Kindergarten Literacy Remediation for Low Socioeconomic and ELL Students Without Preschool Experiences

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Kindergarten Literacy Remediation for Low Socioeconomic and ELL Students Without Preschool Experiences.

How is remediation effective for those students who are classified as ELL’s, low income and non-attendees of a preschool program to math to their peer who have been to preschool?

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EDCI 590 INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH
DECEMBER 11, 2015

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Abstract

By the end of the first quarter all kindergarten students will learn to identify all 52 uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet. They will also be able to identify all 26 letter sounds and learn to read, these are benchmarks set by schools. Nevertheless, most English Language Learners (ELL) students that enter the elementary school system at age 5 do not recognize any English alphabet letters or letter sounds. Some children know the alphabet in their native language, which makes the learning process easier because there already is a literacy base and understanding, but some children come to school without a concrete understanding of literacy at all. English Language Learners (ELL’s) who attended a schooling program before entering kindergarten have developed some early literacy skills; academically they are ready to explore and eager to learn. They are more socially adjusted to classmates and teachers. However, not all families have the privilege to send their children to a schooling program especially if the students come from a low socioeconomic background. The objective of the proposed research was to investigate the aspects of remediation for kindergarten ELLs and low socioeconomic students to see if extra help will bring the students to where they need to be so they are passing first quarter benchmarks in letter recognition skills.
Introduction

My proposed EDCI 590 project explored the topic of kindergarten readiness for English language learners (ELLs) and low socioeconomic children who may or may not have attended a preschool program prior to entering school. The term ELL as described by the United States Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (2005), is a student of national-origin-minority who has limited English proficiency (Office for Civil Rights, 2005). Because of their limited English proficiency, ELLs begin kindergarten behind their native English speaking peers. Those without preschool experience are even further behind their native speaking peers. While ELLs are not the only students who attend kindergarten significantly behind their preschool attendant peers, according to Waldfogel (2012), the socioeconomic status of a student’s family is powerfully related to their academic performance and the outcomes they face after their educational experiences.

There are several factors that classify a student as being labeled as low socioeconomic, those factors are; race, ethnicity, use of child care and their families’ educational experience. Nevertheless, at the end of kindergarten all students are expected to meet the same grade level standards for entering first grade regardless of their circumstances (Waldfogel, 2012). Therefore, the goal of my project is to explore methods of remediation so the students who fall into these categories can be academically successful with the other members of their class.

I became interested in this topic when I started teaching at my current school located in Northern Virginia. I am a kindergarten teacher at an elementary school; my class consists of 19 students, with 16 of those classified as ELLs, who all come from a low socioeconomic background. The school is considered a Title III and a Title I school. According to the profile
the school district provides, the school is 90% economically disadvantaged and approximately 701 out of 763 students receive free and reduced lunches. There are also 63.3% of students receiving ESOL (English Speakers of other Languages) services in the school (Prince William County Public Schools, 2015).

Reflecting on my own instructional practice and classroom dynamics, I have observed that there is a deficiency among kindergarten students and their ability to learn in a Title I kindergarten classroom. The gap occurs between students who attended a preschool school program prior to entering kindergarten and those students who did not attend a preschool program. In particular, one major problem in my current class is that most of the students enter the school system with no prior background knowledge in literacy skills. For example: students struggle to recognize their first names; they do not recognize upper or lower case letters of the English alphabet; or letter sounds. These students are significantly behind in comparison to their peers who attend a preschool program. The students who attended preschool can write and recognize their names and they can recognize a few letters, some can recognize all letters in the alphabet.

By the second week of school it was easy to tell which children have attended a previous school program, and which did not have exposure to a program. The gap was very noticeable and even more obvious when the beginning of the year language arts testing is completed. As a matter of record, the gap was so large, one child that did attend a previous school program, was able to recognize all 52 (26 uppercase and 26 lowercase) letters and letter sounds, but a child who did not previously attend a preschool school program, was only able to identify three letters correctly. The range in this discrepancy is difficult to remediate in this particular grade level.
Since 90% of the school is also economically disadvantaged, there is little money for parents to send their children to a preschool or learning center to receive early education. Barnett and Husledt (2003), indicated that, the most important grade level is preschool and their research findings confirm the long term benefits of an early structured education program. The ongoing research has shown that a structured preschool program would have benefits for the participants, such as: “they would seek opportunities for higher education, would be less likely to be held back in a grade level and would be less likely to commit a crime” (Barnett & Husledt, 2003 p 23). For this reason preschool is of high importance because of the beneficial outcomes that will serve the child for present and future education.

According to the National School Wide Preschool (NSWP) program funded by the United States Department of Education (2014), a preschool is a place where early instruction is provided and is approved to operate by the Department of Education under the Education and Care Services national laws and regulations. A preschool is required to align their curriculum with the state’s early learning standards. In regards to the differences between a daycare and a preschool, the NSWP provides details on the differences. The term daycare is sometimes a word that is frowned upon, whereas the term learning center or preschool seems more appropriate and holds a higher standard. A daycare is referred to as an establishment that cares for a large age range of children. Most facilities care for children ages 6 weeks to 12 years of age. Daycares provide before and after care for school age children, are open more than several hours a day and may have a limited curriculum. Preschools on the other hand are very age specific, 2 ½ to 5 years old, have limited hours of operation and have a strict curriculum that teachers have to adhere to. In some aspects, a daycare may have the same educational options as a preschool would, but
some do not provide learning objectives aligned to state standards (National School Wide Preschool Program, 2013). With that being said, kindergarten teachers have no control over where their students go and the experiences that their students bring to the classroom.

In addition, the population of non-native parents may not have the same cultural ideas as the American culture regarding the importance of school readiness. Non-native American families may not see early education as an important concept and may lack the money preventing them from sending their children to preschool. Consequently, children who come from disadvantaged families also may not be able to afford a daycare or preschool program to attend before starting kindergarten. While, Head Start is an option for these families, there is a lack of classroom space for the population to be served effectively. At my school, the current kindergarten population of a 165 students only 36 of those students attended Head Start. Those students who attended Head Start or preschool have a greater advantage than those who did not. The majority of Head Start and preschool students come into kindergarten knowing how to recognize their names, recognize letters, and know letter sounds.

