Interactive writing in a kindergarten classroom

Amy Henze

University of Northern Iowa

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Interactive writing in a kindergarten classroom

Abstract
This research study focused on the use of interactive writing as the primary method of writing instruction in a kindergarten classroom. The purpose of the study was to find out the extent to which and in what ways interactive writing supports the needs of all students at various emergent writing stages. The study also examined students' writing samples to see if there was carryover of skills from the interactive writing lessons to the students' independent writing. Results indicate a variety of skills were taught during the interactive writing lessons, and all of the students showed growth in the use of skills taught during the interactive writing lessons in their independent writing samples.
INTERACTIVE WRITING IN A KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

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by
Amy Henze
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This Research Paper by Amy Henze
Titled: Interactive Writing in a Kindergarten Classroom
has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Penny Beed
Date Approved
Graduate Faculty Reader

Rick C. Traw
Date Approved
Graduate Faculty Reader

Jill M. Uhlenberg
Date Approved
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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Chapter 1
Introduction

Writing instruction at the kindergarten level involves more than teaching how to make letters. A key goal for emerging writers is that they develop an understanding of the writing process that allows them to express their thinking through writing as effortlessly as they do through speech and drawing (Casbergue & Plauche, 2005). Several researchers (e.g., Boroski, 2004; Mayer, 2007; & McCrerry, Pinnell, & Fountas, 2000) suggest emergent writers are beginning to develop the idea that what they think and say can be written down. By scribbling and making letter like marks they copy the look of writing. Their written words may have meaning, or they may just be the result of wanting to write. Eventually, emergent writers begin to make connections between letters and sounds, and develop an understanding that words and letters are necessary for others to understand their message (Boroski; & McCrerry et al.). This development of skills happens at a different rate for each child; as a result teachers are working with students at multiple writing levels at the same time (Mayer).

The literature on emergent writing contains numerous suggestions for effective methods for teaching emergent writers. Williams and Hufnagel (2005) suggest that activities such as shared writing, shared reading, interactive writing, the use of word walls, read alouds, journal writing, writing workshops and small-group guided reading instruction provide students with needed experiences with text. Love, Burns and Buell (2007) state that “a writing-friendly environment integrates writing into multiple activities and supports broader literacy development that includes experiences with expressive language and book reading” (p. 12). They go on to suggest that despite the
fact that young children understand the reading-writing connection differently than adults, an environment that is full of literacy activities builds a basic understanding of the concept that written words have meaning.

According to McCarrier and her colleagues (2000), an effective method for teaching emergent writers is interactive writing. Interactive writing allows children to interact and work together with an experienced writer, by “sharing the pen” (McCarrier et al.). Children get the chance to observe the writing process from beginning to end. Through interactive writing students are able to work at levels above current skill level as they create a text together with teachers. They are able to use words and writing conventions that are beyond their reach when they write independently (McCarrier et al.).

During interactive writing lessons teachers are able to provide meaningful instruction to students at multiple writing stages during the same lesson (McCarrier et al., 2000). During the interactive writing lessons the decisions about “sharing the pen” are based on the needs of the students.

In addition to providing a model of the writing process, interactive writing is an authentic way to provide instruction in phonics, word study, and conventions of print (Brotherton & Williams, 2002; Button, Johnson, & Furgerson, 1996; & McCarrier et al., 2000). Children are able to learn these skills within the context of meaningful text. McCarrier et al. state, “Interactive writing is authentic when it accompanies children’s active learning and when it is related to something they are interested in doing” (p. 10).

Rationale for Choosing the Topic

As a first year kindergarten teacher, I thought writing instruction was an area I needed to strengthen. I was using the strategies provided by our reading basal and was
not really sure what else I needed to be doing. Previously, as a special education teacher, I had spent most of my time involved in teaching reading and only a small amount of time teaching written language. I believed learning more about the process of teaching writing at the kindergarten level would make me a better teacher by providing me with additional instructional methods to use with my students. I had heard a lot about using interactive writing at the kindergarten level. I wanted to learn more about what interactive writing was, peruse the research conducted on interactive writing, give it a try with my students and observe the results.

Purpose of Study

As I searched for information, I was looking for studies that reported on strategies indicated to be effective for teaching kindergartners to write. I focused on looking for information about the stages of emergent writing, interactive writing, and the writing process. I was looking for researched-based information that, when applied, would make my current writing program stronger. I wanted to find out if interactive writing was an effective method of instruction for emergent writers. I also looked to see if the effect of interactive writing was different for students at different emergent writing stages.

Importance of Topic

Since learning to write is closely linked to learning to read (Bromley, 2000; McCarrier et al., 2000), I want to make sure that I am giving my students the skills needed to be successful in reading for information and enjoyment and writing to communicate. With the broad range of writing abilities among my kindergarten students I needed to find a method of instruction that would allow me to support the different needs
Interactive writing was a way to work with students at different writing levels during one lesson (McCarrier et al.).

Interactive writing is also a way to help children make the connection between reading and writing by involving students in the writing process. They hear and see their ideas turn into text on the page. Interactive writing is an authentic and meaningful way for children to work on the skills needed to become readers and writers (Bromley, 2002; & McCarrier et al., 2000). Investigating the topic and applying my findings to my instructional methods enables me to be more certain that my students have the skills they will need to become proficient readers and writers.

**Terminology**

In this research study there are several terms that need to be defined. *Emergent writers* are children who are developing the concept that writing communicates meaning and that their marks have meaning (Mayer, 2007; McCarrier et al., 2000). *Interactive writing* is a form of shared writing in which students participate by actually doing part of the writing. Teachers guide and support students as they all work together (Button et al., 1996; McCarrier et al.; Pinnell & McCarrier, 1994). *Teacher modeling* occurs when teachers demonstrate writing in front of students, placing an emphasis on the thinking processes involved in writing (Bouas, Thompson, & Farlow, 1997). *Scaffolding* means providing support to students that enables them to work at a level above their current independent level and learn through experience (Bodrova & Leong, 1998).

*Materialization* is the use of objects and actions to represent a concept or skill as the student is learning it, such as putting down a block for each different sound heard in a word. *Private speech* is the self-talk used by a student to direct an activity (Bodrova &
Scaffolded writing is a method of writing instruction that uses materialization and private speech to support beginning writing (Bodrova & Leong). Directionality of print is the movement of letters and words from left to right (McCarrier et al.) The concept of a word is the ability to understand what makes up a word, how to tell where a word starts and stops (McCarrier et al.). The alphabetic principle is the understanding that sounds are represented by letters (McCarrier et al.). A word wall is a place in the classroom where the words that have been introduced and worked on as sight words and other important words are posted for the students to reference as they write.

Research Questions

Writing is such an important part of literacy instruction that I wanted to make sure I was using research-supported methods to strengthen my writing program. My research is based on the primary question: In what ways does interactive writing support the needs of all students in kindergarten even though they are at different emergent writing stages? The primary question is further defined by these secondary questions:

- In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help less developed emergent writers?
- In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help more developed emergent writers?
- To what extent does the skill instruction given during interactive writing carry over to kindergartners’ independent writing?
As the literature related to writing instruction for kindergartners and interactive writing was reviewed, three areas of focus emerged: stages of writing development, the nature of interactive writing instruction, and the uses and effectiveness of interactive writing. Each of these focus areas is discussed in a separate section of the review.

**Stages of writing development**

As children develop an understanding of the relationship between written language and oral language they begin to form a theory about how writing works (Zecker, 1999). Children begin by using drawing and scribbles to symbolize events, people and things. "Gradually, children come to understand that they can also 'draw their speech' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 115), and at this point in development, they begin to use letter-like forms, numbers, and letters as designations for oral language" (Williams & Hufnagel, 2005 p. 235). This development is not exactly the same for each child, but follows a progression of steps.

