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The Impact of Word Study Instruction on Kindergarten Children's Journal Writing

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The research reported here examined word study as an approach to spelling instruction. In particular, the researchers investigated kindergarten children's transfer of specific words, word knowledge, concepts about print, and strategies for spelling unknown words to their self-selected journal writing. Results of the study indicated that the classroom teacher taught the children a wide range of fundamental concepts and strategies, and all of the focal students transferred word study instruction to their independent writing. The teacher's whole-group approach, however, did not meet the instructional needs of the children with the highest or the lowest literacy knowledge and ability. Findings suggest that small-group, instructional-level word study instruction may be necessary for optimum results, even in the kindergarten setting.

When young children are learning to write, they are immediately confronted with a host of conventions to address, including conventional spelling. Spelling is an important component of learning to write, for being able to spell fluently allows young children to focus on the message they are composing and the meaning they wish to create. Young children's acquisition of spelling has received considerable attention in the research literature, and a large body of work describes their developmental knowledge of the patterns of English orthography and their use of phonological and morphological strategies to spell unfamiliar words. This research has given rise to a number of instructional programs designed to reflect children's developing awareness of English orthography. *Word study,* the most recent approach to spelling instruction, moves away from memorization and the test-study-test cycle (Fitzgerald, 1953) to involve children in active exploration of the principles of English orthography—how English words *work*. Teachers engage students in a variety of activities that help them to see the regularities, patterns, and

derivations in English words and to use this knowledge to guide their spelling during writing.

A number of word study methods texts have been published recently (e.g., *Words Their Way,* Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2000; *Word Savvy,* Brand, 2004; *Making Words,* Cunningham & Hall, 1994; *Word Matters,* Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). These texts provide teachers a scope and sequence of word study instruction, as well as myriad activities, word lists, assessments, and organizational techniques to support "word work" in the elementary classroom. Instructional videos accompany some of these texts to demonstrate how teachers "organize their classrooms for study and conduct word study lessons" (Bear, et al., p. vi). Book sales of these "how-to" manuals and their use in university teacher-preparation programs suggest the growing popularity of word study as an instructional method.

While word study is grounded in research on developmental spelling, few investigations document the effectiveness of word study as a comprehensive approach to spelling instruction or address its impact on young children's writing. Can word study effectively replace traditional approaches to teaching spelling? Do children transfer word study concepts and strategies to their independent writing? Preliminary studies (Anderson, O'Flahavan, & Guthrie, 1996; Brandt & Gielbelhaus, 2000; Elliot & Rietschel, 1999) lend support, but further research is clearly warranted.

The purpose of the research reported here was to examine the use of word study as a systematic approach to spelling instruction in kindergarten. In particular, this investigation addressed the impact of word study instruction on kindergarten children's spelling during journal writing. We were primarily interested in whether young children would internalize the word knowledge, concepts about print, and spelling strategies that were taught through a word study approach and apply them as they wrote self-selected messages in their journals.

Review of Related Literature

Theoretical Frame

Our project was grounded in sociocultural perspectives that view learning as inherently social (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1991). Children make sense of recurrent activities of classroom life through participation and social interaction with others, and language mediates their learning (Rogoff, 1990). Adults and more experienced peers offer instruction and guidance, and through a kind of apprenticing, children actively construct understandings of shared experiences. Immersion in meaningful activity and frequent practice are essential (Cambourne, 1995; Gee, 2001). Over time, children come to control specific knowledge and skills, and they assume new roles and responsibilities within socially situated activities. In effective learning environments, teachers and

expert others help children to recognize and apply these resources to the demands of new learning tasks (Vygotsky, 1978).

Our work was also framed by prior research in *emergent literacy,* a term that refers to preschool children's knowledge and understandings about written language and the "not-yet-conventional" ways in which they read and write (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. vii). Emergent literacy represents a re-conceptualization of our understanding of the nature and importance of children's early literacy development by deeming legitimate the literacy-related knowledge and behaviors that precede conventional literacy. As a theoretical orientation, emergent literacy stands in contrast to *reading readiness,* an earlier (albeit persistent) perspective which suggests that literacy development begins with a set of skills considered prerequisite for learning to read, and that writing should be postponed until children are reading conventionally. Research in emergent literacy has demonstrated, however, that the ontogeny of literacy begins in the social contexts of the home and community, and that children may learn a great deal about reading and writing prior to formal instruction in school settings. The research also suggests that children's early experiences with print have a direct influence on their initial understanding of literacy in school and their subsequent reading achievement (Smith, 1997; Wells, 1986).

Emergent literacy research has historically focused on children from birth to age 5 or 6 in the home, preschool, or kindergarten setting, and investigations typically track children's movement from unconventional to conventional literacy (Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000). Research in emergent literacy represents a broad field of inquiry (e.g., oral language, print awareness, phonological processing), but most pertinent to our project were studies of children's emergent writing. A number of studies of emergent writing (e.g., Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984) suggest a common developmental trajectory. Initially, children use drawing and scribbles to write, and these drawings and scribbles represent specific people, objects, and actions; the drawings do not represent speech (Dyson, 1983). Early on, children are not encoding oral language but representing meaning in graphic form. For example, Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) found that when preschool children used scribbles or letter-like shapes to represent individuals or objects, the children's graphic representations often reflected the size or height of the person or object depicted (see also Schickedanz, 1990; Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1982). 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. As children move toward conventional literacy, letters come to represent syllables and, eventually, specific phonemes in words as children acquire the alphabetic principle (Clark, 1988; Ehri, 1988).

Studies of emergent writing have also demonstrated the inherently social nature of early writing development (Dyson, 1983, 1989, 1993; Williams, 1999). The phenomenon of interest in these investigations is not children's construction of the orthographic system per se, but, rather, "how written language itself assumes a substantive role within children's symbolic repertoires and social worlds" (Dyson, 2001a, p. 127). In a series of qualitative research projects on child writing, Dyson (1983, 1989, 1993) demonstrates how children's ways of interacting with others and with varied symbolic media are organizing forces in written language development. When young children begin to write, they weave together drawing, scribbles, talk, dramatic play, and, gradually, letters and words to express meaning in written form. Children's talk and the actions they use to participate in writing events tend to carry the bulk of meaning, not the graphics themselves (Luria, 1983; Newkirk, 1987). Over time, children negotiate the boundaries of each symbol system and come to understand that writing can fulfill the functions once served by their drawing, talk, and dramatic play. This is the developmental challenge of interest, and researchers suggest that it occurs through social dialogue as children interact with peers and adults during writing activities that fulfill personal and social purposes (Dyson, 1991; Williams, 1999).

From this vantage point, to examine children's written texts and fail to take into account the social and symbolic dynamics that help shape those texts is to create a limited view of the young child writer. Indeed, to understand writing development involves the study not only of children's increasing control over the orthographic system but also of growth and change in the nature of their participation in socially situated literacy events (Dyson, 2001a; Gee, 2001; Sulzby, 1990).

Children's Development of Orthographic Knowledge

Given our theoretical perspective, we situated our concern for spelling within the context of young children's literacy development in general. We coordinated spelling with reading and writing because these processes require similar knowledge about written language (Bear & Barone, 1989). Children draw on their orthographic knowledge to accomplish all three aspects of literacy (Ehri, 1997; Gill, 1992; Templeton, 2003; Zutell & Rasinski, 1989). We also knew that spelling development is supported by meaningful and sustained reading and writing experiences (Hughes & Searle, 1997; Temple, Nathan & Burris, 1982). Consequently, spelling instruction and word study should be part of the larger instructional context in which young children are learning to be print literate. As we demonstrate later in this paper, Krissy, the teacher in our focal kindergarten class, often integrated word study into her daily reading and writing instruction to demonstrate purposefully the relationship of spelling to each process.

The ability to spell develops over time as the learner comes to understand the roles of and relationships between phonology and morphology in English orthography (Cummings, 1998; Venezky, 1999). Learning to spell is a developmental pro-

cess, and as children explore the balance between sound and meaning in English spelling, they gradually internalize basic principles of the system. Research demonstrates that most children follow a similar developmental path, or series of stages or phases, in their acquisition of orthographic knowledge (Henderson, 1985; Templeton & Bear, 1992).

In the emergent or *preliterat*e stage, children's spellings consist of scribbles, letter-like shapes, and random letters. As indicated above, children have no knowledge of letter-sound correspondence and do not use writing to represent speech. *Letter-name* spellers understand the alphabetic nature of English orthography and have a rudimentary knowledge of letter-sound relations. They invent spellings by representing the sounds they hear with letters they know, and they frequently use the letter-name strategy to "represent words, sounds, or syllables with letters that match their letter names (e.g., "R [are]; U [you]; LEFT [elephant]" [Gentry, 1982, p. 194]). In the third stage, *within-word pattern*, children come to understand that graphemes and phonemes in common patterns relate to elements of sound, and they correctly spell consonant blends, consonant digraphs, and short vowel rimes (Ehri, 1995). They also use English markers for long vowels. Gradually, they acquire a basic understanding of how meaning is marked in print, and they represent the past-tense inflection with *-d* or *-ed*. The fourth stage, *syllable juncture,* is characterized by increasing orthographic awareness. Children use double consonants to mark short vowels and gain an understanding of when to double consonants with suffixes such as *-ed* and *-ing*. In the final stage, *derivational constancy*, children explore how English orthography reflects semantic relationships across derivationally related words. They understand the constancy of spelling in *confide* and *confidential* despite pronunciation.

