

The Effectiveness of Teaching Traditional Grammar on Writing Composition at the High
School Level

Gina Jaeger

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

May 2011

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Madalienne Peters, for her support and guidance through out this process. Her insight has been invaluable, and I am grateful to her for her tireless dedication to aiding the progression and evolution of this paper. What started out as a seemingly overwhelming, nebulous project became manageable and clear under her direction. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Sarah Zykanov for sharing both her expertise and her personal experience with the creation process. She helped assuage my fears, and she provided useful instruction for many different facets of this paper.

I would like to thank Tom Lippi for allowing me to tap his genius for insight into my research question. As always, he was generous with his time and an enthusiastic participant in the process. Thank you for always striving to better understand your craft.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Bryan Jaeger, for his unending, unconditional support. Your encouragement to undertake this journey spurred me to challenge myself to take my education farther. This has been a tumultuous process, one I would have given up on, had it not been for your enthusiasm, positive feedback and help. You have helped me see this through to very end, and I could not have asked for a better partner.

Table of Contents

Title Page	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Chapter 1.....	5
Introduction.....	5
Statement of Problem	6
Purpose Statement	6
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Rationale.....	7
Assumptions	7
Background and Need.....	8
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature.....	10
Introduction.....	10
Historical Context.....	11
Review of the Previous Literature	12
Interview with an Expert.....	13
Summary.....	15
Chapter 3 Method	16
Sample and Site	16
Access and Permissions.....	16
Data Gathering Strategies	17
Ethical Standards	17
Chapter 4 Findings.....	18
Description of Site, Individuals, Data.....	18
Findings	19
Chapter 5 Discussion	21
How Present Study Compares to Previous Research	21
Summary of Major Findings.....	21
Limitations/Gaps in the Literature.....	22
Implications for Future Research.....	22
Overall Significance of the Literature	23
A Model for Grammar Instruction.....	24
References.....	26

Abstract

Traditional grammar instruction is a challenging element of the English curriculum; both students and teachers struggle with the rules and dull nature of grammar. However, understanding grammar is important because students need to understand the language they speak in order to be effective communicators, and teachers provide grammar instruction with the express purpose of improving students' writing.

The problem lies in the method of instruction; does traditional grammar instruction improve the quality of students' writing? This study examines the effectiveness of traditional grammar instruction on improving the quality of students' writing. Earlier studies conclude that traditional grammar instruction has little to no effect on composition. The findings parallel the previous research, and the English community needs to reevaluate their pedagogical approach to grammar instruction.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Every year that I teach freshmen, they struggle and I struggle with learning the building blocks of grammar: nouns, pronouns, conjunction, etc. As Roberts (1992) accurately communicates “a grammar unit can be daunting and frustrating for both teachers and students...” (p.1). The students find it very dull, they struggle to learn and retain the various components, and it, unfortunately, does more harm than good to their grades. Who cares about the traditional components of grammar? I do not, and they certainly do not, so why do we torture ourselves every year? When we talk about the components of good writing at the upper division levels, we never discuss parts of speech, and rarely do we discuss parts of a sentence. I am not entirely sure if this is because we *assume* they have internalized the process or because it is not an essential piece. I would love to take a very difficult and painful part of the English curriculum out if it does not hold any instructional or pedagogical value.

Perhaps the grammar is important and inevitable; indeed Gill (2000) directly affirms one of the three main goals of English is “to instill mechanics and the subtleties of grammar” (para. 2). If that is the case, then it is the pedagogical approach that influences efficacy. Andrews, Torgerson, Beverton, Freeman, Locke, Low, Robinson & Zhu (2006) conclude, “We should continue to ask whether the teaching of formal grammar is helpful in improving young people’s writing” (p. 52). Formal, traditional grammar instruction does not influence the quality of students’ writing. If one of the ultimate objectives of English curriculum instruction is to teach students to communicate effectively through composition, then the grammar instruction needs to help them with their writing. Traditional grammar instruction teaches students grammar separately from their writing. There does not seem to be any effective application within the

writing. Students make grammatical errors in their essay that they have demonstrated they understand.