A review of the literature reveals several different scales or steps of writing development. Johnson (1999) identifies seven stages of writing. They include Stage 1 in which children scribble. In Stage 2 children write with curvy lines, circles, cursive m's, and vertical lines. In Stage 3 children begin to arrange known letters in different patterns to represent different words (e.g., abfd lmbd adf). Next, in Stage 4, children begin to trace, copy, and use mock letters and symbols (e.g., Iseeghietojyou). In Stage 5 children begin to use random letters, make lists, labels, and use inventive spelling (e.g., bnsfkltr, lic r trc for I like our truck, and lists of words such as mom, dad, sarah, hannah, cat, dog). At Stage 6 children use more letters and their inventive spelling becomes closer to
standard spelling (e.g., I lik plag wf mi dad for I like to play with my Dad). Finally, in Stage 7 children use conventional spelling most of the time.

Gentry (2005) describes a similar progression with a different skills breakdown. The scale begins with non-alphabetic writing. This includes drawings and scribbles without the use of letters. Next is Stage 1, Pre-Alphabetic Writing. Stage 1 includes the use of letters that have no connection to the sounds or words they are representing (e.g., oqpiweur for I like to play on the swings). Stage 2 is Partial Alphabetic Writing. At Stage 2 the writer starts to make connections between letters and sounds to represent words (e.g., b for bed ct for cat). Stage 3, Full Alphabetic Writing, is characterized by the use of a letter for each sound heard in a word (e.g., lefut for elephant, haf for have, and lie for like). Finally comes Stage 4, Consolidated Alphabetic Writing. At this stage the writer has learned how the alphabet works, and is aware of many phonemic patterns. Novice writers apply them consistently when writing.

The Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale developed by Eileen Feldgus and Isabell Cardonick (1999) breaks the writing skills down into eight levels. Level 1 is Emerging. In Level 1 children produce uncontrolled or unidentifiable scribbling. Level 2 is Pictorial, where the child imitates writing, draws somewhat recognizable pictures, and tells about the pictures. In Level 3, Precommunicative, the child writes to convey a message, tries to read it back and uses strings of random letters or letter-like forms (e.g., jvmrt for I went to the movies last night). In Level 4, Semiphonetic, children are using some correct letters to match sounds in words, may represent a word with one beginning letter, and typically writes from left to right (e.g., I c p w m kr for I can play with my car). In Level 5, Phonetic, children use letters to represent beginning and ending sounds
of words, use some high frequency words in sentences correctly, and include vowels in words (not usually the correct ones), and write one or more sentences (e.g., my dog fnd a bin otsod lst nit for My dog found a bone outside last night). In Level 6, Transitional, children spell many high-frequency words correctly, use vowels, though not always the correct ones, in most syllables, use simple punctuation such as period and question marks, and write more than one sentence (e.g., I can mak my red trk go fast. for I can make my red truck go fast). Level 7, Conventional, is where children correctly spell most high-frequency words, have large vocabularies of correctly spelled words, and use phonetic spelling for advanced words. They also use multiple types of sentence structures, and use correct capitalization, punctuation and spacing. Finally at Level 8, Advanced, children have a diverse body of written vocabulary, use conventions of print (quotation marks, commas, apostrophes) correctly and write using paragraphs.

Having an awareness of the skills demonstrated by students at each different emergent writing stage enables teachers to plan instruction based on the needs of the students. Knowing what skills students are demonstrating or approximating and what skills the students will develop next allows teachers to plan instruction that is appropriate for the students and that will build upon the skills already mastered (Gentry, 2005; Johnson, 1999).

Interactive Writing

Interactive writing lessons provide authentic opportunities for teaching writing by sharing thinking processes, allowing students to participate in writing, and showing and involving students in making revisions when needed (Button, et al., 1996; Strickland & Morrow, 1990). This method allows teachers to scaffold the students' participation and
learning and to demonstrate the writing process (Boroski, 2004; Collom, 2004; McCarrier et al., 2000).

*Scaffolding.* Writing with support from teachers gives students immediate feedback and shows them how the writing process works (Mayer, 2007). By providing support and guidance as children write, teachers are able to extend development of skills and then back off as children learn and no longer need support (Love et al., 2007). *Scaffolding* is providing support to students so that they can work at a level above their current independent level (Bodrova & Leong 1998).

In their research Bodrova and Leong (1998) indicate that, when given appropriate scaffolding, children are able to write using more advanced forms than they could do on their own. These authors developed a process known as *Scaffolded Writing.* This process uses *materialization* and *private speech* as temporary supports for the students as they write. Materialization is the use of objects and movements to represent a concept or skill as the thinking process is taking place. In their study Bodrova and Leong used highlighted lines drawn on the page to represent the words in the students’ sentences. Private speech or the speech that is directed at one self for guidance (Bodrova & Leong) happened as the lines were being placed on the page. This made the link between the spoken word and line on the page clear. In their research, Bodrova and Leong found that Scaffolded Writing helped emergent writers progress through the stages of writing. Students were able to produce more advanced writing using this method than they were able to produce before learning the Scaffolded Writing process. At the beginning of the study twenty students of the thirty-four students were in the scribbles, marks or pictures only stage or the pre-communicative stage and the other fourteen were in the pre-
communicative stage. After just one month of teacher-assisted Scaffolded Writing all but
one of the students were writing at a higher writing level. By the end of the school year
the students were able to apply the techniques of Scaffolded Writing independently.
Scaffolding provided students with the support needed to experience writing at a level
beyond what they could do on their own. Interactive writing is one method of instruction
that allows for the use of scaffolding as students are writing, as well as providing
opportunities for the teacher to model skills for students.

*Teacher modeling.* Modeling allows teachers to demonstrate the use of a skill and
their associated thought processes to students before asking them to apply a skill on their
own during writing time (Lamme, Fu, Johnson, & Savage, 2002). Modeling is a process
that allows teachers and children to interact as knowledge is constructed. Through these
interactions children develop a better understanding of writing (Teale, 1995; Yaden &
Tardibuono, 2004). By modeling writing teachers are able to clearly explain their
thinking as they build text (Mayer, 2007). Watching teachers go through the process
helps children decide what they can write about, understand how to organize ideas, and
know what to do when they need help. According to Bouas et al. (1997) and Collom
(2004) modeling writing for students and exposing them to a variety of writing through
quality literature are essential steps in teaching children how to write. McCarrier and her
colleges (2000) discuss how interactive writing is one way that this can be done with
students. It allows teachers to demonstrate the processes used when composing text from
start to finish.

During interactive writing teachers guide their class in composing. Students are
active participants throughout the lesson. Teachers are able to provide instruction at the
level of each student's need as they take part in the activity. Also, teachers are able to use observations from students' independent writing to plan instruction for future interactive writing lessons (Button et al., 1996).

Conducting an interactive writing lesson. A few materials are needed for interactive writing. A place to sit as a group, an easel to hold chart paper, markers, correction tape or sticky notes to cover mistakes are all the materials that are important to have (McCarrier et al., 2000; Boroski, 2004). In addition, alphabet strips or cards, magnetic letters, white boards, and pointers may also be helpful.

McCarrier et al. (2000) describe eight "essential elements" of interactive writing. These elements are "provide a base of active learning experiences, talk to establish purpose, compose the text, construct the text, reread, revise, and proofread the text, revisit the text to support word solving, summarize the learning, and extend the learning" (p. 73).

Boroski (2004) goes further to define six steps for conducting an interactive writing lesson.