Researchers do not necessarily believe that children move rigidly through these spelling stages (Brown & Ellis, 1994; Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Treiman & Cassar, 1997). Spelling development, like all literacy learning, is influenced by participation in recurrent literacy events as children construct hypotheses about written language through social interaction and personal experience (see Rowe, 1994). Indeed, Sulzby (1992, p. 295) suggests that children's writing development involves "building a repertoire of understandings with sociolinguistic properties." Nevertheless, these frameworks offer insight into children's development of word knowledge and provide important information for assessment and classroom instruction (Henderson & Templeton, 1986; Schlagal, 1992).

Word study is grounded in these developmental frameworks (see Bear & Barone, 1989; Bear et al., 2000; Zutell & Rasinski, 1989). Years of research on adults' and children's development of word knowledge and spelling fluency provide a foundation for the scope and sequence of word study instruction. The content of word study is also based on what researchers have discovered about the nature of English orthography, in particular, its alphabet, pattern, and meaning layers. Chil-

dren examine these layers of information and "discover the regularities, patterns, and rules of English orthography needed to read and spell" and increase their "specific knowledge of words" (Bear, et al., 2000, p. 4).

Teachers craft a systematic word study program based on a developmental assessment of children's word knowledge. Word study activities are typically hands-on, engaging children in comparing and contrasting categories of word features, and examining and discovering similarities and differences within and between categories (for examples see Bear et al., 2000; Cunningham & Hall, 1996; Fresch, 2000; Fresch & Wheaton, 1997; Graham, 2000; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Templeton, 1991; Zutell, 1998). Effective instruction addresses the features of words and concepts about print that students need to explore at their respective developmental levels. Word study instruction also helps children to broaden the range of strategies they use to read and spell unknown words (Invernizzi, Abouzeid, & Gill, 1994). Instruction on specific strategies has been shown to support children's spelling development (Bosman & Van Orden, 1997).

Research on Word Study

To ground our investigation in the current research literature, we searched for studies that specifically examine the efficacy of a systematic word study program on children's writing or spelling ability. We located numerous articles that describe the effectiveness of particular word study activities, but we found little published research that specifically addresses the impact of a systematic word study program on young children's writing. In fact, we found only three studies that examine word study as an instructional approach, and none of these was published in refereed journals.

In the earliest investigation, a report of the National Reading Research Center, Anderson et al. (1996) followed three slow-progress first graders over a four-month period as they participated in word study activities embedded within the context of classroom reading and writing events. The researchers were interested in the ways that embedded word study promoted the students' word knowledge, word recognition, and writing attempts. The three children selected for the study were the slowest progress readers and spellers in the class of 18 who did not receive supplemental services, as determined by performance on the *Developmental Spelling Analysis* (Ganske, 1993) and running records. The classroom teacher embedded word study instruction within the context of ongoing literacy events, and these were taught in both small-group and whole-group contexts. The researchers observed each focal student weekly, for two to six hours, as he or she participated in guided reading, buddy reading, independent reading, and independent writing activities. They documented the students' participation through field notes, and they photocopied weekly journal entries. Findings of the study indicate that the focal children exceeded all students in spelling knowledge at the end of the school

year as determined by their performance on a final administration of the *Developmental Spelling Analysis*. They also exceeded the class average in reading level. Analysis of the writing samples indicates that the students also showed "progress as writers" (p. 21). Based on these findings, the researchers argue for embedded word study instruction as a way to support students' progress in word knowledge, word recognition, and writing development.

In a later study, Elliot and Rietschel (1999) investigated the effects of instructional-level word study on second graders' application of spelling and phonics in their independent writing. The researchers divided the students into four homogeneous groups based on scores on the *Qualitative Spelling Inventory* (Bear & Templeton, 1996). The groups met two to three times each week for approximately 45 minutes from September through March and engaged in a variety of word study activities, including exploring and applying patterns in words, word sorts, word hunts, making words, and reading books and poems. Using a pre-test/post-test design, the researchers documented student performance on the *Qualitative Spelling Inventory,* on an adaptation of Clay's (1993) *Hearing Sounds in Words* test and collected samples of the students' writing. Results indicate that all students made progress in their phonemic analysis of words and ability to spell words correctly on a dictation test; students who spoke English as a second language made the greatest gains.

In the most recent study, Brandt and Gielbelhaus (2000) used a quasi-experimental approach to investigate the effectiveness of word study on the spelling achievement of 12 first through third grade students who had developmental handicaps. The instructional-level groups were determined by performance on the *Developmental Spelling Analysis* (Ganske, 1999). For a period of six weeks, each group received word study instruction at its developmental level. The researchers used 10-15 words for each week's lesson, and at the end of each week, the children were tested on their knowledge of these words. At the end of the six-week period, the researchers re-administered the *Developmental Spelling Analysis,* and results indicate a significant difference between pre- and post-test measures ($12=2.602$ $p>.05$). The researchers attribute student gains to the effectiveness of the word study program.

Each of these investigations suggests that word study instruction supports students' spelling ability and may contribute to their writing development. Our goal was to augment this limited research base by examining the impact of a word study program that was embedded within the daily reading and writing activities of a half-day kindergarten program. Specifically, we wanted to know if kindergartners *transferred* to their journal writing the specific words, word knowledge, concepts about print, and strategies for spelling unknown words that their teacher explicitly taught and modeled across one academic year. We realized, however, that transfer is not necessarily a straightforward process.

Transfer of Learning

As Dyson (1999, p. 144) suggests, "Teachers' pedagogical behaviors do not cause children's learning behaviors." We viewed transfer, like learning in general, from a sociocultural perspective. For children to transfer the knowledge and skills they learn in one context to another related context, they must recognize the commonalities between the two—in this case, word study and journal writing. Specific features that link the two activities must be apparent and make relevant the children's social and cognitive resources (Rogoff, Radziszewska, & Masiello, 1995). Since learning is socially constructed, transfer may also depend on the nature of the social interaction within that activity (Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith 1995).

A number of factors may influence whether children transfer word study instruction to their writing. The developmental challenges inherent in the writing process may contribute to a lack of transfer. Young children rarely control all aspects of the writing process at once (Graves, 1982; Jacobs, 1985). Individual children attend to particular aspects of the process at any given moment. Learning to orchestrate the various aspects of the writing process is part of the developmental challenge all young learners face.

Children's approaches to the writing task and the texts they produce are shaped not only by their knowledge and control of written language but also by their own intentions and stylistic preferences (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985). A lack of transfer may well be attributed to children enacting their own purposes during writing time, purposes more related to producing a text that meets the social expectations of peers rather than the academic expectations of teachers (Dyson, 1993, 1997). All school activities are bounded by certain historical, institutional guidelines for participation (Rogoff et al., 1995), yet research has repeatedly demonstrated that children do not always embrace teachers' assumptions and expectations for these events (Delpit, 1995; Dyson, 1993, 1997; Heath, 1983; Labbo, 1996; Williams, 1999). Rather, children make sense of school learning tasks by positioning them within familiar frames of reference (Bruner & Haste, 1987).

Dyson's (1989, 1993, 1997, 2003) extensive research on writing has illustrated in powerful ways how children make learning their own. Through rich descriptions of children's participation in open-ended composing periods, Dyson demonstrates how young children *transfer,* with seeming ease, out-of-school experiences and cultural material to the task of writing. For example, children take bits of songs, movies, cartoons, and video games and apply them to their daily journal entries. In so doing, they satisfy their teacher's directive to write, but they have also transformed the task into something personally meaningful and relevant. Dyson redefines this transfer as *recontextualization,* suggesting that children "contextualize new situations within what seem relevant frames of reference and use available means, given (as they see it) the demands or expectations of others" (1999, p. 156).

At one and the same time, young children are making sense of the social construct of "journal writing," the medium of written language, the writing task assigned, and their own purposes and intentions. Whether children transfer (or recontextualize) the concepts and strategies of word study instruction to their writing is most likely influenced by these factors and perhaps others yet to be explored.

Background of the Study

This project brought together a school-based researcher (Krissy) and a university-based researcher (Cheri), both of us early childhood educators keenly interested in young children's literacy learning. We met when Krissy took a graduate course on innovative approaches to literacy instruction. When the group examined and discussed various approaches to teaching spelling, several of the graduate students —all of whom were classroom teachers—indicated that they had replaced traditional spelling instruction (i.e., memorization of word lists and weekly spelling tests) with a word study approach. They knew that students often perform well on their weekly tests yet transfer little of this word knowledge to their writing (Chandler & The Mapleton Teacher-Research Group, 2000; Gill & Scharer, 1996; Laminack & Wood, 1996; Wright, 2000). Krissy had been using word study in her kindergarten for about a year, and she was interested in what the research had to say about the efficacy of this approach for supporting the children's literacy development.