Statement of Problem

The traditional grammar elements seem unrelated to effective writing, so might we edit high school English curriculum to reflect a more real-world application of grammar within writing. As students develop their writing abilities, they need to master the language in order to effectively communicate their ideas. If the purpose of grammar instruction is to provide students with the tools for both discussing and crafting compositions, then we would be using the language of traditional grammar elements in writing instruction. Writing instruction does not include the language of traditional grammar elements, so it seems that the instruction of traditional grammar elements is a waste of time.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of teaching traditional grammar components to high school students; this study will examine if learning traditional grammar components is an effective means for helping students develop their writing abilities.

Additionally, as Andrews (2005) concludes “It is more likely that such knowledge [of abstracted grammatical rules] *may*...help in the subsequent production of writing. But so far, we have a situation of cases not proven” (p. 74).

Research Questions

If understanding the components and structure of the English language makes students more effective communicators, then it stands to reason, they must know the formal rules of grammar.

Patterson (2006) suggests “we should teach grammar to help students gain flexibility in their use

of language” (Teacher to teacher: What is your most compelling reason for teaching grammar? (p.19). If educators wish to help students improve their writing, they must teach these rules of Standard English. Past practice has been traditional, formal instruction in isolation with heavy emphasis on rote memorization and drilling. The rules, taught using this traditional method, do not seem to be permeating the students’ writing pieces. Perhaps the problem lies not with the content of instruction but with the method. This research investigates if teaching traditional grammar components does, in fact, improve the quality of students writing: Is teaching the traditional grammar components an effective method for improving student writing at the high school level?

Theoretical Rationale

The National Council of Teachers of English state grammar is an essential component of the English curriculum because “knowing basic grammatical terminology does provide students with a tool for thinking and discussing sentences” (Haussamen, Dongier, Dykstra, Kollin, Rogers, & Wheeler, 1998, para. 4). Talking about writing is a critical step in writing development. Students cannot talk about their writing, and thus improve and develop, without the proper language. Grammar provides students and teachers with a means for discussing sentence correctness, the different types of sentences, and, ultimately, using sentences to make their writing “clear and interesting and precise” (Haussamen et al, 1998, para. 4).

Assumptions

Traditional grammar instruction is important because grammar has been a staple in the English curriculum for hundreds of years. Additionally, in order for students to be effective communicators, they must understand how to use language correctly according to acceptable

grammatical standards. If traditional grammar is essential to writing, then it should follow that traditional grammar instruction is essential to writing instruction. Teachers and students need to understand grammar in order to writing effectively.

Despite these assumptions, traditional grammar instruction seems boring and unrelated to writing because it is taught in isolation, and students do not apply the rules and theory to their composition process. If traditional grammar components are important to effective writing and traditional grammar instruction does not affect the quality of writing, then traditional grammar instruction should be eliminated from English instructional courses.

Background and Need

There are two comprehensive reviews that were conducted in 2001 and again in 2006 that examine the body of research devoted to evaluating the effectiveness of traditional grammar instruction on improving students' writing. Their reviews echoed the same conclusion: "Traditional grammar teaching showed no measurable benefits" (Wyse, 2001, p.420).

Wyse's (2001) review explicitly states that the collective findings from studies conducted in English speaking countries "clearly indicate that the teaching of grammar (using a range of models) has negligible positive effects on improving secondary pupils' writing" (p.422). He concedes that there might be some intrinsic value to the study of grammar, but he also advocates for a reduction in the time spent on this topic within the classroom.

Similarly, Andrews et al (2006) review concluded "the teaching of syntax (as a part of a traditional or transformational/generative approach to teaching grammar) appears to have no influence on either the accuracy or quality of written language development for 5-16 year olds" (p.51). Andrews et al (2006) further warns that just because there didn't *appear* to be any influence does not necessarily preclude the possibility that it might have influence. There simply

is not any “significant studies to date that have proved such an effect” (p.51). Generally, there seems to be a large body research devoted to researching this issue, but the studies all conclude there needs to be more research in this arena.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

The historical context framing this research details the disappearance of grammar from English curriculums as educators and researchers dismiss it from English language arts. Contrastingly, the authorities on teaching English in the United States state clearly grammar's importance. The expanse of literature devoted to the relationship between grammar instruction and students' writing quality conclude that there is no link between traditional grammar instruction and improving students' compositions. An expert lends his testimony affirming this lack of connection. Educators and researchers collectively agree that there should be more research done to examine what grammar methods *do* improve the quality of students' writing.