I have observed that with an entire year of preschool experience these children have adapted to kindergarten very quickly, but their counterparts who have no preschool experiences do not adapt as well. Most of the non-preschool students cry during the first two weeks adjusting to the classroom and being away from their families; whereas the preschool students are eager to be instructed. Teachers spend 12 weeks on recognizing letters with non-preschool attendees whereas former preschool students are learning sight words. The learning gap then becomes larger and larger as the year progresses.
As required by the State of Virginia, I have a pacing guide to follow for all subjects I teach. There are academic benchmarks each student needs to meet to receive a passing score for each quarter. Most of the non-attendees of a preschool program prior to kindergarten were not meeting the benchmarks for the first or second quarter. I determined that I had an evident and problematic issue to address; I needed to devise a remediation plan to help the non-preschool attendees reach their potential and strive in the classroom.

In a previous course during the spring of 2014 I conducted an action research project that sparked my interest. There were several kindergarten students involved, and almost half of those students were labeled as English language learners. Their ages ranged from five years old to seven years old (one student was a retention from the previous year). All students came from a low socioeconomic background. Only a few of the students attended a preschool program, most of the students did not, and all of those students who did not attend a preschool program were ELLs and or low socioeconomic.

The students who did not receive any formal schooling before kindergarten stayed at home with family members. Each student was tested their first two weeks in kindergarten: they are tested in several areas in relation to the language arts curriculum. Scores recorded from students who attended a preschool enrichment program including students who attended a Head Start program showed that those students entering kindergarten had a 42% advantage over non-attendees in reading academics. This data was taken from the action research project. The 42% advantage is a very high number and because of that I would like to continue this research plan and develop something to put in place for the non-preschool attendees to determine if they can be remediated in a timely manner to begin and participate in a kindergarten classroom (Leedock,
2014). After testing results are accounted for, a remediation plan is necessary to boost student scores.

Each quarter teachers are required to test all students as part of our school data requirements. These are the same scores and percentages that I used to conduct the beginning phase of the action research project. After testing letter recognition the non-preschool students knew less than 6 letters and still at the end of the 1st quarter, they knew less than 13 on average. The students who attended a preschool program knew all letters upon entering kindergarten. The non-preschool students were almost three months behind the preschool attendees. At this point, the non-pre-schooled students received an entire quarter of letter recognition activities and they were still 25% behind the other students who had attended a preschool program (Leedock, 2014). As seen by the percentages early intervention is of critical importance.

I then decided to research some remediation techniques in conjunction with the action research project to bring the students up to a similar academic skill level as the rest of the class. I feel that the remediation did its job and progress was made, but the rigorous remediation was started too late in the school year. I replicated the action research plan to determine if an intervention with the non-preschool attendees will improve their ability to engage with the testing benchmarks that are required.

As part of the research, I put a data collection plan in place as a component of keeping track of the remediation being implemented. I did this by using a letter recognition system that has benchmarks in place to ensure students are on track with letter knowledge. The data collected will be measured using a portfolio system called Baldrige Education (Prince William County Materials, 2009). The Baldrige system is aligned with the school districts pacing and
benchmark guides for letter recognition. It is a progress monitor system that is given once a week to students in a relaxed environment. I choose this system to keep track of remediation progress because it is a very informal way to assess. Some students do not do well if they know they are being tested or watched on a particular skill. I want to remove the stress and allow students to be themselves in a calm environment. The Baldridge system can also be used as a pretest before remediation and a posttest after (Prince William County Materials, 2009).

Teachers have to find a way to close academic gaps in the classrooms. In the past twenty years, the number of ELLs has more than doubled in American classrooms and the numbers are still growing (National Education Association, 2010). With the increase of ELLs impacting the way curriculum is taught, teachers need to find effective techniques to enhance learning. As stated by the National Education Association (2010), achievement gaps between ELLs and non-ELLs the achievement gap is not only present in ELL students, but the native speaking population as well.

The big question is how can we improve the educational strategies for the entering ELL and low socioeconomic students who have not had any prior background or schooling experiences; what can we do better as educators to close this gap? We need to start by seeking instructional strategies for incoming kindergarten students who fit these descriptions to help continue a steady pace with the district wide pacing guides. Higher level schools are soaring in content above the Title I and Title III kindergarten classes because their students were ready and well equipped for the upcoming grade as most students went to a prior preschool program. The goal of my EDCI 590 research was to address these gaps faced by kindergarten ELLs and low socioeconomic students who have not attended preschool. Letter knowledge is an essential skill
to learn at the beginning of kindergarten because it is the building foundation of learning sight words and how to read. As part of my research, I devised a remediation plan to determine how to make up for the lack of preschool instruction for those students entering kindergarten who did not attend a preschool program.

**Research Question(s)**

The research questions for my EDCI 590 project are as follows:

1. What does research say about the importance of ELLs and low socioeconomic students receiving a preschool education before entering kindergarten?
2. What are effective practices for remediating strategies for kindergarten students who did not attend a preschool program?
3. What effect will direct and small group instruction focused on literacy remediation have on ELLs and low socioeconomic students who are non-preschool attendees?

Questions 1 and 2 were addressed through the literature review. Question 3 was explored through action research conducted in my own classroom.

**Literature Review**

The following is a preliminary review of what educational writings and research has to say on the importance of children attending preschool before entering kindergarten, regardless of their race, language, and background. The literature review will touch upon three key aspects: first, the importance of preschool for ELLs and low socioeconomic students; second, preschool barriers and opportunities for ELLs and low socioeconomic students; and third, instructional remediation strategies for kindergarten ELLs and low socioeconomic students.
Importance of Preschool for ELLs and Low Socioeconomic Students

The John Hopkins University Early Learning Center (2015) poses the question, why is early education so important, simply put that the early years lay an educational foundation for future educational endeavors. At this stage in life, the brain development that is taking place is of high importance, it happens between the ages birth to four years old. This is when major neurons are developing in the brain and are most receptive to learning. It is believed that early education is a critical piece of the education puzzle, and to receive education during this important brain development time is vital. There are many different types of programs preschool individuals can choose from, but there are barriers that also hold children back from receiving early education; language barriers and socioeconomic barriers are the two largest categories that stop a child from going to a preschool program in the United States (John Hopkins University Early Learning Center, 2015).

