

Putting the G back in English: Preparing pre-service teachers to teach grammar

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ABSTRACT: Classroom teachers need to have a solid foundation in understanding and applying English grammar in order to buttress their content and pedagogical content knowledge and support their students' literacy development. However, teacher preparation programs are challenged to incorporate this kind of content into the existing curriculum, which is heavily laden with other core requirements, including the need to prepare teachers for classrooms of diverse learners, many of them ELLs. How can we best prepare future teachers so that they have the requisite knowledge and skills, curiosity, and training to meet the language learning demands of today's students? This case study explores a collaborative attempt to respond to the grammar challenge in teacher education involving a block of literacy courses and a linguistics course.

KEYWORDS: Grammar, grammar instruction, teacher preparation, service-learning

Linguists who have engaged in serious, thoughtful and rigorous study of the English language may be forgiven for assuming that the results of their work would have a significant effect on the way English grammar is taught in schools. (Meyer, 2003)

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

There has been a long and cantankerous debate about the efficacy of teaching grammar concepts explicitly to students (Hartwell, 1985; Myhill, 2005; van Gelderen, 2006). Very few can argue, however, against the need for today's classroom teachers to have a solid foundation in understanding and applying English grammatical structures in order to buttress their content and pedagogical content knowledge (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000), serve as appropriate role models for language usage, and facilitate their students' literacy development. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) underscore this need by arguing that "the more teachers know about grammar, the more expeditiously they should be able to raise a learner's consciousness about how language works" (p. 1). Indeed, Denham and Lobeck (2002) point to research that supports the notion that teachers need this background knowledge:

The general thrust of [this research] is to highlight how linguistic knowledge enhances teachers' and students' understanding of language structure, acquisition, variation and change. Such knowledge, in turn, leads to a greater understanding of linguistic diversity, and to recognition of linguistic discrimination both inside and outside of the (often multilingual) K-12 classroom. (p. 1)

In addition, it is important to note the significance of language metaknowledge in critical literacy, a key consideration of modern pedagogy, particularly when working with linguistically and culturally diverse learners. After all, critical literacy entails at its core the acquisition and composition of multiple genres (both written and oral), the critical awareness of the social-semiotic function of various genres (Halliday & Hasan, 1991), and the language variety/register that codifies each social-semiotic function (see Clark & Ivanič, 1997; Street 1996; Street & Lea, 2006; Gee 1990; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, 2000). None of these pursuits of students and their teachers can be meaningfully accomplished in the absence of grammar knowledge, awareness of its constraints and affordances, or awareness of varying grammatical expectations across languages, varieties and registers.

Perhaps the best place for teachers to develop this acumen in the English language is in their pre-service preparation. To be sure, many preparation programs provide coursework in English grammar, and there has been reported success in having future teachers incorporate the knowledge and concepts into their own practice (Denham & Lobeck, 2002; Smagorinsky, Wright, Augustine, O'Donnell-Allen, & Konopak, 2007). However, Belk and Thompson (1999) assert that many pre-service teachers do not acquire the requisite grammar skills despite being offered many opportunities to do so. In a review of research on prospective teachers' knowledge about language, Borg (2001) cites several research studies including Bloor, 1986; Wray, 1993; and Williamson and Hardman, 1995; which reported significant gaps in the study participants' grammatical knowledge. An acknowledgment of this situation was also recognised by teachers themselves in Fagan and Laine (1980) and Folsom (1983), as it was identified as the item needed most strengthening in undergraduate preparation programs. This lack of knowledge can have detrimental effects, particularly for teachers who need to meet the needs of diverse students (Belk & Thompson, 1999, p. 2).