After a short review of the literature, Krissy was struck by the paucity of research on word study as a comprehensive approach, and so to fulfill specific graduate program requirements, she proposed a classroom-based study to examine this question. Essentially, she wanted to know if her word study program was having an impact on the children's writing. Cheri had previously investigated various approaches to teaching spelling with other graduate-student teacher-researchers (Rymer & Williams, 2000; Beckham-Hungler & Williams, 2003). The findings of those projects suggested the potential of a word study approach, so she enthusiastically agreed to collaborate. Cheri visited in Krissy's classroom several times to get a feel for the instructional context and to see her word study program in action.

Krissy's primary goal in word study instruction was to support the children's development of a *working knowledge* of the alphabetic system, that is, knowledge that students would actually apply as they were reading and spelling words. Similar to the format of the Anderson et al. (1996) study, Krissy embedded word study instruction within the context of daily reading and writing events. Each day, Krissy engaged her students in a wide range of meaningful literacy activities, including morning message, the read aloud, shared reading, interactive writing, small-group guided reading instruction, and journal writing. Krissy integrated word study into one of these larger literacy events, and so instruction was most often taught in a whole-group context. Krissy also used separate mini-lessons to teach specific word study concepts.

The "word wall" and "word-wall words" were primary features of Krissy's word study program. Krissy had covered a large portion of the north wall of her classroom with a 32 x 16 ft. piece of green felt. The letters of the alphabet, from A to Z, spanned the horizontal width of the wall on the top edge. The purpose of the word wall was to display the words that Krissy was teaching ("word-wall words"), and to demonstrate the relationships between and among these target words. The word wall was visually prominent in the classroom and easily viewed by all children.

Each Monday, Krissy introduced one to five word-wall words, depending on the difficulty of the words and her goals for the week. Word-wall words included the "sight words" the district curriculum required kindergarteners to learn to read (*me, my, like, he, on, for, you*) and spell (*the, and, a, to, is, in, it, on, I*), suggested "high frequency" core words for kindergarteners (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998, p. 89), and words the children were attempting to spell in their journals.

To help the children learn the weekly word-wall words, Krissy had them "clap and cheer" each word she introduced. First, they examined each word for its visual features (tall letters, short letters, letters below the baseline) and talked about its spelling. Then, they would "cheer" each word three times, which involved saying each letter and clapping; they clapped above their heads for tall letters, at their chests for short letters, and at their knees for letters below the baseline. Then Krissy would ask the children to brainstorm several sentences using the new word, which she wrote on chart paper with the target word highlighted. The new words were then added to the classroom word wall, organized by the first letter in the word. For example, the words *is, in,* and *it* were listed under the letter I; the words *me, my,* and *mom* were listed under the letter M. Each word was written on its own card, which had Velcro on the back. This enabled the children to remove the word cards and take them to their seats while writing if they had difficulty copying from the wall to their paper. Throughout the school year, Krissy encouraged the children to use these words in their writing, and to use the word wall as a resource for spelling the words.

During the remainder of the week, Krissy engaged the children in a variety of word-work activities. Word work included practicing the spelling of the target words with magnetic letters, with Play-Doh, or in a salt tray, changing the first letter or changing the ending to make new words, word sorts, word searches, word families, and other games and activities designed to help the children examine word features and internalize the relationships between and among the words they were learning. Krissy also drew the children's attention to word-wall words that appeared in the books they were reading and in the texts they were composing during interactive writing events. Word-work activities were similar to those recommended in the current research literature (see Bear et al., 2000; Cunningham & Hall, 1996; Fresch, 2000; Fresch & Wheaton, 1997; Graham, 2000; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998; Templeton, 1991; Zutell, 1998).

Journal writing was a daily, open-ended composing period, 20 minutes in length. Children wrote on a topic of their choosing, and Krissy encouraged them to represent meaning by using any and all symbolic and social resources available. The children were free to talk, draw, dramatize, and write as they participated at their tables. Krissy encouraged them to "write two sentences" and to use the words and strategies she had taught them during word study instruction. As we illustrate later in this paper, she also encouraged "kindergarten spelling" (invented spelling). Krissy knew that using invented spelling would allow the children to get their messages into print and would support their developing knowledge of the alphabetic system (Clark, 1988). While the children were writing, Krissy observed and interacted with them, documenting progress, making notes to guide further instruction, and providing individualized instruction as needed. If children finished their journal entries before the period ended, they were free to engage in other literacy tasks, including a host of word study games and activities.

As these descriptions make clear, the instructional context for our study included "structured occasions for learning specific new writing practices" as well as "open-ended composing periods" (Dyson, 2001a, p. 138), a balance we believed would effectively support the children's emerging writing development.

Methods

Our selection of Krissy's kindergarten class as the sample for this study was both convenient and purposeful. The sample was convenient because we had easy access to it and purposeful because it allowed us to examine an "information-rich case" that would "illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 230; see also Merriam, 1991).

Krissy taught kindergarten in an affluent school district; less than 3% of the children qualified for the free and reduced lunch programs. The majority of the children had two-parent families, and the parents were typically well educated. Overall, parents in the district were very involved in their children's schooling and extra-curricular activities, and they advocated for their children's education. Many of the children were read to at home on a regular basis and frequented the community library. By all accounts, home literacy practices were similar to school literacy practices. Krissy knew from her years of teaching kindergarten in this district that many of the children came to school knowing a great deal about reading and writing. In fact, many of the children scored relatively high on kindergarten entrance exams of literacy knowledge and ability. That knowledge would provide an incipient foundation for literacy instruction in kindergarten, including the early introduction of word study instruction. While socioeconomic status cannot predict literacy success or failure (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988), it seemed to us that Krissy's classroom was a best-case scenario for our project, what Patton (2002,

p. 236) might call "a critical case," in that "if it doesn't happen [here], it won't happen anywhere."

The fact that Krissy's students were kindergarteners added another important dimension to our study. Previous research has examined word study instruction in first through third grades, but word study is also recommended for kindergarteners (see Bear, et al., 2000; Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). We need systematic investigations of the impact of a word study approach at this early phase in development.

There were 22 children in Krissy's kindergarten class, and while all of them participated in word study instruction, we collected data on only 12 of these students. Once we had received informed consent from the children's parents, we used quota and stratified purposeful sampling (McMillan, 2000; Patton, 2002) to choose 12 children who would be representative of the entire group. We wanted our study to include both boys and girls and a range of literacy knowledge and ability.

To identify our sample, we rank ordered the 22 children from highest to lowest based on their scores from informal literacy assessments (adapted from Clay, 1997) administered at kindergarten entrance. We then divided this list equally into thirds to identify the children with high, middle, and low literacy knowledge and ability. We separated the children by gender to create six rank-ordered lists: girls with high, middle, and low ability, and boys with high, middle, and low ability. We chose every third child from each list. The final group of 12 included four high-ability, four middle-ability, and four low-ability children, with two boys and two girls in each of the three subgroups. A stratified sample would serve to illustrate particular characteristics of each subgroup and facilitate comparisons (Patton, 2002). All 12 children participated in the study the entire school year.

Data Collection

In a series of meetings and extensive conversations, we refined Krissy's original research question and identified two primary sources of data: (1) the content of Krissy's word study instruction and (2) the focal children's transfer of that instruction to their journal writing. Krissy collected all of the data for the study from October 15 through May 1. We discussed specific methods for recording and organizing the data, and we conferred by phone and/or e-mail when Krissy had questions or concerns about the data collection process.

The Content of Word study Instruction

Krissy used objectives from the kindergarten curriculum and her lesson plans, field notes, and reflective notes to document the content of her word study instruction. Prior to each school week, Krissy wrote lesson plans that summarized the curriculum objectives she intended to cover that week. Her observations and anecdotal records of the children's progress helped determine the specific

objectives she taught in any given week. At the end of each day, Krissy added field notes to her lesson plans that detailed specifics of the word study lessons, and, in particular, any "critical moment teaching."

At the end of each week, Krissy reviewed these lesson plans and field notes and wrote reflective comments. She noted concepts that seemed difficult for the children and those that appeared easy, as well as specific concepts about print that came up inadvertently during the lesson and seemed to spark the children's interest (e.g., use of a comma). These concepts were not necessarily objectives she had planned to teach that week (or part of the kindergarten curriculum), but she taught them because they grew out of the children's interest. Krissy used these reflective notes to drive her daily instruction as well as the following week's lesson plans. In addition to these reflective notes, Krissy also identified the specific concepts about print and strategies she had taught each week and listed these on a separate chart.

