceThread presentation was shared under the “Weekly Newsletter” page of the classroom Wiki website and emailed to those that asked. Permission to access the school page was needed and the VoiceThread presentation was on the classroom webpage.

A newsletter (see Appendix A) was sent home to inform parents of the research project to begin in their child’s classroom. Parents were told about the VoiceThread site to provide a user-friendly, virtual way for parents to support vocabulary learning at home. In addition to assessing vocabulary acquisition for students, I was interested in understanding more about parent engagement. To do that, I chose to chart parent participation and homework completion. In order to begin research, I found it most helpful to have the weekly parent participation form (see Appendix B) and weekly homework completion charts (see Appendix C) printed for each class. Each student had a two sided paper of the pre and posttest information (see Appendix D). For pre and post testing purposes, each vocabulary word’s picture was printed and laminated, eight cards total. The vocabulary words (see Appendix E) were printed and sent home the first week of the unit.

### **Parent Involvement**

The first parent questionnaire (see Appendix F) was sent home written in English at the beginning of the curriculum unit along with the weekly newsletter. Questions were about what access the family had of technology at home with actual photos (ex. computer, laptop, and/or a smart phone) and if they had heard of a program called VoiceThread. Pictures were included in order to help explain the English written words. The questionnaire was asked to be returned as quickly as possible. In the following two weeks, a gentle reminder to send back the completed questionnaire was included in the weekly newsletter under the “Reminders” section.

Each week, homework was sent home with the newsletter of the week. Homework consisted of worksheets that had line tracing activities, circling of a certain item, and coloring in a flower. Grading of homework was only based on if the student completed the activity. If students brought the completed homework page back by Friday, the completed work was tallied, and students got to pick a sticker to put on their work. Reminders about homework completion were also included in the weekly newsletter.

At the end of each week (every Friday), the classroom website page was checked to see when or if each parent viewed the site. Information was gathered on which parents were verified to use the site, which families viewed the site, and when they viewed the website (ex. one day ago, three days ago, four hours ago, three months ago, etc.). This information was then tallied each week; did the family view the site once throughout this week, and how often they view it?

The second parent questionnaire (see Appendix G) was given during a scheduled Parent Day (the third week in May) at school. Parents were pulled as a group for a short time (three to

seven minutes during their child’s half day school session). Parents were shown the classroom website, shown the VoiceThread online tool, given the opportunity for questions/comments and then asked to complete the final parent questionnaire. The questionnaire asked what type of technology they used at home with their child and if they thought VoiceThread was a good tool to engage in learning with their child. Questionnaires were sent home to families that were not able to participate in the Parent Day.

### Student Vocabulary Acquisition

Six students participated in the study. All speak a language other than English at home, and all are children with special needs. Study participants were given pseudonyms and are listed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Study participants**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Home Language</u>
Jose	4	Spanish
Maria	4	Spanish
Dhanesh	4	Hindi
Vue	5	Hmong
Yia	5	Hmong
Amir	4	Nepali

The first week of introducing the new vocabulary unit, each student was individually sat down in a separate, quiet location in the classroom. I placed two pictures of vocabulary objects on the table in front of them. First, I asked a descriptive question to see if they could answer a

yes or no type of question, and then followed up with a question to see if they knew the actual vocabulary word. For example, I placed a picture of a carrot and a picture of broccoli on the table, and then asked “What is something orange and crunchy?” for the carrot. After that, I asked the student “What is it?” to see if they knew the word. Data was gathered on both identification (can the student point to the picture out of two items when asked the descriptive question, yes/no) and labeling of the vocabulary word (do they know what the picture is).

After five weeks of instruction, a posttest was given. Students were taken separately to the same quiet work area in the classroom. Students were presented with two vocabulary pictures at a time. A short descriptive question was asked; students needed to identify the correct option. Students were then asked “What is it?” Data was collected again on both identification (can the student point to the picture out of two items when asked the descriptive question, yes/no) and labeling of the vocabulary word (do they know what the picture is).