Shulman (1987) found that teachers who have not received adequate preparation in grammar instruction experience apprehension in teaching grammar topics, and the quality of their instruction noticeably deteriorates as they struggle to teach a subject in which their subject matter knowledge is lacking. Similarly, Borg (2001) reports that teachers' self-perceptions of their knowledge about grammar have significant effects on their work. Conversely, as Meyer (2003) states, "We will not have good instruction in the structure of English unless teachers themselves are curious about it, are trained to observe it, and know where to look for answers" (p. 42). Furthermore, even if teachers have acquired "conscious awareness of grammar structures" (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000, p. 446), it appears that, more often than not, they are challenged when trying to negotiate their understanding of the English language and their application of this knowledge in a meaningful way in the classroom (Denham & Lobeck, 2002; Smagorinsky et al., 2007).

Therefore, a significant question for teacher education is as follows: How can we best prepare future teachers so that they have the requisite knowledge and skills, curiosity, and training to meet the language learning demands of today's students? Traditionally, the subject of grammar, if at all explicitly present in teacher education, has been delegated to linguistics or language analysis courses offered as isolated modules, without any overt connections to pedagogical content or classroom application (Myhill, 2005). However, Johnston and Goettsch (2000) argue that teacher

education programs should not only pursue the ability to recite rules and recognise grammatical phenomena but should also focus on “knowledge as process” (p. 462). The authors also critique the modularised nature of knowledge in teacher education and recommend a “significantly more integrated approach to the language teacher curriculum,” in which explicit connections are made across grammar knowledge, methodology and articulations of how learners learn (p. 463).

Andrews (1999) considers *Teacher Metalinguistic Awareness* (TMA) a significant component of language teachers’ knowledge base. According to Andrews, TMA involves “explicit knowledge about language” (including grammar terminology) and reflecting on this knowledge to inform instructional practices (p. 144). The need for connecting the declarative knowledge involved in the ability to describe linguistic forms and the capacity to productively incorporate this knowledge in instruction is also echoed in Johnston and Goettsch’s (2000) study of four experienced ESL teachers. The researchers found that the knowledge base of these effective teachers included (a) significant *content knowledge* (awareness of grammatical structures) (b) *pedagogical content knowledge* involving effective teaching strategies, and (c) *knowledge of learners*, which entails a sensitivity to students’ evolving knowledge of language.

In her work, Myhill (2005) advocates against the “deficit model of grammar teaching” (p. 78), whose educational value has been repeatedly discredited by various studies, and proposes instead the teaching of grammar in context. However, Myhill cautions against naïve and uncritical implementations of this *functionalist view of grammar*. These may include instructional situations in which the study of the context takes precedent, relegating grammar to the sidelines, or situations of “pseudo-contextualisation, where separate, discrete grammar lessons are replaced by ‘mini’ grammar lessons in the midst of something else” (p. 82). Myhill’s recommendations parallel the work by Weaver, Bush, Anderson and Bills (2006), who advocate instructional practices that make “grammar real” by purposefully and organically integrating the study of language in the processes of reading and of composing meaningful, authentic texts (p. 80).

The kind of knowledge and methodological dexterity described above is unlikely to be developed through the sporadic and fragmented attention to grammar and its instruction currently common in teacher preparation programs. Long-term theoretical coursework combined with authentic, hands-on experiences, such as service-learning, may be the answer to the call to prepare teachers who have both adequate content and methodological knowledge to teach grammar effectively. This intensive pedagogical approach, which combines theory with a service component, can offer pre-service teachers an additional experiential offering beyond their traditional field experience and student teaching practicum. Swick and Rowls (2000) believe that this service-learning methodology can transform teacher education programs by offering students not just a foundation in the theory of English language learning, but also a way of rethinking “teachers’ roles, responsibilities, and functions” (p. 468). Indeed, the role of service-learning in teacher education has taken on considerable import in the last decade, particularly in its contemporary conceptualization as “community-based engagement that is informed by an ethic of service” (Buchanan, Baldwin & Rudisill, 2002, p. 28).

In this paper, the authors present a study of a collaborative attempt to respond to the *grammar challenge* of teacher education, which spanned several courses, utilised a variety of approaches to content presentation, and engaged students in a range of diverse activities and assignments.