Transfer to Journal Writing

The second source of data was information about the children's attempts to apply to their journal writing the concepts and strategies Krissy taught. To collect these data, Krissy observed the focal children once each week as they composed self-selected messages in their journals. During journal writing, the children sat at square tables with five to six at each table, and the groupings reflected a range of abilities. Krissy observed 30 minutes at each table once a week.

During these observations, Krissy wrote field notes to document any *overt* evidence of the focal children's use of the words, concepts, and strategies she had taught. She observed quietly for about 15 minutes so as not to disturb the children's writing, and then she asked each child to read his or her story aloud. She talked with each child for five minutes or so about the composition, seeking information about *covert* strategy use (e.g., "How did you figure out the spelling of that word?"). She documented her questions and the children's responses in her field notes, as demonstrated below[1]:

Holly, 3/13

Entry: MNMFRD INg S iNg

K: What did you write?

H: (reading) Me and my friend sing.

[. . .]

K: What did you do to help yourself?

H: I stretched the word *friend* like a rubber band.

Steven, 3/18

Entry: All ABowt Steven. I like I spy. I like scooby doo. I like my mom and dad. I like green. I am speshol.

K: What did you write?

S: (reading) All about Steven. I like I Spy. I like Scooby Doo. I like my mom and dad. I like green. I am special.

K: Tell me about any tricky words for you.

S: *Special* is the only hard word—I just had to stretch it out.

K: How did that help?

S: Well—I knew all the sounds when I said it slow—like /sh/.

[. . .]

K: I notice you have all the periods in the right place—how did you know how to do this?

S: I just listen and put them where I stop—where it makes sense.

At the end of the kindergarten day, Krissy photocopied each focal child's journal entry and included it in the data corpus.

Krissy organized all of these data in a three-ring binder with a section for each of the 12 focal students. The binder facilitated systematic data analysis.

Data analysis

We analyzed the data inductively (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) yet searching for links between what Krissy taught and what the children learned and used in their writing. Data analysis was both an individual and joint endeavor. We met after school, spoke by phone, and used email extensively (often into the wee hours) to flesh out our preliminary analyses and interpretations. We pushed each other to make sense of the data and to consider its implications for classroom instruction.

The first step in data analysis was to examine the *content* of Krissy's word study instruction, that is, to determine exactly what she taught through her daily word study lessons. This step was fairly straightforward, albeit time consuming. We systematically reviewed Krissy's lesson plans, field notes, reflective comments, and the concepts/strategies chart, and we created a table that documented each word, concept about print, spelling strategy, and reading strategy Krissy had taught across the academic year. We included the date Krissy first introduced each word, concept, or strategy, and a short description and/or example.

The second step in data analysis was to examine the data related to the children's *transfer* of the words, concepts, and strategies Krissy taught to the messages they composed during journal writing. This step was actually ongoing throughout the data collection period. At the end of each week, we examined the photocopies of the children's journal entries and reviewed the field notes Krissy had written during journal observations and triangulated these data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Then, we documented whether the children

1. used the word-wall words in their stories;
2. wrote the word-wall words with / without referencing the word wall;

3. correctly spelled or misspelled the word-wall words;
4. applied any of the concepts about print or spelling strategies that Krissy taught;
5. applied a concept or strategy independently or with support (i.e., received help from peers or teacher or used environmental print, word wall, or other resource).

When all the data had been collected, we conducted a second wave of analysis that focused on the individual children's application (transfer) of the words, concepts, and strategies. Krissy created a chart for each student with a section for every journal observation across the school year, and she dated each section. For each observation, we typed the children's message just as it appeared in their journal entries (e.g., "MFSrPNTTHeB") in the appropriate section of the chart. Krissy provided a transcription based on the child's oral reading of each message ("My friends painted the ball"). If a child used a word-wall word in the story, we typed it in blue font to indicate independent use, in red font when the child referred to the word wall, and in green font when the child wrote the target word before it had been added to the word wall. We then listed the concepts about print and the strategies Krissy had observed the child using as he or she wrote. The following examples are illustrative[2]:

Sam, 11/16
I [in blue font] KPAR ABOP THE [in red font] MAKKETS
"I care about the Americans."
- writes I independently (a word-wall word)
- copies the from the word wall
- understands that print carries the message
- knowledge of sound/symbol correspondence
- understands concept of word/spacing

Wendy, 12/7
IIMMRE
KYLEl
"I'm marrying Kyle."
- some knowledge of sound/symbol correspondence
- uses resource for writing Kyle's name
- evidence of directionality, but does not fill line

These charts demonstrated each child's emerging knowledge and use (transfer) of the words, concepts, and strategies Krissy had taught. The charts also allowed us to see patterns among students of differing literacy knowledge and ability.

Cheri made several videotapes of Krissy's literacy instruction, specifically of

shared reading, interactive writing, and guided reading instruction, as well as observations of the children during writing time and word-work activities. We did not analyze those videotapes; rather, we used them as a reference point to which we compared Krissy's field notes and reflective comments. The videotapes lent referential adequacy to our study's findings (see Eisner, 1975). Our systematic data collection and analysis procedures, our prolonged engagement and persistent observation in Krissy's classroom, and the triangulation of all data sources further served to strengthen the credibility of our findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002).

Results

The findings of our study fall into three major categories: (1) the content of word study instruction, (2) the children's transfer of the words, concepts, and strategies to their journal writing, and (3) the children's transfer of the word knowledge, concepts, and strategies to group reading events.

The Content of Word study Instruction

Our most obvious finding is that through word study instruction, Krissy taught her kindergartners 53 words across the school year. These were high frequency words that the children were using in their writing and encountering in books; more than 30 of the words appear on Fry's *First 100 Instant Words* list (Fry, Kress, & Fountoukidis, 2000). These words were introduced, examined, added to the word wall, and reviewed during word-work activities on a weekly basis, as described previously.

Data analysis also revealed that Krissy explicitly taught her kindergarten students a host of fundamental concepts about print and a wide range of strategies for spelling, as well as for reading, unknown words. Appendix A details the general content of her word study instruction.

Concepts about Print

While Krissy taught the children many concepts about written language over the course of the academic year, she emphasized six fundamental concepts:

- Relationship of letters to sounds (phoneme/grapheme correspondence)
- Movement of written language from left to right and top to bottom (directionality and return sweep)
- Spacing between words (concept of word/concept of spacing)
- Sentences and names begin with a capital letter (capitalization)
- Sentences end with a period or an exclamation point, while questions end with a question mark (punctuation)

To a lesser extent, Krissy also taught the children about short and long vowel

sounds, digraphs, consonant blends, syllables, rhyming words, and the "silent e." They discussed several word endings (-s, -ed, -er, -ing). She also introduced compound words and contractions.

Krissy taught the majority of these concepts about print within the contexts of shared reading and interactive writing. For example, in mid-October, she focused on *concept of word* and its related counterpart, *concept of spacing.* The lesson began with a shared "big-book" reading of *Mrs. Wishy Washy* (Cowley, 1992). Krissy extended the text by having the children draw farm animals for a large mural. They then used interactive writing to add a sentence under each animal, in keeping with the book's text: "In went the_____." To help the children understand *concept of word,* Krissy asked them to count the number of words as they read the sentence aloud. She explained that when they wrote, the words would be separated by spaces (*concept of spacing*), and to demonstrate, she had one child write while another child would "hold the space" with his or her hand. Multisyllabic words, such as *chicken*, led to an important discussion about words that "have more than one part," a concept they would revisit many times across the school year. Understanding these critical concepts about words helps children move from emergent reading and writing behaviors to early conventional literacy (Morris, 1983, 1993).

One of the most important concepts Krissy taught was that "letters represent sounds" (*phoneme / grapheme correspondence*). On a daily basis, interactive writing provided numerous opportunities to demonstrate the relationship between letters and sounds, as well as the specific sounds that particular letters (and groups of letters) can represent (e.g., "We're writing the word *bat.* What letter makes the /b/ sound?"). Krissy also taught phoneme/grapheme correspondence in a daily word study activity. She focused on two letters each day. The letters, written on small squares of paper, were randomly drawn from a jar, and then children found an item in the room or a picture that "matched with the sound of the letter." For example, a book might be used to match /b/ for the letter B or b. Once the children understood the concept of matching the initial sound of a word to a specific letter, Krissy introduced the "Mystery Bag" activity. Each day, two children took home the Mystery Bag and it was their responsibility (with help from parents) to place an item inside the bag that began with the assigned letter's sound. They also wrote clues to help their classmates guess the "mystery" item in the bag. For example, one child had the letter *A* and placed an apple in the bag. Here are the clues she and her parents wrote:

1. It begins with an *A*.
2. It is red.
3. You might find a worm in it.
4. I like to eat them for lunch.

The concepts Krissy taught were critical to the children's early literacy development and provided the foundation for learning important strategies for reading and spelling unknown words.