In recent history grammar has been increasingly absent from English curriculums; however, teachers, researchers and the National Council of the Teachers of English affirm the importance of grammar in the English curriculum. Understanding the rules of language (grammar) helps students to master the language they speak and write. The shifts the focus from a question regarding teaching grammar at all to one examining exactly how it is taught. The method of teaching traditional grammar has come under scrutiny as this pedagogical approach seems unrelated to improving the quality of students' writing. Studies have found, in fact, that this approach of teaching grammar exercises in isolation has a negligible, and sometimes even harmful, effect on process of writing instruction and learning. Indeed, even teachers with lengthy careers and vast amounts of experience have observed the waste of time taking a traditional approach to grammar can be because the students still make the same errors they have learned to avoid within their grammar unit. If traditional methods of grammar instruction are ineffective because there is not any established link between that instructional strategy and

improved student writing, they researchers must look to other strategies for successfully teaching students the grammar that will make their writing stronger.

Historical Context

Mulroy (2004) has noticed that grammar is disappearing from English curriculums. Reflecting on his experiences with his students, he has come to conclude that there is a growing ignorance of grammatical concepts. Increasingly his students have no knowledge of the subject. The absence of this knowledge seems to reflect shift away from valuing grammar: “The best that most people have to say about grammar is that correct usage impresses prospective employers; it is about as important as shining one’s shoes” (p. 52). Educational experts he has encountered echo this general opinion about grammar: “Years of research had proved, they said, that the formal study of grammar was counterproductive” (Mulroy, 2004, p.52). Mulroy (2004) laments this movement away from teaching grammar because it is “a fundamental problem in our education system” (p.52). Just as Mulroy deems grammar important and essential, so too does the National Council of Teachers of English, the reigning authority on all matters pertaining to English curriculum and instruction in the United States. Grammar is the key to understanding the language people speaks. When learning grammar, an individual can then “talk about language...understand what makes sentences and paragraphs clear and interesting and precise...[and has] a tool for thinking about and discussing sentences” (Haussamen et al, 1998, para. 2). Unfortunately, Mulroy (2004) points out, students who do not understand grammar “lack any method for analyzing meaning”; if a student can not decipher meaning, he or she certainly can not reproduce meaning (p.53). Because the NCTE, in addition to other scholars,

have deemed grammar important, the focus should not be on whether or not to teach grammar, but, instead, the focus should be on how best to teach these grammatical concepts.

Review of the Previous Literature

Grammar *is* important; however, there is wide spread evidence that traditional grammar instruction does not improve students' writing. Sipe (2006) articulates why grammar is important: "...the students' ability to understand and control their own written language provided them with a degree of power when they entered into certain written conversations beyond our classrooms" (p.16). The traditional instructional methods for teaching this ability, however, do not seem to have any effective on improving the quality of those "certain written conversations." Sherwin & New York State (1970), in a review of research done evaluating the effectiveness of traditional grammar instruction, concluded, "instruction in formal grammar is an ineffective and inefficient way to help students achieve proficiency in writing" (p.39). Sipe (2006), first-hand, experienced this failure of grammar to affect writing when she observed her students "do well on the [grammar] test Friday" but "months afterward...students strewed commas across their papers as if sprinkling them from a salt shaker" (pp.15-16). Andrews (2006), as stated earlier, reached the same conclusions both Sherwin and Sipe did: "the teaching of syntax (as a part of a traditional...approach to teaching grammar) appears to have no influence on either the accuracy or quality of written language development for 5-16-year-olds" (p.51). Some of these researchers and teachers even go so far as to suggest that teaching traditional grammar has an adverse affect on students learning to write. Unfortunately, if teaching this way has no effect but teachers continue to do so, that is a time spent on something ineffective while time *not* spent on actual effective instruction. Sipe (2006) discovered the most "disturbing thing...about teaching isolated grammar skills was the huge amount of time the exercises took

away from writing and reading that mattered” (p.16). Additionally, Wyse (2001) acknowledges another degree of concern when teaching traditional grammar: “the negative impact on pupils’ motivation” (p.422).