1. Negotiate a sentence. The teacher and students work together to compose meaningful text that can be read by everyone.

2. Count the words on fingers. As the teacher repeats the sentence slowly, one finger is held up for each word spoken.

3. Recall the word to be written and stretch the word. "The teacher articulates the word slowly using a technique known as "stretching the word." As the word is stretched, or spoken slowly, the students listen for the individual phonemes that make up the word" (p.2).
4. *Share the pen.* “A student volunteer uses the pen... to write part of the word or the whole word on the chart paper” (p.2). The teacher provides support so that the student is able to correctly write his/her part. The teacher may write all or part of a word so that the text can be read by others. Conventional spelling is used in order for the text to be readable by others.

5. *Point and read.* “Once the word has been written on the chart, the teacher or a student can use the pointer to point to the word as it is read” (p.3).

6. *Recall the entire sentence to be written, then go back to step 3.* “The teacher and students repeat the sentence they have agreed to write to refresh their memory. The next word in the sentence becomes the new focus” (p.3).

Decisions about when to “share the pen” with students or to do the writing for the students are made based on the needs of the students and goals of the lesson. This is one of the key differences between interactive writing and shared writing (McCarrier et al., 2000).

Interactive writing can be done during lessons that involve an entire class or during small group instruction. During large group instruction teachers use what they know about the students to choose who completes different tasks. In small group instruction teachers can focus in on a small number of students who have common needs and give them support as the skill is practiced (McCarrier et al., 2000; McCloskey, 2004).

**Benefits of interactive writing.** Interactive writing provides opportunities for teachers to scaffold children’s learning as they are engaged in authentic writing situations (Button et al. 1996; Pinnell & McCarrier, 1994). Students learn about the conventions of print, make letter sound connections, and connect the reading and writing process while
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working for a real communicative purpose (McCarrier et al., 2000; Button et al.). Teachers are able to plan instruction based on interests and needs of students. Observations made during independent writing time can be used to decide what each student needs to work on. Teachers can then incorporate those skills into the interactive writing lesson for individuals.

Ways to use interactive writing. Interactive writing can be used to create a variety of texts within the context of classroom curriculum. Interactive writing can be a list, a retelling or extension of a story, a thank you note, letter, daily news, morning message, alternate ending to story, or a summary of what is learned in a unit. These all provide authentic opportunities for writing. Interactive writing does not have to involve writing a story or a letter to be authentic. The key is that there is a real purpose that is connected to children’s learning (McCarrier et al. 2000).

Studies of the Effectiveness of Interactive Writing

A review of the literature found four studies that reported the use of interactive writing in primary classrooms. Two studies reported on the use of interactive writing as described by McCarrier et al. (2000). The other two reported on the use of interactive writing in combination with other instructional strategies.

Button et al. (1996) conducted a study that examined the effectiveness of interactive writing in the kindergarten classroom of Paige Furgerson. The class was made up of seventeen students. After assessing students in the fall using Clay’s Observational Survey (1993) and other informal assessments, Furgerson began interactive writing lessons with her class, closely guiding her students through the writing process. Interactive writing was used on a daily basis in the classroom, following the guidelines
for interactive writing described by McCarrier et al. (2000) with the entire class (Button et al.). Lessons were planned around the needs of the students. Furgerson used a checklist that she developed to monitor writing skills demonstrated through independent journal writing to assess where her students were in their writing development throughout the year. As the year progressed she was able to let the children take on more of the responsibility of writing while scaffolding the children’s learning during the interactive writing lessons.

Clay’s Observational Survey (1993) was used in the spring to monitor the growth made by the students (Button et al., 1996). Students showed growth in all areas tested by the Observational Survey. Thirteen of the students were able to read books that had predictable text that was directly supported by the pictures with ninety percent accuracy or better. The students improved the most in their ability to hear sounds in words (Button et al.). This was measured by the Dictation Test of Clay’s Observational Survey (1993). This test asks the students to write down a dictated sentence. The students’ scores are figured by counting the number of letters the students correctly write to represent the sounds in the sentence. In the spring the students mean score was 29 which was almost three times the students’ fall mean score of 9.8.

Brotherton and Williams (2002) studied the use of interactive writing in a first grade Title 1 classroom. The purpose of this study was to find out what skills were taught during the interactive writing sessions. This study was a qualitative study that used videotaping to record interactive writing lessons taught to a group of five first grade students.
Data were collected from twenty-four lessons that were videotaped on a weekly basis. The lessons were about twenty-five minutes in length. The study was specifically focused on what the teacher was teaching about the writing process, written language, writing strategies, concepts of print, and letter sound correspondence. The researcher and teacher independently coded the skills taught during one of two weekly interactive writing sessions conducted and then compared the findings to each other's findings.

The results revealed that numerous concepts about written language were taught as the students were involved in meaningful authentic instruction. Skills on the concepts of print that were taught included directionality of print, spacing, return sweep, punctuation, and capitalization. The understanding of the concept of a word, a sentence, a story, a title, and a list were also taught. Other skills taught included letter formation, vowel patterns, letter sound correspondence, how to spell unknown words, and strategies for composing.

While this study did not look at what progress was made by the students it did show that teachers can teach writing skills while involving students in authentic activities that relate to classroom instruction throughout the curriculum.

In Sharon Craig's (2003) study, the researcher looked at the effects of "interactive writing-plus" compared to "metalinguistic games-plus" on kindergarten students' phonological awareness skills, alphabet skills and emergent reading skills. The "interactive writing plus" treatment consisted of the use of shared reading, a written response to the reading, and related word building activities. The "metalinguistic games-plus" treatment was made up of the use of a step-by-step phonemic awareness curriculum with the addition of letter-sound activities and segmentation activities.
Students participating in the study were divided randomly into small groups of four to five students in which they received instruction in one of the methods for four twenty minute sessions a week for sixteen weeks. The students were chosen from four sections of half day kindergarten in a rural suburban elementary school. All children in the sections were invited to participate. Three students were eliminated due to communication or behavioral problems that prevented them from participating in the testing or instruction. Of the eighty-seven participants there were forty-three boys and forty-four girls. Pre and post treatment testing was conducted using the following measures: Snider’s (1997) Test of Phonemic Awareness, Hearing Sounds in Words (Clay, 1993), Developmental Spelling Test (Tangel & Blachman, 1992), Woodcock Reading Mastery Test – Revised Word Attack subtest, Revised Word Identification subtest, Revised Passage Comprehension subtest (Woodcock, 1987), and “a measure of word reading development” (Craig, 2003, p 717).

The instruction was given to the groups by three teachers from within the elementary school who all held master degrees in education. These teachers were called tutors to separate them from the classroom teachers. The tutors met bi-weekly with the researcher to plan instruction for the groups.

The study found that while both treatment groups showed improvement in spelling and phonological awareness there were no significant differences between the groups in these areas. The children who participated in the “interactive writing-plus,” however, did better on word identification, comprehension and word reading development than the “metalinguistic games-plus” groups. These results were not only true for the groups as a whole, but for students at each literacy stage as well.
One of the major results of this study was that the achievement of children who participate in authentic writing activities matches or exceeds that of those in skills based programs. This provides evidence that students can learn to read and write while participating in a program that shows students real life purposes for write just as well as they can in a skill driven drill and practice type program.

Williams and Lundstrom (2007) conducted a study looking at the effects of use of interactive writing in combination with word study instruction with a group of six first grade students in a Title 1 class who were struggling to learn to read and write. The study was conducted over a nine month period. The students met daily with the Title 1 teacher for thirty minutes. Four days a week the students had ten minutes of focused word study instruction and twenty minutes of guided reading instruction. Twice a month the students spent the thirty minutes engaged in interactive writing lessons. The purpose of the study was to see what spelling strategies were taught during word study instruction, to see how the teacher scaffolded the children’s use of the spelling strategies during interactive writing lessons, and to see what strategies the children used to write unknown words during journaling in their first grade classroom.