### **Analysis of Data**

Six of the students in the classroom were considered ELL (English Language Learners); English is not the only language spoken in their home. The first questionnaire was sent home to the six families, but one family did not respond/send back the first questionnaire. The first question that parents of the ELL population in the classroom were asked is what kind of access they had to the internet at home. Five out of six had access to the internet via computer, and some of the families had additional tools such as a Smart phone or iPad. These parents confirmed that the majority of the ELL students had access to the internet at home. The second question then asked if parents had ever heard of an online tool called VoiceThread. Three of the six families answered yes. I was already working with one of the families in my class to help

translate words on VoiceThread. So that family was very aware and familiar with it. However, I was surprised to hear that two additional families had heard of VoiceThread, because I had difficulty communicating with both families over the phone and in person while using an interpreter.

Each week a homework sheet was sent home at the beginning of the week with the weekly newsletter. Parents were asked to help their child complete each worksheet (ex. line tracing, color in a flower, circle the flowers) and turn in the completed work by Friday. Homework completion was not graded based on right or wrong answers. Homework completion was based on homework returned with some form of work completed.

**Table 2 – Weekly Homework Completion**

<b>Student</b>	<b>Wk 1</b>	<b>Wk 2</b>	<b>Wk 3</b>	<b>Wk 4</b>	<b>Wk 5</b>	<b>Wk 6</b>
<b>Dhanesh</b>	X	X	X	X		
<b>Amir</b>	X	X		X	X	
<b>Jose</b>	X	X		X	X	
<b>Vue</b>	X				X	
<b>Maria</b>		X				
<b>Yia</b>	X					

Overall the majority of students completed homework with their parents most of the time.

At the beginning of the school year, parents were informed by the teacher during Welcome Night about a classroom website used by this class. Only two of the six families responded to the teacher email about verifying their participation in this website. Parents were

also informed that updates were recorded weekly. Updates included weekly newsletter (weekly songs, books, activities, etc.), calendar information, and letter of the week information from the Speech Language Clinician. For this research project, access to the VoiceThread tool was shared on the Weekly Newsletter page. On Friday of each week, access to the classroom website was documented by the teacher. The classroom teacher was able to view which family accessed the website each week.

**Table 3 – Website (Web) and VoiceThread (VT) participation by family**

Family	Wk 1		Wk 2		Wk 3		Wk 4		Wk 5		Wk 6	
	Web	VT										
<b>Dhanesh</b>	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X		
<b>Amir</b>	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		
<b>Jose</b>												
<b>Vue</b>												
<b>Maria</b>												
<b>Yia</b>												

Table 3 shows that only the families of Dhanesh and Amir used the tools. It is unknown why the majority of families did not use the classroom website either, when the majority responded that they had access to the internet at home.

In the beginning of the *Garden* unit, students were taken separately to a quiet, separate area in the classroom for the pretest to assess their knowledge of vocabulary for this particular unit. Vocabulary words were: broccoli, carrots, basket, asparagus, peas, shovel, potato, and

tomato. Students were presented with two pictures and then asked a descriptive question of each vocabulary words. If students were able to answer the descriptive answer, then they demonstrated their ability of understanding what the object is. If they were able to answer the descriptive question, then students were asked “What is it?” That information was asked to see if students could label each picture.

**Table 4 – Students correctly identifying objects and labeling vocabulary: Pre and post test results**

Student	Correctly identified objects (8 words)		Correctly labeled vocabulary (8 words)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Jose	8	8	6	7
Maria	8	8	5	7
Dhanesh	7	8	7	6
Amir	7	7	7	7
Yia	5	7	0	0
Vue	4	7	0	0

In the first data collection session, Jose and Maria were able to identify all eight of the objects in the pictures. Dhanesh and Amir were able to identify seven of the eight. Yia was able to identify five of the eight, and Vue was able to identify four of the eight of the vocabulary objects. All of the children demonstrated familiarity with at least half of the objects in the curriculum unit even if they didn’t know the English word for the object.

After students were asked to identify one of the two pictures, then students were asked to label each picture to assess their awareness of the English word for the object in the picture. Dhanesh and Amir labeled seven of the vocabulary words. Jose labeled six of the vocabulary words. Maria was able to label five of the eight vocabulary words. Vue and Yia were able to label zero of the eight vocabulary words.

In the second data collection session (five weeks after the first data collection session), students were taken to the same area and presented with two pictures again.