There is a collective agreement that there is no link between traditional grammar instruction and improvement in the quality of students’ writing. The NCTE articulated a resolution on traditional grammar instruction based on 50 years of research: “Resolved, that the National Council of Teachers of English (1985) affirms the position that the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises...is a deterrent to the improvement of students’ speaking and writing” (para. 1). The studies conducted in English speaking countries have determined the ineffectiveness of this teaching strategy, but scholars, teachers and researchers alike still remain adamant that grammar is an important part of the English curriculum. Patterson (2001) articulates the dilemma clearly when she states: “Yes, grammar has a place in the language arts classroom. In fact, the conversation should never be whether or not grammar is taught. Rather it should be about *how* grammar is taught” (p. 50).

Interview with an Expert

Lippinski (pseudonym) has been an English teacher for 30 years, and as a result of his experience as a teacher, he has observed and participated in the evolution of grammar instruction (personal communication, December, 2010). Traditionally grammar was taught in isolation with a heavy emphasis on drilling grammar rules. Slowly pedagogy has shifted to a writing centered approach to grammar instruction.

From the beginning of his career and for many years after, Lippinski has placed a heavy emphasis on grammar instruction. The strategy was drill and kill; students memorized grammar rules, did a lot of grammar exercises practicing those rules and then took assessments to

demonstrate their proficiency in grammar. Textbooks focusing on fundamentals and rudimentary grammar concepts were a large part of the curriculum. When probed as to why grammar was taught this way, Lippinski explained, “It had always been taught that way.” There were always a variety of different textbooks that all approached grammar in a similar manner. Lippinski further elaborated on the effectiveness of this method of grammar instruction communicating that it was “...good for the good students. They learn grammar.” However, the majority of students seemed only moderately proficient even after extensive time spent with the grammar (textbook, exercises, quizzes, etc.).

Lippinski has participated in the evolution of grammar instruction. He explained that now grammar is taught much less in the abstract. There are fewer worksheets and exercises. Grammar has become more grounded in writing instruction. He, in his own classroom, discusses grammar within the context of a particular student’s writing piece. If the sentence is the basic unit for writing, then the discussion needs to start there. For example, when students write a piece, they will read it aloud to the class. Then, as a group, the class will talk about the grammatical strengths and weaknesses. He has found, when correcting their grammar mistakes within their writing, it is important not to correct something they do not know and to avoid overly saturating them with too many corrections. This hurts their confidence with the writing process.

Grammar instruction is still a nebulous subject for Lippinski as well as the colleagues he works with and encounters in the English community. While there does seem to be a significant shift towards grammar instruction *for* writing, there is not a clear-cut method of achieving the level of expertise within a student’s composition that every English teacher hopes for. Lippinski suggested that perhaps this investigation should not focus on the high school teacher and his or

her curriculum but on graduates who are in college utilizing, or not, what they were taught in high school.

Summary

There is a consensus among researchers and educators that there is no link between traditional grammar instruction and improvement in the quality of students' writing. Understanding the tools of the English language is an important factor in mastering written communication, underscoring the fact that students must learn grammar in order to write effectively. There needs to be more research in this area to firmly establish the strategies that do successfully teach students grammar rules that they then reproduce within their writing.

Chapter 3 Method

Introduction

The researcher took a qualitative approach to the research using a quasi-experimental design.

The researcher examined a population of high school students; their names and school remained confidential in order to protect their privacy. The researcher administered a pre and posttest assessing grammar proficiency within a writing sample. The treatment was direct instruction of the grammar in the manner under investigation: traditional grammar instruction.