Data were collected from the teacher’s lesson plans, reflective notes on daily lessons, field notes taken during and after the interactive writing lessons, field notes on weekly journal writing observations, and photocopies of the children’s journal entries written during the weekly observations (Williams & Lundstrom, 2007). After Williams and Lundstrom independently coded the notes, they compared their findings and found them to be very similar.
The authors found that there were ten key strategies taught to the students throughout the year. These strategies were broken down into two categories: “Tools of the Trade” and “Tools of the Mind” (Williams & Lundstrom, 2007, p 207). The four strategies considered to be “Tools of the Trade” (strategies 1-4) involved the use of physical objects located in the classroom. The ten strategies that Williams and Lundstrom found were:

1. Look for the word on the word wall.
2. Find a word on the word wall that will help you (could – should).
3. Look for the word in your dictionary.
4. Look for the word in print around the classroom. (….)
5. Say the word slowly and listen for the sounds you hear.
6. Think about different spelling patterns that can spell the sound you hear (out vs down).
7. Say the word slowly and listen for any parts you know how to spell (and in candy).
8. Think about the word in your head. Can you “see” the word?
9. Think of a word you already know how to spell that will help you spell this word.
10. Think of a word you know that rhymes with the word you’re trying to spell. (p. 207)

During the fifteen interactive writing lessons these strategies were prompted sixty-one times. The teacher prompts encouraged students to use a specific strategy in order to figure out how to write a word independently. As a group, students were
observed independently using the spelling strategies twenty-three times during the interactive writing lessons.

Williams and Lundstrom's (2007) study found that interactive writing was effective in three different ways. First, the students learned their spelling words. Second, students had guided practice in word solving skills. Finally, students had opportunities to use spelling strategies that they had learned.

Students were also observed using the spelling strategies taught while independently writing in the journals in their first grade classroom. The Title 1 teacher observed them using the word wall, listening for sounds, listening for known parts and using known words (Williams & Lundstrom 2007). The researchers commented that, since the data came only from teacher observations, it is hard to know the true degree to which the students were using the strategies.

The studies conducted by Button and her colleagues (1996) and Craig (2003) show the students making progress in their ability to hear and write down the sounds in words. Williams and Lundstrom (2007) saw carryover from skills taught during interactive writing lessons to students’ journal writing. The results of the studies indicated that interactive writing is a method of instruction that allows teachers to work on a variety of skills while involving students in the writing process in meaningful and authentic ways.
Interactive Writing in a Kindergarten Classroom 25

Chapter 3

Methodology

As I reviewed the literature on interactive writing I was able to locate information on early writing stages, pieces on how to conduct interactive writing lessons, and research on the use of interactive writing in the classroom and how it affects students reading skills and spelling skills. I was not able to locate any information that specifically focused on the ways that interactive writing affected emergent writers at different stages of writing development. Since interactive writing is a method of instruction that allows for direct instruction of skills, modeling, and scaffolding of skills (McCarrier et al., 2000), I felt it was a method of writing instruction that was beneficial to my students. I wanted to know if interactive writing was an effective method of instruction for students at different emergent writing stages. As a result I designed my study to observe the ways that interactive writing supports writing development for emergent writers at early writing stages and at more advanced writing stages. My research is based on the primary question: In what ways does interactive writing support the needs of all students in kindergarten even though they are at different emergent writing stages? The primary question is further defined by these secondary questions:

- In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help less developed emergent writers?
- In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help more developed emergent writers?
- To what extent does the skill instruction given during interactive writing carry over to kindergartners' independent writing?
In this chapter I will address the research design, where the study took place, how participants were selected for the study, the procedures for the study, methods of data collection, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study was designed as a typical case sampling that was purposeful and convenient (McMillan, 2004). It was convenient because I was able to conduct the research in my own classroom. It was purposeful because I was able to look closely at the effects of interactive writing on students who were at different emergent writing levels and to see if skills taught during the interactive writing lessons transferred to the students’ journal writing.

After reading research by Williams and Hufnagel (2005), Brotherton and Williams (2002), and Willimans and Lundstrom (2007) and discussing my study with my advisor, Dr. Penny Beed, I decided to examine the interactive writing lessons to find out the ways that students at different emergent writing stages participated in the lessons and to find out what skills were taught. I also wanted to find out if the students were able to transfer what was taught during interactive writing lessons to independent journal writing.

As in the Williams and Hufnagel (2005) and Brotherton and Williams (2002) studies, I planned to determine specifically which skills were taught during the instructional sessions. Since I wanted to find out which skills were being used by my students in addition to what was being taught during the lessons (like Williams and Hufnagle and Williams and Lundstrom [2007]) I looked for the extent of transfer to my students’ independent writing.
Setting

This research was conducted in a kindergarten classroom in a rural central Iowa school district. The kindergarteners participated in an all day kindergarten program. The district is a small consolidated district that has an enrollment of around 350 students K-12. The district is made up of students who come from farms and small towns, and has a large open enrollment population from a nearby larger town. The study took place over nine school weeks from November of 2008 to February of 2009.

The writing program that was used consisted of interactive writing lessons connected to the themes that are taught and independent journal writing time. All writing instruction took place during the interactive writing lessons. Students had a chance to practice the skills they had learned while writing independently in their journals.

Participants

The research participants included four kindergarten students selected from the teacher-researcher's classroom of thirteen students. The ages of the focus students ranged from 5.2 to 5.9 when the research study began. All were of Caucasian descent. Three of the students in the study were male and one was female. For the purpose of this study students were selected based on the type of writers they were as indicated by their performance on the Conventions of Writing Development Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) which was determined using a writing sample at the end of the first quarter. Two students were chosen from those who were writing at the less developed emergent writing level and two were chosen from those who were at a more advanced emergent writing level. To be part of the less developed emergent writer group students needed to have scored at Level one, two, or three on the Conventions of Writing Developmental
Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick). To be in the more developed group of emergent writers students needed to have scored at Level four or higher on the Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick).

To select the students for the study, the teacher-researcher first examined all of the children’s writing samples to determine at what stage they were writing. After examining the writing samples of all thirteen students in the class there were seven students who were in the more developed emergent writer group and six in the less developed emergent writers group. Parents of five students who were in the low emergent writer group and five students who were in the higher emergent writer group were sent a letter and consent form asking for permission for their child to participate in the study. Of the seven students who were in the more developed emergent writer group one student was a second year kindergarten so he was not included in the study. The other student whose parents did not receive a letter is a drug-effect baby and has been labeled as extremely ADHD. To choose the five who got letters in the low emergent writer group the researcher used her class list. The first five students on the list were sent letters. In the letter they were told that they would return their consent forms to another teacher, who would not disclose their forms to the teacher-researcher until grades have been given at the end of the school year. The consent forms were then indeed returned to a colleague of the researcher, who then randomly selected two students from each group from those whose parents gave consent and gave the names to the researcher. Both of the students in the advanced emergent writer group were males; the less emergent writer group consisted of one female and one male.
Procedures

The focus students took part in interactive writing lessons taught to the entire kindergarten class of 13 students every other day. Recall that interactive writing is a method in which the teacher and students work together to compose text. All students are able to work at levels beyond their independent levels with the support of the teacher (McCarrier et al., 2000).