The National Association for the Education for Young Children (2014), as the research serves, there are many short and long term benefits for students who are enrolled in a preschool program. The repercussions improve a child’s academic as well as their social development. In this present time, there is such a high demand for early education, for the simple fact that now we know just how empowering it is for a student success in kindergarten. Studies have shown it is not only kindergarten aged students who will benefit from a preschool program; their success will follow them through second grade (NACEY, 2014).

The John Hopkins University Early Learning Center (2015), several states have implemented preschool programs in their school districts and the federal Government has
continuously funded the Head Start program for children birth to five years of age to receive free early educational services. Magnuson & Waldfegel (2005), explain the effects of racial and ethnic gaps in school readiness in the world of early childhood care. The authors found that children who attended some sort of early childhood care or education entered school more ready to learn especially those who come from low income households (Magnuson & Waldefegel, 2005). Klein and Chen (2001), state that many people now see how important early childhood education is. All types of parents in all social classes are making an attempt to send their child to an early schooling program, whether it be a single parent household, both parents working outside of the home, or a parent staying at home. Preschool is just not learning academics; it is about learning appropriate social interactions (Klein & Chen, 2001).

The Education Corner (2013) states that, research has shown that students enrolled in a preschool or Head Start program benefit significantly by receiving early education before entering kindergarten. These students have better behavior and a higher IQ than those students who did not attend a preschool program. The research also shows the students who were enrolled in a preschool program acquire information faster than those students who did not (Education Corner, 2013). NAECY (2014), if the time is invested now to provide high quality education we will enjoy the benefits of the long term effects of a healthier nation. However, with that being said, we cannot ignore the educational gap between the impoverished children and the non-native children. This population is now making up more than half of the schools, these children need to be recognized now more than ever, and all children need to be given the same opportunities (NAECY, 2014). Magnuson & Waldefegel (2005), pointed out all the types of childcare they researched differed greatly, and some of the children who did attend a preschool...
program were more comfortable entering an elementary school, but not necessarily with higher academic skills. The authors found African American children had a high percentage of enrollments, but the care of the students was of lower quality (Magnuson & Waldefegel, 2005).

As the population in the United States becomes more diverse, there is a calling to provide schools with a better teaching force that is prepared to handle ELL students (Pelletier & Corter 2005). There is a high importance as to why an ELL should attend a preschool before entering a kindergarten classroom. We have also seen an increasing number of non-native English speakers in classrooms. With that being said, the United States now puts a higher request on policy makers and teachers to create quality preschool programs for ELLs that are not only affordable, but help the students continue to grow to be ready for school (Garcia & Gonzales, 2006). Pelletier and Corter’s (2005), focuses on designing, implementing, and researching the outcomes of a school readiness program for diverse families. Their findings provided much insight on the general education teacher collaborating and finding a happy medium with the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teacher to better equip the ELL student. The article also shares stories about kindergarten teachers that have to remediate and differentiate the curriculum in order for beginner success of a new ELL student in an elementary school (Pelletier & Corter, 2005).

As the authors state, a general educator should not be working alone to strive for success when it comes to an ELL student, collaboration is the key to success. Ford (2010), states how important early childhood education is for an ELL’s future success in the elementary classroom. ELLs in a preschool setting learn to acquire a multitude of skills that will prepare them for the kindergarten classroom. Teachers need to come together with variations of lesson plans, state
standards, language proficiency standards, ESOL levels and remediation lessons put into place so there is a wide range of ideas for everyone to share. The authors state it is very beneficial to add specialists into the mix of collaboration, for example if the student has a speech therapist or a special education teacher. This way the whole child is taken into consideration and not just the language aspect (Pelletier & Corter, 2005).

For a non-native speaker, preschool can open up the doors to the English language, even if the child only gets minimal exposure of the language, that is enough to make them comfortable to move on to the elementary level (Ford, 2010). When a non-native speaker can pick up more than just a comfortable level with a language, more opportunities will arise, this is when a child can start picking up fluency, English academic language and conversation vocabulary (Ford, 2010).

Preschool Barriers and Opportunities for ELLs and Low Socioeconomic Students

Waldfogel (2012), reflects upon the difficulties that children who are entering the United States school systems face with their literacy skills due to their socioeconomic status. She also touches upon the same issues for children based on their race, ethnicity and immigrant status. Children who come from different households are exposed to all different types of literacy, some homes are enriched with practice and some lack the enrichment needed. For this reason there is already a literacy gap taking place before the children even begin school and this gap continues to follow them and influence their progress throughout their literacy development (Waldfogel, 2012). The Future of Children (2012) state, severe problems are being faced by the enormous number of immigrant children that are entering the United States school system. These children
are being faced with many different obstacles such as: inadequate education, poverty and poor health. Although all of these factors have been identified, the question poses what we can do to help eliminate or elevate these factors. The goals of bringing all these factors together are to create a student as a long term prospect for financial mobility and citizens to grow our economy (The Future of Children, 2011).

As Magnuson and Waldfigel (2005), state Hispanic children had the lowest rate of enrollments in any type of preschool program. Hispanic children and African American children were more likely to attend a Head Start program because they were free to attend. The Future Children of America (2011), participating in an early education program is crucial piece to an immigrant child’s early life; however there are many factors that intrude with a child attending an early education program. There are five million children who are accounted for that at least one or both parents are unauthorized to live in the United States, but ¾ of these children are native born. Even being born in the United States, these students are still having a grave disadvantage to their native counterparts (The Future of Children, 2011). Yettick (2015), as more immigrant and minority children enter the United States school systems every year, the Hispanic population is always our nation’s largest minority group. That makes up a quarter of our preschool age children (Yettick, 2015). Parents simply cannot afford a program, they distrust government programs, or there are issues with availability of a preschool program (The Future of Children, 2011).