In the second data collection session, Jose, Maria and Dhanesh were able to identify all eight of the vocabulary pictures. Vue, Yia, and Amir were able to identify seven of the eight pictures. Those students who didn't know them all at the start of the unit still knew them all, but those students who didn't know them all showed that they made gains in understanding a description of the various objects from the unit. However, these gains in describing objects did not mean students were able to correctly identify the vocabulary for each object.

Jose, Maria and Amir were able to label seven of the eight vocabulary words. Dhanesh was able to label six of the eight vocabulary words. Vue and Yia were able to label zero of the eight vocabulary words. All of the six students increased in their ability to identify the objects represented by the vocabulary words. Most of the six students increased in their ability to label the vocabulary words. Vue and Yia did not increase their ability to label the vocabulary words.

Table 3 showed that most families did not participate in using VoiceThread. Both students whose families accessed the VoiceThread – Dhanesh and Amir – did well in their ability to identify the pictures and label the eight vocabulary words. Dhanesh and Amir were able to identify seven of the eight objects, but their ability to label differed. Dhanesh labeled seven

words during the pretest, but only six words during the posttest. I believe this was due to his inattention at the time. Jose and Maria, whose families did not access the VoiceThread tool, were able to identify all vocabulary words in data collection sessions, while labeling five to six words on average. While Maria seemed to do fine without doing a lot of the homework or using the tools at home with her family, the same is not true of Vue and Yia. Vue and Yia were the two Hmong speakers, they did little of the homework, their parents did not access the website or VoiceThread tool, nor did they attend Parent Day. I believe Vue and Yia had difficulty labeling the vocabulary words because of the language disorder documented in their IEP. Vue and Yia both need a significant amount of support with visuals, actual objects, and adult modeling to answer a what/what do/who/where question correctly. Maria did not have this challenge. She could label vocabulary, and was also able to answer what/what do/who/where questions with greater accuracy and less support.

The second questionnaire was presented during Parent Day. This day was devoted to including parents and showing them what their child does during school each day while providing activities that promoted participation between the parent and child at school (ex. Art and planting a seed). Only three of the six families attended the Parent Day. All three of those families that attended the Parent Day responded that they use a Smart phone and computer to access the internet at home. The second question asked for the survey was "Do families think that this was a productive method to engage in homework with their child?" All three of the families who attended Parent Day responded *yes* to the question. The other three families that did not attend Parent Day were sent home the questionnaire to fill out at their convenience. Those three families did not return the survey.

### **Action Research Plan**

From this small study, it isn't possible to conclude that parent participation outside of the classroom contributed to each student's increase in vocabulary recognition. Three families didn't respond to the first email to verify their email address and become part of the classroom website. Reminders and confirmation of the correct email address were sent home and asked to be returned to school. Another email was sent to follow up and still, those families did not respond to the verification email. According to the data, parent involvement was divided amongst the group. Only two of the six families accessed the website. Homework worksheet completion was successful as most families sat down with their child and returned completed work within the school week, but full participation was not seen by all students in the classroom. Parent Day was a split between some ELL families participating and some that did not attend. It is unknown if those families that did not attend could not make the day due to work, transportation, or comfort in attending a school day that is taught in English. Those families that did attend, their child appeared happy and eager to show their mother or father what they do at school each day. As for student vocabulary acquisition, all students increased their ability to identify pictures of the vocabulary based on pre and posttest data. However, two students could not label any vocabulary words after six weeks of focus.

Although this study had some mixed results, there are some takeaway lessons. First, for students that are just entering the classroom, more information should be given to parents or families about expectations of the teacher, program and school. This project utilized multiple means of communication – weekly newsletters, calls home, written notes, conferences. But not all parents remembered, participated, or followed through. I believe that parents, especially

those that are ELL, may have different expectations or ideas of what their child will be doing at school. This could be the first time the family has entered an American school. Some parents may be unfamiliar about daily homework, fundraisers, after school activities, parent volunteer opportunities, etc. Not only sharing with families the expectations of their child, but going over all of this information repeatedly over the year could increase parent involvement and awareness of their child's school. If families knew more about involvement, maybe they would be more willing to participate. Perhaps families were unaware of how to participate within and outside of the classroom. For the initial meeting of families, it could be beneficial to go over exactly what their child is doing throughout his or her school day, how the family best likes to communicate with the teacher, and what the teacher expects the family to be working on with their child at home.