The lessons lasted between five and fifteen minutes and were immediately followed by time for the students to write independently in their journals. The interactive writing lessons allowed the teacher to model skills such as identifying and writing the beginning sound of a word, putting a space between words, and using punctuation, for all of the students. The teacher was also able to provide guided practice of these skills. Interactive writing lessons were the primary method of writing instruction used with the students. During the study a detailed list of skills taught and sentences written during interactive writing lessons was kept by the teacher-researcher. The interactive writing lessons were audio-taped in order to examine on what skills the participants of the study worked and to keep track of what each student wrote during the lessons.

Students chosen to participate in the study (the focus students) participated equally along with all of the other students in the writing activities. However, the independent writing of the students chosen for the study was examined more closely and more frequently to see whether they were independently incorporating skills taught during previous interactive writing lessons. Their work was also examined to see if they were exhibiting more development as writers in their independent writing by using the Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999). Both were
done by the teacher-researcher at the beginning of the study, after the 3rd and 6th weeks and at the end of the study.

Before the nine week study began and again at the end of the nine weeks the teacher-researcher administered two subtests from Marie Clay's Observation Survey (2002) to all of the members of the class. The subtests were the Hearing and Writing Sounds in Words subtest and the Writing Vocabulary subtest. The answers and scores of the students in the study were examined to see if there was evidence of growth for these students as well to see if the students were using skills taught during interactive writing lessons.

Data Collection

Data were collected for this study from teacher lesson plans, audio recordings of interactive writing lessons, writings done during interactive writing lessons, independent journal writing samples, student test papers from Clay's (2002) Writing Vocabulary test and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test.

Student's independent journal writing samples were collected at the beginning of the study, at the end of weeks three and six, and at the end of the study. Pre and post testing was done using two tests from Marie Clay's Observation Survey (2002): the Writing Vocabulary subtest and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words subtest. Both were given at the beginning and end of the data collection. The Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words subtest was chosen since it shows how many sounds students are able to record while having a sentence dictated to them. The Writing Vocabulary subtest was chosen since it gives students the opportunity write down all words that they believe they know how to write.
Audio recordings were kept of the interactive writing lessons in order to keep track of the skills taught and how often, and the contributions that each focus student made to the writing. The focus students’ journals were also examined at the beginning of the study, after the third and sixth weeks, and at the end of the study. The journals were examined for stage of emergent writing using the Conventions of Writing Development Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) and to see if skills taught and practiced during interactive writing lessons were carrying over to student’s independent writing.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed inductively (McMillan, 2004, Williams & Hufnagel, 2005) looking for links between the skills taught during interactive writing lessons and skills demonstrated in each student’s writing. Multiple sources of writing data were looked at which allowed for triangulation (McMillan). The students’ writing was also examined to see the extent of growth from the beginning of the study to the end.

The first step in the data analysis was to make a sequential list of skills that were taught during the interactive writing lessons and to track the number of lessons in which each skill was taught. This was accomplished by reviewing lesson plans, the tapes of the interactive writing lessons, and works composed during the interactive writing lessons.

Next, writing samples from the focus students’ journals were examined to see which skills were demonstrated in their independent writing. The samples were examined for use of each skill that had been taught during the interactive writing lessons. When evidence of the use of skill was found it was listed under the student’s name. The teacher-researcher also looked at the writing samples to decide at what stage of writing development the students were when each sample was written.
Next, the teacher-researcher looked at the pre- and post-tests from Marie Clay’s Observation Survey (2002). The Writing Vocabulary Subtest and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words Subtest showed the nature of each student’s growth from the beginning of the study to the end. On the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words Subtest the number of correct sounds written was compared to see if growth had been made by the students. On the Writing Vocabulary Subtest the numbers of words written correctly was compared to see if the students had a larger writing vocabulary at the end of the study than at the beginning.

Finally, the focus students’ work from the Writing Vocabulary subtest and Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words from the end of the study were also examined for evidence of the use of skills taught during interactive writing lessons. The findings are reported in the results section of the paper.
Chapter 4

Results

Choosing effective methods of writing instruction is critical for helping emergent writers develop as writers. In order to find out if interactive writing was a method of writing instruction that would benefit students at different writing stages, I collected data and examined it to see what effects interactive writing had on my students. My research looked at the primary question: In what ways does interactive writing support the needs of all students in kindergarten even though they are at different emergent writing stages? The primary question was further defined by these secondary questions:

- In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help less developed emergent writers?
- In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help more developed emergent writers?
- To what extent does the skill instruction given during interactive writing carry over to kindergartners’ independent writing?

Four kindergarten students were chosen as the focus students for this study. The two students in the more developed emergent writers group were both male. The less developed emergent writers group consisted of one male and one female. In order to answer each question I examined the data collected from the focus students’ writing samples, lesson plans, interactive writings created as a class, and audio recordings of interactive writing sessions to determine the ways in which each student’s development was affected. Before going into a detailed analysis of each question a description of which skills were taught during the interactive writing lessons is given.
The Content of the Interactive Writing Lessons

Nineteen interactive writing lessons, taught over nine school weeks, were included in this research study. The teacher lessons plans, recordings of the lessons, and works produced were examined to find out what skills were taught and how often. The skills of identifying beginning sounds and stretching a word to hear sounds were worked on, as well as the concepts of the alphabetic principle (the idea that sounds are represented by letters), and what is a word (the understanding of what makes up a word, where a word starts and stops) were worked on in all nineteen interactive writing lessons. For a breakdown of all concepts and skills taught and how often they were taught see Table 1.

Modeling and scaffolding of students’ skills were part of each interactive writing lesson. During each lesson I modeled and discussed stretching out words to listen for the sounds, writing the corresponding letter in the correct place on the page for the students, and using spaces between words as I wrote. Students were chosen for participation (sharing of the pen with me) based on what skills they were using in their independent writing and given chances to practice skills that had been taught that they were not yet using in their independent writing. They were also given chances to practice skills already learned to reinforce the correct use of those skills.

Table 1

Number of Lessons in Which Each Skill or Concept was Taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills taught</th>
<th># lessons in which taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch out word to hear sounds</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at end of sentence</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The format and the topic of the interactive writing varied during the nineteen lessons. We made five lists, completed one bubble map (a graphic organizer from Thinking Maps, Inc. that our district uses—see Appendix A for example), wrote one letter, and composed seven different paragraphs that were connected to the theme that we were studying or to our reading lessons (see Appendix B for list of topics by writing type). An example of each type of writing done together during the interactive writing lessons is included in Appendix C.

Fourteen of the nineteen lessons followed all six steps for conducting an interactive writing lesson as described by Boroski (2004). Recall that the six steps were as follows:

1. *Negotiate a sentence*. The teacher and students work together to compose meaningful text that can be read by everyone.

2. *Count the words on fingers*. As the teacher repeats the sentence slowly, one finger is held up for each word spoken.
3. *Recall the word to be written and stretch the word.* “The teacher articulates the word slowly using a technique known as “stretching the word.” As the word is stretched, or spoken slowly, the students listen for the individual phonemes that make up the word” (p.2).

4. *Share the pen.* “A student volunteer uses the pen... to write part of the word or the whole word on the chart paper” (p.2). The teacher provides support so that the student is able to correctly write his/her part. The teacher may write all or part of a word so that the text can be read by others. Conventional spelling is used in order for the text to be readable by others.

5. *Point and read.* “Once the word has been written on the chart, the teacher or a student can use the pointer to point to the word as it is read” (p.3).

6. *Recall the entire sentence to be written, then go back to step 3.* “The teacher and students repeat the sentence they have agreed to write to refresh their memory. The next word in the sentence becomes the new focus” (p.3).

The five lessons that did not include the six steps were lessons in which the class made lists of things needed for upcoming activities or listed words that were related to the theme we were studying at the time. In those lessons we did not work together to come up with a sentence to be written or count the words on our fingers. We started by coming up with the word to be written and stretching it to hear the sounds to be written. Next, the students and I collaboratively wrote the words on our list, reading the word
after it was written. Then we reread the whole list of words before coming up with the next word to be written.