Sample and Site

The researcher teaches sophomore English at local faith-based high school, so these 21 students are the intact group for the research. This researcher is using an intact group as her sample because these students are familiar to her, having taught most of them the previous year; additionally, at the time of this experiment, the researcher has known her students for six months. Their curriculum and their experiences this year make them an ideal population because they began the year without any traditional grammar instruction and have received three weeks of the very grammar instructional methods in question within this research.

Access and Permissions

This is a sample of convenience because this researcher is a high school English teacher and, consequently, has access to her English students. There is no deviation from the current curriculum; rather, the writing produced, the grammar instructed and subsequent writing assignments will provide the necessary information for examination.

Data Gathering Strategies

For this quasi-experimental design, the research administered a pretest. To begin the school year, the students had a writing assessment, a paragraph about their summer text, in class for approximately thirty minutes. This was the second day of meeting as a class, and the students had not received any direction instruction on writing or grammar. The researcher, then, assessed the grammatical mastery of the students within their compositions.

Later in the semester, the researcher taught 6 grammar rules over the course of three weeks. This traditional grammar instruction serves as the experimental treatment. The instruction included rote memorization, grammar exercises for practice of the rules and a test assessing the students' mastery of the grammar rules. A few weeks post-instruction, the students wrote another paragraph about a different text.

The format, requirements, length and structure were the same as their pretest assessment. The researcher then, again, assessed the grammatical mastery of the students within their compositions. The comparison of the pretest and posttest levels of mastery of the grammar rules within the students' compositions determined if teaching the traditional grammar components was an effective method for improving student writing at the high school level.

Ethical Standards

This study adheres to ethical standards in conducting research on human subjects, following the policy established through the American Psychological Association. The researcher has disguised all personally identifiable information specifically their names and school.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

The data was collected at a small, faith-based high school with about 700 students. Of those 700 students, 600 hundred students are white, Caucasian, and the remaining 100 are multi-racial. Seven percent of the students are Asian American, 10 percent of the students are Hispanic, and four percent is African American.

The school draws from a fairly affluent population, and they pay tuition; however, twenty-three percent of the student population receives some degree of financial assistance. The parents are present and supportive in their students' academic lives. Many of the parents are college educated and beyond, and the high school is a college preparatory high school.

This is an academically rigorous school with high expectations for their students. The school rewards academic excellence publically and frequently, and 100% percent of the senior class attends college the following year with 95% of those students attending a four year university or college. The individuals in this research are students in Sophomore English between the ages of 15 and 16. They attended this high school last year, so this is their second year there. The class is composed of roughly half boys and half girls.

The data collected included writing samples from before and after grammar instruction. The students wrote a paragraph discussing their summer reading text on the second day of school. The students were asked to reflect on their reading over the summer and discuss how it reflected interdependence. The students had the entire class period to compose the paragraphs. Later in the semester, the students were given direct instruction on seven grammar rules. The teacher used the traditional grammar instructional method including lecture, rote memorization,

exercises for practice and a summative grammar test. A month after learning the grammar rules, the students wrote another paragraph on a different text. The format and structure of the paragraph was exactly the same as the earlier paragraph, but the text they discussed within the paragraph changed.

Findings

Out of twenty-one pretest student paragraphs, six students did not make any grammatical errors in their writing. Additionally, fifteen students made two or fewer mistakes. Within the pretest writing sample, six students had three or more errors including one student made seven mistakes.

From the same twenty-one students who then wrote the posttest paragraph, no one had an error-free paper. Fourteen students made two or fewer mistakes, and seven students committed three or more errors; however, the largest number of grammar mistakes made in this posttest paragraph was four.

In examining the pretest and posttest of individual students; six students improved between the two tests making fewer errors in the posttest, four students made the same number of mistakes on both tests, and ten students made more errors in the posttest than in their pretest writing. Only one student made the same mistake the same number of times for both tests.

Additionally, of the eleven who did not seem to improve between the pretest and posttest, six of those students did not commit a single error on the pretest. They were the six students that did not make any grammatical errors in their writing; they, then, made a range of mistakes on the posttest with the highest count being four errors. In looking even closer at the specific grammatical mistakes each student made on both the pretest and posttest, of the twenty-one students five students committed the exact same grammatical errors on the pretest and the

posttest. Ten of the students made different errors on the posttest than were originally committed on the pretest. The six who did not make any errors on the pretest were taken out of the sorting because the deviation between the pre and posttest is irrelevant; they did not make mistakes on the pre-test, and then they did make mistakes on the post-test.