Strategies for Reading Unknown Words

Krissy taught the children several strategies for reading unfamiliar words and making meaning from text. Early strategies included one-to-one correspondence (finger-point reading) and using the book's illustrations to predict meaning and confirm word "guesses." By mid-November, Krissy was encouraging the children to use the first letter/sound in an unknown word to predict "what would make sense." In early December, she taught the children to scan a sentence and "look for all the words you know," and then to use these "anchor" words and the illustrations to get a sense of the overall meaning. A week later, Krissy began teaching the children the "chunk strategy," and over the next few months, she helped them to refine their use of this important tool for reading unfamiliar words. First Krissy taught the children to look for a smaller, known word within a larger, unknown word (e.g., *and* in *stand*). She encouraged them to use their hands to isolate the smaller known word within the larger unknown word. Krissy then refined this strategy further, teaching the children to look for word parts (or "chunks") within the words they were trying to read (e.g., *-er* in *harder*). In early February, Krissy taught the children to put these two strategies together and look for "chunks and little words" within larger, unknown words. Each reading strategy Krissy taught was designed to build on earlier strategies and to help the children become competent word solvers (Pinnell & Fountas, 1998). Krissy taught these fundamental strategies during shared reading events and later reinforced them during small-group guided reading instruction.

Strategies for Spelling Unknown Words

As Appendix A demonstrates, Krissy taught the children a wide range of specific strategies to spell the words they were writing. She began with the strategy of invented spelling. During the first week of October, Krissy modeled using invented spelling by first saying the word slowly, listening for the sounds, and then writing letters to represent those sounds. She also "thought aloud" as she wrote (e.g., "I need a space between these words") to build critical concepts about print. Krissy called invented spelling "kindergarten spelling," explaining that "it takes a long time to learn how to write every single word." She assured the children that if they "stretched a word and wrote the sounds they could hear," their kindergarten spelling would be "just fine."

At the end of October, Krissy introduced the word wall. She explained that the word wall would be "a place to put the words we are learning," and she encouraged the children to use the word wall to help them read and spell new words. Each week Krissy introduced new words and placed them on the word wall. She

helped the children to see the relationships between and among the words that were displayed (e.g., in/it; we/he/she; this/that), and she showed them how to use their knowledge of one word to help spell other words.

Invented spelling and word wall were primary spelling strategies for this kindergarten class, and Krissy built on these two strategies throughout the academic year. For example, once the children understood the purpose of the word wall, Krissy extended this spelling strategy to other resources in the classroom. She explained that the children could also use "the morning message, other print in the room, and alphabet books" to help spell the words they were writing. Once the children understood the process of invented spelling (writing the sounds they could hear), Krissy helped them to refine this strategy by listening for and writing the initial and (several weeks later) final phonemes in words.

There was a synergistic relationship among the reading strategies Krissy was teaching, her use of the word wall, and the spelling strategies she introduced. In late January, Krissy explained that the "chunk strategy" they had learned previously to help read unfamiliar words could also be used to spell new words. Over a two-week period, Krissy taught the children three digraphs, *-sh, -ch, -th,* and the *-ing* ending, explaining the nature and purpose of these "chunks" and demonstrating their use during shared reading and interactive writing. She added these chunks to the word wall and reminded the children that they could be used "to help write many words." Krissy also used the word wall when she taught the children how to "change the first letter of a known word to make a new word." Using the familiar word-wall word *can,* Krissy demonstrated how changing "just the first letter" allowed them to spell *ran.* Krissy modeled the strategy, and then, using magnetic letters, the children created new words by changing the onset of several familiar word-wall words (e.g., *like* to *bike*).

In late February, Krissy taught the children that "the sounds of words are often represented by more than one letter." To illustrate this concept, she demonstrated the use of "sound boxes" (Elkonin, 1973) as a strategy for helping the children to "listen for word parts." During an interactive writing lesson, as Krissy and the children were writing the word *thank* (as in "thank you"), she reminded them to say the word slowly and to listen for the sounds they could hear. They isolated four sounds, /th/-/a/-/n/-/k/. Krissy drew four Elkonin boxes on her "practice page," and as she said the four sounds slowly, she pointed to each box. She then wrote the letters that represented those sounds in the appropriate boxes, reminding the children of the *-th* digraph they had learned earlier. Krissy used the Elkonin boxes six times during that interactive writing lesson. Later that day, she gave each child a "practice page" and encouraged the children to use it and the sound boxes to help "hear the sounds in words." Krissy reminded the children that they could use this sound-box strategy when they were writing in their journals.

In early March, Krissy introduced using "word families" as a strategy for spelling

new words. She chose word families based on those recommended in the scope and sequence of Bear et al. (2000, p. 155). Krissy focused the children's attention on the similar rime (ending) in each related word, and explained that "by changing the first part" they could "spell an entire family of words!" Over the next six weeks, Krissy and the children created a large chart of the 12 word families they had studied, which included all of the words in each family. This chart was displayed in the classroom for the children to use as "another resource for spelling."

During the last three weeks of April, Krissy introduced 15 consonant blends organized in three groups, teaching one group each week (l blends: *bl, gl, cl, fl, pl*), (r blends: *br, dr, gr, tr, fr*), (s blends: *sk, st, sp, sn, sm*) (see Bear et al., 2000, pp. 153-154). She said the blends slowly, demonstrating that each sound could be heard, but she explained that they "worked together to make a new sort of sound." Krissy and the children created a chart for each group of blends, and they listed sample words for each blend (e.g., *br*—bright, brown, brother, bring). The charts were displayed around the room to help the children "remember the letter combinations," and Krissy encouraged them to use these blends in their writing.

As these examples demonstrate, word study instruction provided ample opportunities for teaching a number of high frequency words, a range of critical concepts about print, and many fundamental strategies to help children read and write new words. The content of Krissy's word study instruction exceeded the district's kindergarten curriculum requirements.

Transfer to Journal Writing

A primary reason we conducted this study was to determine if kindergarten children would transfer word study instruction to their journal writing. Would Krissy's young learners use the word wall as a resource for spelling words? Would they understand and apply the concepts about print as they wrote in their journals? Would they use the spelling strategies Krissy taught? Systematic data analysis demonstrated that the answer to these questions was *yes*; word study instruction had an impact on the children's journal writing. All 12 focal students used at least some of the words, concepts, and strategies as they wrote self-selected messages in their journals. The impact of the program varied considerably, however, among the three groups of children, as the sections below demonstrate.

High Group

It was clear that Krissy's word study instruction was too easy for the four children with high literacy knowledge and ability. These children often knew the target word-wall words, concepts about print, and reading and writing strategies that Krissy was currently teaching. In fact, frequently these children had mastered a concept or strategy long before Krissy introduced it to the class. Figure 1 demonstrates that the children in this group used many of the strategies as much as 5 to 10 weeks prior to formal instruction. For example, some of the children were

using vowels in their writing six weeks before Krissy talked about vowels. Others in the high group were including consonant blends in the words they were writing a full nine weeks before she introduced blends.

Moreover, Krissy's observations during journal time indicated that the children in the high group only used the word wall as a resource for their writing until approximately mid-January. The words on the wall as well as the words that were being introduced were already known to these children. Figure 2 clearly demonstrates that the children with high literacy knowledge and ability showed a gradual decline of dependence on the word wall through February, and by mid-March, Krissy's observations revealed that they were not using the word wall as a resource for their writing. These children had already learned to spell the words that were on the word wall.

Steven's (all names are pseudonyms) case study is illustrative of the children with high literacy knowledge and ability. Steven entered kindergarten already reading and writing. On kindergarten entrance tests, he identified 52/52 letters and 20/33 sounds. He knew all nine concepts about print, and he could rhyme five out of five times. Books were leveled in this district using the *Developmental Reading Assessment* (Beaver, 2002), and the end-of-kindergarten benchmark was a Level 3 book. Already reading a Level 4 book with 98% accuracy, Steven had entered kindergarten reading above end-of-year expectations for typical children.