In the following sections, I provide findings related to each research question. The purpose of my primary research question was to examine the instruction provided during interactive writing for ways that kindergarteners at different emergent writing levels were supported as they developed as writers. My secondary questions looked specifically at the support given to less developed emergent writers, more developed emergent writers, and at the independent writing of students in both groups.

The Writing of the Less Developed Emergent Writers

The secondary research question, "In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help less developed emergent writers?" guided my data collection as I looked at the less developed emergent writers. Sarah and Thomas (all names are pseudonyms), the two students in the group of less developed emergent writers, were both at Level 3, Precommunicative, on the Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) pre-test at the beginning of the study. They wrote with a purpose and would attempt to read back what was written. Both were able to write their own names independently. Thomas used random letter strings or included an occasional known word. For example, he wrote “I M C” for “I am playing in the snow.” (see Appendix D for this example). Sarah would copy a string of words off the word wall (the place in the classroom where words sight words and other important words are posted by initial letter for students to reference), but when she read what she wrote back to me, what she said did not include any of the words she had written down.
Sarah was present for all nineteen interactive writing lessons, while Thomas was present for eighteen of the lessons. Both participated with the group during the lessons. They took part in the process of deciding what should be written, counting the number of words to be written, recalling the word to be written, stretching it to hear the sounds, and rereading what had been written with the group.

Over the nineteen interactive writing lessons Sarah was an active participant in fifteen of the lessons, while Thomas was an active participant in twelve lessons. See Table 2 for a detailed list of the skills on which each student worked while “sharing the pen” during our interactive writing lessons. When it was each student’s turn to “share the pen,” the student was asked to identify the sound that we were looking for. For both Sarah and Thomas, this meant the sound at the beginning of the word and the letter that was needed to write that sound. When it was his or her turn, each then came to the easel and wrote the letter in the appropriate spot. This not only allowed us to work on identifying sounds, but it also reinforced the concept of what a word was, the directionality of print (the idea that you start on the left and go right), and idea of leaving a space between words.

Table 2

Skills Directly Worked on During Interactive Writing by Each Less Developed Emergent Writer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills participated in</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying beginning sound</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of the sentence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The format of the interactive writing lessons allowed me to call on the students in the group of less developed emergent writers to “share the pen” when working on skills that they needed assistance with. Since I knew that Sarah and Thomas, both at Level 3, Precommunicative (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999), were not using sounds when writing independently, I was able to model stretching out the word and identifying the first sound that was heard. I also called upon both students to identify the beginning sound of words and write the letter needed. This allowed them to practice these skills in a setting that allowed for teacher support when needed.

The Writing of the More Developed Emergent Writers

Then next secondary research question that guided my research was, “In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help more developed emergent writers?” The two students in the group of more developed emergent writers were Brad, initially at Level 5, Phonetic, and Ryan, at Level 4, Semiphonetic, on the Conventions of Writing Developmental Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) pre-test. Initially, Brad, at Level 5, was using beginning and ending consonant sounds, using some vowels in his words (e.g. rodin for riding and goien for going), spelling common sight words correctly in sentences (e.g. I, am, and see), and writing one or more sentences. Ryan, at Level 4, was matching some letters to sounds, writing left to write, writing one or more sentences and including some sight words, (such as I, a, and to) in his sentences.

Brad was present for all nineteen interactive writing lessons, while Ryan was present for eighteen of the lessons. Both students were involved and contributed to the conversations during the lessons. During the lessons they were on task and participated in the process of deciding what should be written, counting the number of words to be
written, recalling the word to be written, stretching it to hear the sounds, and rereading what had been written with the group.

Brad was an active participant during twelve of the nineteen interactive writing lessons, while Ryan was an active participant for thirteen of the lessons. During these lessons they took an active role in the writing of our text. See the Table 3 for a detailed list of skills on which the two students worked while “sharing the pen”. When it was each one’s turn to “share the pen,” the student worked on stretching out the word to hear the sound for which we were looking, identifying the sound and letter that we needed to write for that sound, and writing the letter. For example during one lesson Ryan identified the ending sound “d” in good and wrote the d in the correct place. In another lesson Brad was able to hear all three sounds in fun and write the letters. In addition to identifying the sound and writing the letter needed, each student worked on directionality of print, used spaces between words, and reinforced his concept of a word.

Table 3

Skills Worked on During Interactive Writing Lessons by Each More Developed Emergent Writer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills participated in</th>
<th>Brad</th>
<th>Ryan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying beginning sound</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying ending sound</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying middle sound</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stretch and write entire word</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the students in the group of less developed emergent writers, the interactive writing lesson format allowed me to provide support for skills for which the students in the more developed emergent writer group were ready. I knew from looking
at Ryan and Brad’s writing that each was able to identify sounds in words, usually the beginning sounds, and that each was using some sight words when writing. Therefore, I was able to plan interactive writing lessons that allowed them to work on skills they were ready to develop. I was able to model stretching words to hear the ending sound and writing the letter needed for that sound. I was able to have them participate in identifying and writing these sounds as the class worked together on our texts.

_Carryover to Students’ Independent Writing_

The final secondary question that guided the data collection for my research was, “To what extent does the skill instruction given during interactive writing carry over to kindergartners’ independent writing?”

After examining the recordings of the nineteen interactive writing lessons, the works composed, and the teacher lesson plans, I was able to identify twelve skills or concepts for which I would be able to find evidence of application in the students’ independent writing pieces. This was accomplished by first listing all of the skills taught during the interactive writing lessons. I then looked at the list and eliminated any skills for which the application would not be evident when looking at the writing sample. For example the researcher cannot know for sure if a student stretched out the word to hear the sounds by looking at what she wrote. A guess can be made, but the researcher cannot be sure of what she did without observing her write the word. The students’ writing samples could then be examined for evidence of use. These skills or concepts were then examined to see which were taught during weeks one through three, weeks four through six, and weeks seven through nine. Table 4 provides a list of the twelve skills or concepts and shows in which time frame each was taught.
Table 4

*Time-Frame in Which Each Skill or Concepts Was Taught During Interactive Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Taught</th>
<th>Weeks 1-3</th>
<th>Weeks 4-6</th>
<th>Weeks 7-9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality of print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ending sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write a list</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter formation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of a sentence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a line when don’t know what to write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify middle sounds</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to use lower case letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetic principle</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Students’ journal writing.* The writing samples collected on the pre-tests showed that the students in the group of less developed emergent writers were both at Level 3 on the Conventions of Writing Development Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick, 1999) using random strings of letters, using directionality of print correctly, writing to tell a story, and trying to read it back. Sarah would write or copy a string of sight words but not include the words or their meanings in her “reading” of her story.

The students in the group of more developed emergent writers, one at Level 4 and one at Level 5 on the Conventions of Writing Development Scale (Feldgus & Cardonick), both initially showed use of some word wall words (sight words and other important words that have been taught and posted for students to reference), directionality of print, correct identification of beginning sounds and writing the letter for the identified sounds. Brad’s writing also showed the use of identification of middle and ending sounds and
writing letters for those sounds. See Table 5 for a list of the skills taught during the interactive writing and indicators of which of those skills each student used in independent journal writing before the study began.

Table 5

Skills Used by Students in Independent Writing Samples Before Study Began

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Taught</th>
<th>Less Developed Emergent Writers</th>
<th>More Developed Emergent Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knew</td>
<td>Knew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality of print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ending sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write a list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter formation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of a sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a line when don't know what to write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify middle sounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to use lower case letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetic principle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After breaking down the skills and concepts taught during each three week period, students' writing samples from their journals were examined to see if there was evidence of carryover from the interactive writing lessons to students' independent writing during each time period.