Magnuson & Waldefegel (2005), the authors promote the idea of lowering costs of childcare to make it more affordable for all races to increase enrollment among African American and Hispanic children, for example, making preschool enrollment in the United States
for three- and four-year-olds in poverty and increasing the quality of daycare could close up to 20 percent of the black-white school readiness gap and up to 36 percent of the Hispanic-white gap (Magnuson & Waldefegel, 2005). Waldfogel (2012), continues to point out the differences in parenting between parenting styles and maybe this might explain the black-white literacy gap and how it is directly related to socioeconomic status. Another group to pin point is the United States immigrant population. Barriers among the population are related to home language differences. The author digs a little deeper as to why these two groups have such difficulties with literacy skills, even outside of school. The gaps tend to vary based on group. The Hispanic group’s gaps tend to close over time because of family support and community involvement. The African American gap, based on socioeconomic status tends to carry on, but there is not enough solid evidence to point out why this happens other than little family support base on a broken home. Waldfogel (2012), concludes that addressing these early learning gaps early on will help students succeed in the classroom. She states that even though at home factors contribute to a student’s early education, schools still have the responsibility to close such gaps (Waldfogel, 2012).

The NWEA (Northwestern Evaluation Association) (2015), is an association that is nonprofit which helps school districts improving their learning through different tests and research methods. The NWEA had prepared an analysis of the early education of children in the United States. They conducted a breakdown of the enrollment patterns of children ages 3 to 6. Their results found that enrollment was heavily impacted by socioeconomic factors, household income, and parent’s level of education, race and ethnicity. The research found that children who come from low socioeconomic households are less likely to be enrolled in a preschool program
than their peers from higher socioeconomic households. White, African American and Asian children are more than half most likely to be enrolled in a preschool program and only 4 out of 10 Hispanic children are enrolled in the same type of program (Northwestern Evaluation Association, 2015). There is also a link presented that shows when a child’s parent did not further their schooling past high school, their children were less likely to be enrolled in a preschool program (Northwestern Evaluation Association, 2015).

In the United States, early childhood education is important and occurs in a variety of settings. According to Klein and Chen (2001), the definition of early childhood programs include, but are not limited to: Head Start, both private and public child care centers, nursery schools, family day care and prekindergarten schools. The United States has a variety of goals when it comes to their early childhood education programs. Head Start is a free preschool program that is meant for families below the poverty level in their state. State licensed daycares are normally for working parents and private preschools usually are half day programs that have a heavy focus on curriculum and academics. There are sometimes great variations in quality among the education experience in each setting (Klein & Chen, 2001).

Robertson (2008), expresses her concerns when she interviewed a childcare director in a large urban area. The director explained that the neighborhood has three facilities for preschool aged children that are accommodating to low income families, mostly immigrants and non-native speakers, but the parents still do not send their children, even though the programs are at a low cost or even free (Robertson, 2008). As the United States is expanding you may see children in early childhood education programs whose families are newcomers to the United States. Some of the families are familiar with the preschool programs in their countries, but may not be
familiar with the programs here in the United States. Public preschool education is valued, however it is probably not an option for some non-native families, or a preschool program was not necessary in their country because the mother did not work out of the home or the children were cared for by extended family members. The author explains that the United States is doing a fair job promoting the importance of ELLs attending preschool, and the schools are being promoted well, but there are still a couple of barriers for the parents to get the children into the programs. Socio-economic status is one, the second it that the parents do not speak English themselves and they may not feel comfortable coming to enroll their children, and last, the family’s culture may not see the importance of a preschool program (Robertson, 2008). Klein & Chen (2001), however, now living in the United States, these families may need to enroll their children in early childhood programs because of job requirements and the lack of extended family support. Some families, for those who can afford it, send their children to preschool to learn English and the customs of their new country (Klein & Chen, 2001).

Yettick (2015), depending on the state, the Hispanic preschool population differs based on attendance. With that being said, even with such a high rate of attendance in the United States, the Hispanic population has the lowest rate of preschool participation of all the major race or ethnic groups in the United States (Yettick, 2015), states who have large populations of Hispanic preschool age children do not have a high an attendance rate in preschool classrooms. The states that have fewer numbers of Hispanic children have a higher rate of those children attending a preschool program (Yettick, 2015). These statistics have implications that the states with higher numbers of Hispanic preschool age children cannot support the demand of the schools and programs needed to accommodate them. Many families coming into the United
States do not have the means to pay for a preschool program for their children. Most of these families would qualify for programs like Head Start, but there is little or no room for the expanding populations to be placed (Yettick, 2015).

There are many different types of preschool programs that a family can enroll their ELL in to ensure a quality education. Head Start is federally funded by the United States government and is a readiness program for children age birth to 5 years old of low income families (United States Department of Health and Human Services Head Start, 2014). The Head Start program is taught by degreed teachers that have an early childhood degree and background. The program can be four or five days per week, full or half days. Head Start has a fully enriched academic program as well as adding a social and emotion component (United States Department of Health and Human Services Head Start, 2014). Families enrolled in the Head Start program have to have a certain income requirement, which varies state to state; this requirement is usually a poverty limit in the state. Non-native speakers are also welcomed into the program and provided rich language environments to be immersed in all day long (United States Department of Health and Human Services Head Start, 2014). Another major component of the Head Start services is focusing on healthy families. Parents are involved in the Head Start process to the fullest extent (United States Department of Health and Human Services Head Start, 2014).

**Instructional and Remediation Strategies for Low Socioeconomic and ELLS**

As Shapiro (2011) states, there are many teaching methods used in a kindergarten classroom, if an individual would walk into a kindergarten classroom, they should not find rows of desks with students individually working. Instead they should see the dynamic of whole
group instruction taking place where all students are engaged in the learning process. On the contrary, there are some students who need more instruction than just the whole group approach. Many teachers will assign a whole group activity then call a small group of students to conduct a more in depth activity; normally small group instruction is conducted for language arts. However, there does come a point where even small group instruction is not enough for a student. This is where individualized instruction comes into the picture. Individualized instruction is a term used for one-on-one instruction that is utilized for remediation purposes. Remediation such as this is used for students who are struggling in one skill and the teacher pulls them aside to catch them up with their peers. Normally this type of instruction should be differentiated to meet each student’s individual needs. Differentiated instruction can be adapted to meet all the needs of students. This method requires teachers to know their students on a deeper level and understand their learning styles and patterns. Differentiation can happen if the student is enrolled in an ESOL program or if the student comes from a low socioeconomic group that enabled them from attending a preschool program. Remediation can be a powerful tool if it is implemented correctly in the appropriate atmosphere (Shapiro, 2011).