It may also help parents with possible uncertainty of what is happening at their child's school to provide information sent home and shared with families in their own first language, including access to interpreters for families throughout parent involvement at the school. Families may be embarrassed if they cannot read, write or communicate in only English, or may be unsure that they have understood something correctly. If an interpreter or written language support could help to better explain important information, maybe the family would be more willing to participate in their child's education. I am speculating on why all of the ELL families involved in this study did not attend Parent Day, but I don't think they didn't attend because they weren't sure if an interpreter would be there. Those families that did not attend required an interpreter for communication at all other times throughout the school year (ex. conferences and phone communication). If parents participated in Parent Day and there wasn't

an interpreter available, maybe they would stand away from the group because they aren't able to communicate or understand completely what may be happening in front of them. That could be frustrating.

Overall, I believe this experience had a positive impact on student learning. Students' demonstrated a sense of accomplishment when bringing completed homework back to school. Although many began the curriculum unit with some knowledge of the vocabulary words, all students increased in their ability to identify vocabulary objects in an array of two pictures. The thematic unit was targeted throughout the entire classroom from stories, songs, and activities to materials provided in the classroom for dramatic play. The classroom website and VoiceThread tool was accessed only twice during classroom instruction by the teacher and students for a song and video used at circle time. One ELL student was very eager to watch both as he shared with his classmates that he saw the video before and liked it. His family watched the video outside of school before the video was used in the classroom.

In order to recreate this type of research, knowledge of each family's access to the internet at home is important. Expectations about parent involvement, usage of a classroom website, and completion of homework could be shared with families through a variety of means (ex. a weekly newsletter, email, phone call, note home, etc.). These expectations may be repeated throughout the year so parents have reminders about any work or participation outside of school. I would definitely use VoiceThread again, however the way I incorporated it into my classroom would be different. I would use student's artwork and upload each piece into the presentation, and then I would record each student's voice in order for each student to share what they drew. I believe families would enjoy engaging with materials that actually

involved their child. I will still continue to use a classroom website in the future. The website held all school information in one location. Parents had access to a calendar, videos, music, stories, and weekly lesson plans so they could follow along. Throughout the course of this study, I have learned that much more emphasis on expectations of what the school expects from the parents, what the school expects from the child and what the family can expect from the teacher need to be reminded many times throughout the school year. I would include more Parent Days throughout the school year in order to model for parents how to facilitate learning with their child with simple manipulatives, encourage parent involvement, and allow for parents to interact with one another. Since preschool may be the first step in a classroom experience for most families; guidance, persistence, and repetition has shown to be especially helpful for the parents, not only the students.

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involvement of parents of English learners. *School Community Journal*, 22(2), 183-202.

**APPENDIX A****Increasing student knowledge of vocabulary by extending learning opportunities with family  
Notification Form**

Dear Parents,

As you may know, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education degree. An important part of my program is the Action Research project, a small research project that I will do in my own classroom.

As the teacher of your child in preschool, I have chosen to study how to help students learn new vocabulary words and increase families' participation in education outside of school. I have created an online tool for each literacy unit to have vocabulary words described and translated into the languages spoken in the homes of some of the students in your child's class. This resource will be accessible through the classroom website. I chose to study this because I would like to increase all students' knowledge of new vocabulary and expose them to learning opportunities with their family. Parents are also asked to complete two parent questionnaires that are sent home (this is optional, but highly encouraged). Studies show that higher student achievement occurs when real partnerships between families and schools existed. I am working with a St. Catherine University faculty member, Siri Anderson and an advisor, Kimberly Johnson to complete this project.

I will be writing about the results from this research, however **none of the writing** that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. **Other people will not know if your child is in my study.**

When I am done, my work will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine's library, which holds published reports written by faculty and graduate students at St. Catherine's. The goal of sharing my final research study report is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The *benefits* to participation in this study include: increasing your child's knowledge of vocabulary words, helping children to understand concepts of new vocabulary, increasing educational experiences outside of school, and exposing children and families to vocabulary in English and their home language. Since the goal of increasing students' vocabulary recognition, there are no real risks in this research. All children will be participating in the activities, but each parent may decide whether or not to allow your child's data to be included in this study.