Weeks one through three. At the end of week three the students' writing was examined for evidence of the skills or concepts worked on during our interactive writing lessons in weeks one through three (See Table 4). The writing of the students in the group of less developed emergent writers continued to show use of directionality of print and
correct letter formation. The writing of students in the group of more developed emergent writers showed proper identification of beginning and ending sounds, use of the alphabetic principle, directionality of print, and correct letter formation. One student, Ryan, began using a new skill during this time period. He used a period at the end of his sentence. See Table 6 for comparison of skills students' used before weeks one through three and used after weeks one through three.

Table 6

Comparison of Skills Used in Writing Before and After Weeks One through Three.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Less Developed Emergent Writers</th>
<th>More Developed Emergent Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills taught in weeks one through three</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality of print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ending sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write a list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter formation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of a sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetic principle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weeks four through six.* After week six the writing of the students in the group of less developed emergent writers again showed use of directionality of print and correct
letter formation. Sarah’s writing also demonstrated use of the alphabetic principle, identifying beginning sounds, middle sounds, and writing down letters for the sounds heard. Thomas’s writing continued to consist of strings of letters that showed no connection to the sounds in the words he “read.” The students in the group of more developed emergent writers writing samples continued to show use of identifying beginning and ending sounds, directionality of print, correct letter formation, word wall words, and use of the alphabetic principle. This was the first time that Brad’s and Ryan’s writing included middle sounds. Table 7 provides a comparison of the skills evident in students’ independent writing before and after weeks four through six.

Table 7

*Comparison of Skills Used in Writing Before and After Weeks Four through Six*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less Developed Emergent Writers</th>
<th>More Developed Emergent Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Thomas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills taught in weeks four through six</strong></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality of print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ending sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write a list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter formation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of a sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Skills taught in weeks four through six**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Less Developed Emergent Writers</th>
<th>More Developed Emergent Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a line when don't know what to write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify middle sounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetic principle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Weeks seven through nine.** From the writing samples taken at the end of the study the writing of all the students showed the use of beginning sounds, use of the alphabetic principle, directionality of print, and correct letter formation. This was the first time that Thomas’s writing had shown use of beginning sounds. His writing showed that he now understood the alphabetic principle. Of the students in the group of less developed emergent writers Sarah was able to demonstrate the use of middle and ending sounds.

Both students in the group of more developed emergent writers continued to demonstrate the use of middle and ending sounds. In addition their writings showed the use of the word wall to write sight words correctly. During this time period Ryan, Brad and Sarah did not demonstrate the use of new skills in their independent writing samples. They did show continued use of the skills learned. Thomas’s writing showed that he had made the letter sound connection (the alphabetic principle) and he was now representing some words with a single letter for the beginning sound and using the word wall to write
sight words. See Table 8 for a break down comparing the use of the skills in independent writing before and after weeks seven through nine.

Table 8

*Comparison of Skills Used in Writing Before and After Weeks Seven through Nine*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills taught in weeks seven through nine</th>
<th>Less Developed Emergent Writers</th>
<th>More Developed Emergent Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah Before</td>
<td>Thomas Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality of print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ending sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write a list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter formation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of a sentence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify middle sounds</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to use lower case letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Taught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetic principle</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words (Clay, 2002)**

The Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay, 2002) was administered at the beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study. The students were asked to write down the sounds they heard in the words of a dictated sentence. For this study I used Form A “I have a big dog at home. Today I am going to take him to school.” at the start of the study and Form D “The bus is coming. It will stop here to let me get on.” (Clay, 2002, p. 115) at the end of the study. The students were given a point for each sound they represented with the correct letter. There were a possible 37 correct phonemes (sounds) in the dictated sentences. See Table 9 for individual students’ scores.

Table 9

**Students’ Scores on the Assessment “Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words” (Clay, 2002)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When test was given</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
<th>Brad</th>
<th>Ryan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start of Study</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Study</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student’s score is the number of correct sounds out of 37 possible

See Table 10 for a list of the skills taught and each students’ use of skills on the post-test.

Table 10

**Each Child’s Post-Test Use of Skills and Concepts Taught on the Assessment “Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words” (Clay, 2002)**
The students in the group of less developed emergent writers showed significant growth on this test when compared to the students in the more developed emergent writer group. Sarah and Thomas both showed growth in the skills that were used on the post-test. Sarah’s score went up five points and Thomas’s score went up eight points. While the students’ in the group of more developed emergent writers showed little growth. Brad’s score went up one point and Ryan’s score went down three points.

Writing vocabulary. The Writing Vocabulary test (Clay, 2002) was given to the students both at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study. For this test students were given ten minutes to write down as many words as they knew how to write. Students were given credit for correctly spelled words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-test use of skills and concepts taught</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
<th>Thomas</th>
<th>Brad</th>
<th>Ryan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify beginning sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directionality of print</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify ending sound</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space between words</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to write a list</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letter formation</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period at the end of a sentence</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a line when don’t know what to write</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify middle sounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word wall to write sight words</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to use lower case letters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concept</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphabetic principle</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This test was a very difficult test for my students to complete both during the pre- and post-testing. All of the students struggled to come up with words that they knew how to write even when given allowable prompts such as “Do you know any names you can write?” “Do you know how to write Mom or Dad?” The students found it difficult to stay focused on writing words for the ten minutes and were easily distracted by others in the room. I observed them looking for any word that they could find to copy down instead of trying to write words that they knew.

The most developed writer of all of the students in the study was only able to correctly write three words (Brad, Mom, and Dad) in the ten minutes on the test given at the end of the research study. At the same time he was able to correctly write six words on the Hearing Sounds in Words test (Clay, 2002) and had spelled many words correctly for me without assistance during our interactive writing lessons.

After observing my students take the test and looking over what was written by the students, I did not see data that would help me better understand my students as writers. It did not provide me with a true picture of the type of writers my students were. As a result of this finding, I did not analyze the data from the pre and post tests on this assessment any further.
Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways that interactive writing supports the needs of all kindergarten students even though they are at different emergent writing stages. The results of the research were analyzed inductively using a constant comparative method of data analysis (McMillan, 2004). In this section I will discuss themes and trends found, implications, limitations, and recommendations.

Themes and Trends

Several key themes or trends were found when further analysis was done on the data collected during this research study. One was that the skills taught during interactive writing carry over to students’ independent writing. Data from examining both the students’ journal writing and the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay, 2002) showed that skills modeled and practiced during interactive writing lessons were demonstrated by the students while writing independently. For example, in his independent journal Thomas began to identify beginning sounds, use the word wall to write sight words and use of the alphabetic principle. On the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay) he was also able to identify ending sounds. On her independent writing Sarah was able to identify beginning and middle sounds, and use the alphabetic principle. On the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay) she could identify ending sounds and the sight word to was spelled correctly. It was not possible to tell if she used the word wall to spell to, had learned to spell to, or identified both sounds in the word. Brad showed use of identifying middle sounds and using spaces between words in both his independent journal writing and on the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay). Ryan was identifying ending and middle sounds both in his
independent journal writing and on the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay). He also used spaces between words on the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words test (Clay) and in his independent journal writing was using a period at the end of a sentence. This is comparable to the findings of Williams and Lundstrom (2007).