Krissy never saw Steven refer to the word wall as she observed him during journal writing. This is not to say that Steven did not use the word wall, only that

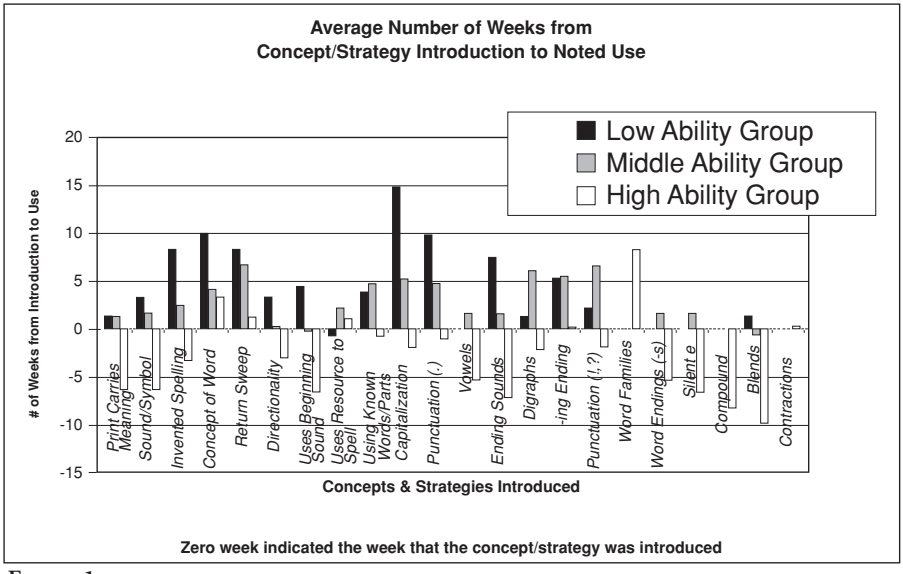

FIGURE 1

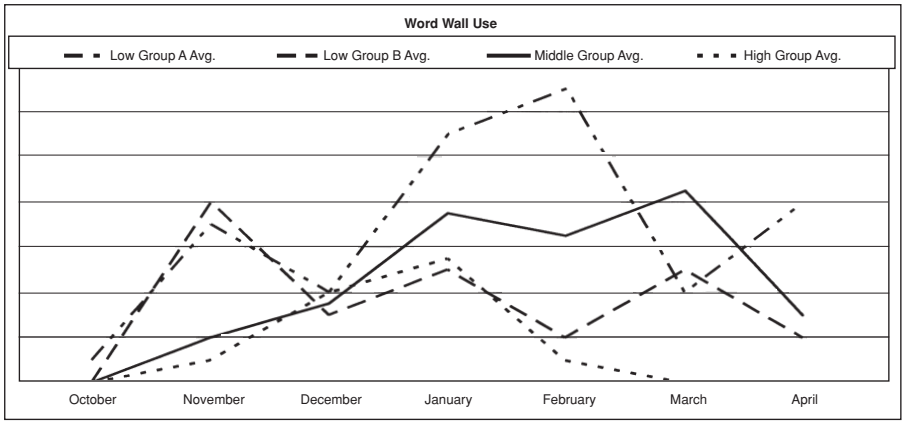

FIGURE 2

she never observed him doing so. Nor did Krissy see him using other resources to spell. Steven frequently used word-wall words in his journal before they were introduced and displayed on the word wall. For example, on October 26th he wrote,

IWINTTO The BINCHH WITHMY MOMMY.
[I went to the beach with my mommy.]

The words *I, to, the, with, my,* and *mommy* would later be introduced and added to the word wall, but Steven spelled all of these words correctly prior to instruction.

Two days after Krissy taught the concepts of word and spacing, Steven was using them in his writing. Moreover, our data indicated that Steven used 13 of the 22 concepts and strategies that were taught *before* Krissy introduced them. For example, in his journal entry above, Steven used digraphs, vowels in every word, and invented spelling with initial and final phonemes—none of which had been discussed yet in class. In a journal entry in early February, Steven used the familiar word *how* to write the unfamiliar words *out* and *clouds.*

It Is a NIS DAY. ThE Sun is owT. The Clowds are owt
[It is a nice day. The sun is out. The clouds are out.]

Steven's misspelling of these words demonstrated his strategic approach to the writing process.

The data for the other three children with high literacy knowledge and ability was similar. Susan, Kristen, and Sam all entered kindergarten with a good understanding of phoneme/grapheme correspondence and knowledge of the basic concepts about print. Susan used 13 of the 22 concepts and strategies before Krissy taught them, and both Sam and Kristen used 10. These three children were observed using the word wall only through mid-January, at which time the majority

of the target words were already a part of their known-word vocabulary. Data analysis clearly demonstrated that Krissy's word study instruction was too easy for these children. For the most part, the children's working knowledge of the alphabetic system was in advance of Krissy's word study program.

Average Group

Krissy's word study instruction appeared to be within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) for the children with average literacy knowledge and ability. The words Krissy introduced for the word wall, the concepts about print, and the reading and writing strategies she taught were useful for and supportive of the children's writing endeavors. As seen in Figure 1, these children typically began to use the concepts and strategies Krissy taught within three to five weeks of instruction. Moreover, as documented in Figure 2, the children used the word wall throughout the year as a resource for their writing, and they gradually added these target words to their known-word vocabulary.

Gwen's case study is representative of the children with average literacy knowledge and ability. On kindergarten entrance measures, Gwen identified 46/52 letters, 19/33 sounds, eight of the nine basic concepts about print, and she could rhyme five out of five times. Gwen started kindergarten reading a Level 2 book.

Gwen began to use invented spelling in her journal three weeks after Krissy demonstrated and modeled the use of "kindergarten spelling." As Gwen's messages increased in length and complexity, Krissy observed her using the word wall more often, and as Gwen did so, her independent spelling of the target words also steadily increased. For example, data analysis indicated that by March Gwen had correctly spelled target words in her journal 11 times without looking at the word wall; clearly Gwen had learned to spell these words. Like the other children in the middle group, Gwen typically used the word wall as a resource for words that Krissy had recently introduced. For the most part, Gwen spelled correctly (i.e., independently) words that had been displayed on the word wall for a month or longer.

Krissy observed Gwen using 12 of the 22 concepts and strategies within three weeks of instruction. Gwen used five other concepts (*-ing* ending, punctuation, digraphs, return sweep, and concept of word) within five weeks of instruction. For example, Krissy taught *concept of word and spacing* during the week of October 15. Five weeks later, Gwen successfully used these important concepts for every word in her journal entry:

IM PLAN W U Bres
[I'm playing with your brothers.]

The data for the other three children with average literacy knowledge and ability was similar to that reported for Gwen. Mary, Kelly, and Scott all tended to

use the word wall to spell recently introduced words; after a month or so, these children typically added the target words to their repertoire of known words and wrote them independently in their journals. Scott used 15 of the concepts and strategies Krissy taught within three weeks of instruction. Mary used 12 concepts/strategies within three weeks and five others within seven weeks. Kelly used seven concepts/strategies within the very week Krissy taught them. On occasion, these children used a concept or strategy prior to instruction. For example, Gwen included a consonant blend (fl) in her journal entry two weeks before Krissy introduced this concept:

I Like My Flawrs! Tha Are so Budflr.
[I like my flowers! They are so beautiful.]

In general, data analysis suggested that word introduction was well matched to the children's writing needs and that the concepts and strategies Krissy taught were developmentally timely. The children began to transfer word study instruction to their writing after a short period of practice.

Low Group

Results of our data analysis indicated that Krissy's word study instruction may have been too advanced for the children with low literacy knowledge and ability. These children began kindergarten as emergent writers, and during the first few months of the school year they were learning what it meant to convey meaning in graphic form. For the most part, it took the children several months after introduction to consistently use the target words, concepts, and strategies Krissy taught. For example, Krissy introduced *concept of word and spacing* during the first week of the study. Most of the children in this group did not consistently use these critical concepts of print until the tenth week of our investigation. The concept of *return sweep* did not appear consistently in the children's journals for eight weeks. It took the children nine weeks to consistently "end a sentence with a period" and 15 weeks to "capitalize the first word in a sentence and people's names." As shown in Figure 1, several concepts that Krissy taught in the latter half of the school year did not appear in the children's writing (e.g., plural s; past-tense marker -ed; -er ending; "silent e" rule). These concepts may have been beyond the children's current level of spelling development.

Our findings for this group's use of the word wall reflected two distinct patterns (see Figure 2). Krissy's observations indicated that Holly and Nick would use the word wall for several weeks, move away from using it, then begin using it again, only to move away from it a few weeks later. Interestingly, both children were using the target words in their journals, but they did so without referencing the word wall, and they most often misspelled the words. Holly's journal entries during the month of March included 21 word-wall words, and only seven were

spelled correctly. These two children seemed more interested in the content of their journal entries than in correct spelling.

The other two children in this group, Wendy and Luke, used the word wall as a resource for their writing across the school year. They relied on the word wall a great deal through mid-February and then used it less frequently for a short time in early March. In mid-March, however, they resumed their dependence on the word wall and continued through the end of the study. None of the four children readily assimilated the word-wall words into their known writing vocabulary. The target words they eventually learned to spell were words that Krissy had introduced early and reviewed frequently throughout the school year.

Luke entered kindergarten with the lowest literacy knowledge of the group. On pre-test measures he identified only 8/52 letters and 3/33 sounds. He could not produce any rhyming words, and he only knew two of the nine basic concepts about print. Luke read a Level A (i.e., emergent) book at kindergarten entrance.

Luke's writing reflected many of the characteristics of an emergent writer, as illustrated by the following journal entry written in December:

BisRIABbMWoLVjthev8.
[This is a rainbow in the rain.]

Krissy's field notes indicated that as Luke wrote this message, he looked at the word wall to spell the words *is* and *the.* Early on, and throughout the school year, Luke used the word wall to spell specific words in his journal. "Use the word wall" was a strategy that Luke readily and consistently employed.