**If you are agreeable to having your child's data and your input from the parent questionnaires included in this study, you don't need to do anything at this point.** (Remember, no names, or other identifiable marks will be included in the data).

If you decide you do **NOT** want your child's data or your input from the parent questionnaires included in my study, please note that on this form and return it by Monday, April 22nd, 2014. All children will receive the same treatment in my class, regardless of your decision on this matter. If at any time you decide you do not want your child's data or input from the parent questionnaires to be included in the study, I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, [ ]. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, you can ask me or my advisor, \_\_\_ (\_\_\_@stkate.edu) who will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact \_\_\_, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at \_\_\_.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.



**Opt Out**

I do NOT want my child's data or input from the parent questionnaires to be included in this study. Please respond by March 28th, 2014.

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Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



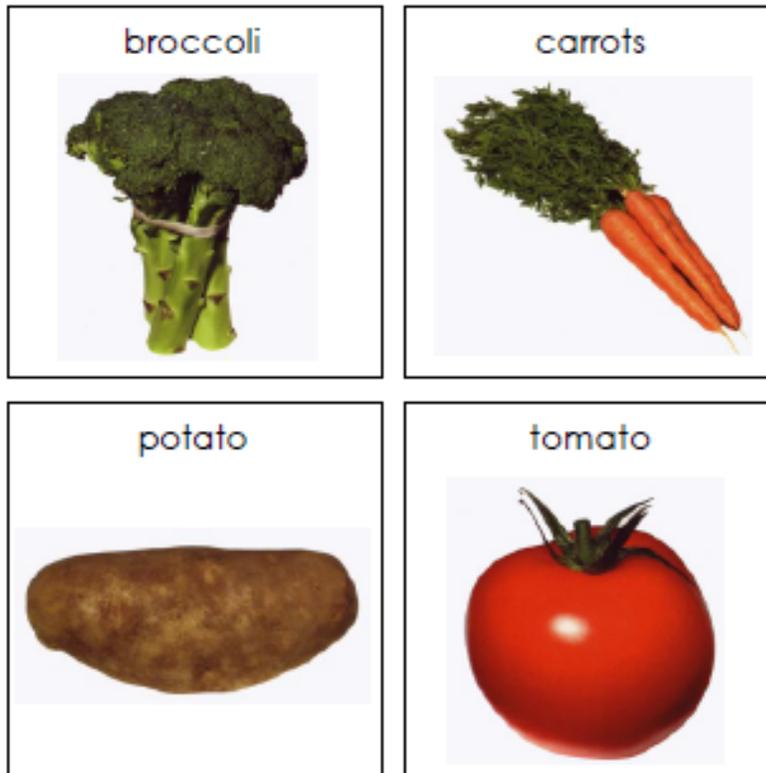


**APPENDIX D**

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Vocabulary word	Yes	No
Shovel		
Basket		
Broccoli		
Carrots		
Asparagus		
Potato		
Tomato		
Peas		

APPENDIX E



Vocabulary  
Words  
for the  
unit  
"GARDEN"

These vocabulary words correspond to the literacy curriculum we use in your child's classroom. Please review these words with your child to help build their vocabulary!



APPENDIX F

Participation is strongly encouraged but you can decline to allow your response to be used for research by checking this box.

1. Do you have the internet at home?

YES or NO



Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone



Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_

Computer



Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_\_

iPad

2. VoiceThread is a web-based digital storytelling program that allows people share pictures or documents with voice (or video) recording comments and invites others to record comments as well. Have you heard of VoiceThread?

\_\_\_\_\_ - YES      \_\_\_\_\_ - NO

**APPENDIX G**

*Participation is strongly encouraged but you can decline to allow your response to be used for research by checking this box.*

**1. How do you use the internet at home?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Cell phone



\_\_\_\_\_ Computer



\_\_\_\_\_ iPad

**2. Did you feel that using the VoiceThread tool provided a good opportunity for you to be a part of your child's school work?**

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES** \_\_\_\_\_ **NO**