I will be conducting remediation at a one on one/small group level with students that are falling behind their peers in letter recognition. Each student’s remediation will be differentiated to fit their needs, as I will be working with ELLs and low socioeconomic students who did not attend a preschool program.

There is a procedure in choosing strategies for remedial intervention. As stated by, Shapiro (2011), the academic problem has to be determined first and data should be collected and reviewed to have evidence of the student’s academic problem. Once the data is collected and
reviewed, teachers need to point out where the student is academically lacking in comparison to their schools benchmarks, state standards and peer performance (Shapiro, 2011). Bogles & Contadino (1997), also describes issues that may interfere with the remediation process, such as, if a student has low self-esteem, and the student realizes that they are not performing at the same caliber as the rest of the class. This can cause a setback because the student may not want to participate in remediation because they are embarrassed. Another issue a teacher may face during remediation is the simple fact that the student does not view school as being important, or school is not a place they want to be, therefore they do not feel remediation is of importance (Bogles & Contadino, 1997). Shapiro (2011), once the students’ needs have been identified, recommendations need to be made for possible intervention strategies that will benefit that student the most. Data should be continued to be collected to show improvement over the remediation period (Shapiro, 2011).

Bogles and Contadino (1997), focus on different instructional strategies to help students, teachers and parents participate in the remediation process and lessons. The authors cover many learning differences among students, and touch upon the remediation of special needs children. Bogles and Contadino (1997), speak about how to work with the school’s special education teachers and students IEP goals to meet all the specific needs of the student. The book incorporates ideas to involve parents with their child’s school remediation. Parents can also take charge of their child’s learning and continue the remediation process at home for extra support (Bogles & Contadino, 1997). Not only is the parent teacher relationship important when remediation is occurring but, Cohen (2009), expands on the relationship of the teacher and the student being culturally accepting of one another and exploring their cultures and heritages.
through learning. As the demographics change in our schools across the United States, teachers will need to start planning a curriculum that reflects the cultural backgrounds, religious affiliations and language groups that children represent (Cohen, 2009).

Once you have identified students in your classroom that may need some extra learning support, you can employ a number of remediation activities that will help students reach their potential and gain academic confidence. Cooper, Chond and Kiger (2006), write about how intervention works when dealing with a struggling reader. The authors provide a number of activities for teachers to use in the phonics remediation process, such as providing real objects that correlate with the letter is being taught (Cooper, Chond & Kiger, 2006).

Remediation strategies that can be used for kindergarten students that are having difficulty with letter recognition should be fun and resourceful. Teachers need to provide authentic, hands on learning experiences and lessons that spark student interests. The more hands on activities, the more the students are engaged and the more the students are engaged, the information will be retained easier for long term benefits (Neuhaus Education Center, 2015). The Neuhaus Education Center (2015), has listed several strategies that would be beneficial for teachers to use in the remediation process to gain letter knowledge.

Multisensory teaching has proved to be very effective, teachers are encouraged to teach student letters using manipulatives students can touch such as; sand, play dough and popsicle sticks to create letters. Singing the alphabet several times a day to different tunes has proved to be an effective approach also, especially when using letter flash cards in correspondence with the song. Touching and saying the letters several times and making games out of letters have also been proven to work (Neuhaus Education Center, 2015). There are online programs that students
can be acquainted with that help them with letter recognition. These programs are: Starfall, ABC Mouse and ABCYA. They do not track progress as a computer program, but are colorful, interactive and fun.

As Lynn (2010) points out, another remedial method that can be utilized is the use of realia to teach letters. Teachers can provide students with real objects or pictures that start with the letter being introduced. Realia is a method used for ELLs in order for them to make real life connections to what is being taught. Students tend to remember information better when they see it in real life or can make a connection to something they already know (Lynn, 2010). Colorin Colorado (2007), describe different approaches teachers or parents can use to teach their ELL letter recognition. These activities include; singing the alphabet in English and Spanish, working with alphabet puzzles, learning the letters in their names first, making new words with letters and reading everyday can greatly increase student letter identification skills (Colorin Colorado, 2007). The use of technology is also a good remediation tool to use to spark student interest.

Across America teachers need to meet the educational needs of diverse readers. Richardson (2009), has become an expert in the area of guided reading, and many school districts are adapting her methods to ensure success in their schools. In the book the author has conducted a lot of student based research to see if her methods are valid, she has identified the essential components of a good guided reading plan that includes specific strategies for student needs (Richardson, 2009). For a student to qualify as a pre-a reader, they need to be able to identify less than 40 letters of the alphabet. Each lesson is tailored to the student based on how many letters they already know. If a student does not know any letters of the alphabet, it is
appropriate to start with the letters of his or her first name. Each lesson is designed around using a variety of methods to help the student recognize the letters, such as tracing the letter with their finger, putting a puzzle together using the letters of their name and incorporating magnetic letters to place the letter in order of how the student’s name is spelled. Each lesson is to be done in a repetitive nature until the skill is mastered (Richerdson, 2009). The Jan Richerdson approach can be used as remediation if a school is not currently using the program as their main reading program. All of the lessons mentioned above can be used in a remediation group.