Luke took longer, however, to apply most other concepts and strategies to his writing. It was not clear until mid-January that Luke was using invented spelling to write, and it was late February before he demonstrated a strong and consistent *concept of word* in text. A few concepts and strategies were easier for Luke to incorporate, as demonstrated in a journal entry he wrote during the week of February 18:

Fing wtor in the soPry!
[Flying water in the submarine!]

Krissy taught the *-ing* chunk four weeks earlier and the *exclamation point* three weeks prior to this journal entry. Overall, however, Luke and the other children in this group took a longer period of time to incorporate the words, concepts, and strategies that Krissy taught. As indicated above, most of the concepts and strategies that were taught during the latter months of study did not appear in these children's journals. The evidence suggested that Krissy's word study instruction was not well matched to the low group's writing needs.

Transfer to Reading

Although we did not systematically collect data on the children's transfer of word study instruction to their reading, there were several instances in the data corpus in which the children with average and high literacy knowledge and ability demonstrated overt evidence of such transfer. For example, Gwen (middle group) read the word *sit,* and then said, "I just saw *it* and added /s/ to it," demonstrating her understanding of the strategy, "look for known words or parts within the new word." Kelly, after reading the word *sand,* commented, "I saw *and* in it." Mary read *bike* and said, "just like . . . *like!*" Scott read *dig* and said, "*-ig,* yeah, like *pig!*" All four children with average literacy knowledge and ability made one or more comments of this kind, demonstrating their understanding and use of the concepts and strategies Krissy taught.

The children with high literacy knowledge and ability rarely verbalized their strategy use, but Krissy often observed them using the chunking strategy she had taught. That is, the children placed their hands around a known part (a chunk) of an unknown word to aid in decoding. Steven read the unfamiliar word *together* by putting his hands around the known parts *to, th,* and *er.* He did this without comment and then read aloud, "together." To read the word *candy,* Kristen first covered the *dy* and said, "Ok, I know *can.*" Then, she covered the letter c and said, "*and . . . candy.*" To read the word *sister,* Sam covered the beginning and ending and read *is,* then he said *er* and then he read *sister.* Susan read the word *band* by covering the b and saying, "*and . . . band.*" Unmistakably, the children were transferring word study instruction to their reading.

The children with low literacy knowledge and ability had more difficulty in transferring to their reading the strategies that were taught. For example, on two separate occasions during small-group guided-reading instruction, Nick came to an unknown word and commented, "That's on the word wall," but he was unable to read the word, despite previous and repeated instruction. Wendy recognized the *-ing* chunk, but she was unable to verbalize the /ng/ sound or use this word part to help read the unknown word in her guided reading book. These children were demonstrating some understanding of the concepts and strategies that Krissy taught, but they were unable to successfully apply this information to their reading.

Summary

The results of our investigation suggest that Krissy's word study program had an impact on the children's journal writing. All 12 focal children used at least some of the target words, concepts about print, and reading and spelling strategies as they wrote in their journals. These findings corroborate those of others (Anderson et al., 1996; Brandt & Gielbelhaus, 2000; Elliot & Rietschel, 1999) who found word study to be an effective instructional approach. The program was not, however, equally supportive of all children's writing development. Krissy's whole-group

instruction was best fitted to the children with average literacy knowledge and ability. The children with high ability needed more advanced instruction, and the children with low literacy knowledge and ability would have benefited from instruction geared more closely to their emergent writing needs.

Discussion and Implications

When we designed this investigation, we were well aware of the developmental nature of word study; we knew that instruction should be organized to address the features of words and concepts about print that students need to explore at their developmental level. We made the decision to teach word study in a whole-group context primarily because of the two-and-one-half-hour kindergarten time frame. Krissy was already grouping the children for guided reading instruction; it did not seem feasible or desirable to also group for word study. This was kindergarten, after all, and we did not want the children to be tracked. We reasoned that explicit, whole-group instruction would be effective because of the overall homogeneity of the group (i.e., from affluent families; home and school literacy practices were highly similar; high entrance scores for a majority of children, etc.). The results of our study proved us wrong. The children's literacy knowledge and ability varied to such an extent as to require a more tailored approach to instruction. We would venture to say that many kindergarten classrooms are considerably more heterogeneous than was Krissy's; it would appear that as early as the kindergarten level, small-group developmental instruction is warranted.

Developmental instruction was not the only issue to be addressed, however, as we tried to interpret and make sense of the outcomes of our study. The children's *response* to Krissy's instruction also warranted our attention. The children in the average group demonstrated a good deal of transfer, and we were pleased with our success (for lack of a better word) with students who might tend to get lost in the shuffle of everyday classroom life. We reasoned that children in the high group would have transferred a great deal more if we had implemented word study instruction and activities at the letter name alphabetic and within-word pattern stages. It was the response of the children in the low group that gave us pause.

We wondered if the lack of transfer among the children with lowest literacy knowledge and ability was influenced by the overall newness of kindergarten literacy activities. Certainly school traditions and ways of doing school are social constructs that must be learned (Dyson, 1984). Perhaps word study and journal writing were sufficiently new to make links between them difficult to recognize. Did the children fail to see the common ground between what Krissy taught and their own participation during journal time? Our data suggest otherwise. After Krissy introduced the word wall as a primary strategy for spelling words, she observed the majority of her students referring to the word wall as they wrote in

their journals. All four children in the low group adopted this strategy as well, demonstrating their understanding of the connection between the word wall and journal writing.

Lack of transfer may have been due to the distance between what Krissy taught and what the children *valued* in their writing (see Guttierez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995). Nick and Holly used the word wall sporadically across the school year and frequently misspelled the target words in their journals. After having embraced their teacher's instructional intentions (i.e., "use the word wall"), they later demonstrated little concern for correct spelling or other surface features of the text and focused instead on the content of their journal entries. Previous research has demonstrated the ways in which children enact their own purposes and stylistic preferences during writing time, pleasing both themselves and their peers through the products they create, often at the expense of their teacher's academic expectations (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, & Klausner, 1985; Dyson, 1993, 1997; Williams, 1999).

Journal writing is not static; it is an evolving activity that is constructed anew through the social interaction, participation, and negotiation of children and adults from one situated event to the next. Whether or not children in the low group applied specific word study knowledge from one journal session to another may have varied with the "flux of social interaction" (Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995, p. 55) and the social roles and responsibilities the children assumed at the writing table on any given day (Dyson, 1999, 2003; Rowe, 1994). Perhaps Holly and Nicks' fluid use of the word wall and other concepts and strategies Krissy taught reflects what was most *salient* about journal writing and their participation at the table at specific points in time across the school year.

We wanted Krissy's kindergarten children to appropriate and apply her "*work* with words" (with apologies to Heath, 1983) as they wrote in their journals, and, in some sense, we assumed common textual goals and values. We were viewing the children's participation during writing time and their journal entries through the lens of our own instructional objectives and research goals. It may well be that Krissy's word study instruction did not always productively converge with the children's frames of reference for journal writing, and that may have influenced the outcomes of our study. Further research needs to examine this issue in more detail.

Further research is also needed to examine the impact of a systematic word study program on children's reading development. Do children directly transfer word study instruction to their independent attempts at decoding unfamiliar words? Although we did not systematically collect data on transfer to reading, several instances in our data corpus for both the middle and high ability children suggested that this was the case.

This is our third classroom-based study on spelling instruction, and through

our work we are re-conceptualizing what it means to teach children about the nature and principles of English orthography. Certainly we have learned that word study can be an effective approach to spelling instruction, and we concede the importance of a small-group approach, although we have yet to resolve our concerns about tracking and the very real, practical constraints of classroom life. We also have been reminded of the considerable importance of children's frames of reference for any literacy event and the impact those changing conceptualizations may have on day-to-day instruction and learning. As Dyson suggests (2001b), the essence of the developmental challenges that children face in learning to write (and to spell) are revealed not only in the texts they create but also the positions they assume and the values they hold relative to those texts, and the relationship of each of these to one another and to the entire literacy event.

Our re-conceptualization does not end there. As we step back from our present work and look at it within the whole of emergent literacy research, we are struck once again by the complexity of emergent literacy learning, and we question, along with others (McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997; Yaden et al., 2000), whether our current epistemologies are capable of accounting for this complexity. We are struggling, in particular, with definitions and terms.

Sulzby's "technical definition" of emergent literacy—"the reading and writing behaviors of young children that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (Sulzby, 1990, p. 85)—seems widely accepted in the research literature. Most folks also agree on an age range of infancy to 5 or 6 years and the home, daycare (preschool), and kindergarten as typical sites for emergent literacy research. But other criteria such as "informal learning" in "informal settings" "prior to beginning formal literacy instruction" (Yaden, et al., 2000, p. 426) seem problematic—at least in our case. Can any school context legitimately be called an informal setting? Schools are established for the express purpose of teaching and learning—for socializing our children into particular and valued ways of knowing, doing, and being. Even if we employ an apprenticeship model of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1991), the institution itself is far from an "informal setting." And is there such a thing as "informal learning" in school? The structure of the most holistic kindergartens (e.g., read aloud, shared "big book" reading, story extensions, writing time, etc.) suggests otherwise, even when classroom practices are grounded in the emergent literacy perspective. And how does a kindergarten teacher separate "informal learning" for emergent learners (like the low group in Krissy's class) from "formal literacy instruction" for children who are not-so-emergent (later emergent? early? beginner?)? And would she want to? While the terms "formal" and "informal" seem ubiquitous in the educational literature, we wonder if their definitions may be more elusive than is generally acknowledged.