Chapter 5 Discussion

How Present Study Compares to Previous Research

The findings of the study reflected the literature. Just as Andrews et al (2006), Sipe (2006) and Sherwin et al (1970) found, the traditional approach to grammar instruction “appears to have no influence on...the accuracy...of written language” (Andrews et al, 2006, p.51). There was not any change in the students’ accuracy within their paragraphs after being taught a set of grammar rules in a traditional method. They made the same number of mistakes in their writing before learning the rules as they did after learning the rules.

The process was almost identical to Sipe’s (2006) experience; her students demonstrated proficiency within a grammar test, but “months afterward...students strewed commas across their papers as if sprinkling them from a salt shaker” (pp.15-16). The treatment took three weeks of instruction, practice and exercise drills without anything to show for it suggesting, “instruction in formal grammar is an ineffective and inefficient way to help students achieve proficiency in writing” (Sherwin et al, 1970, p.39).

Summary of Major Findings

There was no change in the students’ writing accuracy between the pretest and the posttest. The treatment did not seem to have any effect on the students’ writing because they were committing the same errors after receiving the traditional grammar instruction. The students’ writing did not improve; in fact, as about a quarter of the students did not commit a single grammatical error on the pretest, there was not a single student who wrote an error-free paragraph for the posttest.

Limitations/Gaps in the Literature

Because grammar is a facet of English curriculum and an element of composition, it is difficult to extract a clear cause-and-no-effect relationship between grammar instruction and writing proficiency. Grammar is an imbedded element of a whole English class, and as such, it does not lend itself perfectly clear results. Andrews et al (2006) study qualifies their findings with the term “appears” to have to effect, but he could not state it definitively (p.51). He highlights a lack of clear, measurable results in the examination of this topic: “...so far, we have a situation of cases not proven” (Andrews, 2005, p.74).

The articles and the findings all indicate there does not seem to be a correlation between grammar instruction and writing improvement; however, as Andrews et al (2006) indicates there are not any “significant studies to date that have proven such an effect” (p.51). The findings suggest traditional grammar instruction has little to no effect on students’ composition quality, but that does not definitely mean it does not.

Implications for Future Research

The findings are in alignment with the current research on the effect of traditional grammar; however, there needs to be more research done examining this cause-and-effect relationship. The effect of grammar instruction is a nebulous entity to measure because students bring different academic backgrounds to the classroom and the elements they know or do not know might not be isolated to classroom instruction. Consequently, the observations and research about the effects of grammar instruction cannot say, absolutely, that traditional grammar instruction is completely ineffective.

Further studies that could isolate the students’ exposure and experience with grammar instruction and then routinely gauge the effects of that instruction would be helpful and

revealing. Even though the current research implies a lack of relationship between traditional grammar instruction and improving students' writing, further research could solidify and prove that implication.

Overall Significance of the Literature

The literature has overwhelmingly revealed traditional grammar instruction does not effectively improve students writing. The findings of this study have reiterated that gap in isolated grammar instruction and writing proficiency. Consequently, the English community needs to reevaluate their pedagogical approach to grammar. Teachers need to examine and articulate *why* grammar is taught within the English Language Arts.

The NCTE, in addition to the various literature, suggests grammar is an essential tool for successfully and effectively controlling the English language. If understanding grammar is important because it helps students become effective communicators, then we need to align that belief with instructional practice. Grammar can not be taught in isolation from writing, as has been English curricular tradition and it should be taught within the context of writing.

The ideal instructional strategy is very time-consuming, and there is a lot of other English content curriculum that teachers are forced to cover in addition to grammar. Additionally, the students bring a variety of different abilities and levels of understanding about grammar to each classroom, so the breadth of grammar that might need to be covered could be extensive.