Henson (2015) asserts that all these ideas have been proposed time has not been mentioned as part of the remediation plan. Many durations and times per week have been suggested for kindergarten remediation. There are many different factors that need looked at when planning remediation sessions, such as; time of day, where the remediation will fit into the classroom schedule, the location of the remediation, what will be the duration of time, and how many times per week will the teacher see the students. Once a plan is put into place, it is very important to keep the routine going, this will ensure that the data collected will be an accurate reflection on the progress (Henson, 2015). According to Henson (2015), choosing the time of day for the remediation activities is a crucial piece to the puzzle. Teachers have look at their schedule or recreate their existing schedule to fit in the remediation. Teachers have to create a balance when pulling students they need to ensure the rest of the class has a meaningful enrichment activity that will engage them at the same time to minimize distractions (Henson, 2015).
Methodology

The goal of my EDCI 590 action research project was to research and implement appropriate kindergarten level instructional strategies for letter recognition to remediate kindergarten ELLs and low socioeconomic students who are behind their peers. Most of the participants did not attend a preschool program placing them lower than their counterparts that have attended preschool. I conducted an action research project to address issues faced in the classroom and to improve practices through remediation. Sagor (2000) states action research is a process by which solutions are found through open-minded problem solving activities. Action research is research that includes examination to determine an outcome (Sagor, 2000). Since action research combines both quantitative and qualitative research, it is ideal for classroom use. Action research was applied in my classroom and received a positive outcome through the remediation practices.

The school where the action research took place is a Title I and Title III designated school, the school is 90% economically disadvantaged and has a 63% ESOL based population. Schools that have a Title I label, mean each child is defined as being well under the poverty level in the state of Virginia. The schools population generally consists of Spanish speaking families, that is the most predominante language spoken (Prince William County School District, 2015). Some of the participants have attended a Head Start or preschool program prior to entering kindergarten and many participants have attended a structured program. The majority of the participants have not attended any prior pre schooling. Most of the students came right from a home atmosphere where a family
member has been taking care of them. The kindergarten classroom population at this school range from 19 to 38 students at any given time. The students assigned to my classroom were the population for this study.

Sagor (2010) states, action research are a popular form of professional development that incorporates a lot of methods that are not only practical, but useful to the teacher in his or her own classroom. Action research promotes reflective practices and pedagogy. It is conducted by the person who wants to take action to improve the future for their students, classrooms and schools. Sagor (2010) elaborates on the methods of a proper action reach plan and its four components. As I identify the author’s components, I would like to break down the vision of my classrooms action research remediation plan.

The first component of action research is *clarifying visions* of the targeted populations (Sagor, 2010, p.6). The participants of this study are kindergarten aged children who are considered ELLs and or economically disadvantaged. These students are academically behind in their literacy coursework, particularly in letter knowledge, from their peers. At this time there are no academic requirements in place that the participants need to know upon entering kindergarten, however, the state and county standards for kindergarten completion are very high, therefore, if a child comes into the classroom without literacy skills their chances for success are diminished from the start.

The second component is a *research theory*, a research theory will examine the reasons why the action research is taking place and the outcome it will have on the classroom (Sagor, 2010, p.6). My theory is applied to ELLs and students who come from a low socioeconomic background, who are academically behind in literacy (particularly letter
knowledge), that they can be remediated by receiving direct instruction that is
differentiated so that they will have the opportunity to be academically comparable with
the rest of their peers. This theoretical idea is also shared with Waldfogel (2010), who
believes ELLs without preschool attend kindergarten further behind their peers who did
attend a prior school program. He also believes that race and socioeconomic status play a
vital role in why a child is not sent to preschool and they too fall academically behind their
peers in kindergarten (Waldfogel, 2010). Magnusin & Waldfegel (2005), also agree with
the theory that children who attend some sort of preschool are more ready to learn and
succeed in a kindergarten classroom, especially those students who come from a low
income background (Magnusin & Waldfegel 2005).

The third component is implementing the action and collecting data (Sagor,
2010, p.7). The action research was original and conducted, with approval in a
kindergarten classroom. All of the students in the classroom were given the Baldridge
Education (Prince William County Materials, 2009), letter identification test within the first
two weeks of school. Demographic data was collected to identify which students have
attended Head Start or another preschool program, and which did not. After the Baldridge
assessment was given, I was able to see which students have not met the benchmark for the
beginning of the year letter recognition and recognized that they need to be pulled into a
direct instruction setting to receive extra assistance. Once the remediation students were
identified, another Baldridge pretest (Prince William County Materials, 2009), was be
given to the students as a baseline before beginning the remediation process. The pretest
data was used only for those students who are participants in the research. I also
administered a weekly formative assessment to see if the remediation styles were working and helping students.

The students who were identified for remediation were placed in remediation groups based on their tests results. I kept each group as small as possible, two to three students if possible. One on one instruction would have been ideal, but the size of the initial remediation groups depended on the outcome of the data. Each group was placed homogeneously based on the number of letters he or she identified in the pretest. By grouping this way the same remediation styles can be applied to the group with similar knowledge levels. However, as the students start retaining the information, groups will have to be moved around to accommodate how many letters they recognize. Another concept that must be taken into consideration is the language level of the student. Students who have no or limited English language skills had a group of their own, the strategies used were approached differently.

Henson (2015), points out, choosing a time of day for remediation is a crucial piece to the puzzle. Teachers have to keep their schedule in mind and make a realistic plan (Henson, 2015). Remediation in the action plan took place at the end of the instructional day, in kindergarten had a block schedule put in place, for 45 minutes at the end of the day the students are allowed to partake in developmental centers. With that being said, this is the only time during the day I can pull students for remediation services; I cannot pull them during instructional time. I have not found any recommendations in the literature about the amount of time each day to spend on remediation. I also kept in mind the age group I am remediating; 5 year old students will not be able to sit for long periods of time for
intervention. I made the activities quick and engaging to hold each student's interest and keep an appropriate time limit for their attention. I would not want to discourage the students by making them sit for long periods of time reiterating information. I had a 30 minute block, Monday through Thursday to see three groups, 10 minutes a piece.

Shapiro (2011) states, it is a good idea to have the rest of the class engaged in practice while a teacher is pulling students to the side to remediate (Shapiro, 2011). All the other children being remediated will be engaged in developmental centers while I work with the students. The remediation took place in the classroom, using these developmental centers.