Word study is undoubtedly formal literacy instruction, which some might argue is inappropriate for kindergarten, or perhaps fails to reflect an emergent

literacy approach. Our data, however, demonstrate that many of the children in Krissy's class—both emergent learners and those more conventional in their knowledge and understandings—benefited from this instruction. Our point is this: As necessary and important as our terms are, definitions of those terms must not limit what we do for young learners, must not constrain our ways of conceptualizing children's literacy development, and must not constrict our research of this important phenomenon. We see our project as both a study of formal literacy instruction (e.g.,word study) and an investigation of emergent and early (beginning) literacy development, and we do not see these in conflict one with another.

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ENDNOTES

1. Journal entries are in roman, transcribed talk in italics. Ellipses [. . .] indicate omitted words.
2. Children's intended meanings appear in brackets following transcribed journal entries.

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Appendix A: List of Words, Concepts about Print, and Strategies Taught

Date of Formal Introduction:	Words, Concepts, & Strategies Taught:
Week of 9/24	*Phonological Awareness.*
	Children were taught to listen closely for the beginning sounds in words when labeling items in a picture or trying to write.
	Reading Strategy: Use one-to-one matching (finger-point reading/ tracking words).
Week of 9/31	*Concept:* The print carries the message that is read aloud.
Week of 10/7	*Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondence.*
	Concept: Letters represent sounds.
	Spelling Strategy: Use "kindergarten (invented) spelling" to write.
Week of 10/15 (Week One)	*Alphabet Knowledge.*
	Most children were able to identify the majority of the alphabet letters prior to entering kindergarten; however, for the benefit of the children who could not yet identify all of their letters, we randomly chose 7 letter cards per day to identify "quickly."
	Concept: Concept of word & concept of spacing.
Week of 10/22 (Week Two)	*Concept:* Direction and return sweep.
	Phonological Awareness: Rhyming words.
Week of 10/29 (Week Three)	*Spelling Strategy:* Listen for and write the first sound (initial phoneme).
	Reading Strategy: Use the picture to predict meaning.
	Spelling Strategy: Use the word wall to spell words you are writing.
	Word-Wall Words: Black, brown, green, silver, orange, white, blue, purple, yellow, gray, pink, gold, red (color words the children were frequently using in their writing).
Week of 11/5 (Week Four)	*Spelling Strategy:* Use classroom resources to spell. (e.g., morning message, environmental print, alphabet books).
	Reading Strategy: Check the pictures to confirm word "guesses."
	Word-Wall Words: I, a, is.
Week of 11/12 (Week Five)	*Reading Strategy:* Make predictions based on the first letter's sound and "what would make sense."
	Word-Wall Words: the, in, it, to.
Week of 11/26 (Week Six)	*Word-Wall Words:* can, see.

(Continued on next page)

Week of 12/3 (Week Seven)	*Writing Convention:* Letter formation. The district curriculum required teachers to model specific letter formation, so all letters were taught and practiced using mini chalkboards.
	Reading Strategy: Use known words as "anchors."
	Word-Wall Words: me, mom, dad.
Week of 12/10 (Week Eight)	*Reading Strategy:* Look for smaller, known words within larger, unfamiliar words (e.g., *and* in stand).
	Word-Wall Words: and, like.
Holiday Break	
Week of 1/7 (Week Nine)	*Reading Strategy:* Look for "chunks" in words (e.g., *-er* in harder).
	Concept: Capitalization and punctuation: capitals and periods.
	Word-Wall Words: we, he, she, too.
Week of 1/14 (Week Ten)	*Concept:* Vowels Discussed the vowels: *a, e, i, o, u* and explained that every word had to have a vowel.
	Spelling Strategy: Listen for and write the last sound (segment final phoneme / segment onset from rime).
	Word-Wall Words: no, yes.
Week of 1/21 (Week Eleven)	*Concept:* Digraphs: -sh, -ch, -th.
	Spelling Strategy: Use digraphs as "chunks" to help write new words.
	Spelling Strategy: Change the first letter of a known word to make a new word (*can* to *ran; like* to *bike*).
	Word-Wall Words: go/so, my/by.
Week of 1/28 (Week Twelve)	*Concept: -ing* Children were taught that *ing* is a natural part of *king* and *ring* but is added to the end of words that talk about "doing something" such as, *running, dancing,* and *playing.*
	Spelling Strategy: Use *ing* as a "chunk" to help write new words.
	Word-Wall Word: on.
Week of 2/4 (Week Thirteen)	*Concept:* Punctuation (exclamation points and question marks)
	Reading Strategy: Look for word parts *and* known words within larger, unknown words (building on earlier strategies) (e.g., *it* and *ing* in the word *sitting*).
	Concept: Syllables.
	Word-Wall Word: you.

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Weeks of 2/11 & 2/18 (Weeks Fourteen & Fifteen)	No new concepts were introduced; a student teacher had primary responsibility for the classroom for two weeks.
Week of 2/26 (Week Sixteen)	*Reading Strategy:* Read fluently with expression. *Spelling Strategy:* Use "sound boxes" (Elkonin) to help you listen for and write the parts you hear. *Word-Wall Word:* for.
Week of 3/4 (Week Seventeen)	*Spelling Strategy:* Use word families to spell new words. *Word Family:* -an (e.g., *tan, man, fan, can, ran*). *Word-Wall Word:* an.
Week of 3/11 (Week Eighteen)	*Word Family:* -at (e.g., *cat, fat, rat, mat, sat*). *Concept:* Endings: -s, -ed, -er. *Word-Wall Words:* at, look.
Week of 3/18 (Week Nineteen)	*Word Families:* -ag, -ad, -ap (e.g., *bag, tag, rag, flag/ mad, sad, dad, glad/map, sap, nap, tap*). *Concept:* Silent e. *Word-Wall Words:* come, play.
Week of 3/26 (Week Twenty)	*Concept:* Short vs. long vowels. *Word Families:* -ip, -ig, -in. (e.g., *pin, tin, fin / tip, slip, flip / pig, wig, jig*).
Spring Break 3/28—4/7	
Week of 4/8 (Week Twenty-one)	*Concept*: Compound words. *Word Families:* -ot, -og, (e.g., *pot, spot, jot, hot / dog, fog, log, bog*). *Word-Wall Words:* this, that.
Week of 4/15 (Week Twenty-two)	*Word Families:* -ug, -ub, (e.g., *bug, rug, tug, slug / tug, rug, grub, cub*). *Concept:* L controlled consonant blends: bl, gl, cl, fl, pl (e.g., gl—*glove, glisten, glare, glow/* cl—*class, clear, clip, clown* / fl—*flow, flick, fly, flu* / pl—*place, plunk, plate, play*). *Spelling Strategy:* Use consonant blends to help spell words. *Word-Wall Words:* went, stop.
Week of 4/22 (Week Twenty-three)	*Concept:* R controlled consonant blends: br, dr, gr, tr, fr (e.g., br—*bright, brown, brother, bring* / dr—*drive, Drew, dress, draw* / gr - *green, gray, grass, grow* / fr—*frown, free, frightened, frilly*). *Word-Wall Words:* has, are.

(Continued on next page)

Week of 4/29 (Week Twenty-four)	*Concept:* S controlled consonant blends: sk, st, sp, sn, sm (e.g., sk—*skate, ski, skin, skip* / st—*stop, stay, Steve, stick* / sp—*spill, spin, spot, speak* / sn—*snack, snake, sneak, snail* / sm—*smile, smash, smush, smart*). *Concept:* Contractions. *Word-Wall Words:* I'm, all.

Note: Strategies and concepts were continually revisited (at least once each week) after their initial introduction.

Call for Nominations: The CEE Richard Meade Award

The Conference on English Education is now accepting nominations for the Richard Meade Award for Research in English language arts education. Criteria for the award are the following: (1) The selection committee may consider published material of any length, either in pre-service or in-service education of English language arts teachers. (2) Eligibility extends to all published research that investigates English language arts teacher development at any educational level or any scope and in any setting. (3) To be considered, studies must have been published less than two years prior to January 1 of the year of the award.

Nominations *accompanied by three copies of the published material* may be made by any language arts educator or by self-nomination. Nominations for the 2005 award must be received no later than *May 1, 2005.*

Send nominations and materials to: CEE Meade Award, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096, Attn: Kristen McGowan. Winners will be notified in July 2005 and announced at the 2005 NCTE Annual Convention in Pittsburgh.