Regardless of the time constraints and the varying levels of proficiency, the key to effective grammar instruction seems be using the students' writing. If the students can see the connection between the rule and how they construct their written pieces, then there will not be a gap between grammar instruction and writing composition. The model might look different at every school because every classroom and student population is different, but the underlying

foundation should remain the same: grammar instruction within the context of writing, not two separate entities of English.

A Model for Grammar Instruction

A semester model for grammar instruction could be as follows:

At the beginning of the semester, the teacher would give the class a weekly writing prompt. This prompt would be the same for each student, and it would require the student to compose a response. This is what the teacher, then, uses to gather data about his or her students.

The prompt and length of assignment can be designed to fit within the current writing standards, so this would not be any additional curriculum. The students are learning writing as they would be in any English class. As the students write and submit these pieces each week, the teacher can continue with writing instruction focusing the feedback and commentary on each composition to strictly writing only (not grammar).

This should continue for a few weeks at least in order to gain a large sample of specific data for that class; having the student's submit multiple compositions and receive feedback will not only make them better writers but also provide the teacher with adequate information about his or her students. The time span should allow for students having "off" days, absences, etc. After each submission, the teacher should keep a log of grammatical errors noting the most frequent and most common one; plus, the teacher should also photocopy all of the paragraphs before they are returned. The teacher will then use this log of errors to determine which grammar errors are the most problematic. Which error do students seem to make the most frequently? *That* information becomes the grammar curriculum of the semester.

The teacher should start with one rule at a time perhaps one rule every two weeks. The teacher explains the grammar rule for a short period of time like 5 or 10 minutes; for example, if

the students seem to write fragments of sentences but punctuate them as if they were complete thoughts, then the teacher could explain what a fragment is, what it is missing and why it cannot be punctuated as a complete thought.

The teacher would then proceed to use sentence fragments from the copies of the students' compositions. The class would correct these student generated examples as practice with the grammar rule. The teacher can do a few things after that. He or she can return one of the sets of paragraphs, and the students could correct their own fragment mistakes. However, the teacher should also meet one-on-one with those students who seem to commit this error the most frequently using the students' paragraph as the starting point for a more in-depth mini-lesson of the grammar rule.

All of these steps can be repeated with any grammar rule. Ideally, the teacher spends instructional time on those rules revealed to be the most problematic for that particular class. This model is using the student's own writing to explain grammar, and it allows the students to see how the grammar rule actually functions within a written composition rather than in abstraction.

References

- Andrews, R., Torgerson, C., Beverton, S., Freemon, A., Locke, T., Low, G., Robinson, A., & Zhu, D. (2006). The effect of grammar teaching on writing development. *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(1), 39--55. Retrieved from <http://www.jstore.org/stable/30032657>
- Andrews, R. (2005). Knowledge about the teaching of [sentence] grammar: The state of play. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 4(3), 69-76. Retrieved from <http://education.waikato.ac.nz/research/files/etpc/2005y4n3art4.pdf>
- Gill, D. (2000). Division of labor: Improving writing skills by changing the English curriculum. *High School Magazine*, 7(7), 47-49. Retrieved from <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>
- Haussamen, B., Dongier, P., Dykstra, P., Kolln, M., Rogers, K., Wheeler, R. (1998). Guidelines on some questions and answers about grammar. *National Council of Teachers of English*. Retrieved September 23, 2010 from <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/qandaaboutgrammar>
- Mulroy, D. (2004). Reflections on grammar's demise. *Academic Questions*, 17(3), 52-58. doi:10.1007/s12129-004-1018-1
- Patterson, N. G. (2001). Just the facts: Research and theory about grammar instruction. *Voices from the Middle*, 8(3), 50-55. Retrieved from <http://www.ncte.org>
- Roberts, C. M., & Boggase, B. A. (1992, May). *Non-intrusive grammar in writing*. Annual Conference on Computers and Writing. Indianapolis, IN.
- Sherwin, J. S., & New York State, E. C. (1970). Research and the teaching of English. *English Record*, 21 (1), 35-43. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov>

Sipe, R. B. (2006). Grammar matters. *English Journal*, 95(5), 15-17. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30046582>

Wyse, D. (2001). Grammar. for writing? A critical review of empirical evidence. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 49(4), 411. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3122362>