The remediation lasted for 9 weeks, a full quarter; I set remediation goals for students who are not close to meeting the state’s minimum achievements levels for the end of the first quarter. According to National Institute of Direct Instruction (2014), direct instruction is a format for teaching that follows well developed and planned lessons that are prearranged around small learning groups. Direct instruction is a form of remediation that is very intentional and the teaching tasks are designed for the individual student. Direct instruction has four main features. The first main feature consisted of placing students in an instructional level that is appropriate for them. The second feature of direction instruction was to develop a structured program to be put in place that ensures success. The third feature of instruction was to modify students learning pace and style. The fourth and final feature of direct instruction was having an end result that showed growth (National Institute for Direct Instruction, 2014). All of these features were presented in my action research remediation.
During remediation, I used the recommended strategies from the direct instruction (National Institute for Direct Instruction, 2014), guided reading strategies lessons (Richardson, 2009), multisensory teaching letter knowledge (Neuhaus Education Center, 2015) and other strategies found effective in the literature reviews. I also continued to look for techniques and strategies based on the needs of the students. Each remediation group started with lessons based on their ability, once a frustration level is established; each lesson gradually became more difficult to challenge the students’ knowledge and ability. It is suggested to help participants master the skills, only spend about 10% of your time introducing new material, and the other 90% of your time reviewing material that can be mastered (National Institute for Direct Instruction, 2014). After nine weeks of remediation, the post test was given to track progress to see if the remediation works and will be effective to the students.

The fourth and final component is reflection on the data to see what remediation styles worked and which did not (Sagor, 2010, p.7). When all data has been collected, I looked for findings with practical significance. I then analyze the pre and posttest taken by each student to see the improvement of the remediation for letter identification. I then shared these methods with my colleagues in a professional development during our data meeting, it is not only my classroom that requires remediation dynamics, but all kindergarten classrooms at this school have similar student populations. If I can devise an effective remediation plan that I can share, all teachers will be able to utilize the plan and more children will benefit from the remediation, just not the students in my classroom.
Analysis

Data from this action research study was taken from nine students who did not meet the kindergarten requirements for upper case and lower case letter identification using a Baldridge pretest that was given to them the first week of school that confirmed this data. The participants were narrowed down among their peers after the pretest data was collected and examined to see which students would qualify for letter recognition remediation. The pretest consisted of 52 individual letters, 26 uppercase and 26 lowercase letters; each child individually sat down and was tested to see which letters they could identify. The minimum benchmark of the pretest was that each student would be able to identify at least 13 upper case or lowercase letters, or a combination of both to meet the requirements. The nine participants, who were tested out of a class of 19, knew less than 13 letters. The participants showed significantly low scores that placed them into a category of well below grade level. All nine participants did not attend any type of preschool program before entering kindergarten. Their peers that did attend some type of schooling program did meet the 13 letter identification benchmark, with that said, being able to identifying 13 letters is still a slow start, but not as significantly low as the below average students. All nine participants in this study have qualified for free and reduced lunch, this places them into a significantly low economic level and all participants have an ESOL level, meaning English was not their first language. All participants have a home language of Spanish. Two of the participants are non-natives to the United States; they were both born in El Salvador. Both do not have a second language of English, they both speak their home language of Spanish and are learning English in the classroom. The other seven participants are bilingual students, having
more vocabulary in their home language, but can understand and speak English for classroom purposes. All of the remediation activities were tailored to the ESOL participants including lessons that involved vivid pictures relating to letters which included realia, rich letter vocabulary, repetition, hand on learning activities, letter manipulatives and extended wait time and the Jan Richardson Approach to Guided Reading, which provided an extensive letter identification plan with an alphabet book, finger tracing methods of letters and the use of magnetic letters.

The remediation took place in the classroom; the preliminary remediation plan stated in the methodology was a little different then how the remediation time paced out. The remediation was carried out by a school wide improvement plan that added extra time into our schedules which provided all classrooms a block of the day in which children who needed remediation could receive it with one on one base instruction or small group instruction. This block was titled CORE extension. The nine participants were group based on how many letters they knew based on the Baldridge pretest. Two groups consisted of three participants that did not recognize any letters on the pretest. One of those groups had both non English speakers participating; this was intentional and made it possible to tailor to their needs. One group consisted of three participants who knew 13 or less letter. This method allowed the remediation process to be a more targeted intervention to each student’s needs. Each group was seen 20 minutes a day, Monday through Thursday for nine weeks.

This research sought out to answer three questions: the first question, the need for low income and ELL students to receive some type preschool before entering kindergarten has been proven and exhibited through the Baldridge letter pretest. The pretest shows that the nine
students who did not attend a preschool program we significantly behind their peers who did attend a preschool program. The second question of effective practices for remediation has proven to be successful for six out of the nine students. Below is a breakdown of each of the three remediation groups of students. The graph shows where the participants started with letter recognition regarding the pretest and where they ended up after nine weeks of remediation followed by a Baldridge posttest.

Gathering the data shown on the graph shown above, we can infer that Student 1 scored a zero on the letter identification pretest, and after nine weeks of remediation the participant could positively identify 28 letters on the post test. Student 2 recognized 6 letters on the pretest and positively identified 13 letters on the post test. As for Student 3, the participant recognized zero letters on the pretest and a zero on the posttest despite all the remediation strategies presented. This participant has been asked to be put up for Special Education testing at
the parent’s request. Depending on the results of the testing, this may have affected the outcome of the remediation.

Gathering the data shown on the graph shown above, we can infer that Student 1 scored a zero on the letter identification pretest, and after nine weeks of remediation the participant could positively identify 23 letters on the post test. Student 2 recognized zero letters on the pretest and could positively identify 32 letters on the post test. As for Student 3, the participant received a zero on the pretest and a zero on the posttest despite all the remediation strategies presented. This participant is a nonnative and a non-speaker of English; further remediation will be needed to help this student fully succeed in the classroom based on their cultural background.
Gathering the data shown on the graph shown above, we can infer that the remediation process has significantly helped all three of these participants. Student 1 identified 13 letters on the identification pretest and after nine weeks of remediation the participant could positively identify 50 letters on the post test. Student 2 recognized 13 letters on the pretest and could positively identify 46 letters on the post test. As for Student 3, the participant identified 12 letters on the pretest and could positively identify 52 letters on the posttest after the remediation.

