

What is the impact of teaching contextualized grammar?

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"Teaching grammar in isolation produces little if any improvement" (Andrews et al, 2004, p4).

"Instruction in grammar itself is minimal; application of grammar to writing is maximal" (Weaver, 2008, p26).

Introduction

I wanted to find out what the impact would be on pupils from teaching grammar in the context of writing rather than as separate, rule-driven lessons. I was particularly interested in:

- Would it improve the accuracy/quality of their writing?
- Would it improve their attitude towards writing?

Method

I selected a Year 10, GSCE, boys only class to implement the 5 week intervention. The intervention itself was a series of lessons that focused on teaching grammar through the context of writing. This was primarily achieved by employing Didau's ideas of 'slow writing' (2014) and Weaver's advice on teaching grammar to enhance and enrich writing (2008).

A variety of data collection methods were used such as:

- textual analysis of pupils' written work;
- observations by colleagues and lesson filming;
- pupil questionnaires;
- focus group interview.

Main Findings

1. There was a clear increase in confidence from the pupils in terms of their attitude towards writing. This was reflected in the questionnaire revealing that 81% of the class felt that their writing had improved. However, despite this, 50% of the class stated that they would still opt for the previous teaching of grammar in isolation. The main reason given for this from the pupils is that they found the rule-driven grammar lessons 'easier'.

Possible Implications Include:

- Why would pupils, despite acknowledging the benefit of being taught contextualized grammar, opt for 'easier' lessons of less value to their writing?
- Does this imply that there is an issue with pupils' motivations to learning in general? Or is this a subject specific issue?

2. From textual analysis of the pupils' writing from different periods in the intervention, it is clear that *some* of the pupils' written accuracy had improved yet careless mistakes were still evident. Despite this, the *majority* of pupils work did show an increase in style and therefore the overall quality of their writing was improved.

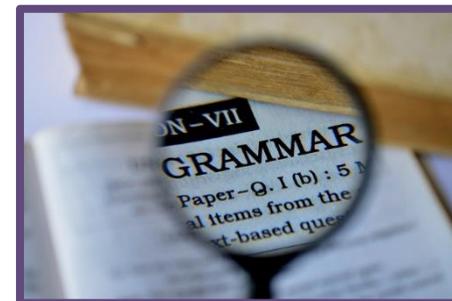
Possible Implications include:

- What could teachers do to improve written accuracy and careless mistakes?
- Is proof-reading a skill that should be taught separately?

3. I have had to revise my own grammatical knowledge during this intervention. By teaching grammar contextually the format is more open and has required a greater in-depth knowledge of grammar. Previously teaching grammar in isolation was controlled and only required the grammatical knowledge on the rule that was being introduced to the class.

Possible Implications include:

- If this method were to be adopted by departments responsible for teaching grammar, would teachers need to further their own grammatical knowledge first?



Conclusion

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that teaching grammar in the context of writing improves pupils' confidence in writing and improves the overall quality of their writing too.

The inquiry has also suggested however that this method would be a significant change for teachers in addition to the pupils and would require a teacher who is more than competent in their own grammatical knowledge to deliver the lessons effectively.

References

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