Another important theme was that despite considerable differences in skill and concept development among emergent writers at the kindergarten level, the interactive writing format allowed the teacher to provide support based on the students' individual needs. Students can be involved in creating text together and have opportunities for guided practice of very different skills during the same activity. For example in one lesson Thomas worked on identifying and writing the beginning sound of the word my, while Brad worked on identifying and writing all of the sounds in the word fun. As Button et al. (1996) found, interactive writing allows teachers to plan instruction based on their knowledge and understanding of their students' needs.

An additional key theme was that the format of the interactive writing lesson allowed for a wide variety of skills to be taught in authentic ways using modeling and scaffolding of skills. Being able to model writing skills for the students while do writing for a real purpose provided great examples to the students. By providing support while having students work on skills they would not be able to do independently, the teacher is able to scaffold the students' learning and provide opportunity for guided practice all while writing for a real reason. The data indicated that skills needed for emergent writers to grow as writers can be taught while writing for real reasons. This is similar to findings by Button et al. (1996) and Brotherton and Williams (2002).
Research questions

This study's purpose was to find out in what ways interactive writing supports the needs of all students in kindergarten even though they are at different emergent writing stages. The results of the study will be further examined by looking at each of the secondary research questions.

In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help less developed emergent writers? Through the use of interactive writing the students in the group of less developed emergent writers were able to participate in the writing that could not have been done independently. Instruction was given on skills both students were developing. Both students were able to "share the pen" while working on the skills they had not yet begun to use independently. They saw proper use of skills modeled for them not only by their teacher, but by classmates as well. The interactive writing lessons provided repeated examples of the correct use of skills at the students' instructional level.

In what ways does the support given during interactive writing help more developed emergent writers? As with the students in the group of less developed emergent writers the students in the group of more developed writers were able to participate in writing that could not have been done on their own. Both students participated in the lessons in a variety of ways that supported the skills they were learning and reinforced skills already developed. While "sharing the pen" the students in this group not only worked on new skills with the support of teacher, they practiced skills already learned and modeled these skills for their classmates.

To what extent does the skill instruction given during interactive writing carry over to kindergartners' independent writing? The interactive writing lessons comprise
the total writing instruction program the children receive in this kindergarten classroom. Therefore, it is likely that most or all of the progress that the children demonstrate in their independent writing is a result of the instruction given and opportunities for guided practice provided during interactive writing lessons.

In this study, the independent writing of all the focus students showed the use of skills taught during interactive writing lessons. The transfer of skills from use during interactive writing to independent writing was different for all of the students. The data from examining the student’s journal writing show that it took longer for the students in the less developed emergent writers to transfer skills to their independent writing. It wasn’t until after six weeks into the study that Sarah showed any growth. It took Thomas until the end of the study to show any use of new skills, but once he learned them, he began applying them consistently. The students in the group of more developed emergent writers did not take as long to transfer skills to their independent writing. At the end of week three Ryan was identifying ending sounds in words and using a period at the end of a sentence. After week six Brad showed use of spaces between words. Both Brad and Ryan showed use of identifying middles sounds, which was first worked on in weeks four through six, at the end of week six.

Data from the Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words assessment (Clay, 2002) showed that over the course of the study the students in the group of less developed emergent writers demonstrated more growth than students in the group of more developed emergent writers. On the post-test Sarah’s score was five points higher and Thomas’s score was eight points higher. While the students in the group of more developed emergent writers showed little or no growth. Brad’s score went up one point,
while Ryan’s score went down three points. It may be that since both of Brad’s scores were close to the maximum number possible we did not work on skills that would be needed to get a much higher score. Ryan’s score may have gone down because he may have known some of the words that were in the sentence given for the pre-test or found them easier to hear the sound in. The words on the post-test may have been more challenging for him.

Of all the students in the study Thomas showed the least amount of growth. Even though he had many opportunities to participate in the interactive writing lessons it took him much longer to carry over any skills to his independent writing. In the classroom he is struggling to recall how to write all of the letters of the alphabet. When working on writing down the sounds that he hears he does fine making the connection that $N$ says /n/, but he struggles to figure out what $N$ looks like so that he can write it down. This is most likely affecting what he is able to write independently. Some of the time he gets frustrated and just writes down a random letter or writes nothing for the sound that he can isolate and hear.

*Implications for Teaching*

This research study offers information about how interactive writing supports the needs of writers across all levels of the emergent continuum. With the increasing popularity of interactive writing it is important to show that it is, in fact, an effective method of writing instruction for emergent writers. The data from this study showing growth in the use of skills and concepts taught during interactive writing during independent writing time is corroborated by the findings of Button et al. (1996) and Williams and Lundstrom (2007). As more studies are completed on the effectiveness of
interactive writing, teachers will have more information available to use when making instructional decisions. This will help teachers judge whether or not the method of instruction they have chosen to use is one that will meet the needs of their students.

**Limitations of the study**

One of the limitations of this study is that the data were collected over a time period of only nine school weeks. Since the time frame was short, it is difficult to tell if the same kind of results would be produced after a longer instructional period.

Knowing how much writing practice the students are receiving at home is another limitation of this study. Without knowing how much writing is done at home it is difficult to determine if interactive writing is the reason for the growth the students made.

Another limitation is that the study took place in just one kindergarten classroom. The students in the class all come from rural Iowa. This means that their experiences and the background they bring with them to school are very different from that of students living in large urban areas. Since the sample of students was small it is hard to tell if the findings will generalize to other populations.

A final limitation of this study is that it looked only at the use of interactive writing during whole group instruction. It is difficult to tell if the results would have been the same if interactive writing were used with small heterogeneous groups of students or even with a larger class, with twice the number of students. Further study in this area may tell us if it is better to use interactive writing with large or small groups of students.

**Recommendations**

Based upon the data from this research study as well as information from the studies reviewed in the literature, it would seem that the use of interactive writing is an
effective method of writing instruction for emergent writers. Interactive writing offers the teacher opportunities to model the use of skills for a variety of students; it also provides students with guided practice of skills being learned in authentic writing situations (Button et al, 1996; Brotherton & Williams, 2002). Finally, it creates a link to students’ independent writing by involving them in authentic writing situations (Williams & Lundstrom, 2007).

In conclusion, interactive writing is a method of group writing instruction that allows teachers to meet the needs of a variety of emergent writers through authentic participatory writing experiences. The teacher and the students collaborate to decide the topic and the message and to plan and transcribe the written message. The teacher “shares the pen” with individual students who are asked to contribute sounds and letters that are just beyond the skills that they have learned. The findings of this research study in a kindergarten setting indicate that groups of less developed emergent writers and more developed emergent writers who participated in interactive writing showed growth in writing skills and transferred these skills to their independent writing. It is likely that this growth resulted from instruction received during interactive writing lessons.
Reference List


Appendix A
Bubble Map Example

- Zebra
- Black and white
- Stripes
- Mane
- Tail
- 4 legs
### Appendix B

**Types of Writing Done during Interactive Writing Lessons and Topics Written About**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of writing done and topics written about</th>
<th>Lists</th>
<th>Bubble Map</th>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Paragraph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td></td>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>Santa Letter</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How make a Santa bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas tree items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What we did over break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What we need to make pizza</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone Soup ingredients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Animals in winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Things done 100 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C

Samples of Each Type of Writing Done During Interactive Writing Lessons
All writing done by the teacher is underlined.

List

- bights
- ornaments
- star
- tree
- stand
- presents
- bells
- ribbon
- tree skirt
- tinsel

Bubble Map

- wet
- cold
- soft
- takes
- snow
- write
- hard
Letter

Dear Santa,

We have been good.

Love,
Mrs. Henze's class

Paragraph

Winter

Some animals migrate in winter.

Some animals hibernate during the winter.
Appendix D
Writing Sample from Before Study Began from a Less Emergent Writer

I am playing in the snow 11-14-08