The third and final research question sought out was; what will be the effects of direct and small group remediating on low income and ELL’s that did not attend a preschool program? As the research proves, remediation is a necessity for student growth among these two at risk populations. This was the only way to fast track their learning to meet the kindergarten
Benchmark expectations and for the participants to be measurable with their peers. Remediation was necessary for student growth, as letter recognition is greatly important to continue the reading process and get the participants on course with the county reading program.

**Conclusion**

The findings from this action research project have fully attested to the fact that students who are below grade level for whatever reason, in this particular study nonnative speakers of the English language and poverty based living, need some form of direct or small group instruction to front load them with the information that they are lacking in comparison to their peers. Part of the research project was too involved and inform the rest of the kindergarten staff of my findings regarding the remediation process. I participated and showed my research with the intention to share my strategies, lessons and grouping ideas. Held at the school are regular weekly data meetings that include all kindergarten teachers, ESOL teachers and a member of the administration. As I shared my data and success, since the remediation is part of a school wide improvement plan, other members of the team recognize and value of the remediation time in their classroom. As a whole, the team has seen major improvements and milestones met with the participants who are involved in the process.

**Limitations**

While the action research that took place in my classroom was a complete success, I feel that time is of the essence and an issue if other teachers would see the value of the remediation process and try to implement it into their own classrooms. If the current school of
the action research did not have a school wide improvement plan in place, time would be a restraint to carry out the remediation. Each grade level is given a block schedule of how many minutes are required by the state of Virginia that each teacher had to meet and set aside certain amount of time on each subject per day. What that being said, there is not much room for error or other activities throughout the day which a remediation as intense as this one could have taken place. As Henson (2015), discusses that the time of day the remediation takes place is a crucial aspect of success, time is one of the largest restrictive components of even if the remediation can take place (Henson, 2015).

Another aspect to take into consideration is the limitations that teachers cannot control. Teachers can control almost everything that goes on and takes place in their own classrooms. However, teachers do not have control which types of students walk through their doors in September. Teachers do not have any control over the prior schooling any student receives upon entering kindergarten. Students arrive in the classroom with vast stages of education and academic backgrounds. With the state and county standards in mind, each student is expected to reach all final year benchmarks and be at or on grade level by the end of the school year. It is an educator’s duty to uphold those standards and give each student the opportunity to learn and succeed, regardless of prior knowledge and experience.
References


Dear Parents,

My name is Jillian Leedock and I am your student’s kindergarten teacher and a graduate student in the University of Mary Washington’s College of Education. In order to successfully complete my graduate degree, I am conducting a research project in my classroom from September 2015 to October 2015. Therefore, I am requesting your consent for your child to participate in my research study. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you agree, I will also ask your child for his or her agreement to participate. Please read further to learn about what the study entails.

My research focuses on developing students’ letter identification skills and letter sound skills so they become good readers. During the project I will be actively monitoring each group of students, providing guidance and small group instruction on these phonological topics. I will use a pretest to check for understanding, weekly checks in to see if the remediation is working to its fullest potential, and a posttest to see if the remediation worked.

Students whose parents allow them to participate in the study will be doing the same work as required for all students in the class. However, for the purposes of my research I will use data only from students who have parental consent to participate in the study. There are no extra benefits to any students for participating in the study, and no penalties for any students who do not participate in the study. Whether your child participates in this research or not, the decision will have no effect either positive or negative on the student’s grades on any assignment.

All observation sheets, student journals, and test scores collected from individual students will be kept completely confidential. In any reports I make about this research, all students will be given pseudonyms and I will not report any identifying information about individual students or their school.

The benefit of this research is to provide educators with deeper understanding of how students develop critical thinking skills and how museum projects in history lessons contribute to that development.

The risks to students participating in the study are minimal. Since all students in the class will be doing the same activities, the risks of participation are the same as the normal risks of being in school. If you give permission for your child to participate in this study, and later change your mind, you have the right to withdraw him/her from the study without penalty at any time.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, please sign the form below and return it to me by _____8/28/15_____(date). If you have any questions before returning the form, or at any time throughout the duration of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at __LeedocJH@pwcs.edu_________. The research described above has been approved by the University of Mary Washington IRB which is a committee responsible for ensuring that research is being conducted.
safely and that risks to participants are minimized. For information about the conduct of this research, contact the IRB chair, Dr. Jo Tyler, at jtyler@umw.edu

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter.

Sincerely,
Jillian Leedock

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

Form to be completed by Parent or Guardian

All of my questions and concerns about the research described above have been addressed.

I choose, voluntarily, to allow my child to participate in this research project.

I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

print first and last name of child

print name of parent/guardian

signature of parent/guardian                      date
Form to be completed by Researcher

I confirm that the parent/guardian named above has been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the parent or guardian.

Jillian Leedock
print name of researcher

_____________________________________________                    ________________________
signature of researcher                      date

_____________________________________________                    ________________________
Oral Assent Form for Students

Name of Participant_____________________________________________________

I am doing a research project for my school to see if working on letters a few times a week will help students remember them better so they can be better readers. I am going to ask you if you will agree to help me with my project. But first I will explain what my project is about.

If you agree to help me on my project, you will do the same work as everyone else in the group. I will use your work assignments as part of my research project. I will also be taking notes about what you do while you are working with me.

It’s ok if you do not want to participate in this project. You won’t get in trouble and you won’t get a bad grade. I am just doing this research to help me and other teachers improve our teaching. I will not use your name in any reports I make about my project. Also, if you want to stop being a part of my project, you may stop at any time without getting in trouble.

Do you have any questions?

If this sounds OK to you and you would like to help me with this project please say “Yes.” If you do not want to be part of my project, please say “No.”

_____ Yes

_____ No
To be Completed by the Researcher:

I confirm that the student named on this form responded as recorded above. He/she was given an opportunity to ask questions about my research, and all the questions asked by the student have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability.

A copy of this Assent Form will be given to the student’s parent or guardian. All data collected for this research will be kept confidential.

_____________________________
(Print Researcher’s Name)

_____________________________ _________________
(Researcher’s Signature) (Date)
Kindergarten Literacy Remediation for Low Socioeconomic and ELL Students Without Preschool Experiences.