METHODOLOGY

This study sought to trace how participation in a series of grammar-centred literacy experiences and assignments influenced pre-service teachers' acquisition of grammatical meta-knowledge and of methodology skills consistent with the *functionalist approach* to teaching grammar. This inquiry was designed as a mixed methods case study, which explored the following research questions:

1. How did participants' growing awareness of language meta-knowledge evolve through their participation in these experiences and assignments?
2. How did participants' knowledge of grammar-specific methodological strategies develop as a result of these experiences and assignments?

The case study approach was selected because it offered multiple vantage points for examining the impact of these course-based experiences and assignments on the study participants. The use of case-study research for educational studies allows researchers to examine complex phenomena in depth and respond to "how" and "why" questions related to such phenomena (Yin, 2009; Scholz & Tietje, 2001). This often necessitates the use of both quantitative and qualitative investigative methods and processes to illustrate a more complete picture of the emerging data (Yin, 2009).

Case-study research has been criticised for its relatively small participant numbers and for the subjective nature of qualitative analysis; however, other researchers (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995) note that generalisability in the quantitative sense is not an objective of case study research. Rather, the objective is one of *extensity* (Webb, 1961). Describing, representing, analysing and explaining a case study has the capacity to provide significant insight into complex educational phenomena and inform practice by making visible possibilities in alternative educational contexts.

Participants and institutional context

This study focused on a teacher education program in which junior-level, pre-service teachers enrol in a nine-credit literacy block offering as well as a three-credit applied linguistics course in English as part of their undergraduate certification program. In this article we present a qualitative case study of 31 pre-service teachers in an elementary education (K-6) certification program offered at a regional campus of a large research university. The campus is located in a large metropolitan area in the Northeast of the US, and encompasses rural, suburban and urban school districts that serve a multicultural/multilingual student population. The pre-service teachers in this study are a mix of traditional-age (18-22 years old) and non-traditional adult learners (23+ years old). The 31 study participants represent typical students in the literacy block and the linguistic course over four consecutive semesters.

Literacy block courses

The literacy block included three language and literacy education courses: reading methods, writing methods and children's literature, all of which were taught by the same instructor. In addition, based on the institution's block/cohort program design, and facilitated by the campus' small student numbers, all of the students "traveled" together as a cohort and were co-registered in the same block sections. The unique circumstance of three courses sharing the same students and the same instructor afforded the opportunity to de-modularise the three literacy methods courses and to instead create an integrated syllabus that capitalised on the natural theoretical and methodological connections across the three courses and provided a rich workshop experience to the students, where dialogue and collaborative work were essential.

Communicative competence, a significant aspect of the study of language-in-use and of critical literacy, was central to these literacy courses both as a teaching tool and as a methodological recommendation. Texts, both oral and written, were understood as communication efforts whose effectiveness hinged upon the individual's ability to appropriately shape his/her linguistic behaviour in response to the situation at hand (Halliday & Hasan, 1991). This focus on the purposeful moulding of language for accomplishing communication purposes led naturally into the study of grammar as a highly valuable tool for thinking about, describing, and refining linguistic choices. Significant aspects of this study include the introduction and practice of key linguistic terminology and other relevant metalanguage, the use of modeling to demonstrate the functionalist approach to grammar, the assignment of lesson plan projects in which a grammatical concept was addressed in context, and the implementation of these instructional plans in mock lessons.

In addition, in the literacy block, students were introduced to the semantic, syntactic and phonological components of language and their respective units of analysis and other key terminology, but that was done in the context of studying different approaches to teaching early reading and writing. Through this approach, students' ability to be conversant about phonemes and the complex relationship between phonemes and graphemes become a core component of class conversations about the notions of phonics and phonemic awareness and how those are implemented in holistic versus phonics-based early reading programs. Similarly, the pre-service teachers' understanding of morphology and syntax was brought to bear as a significant backdrop to discussing ideas such as reading through analogy (Moustafa, 2000) and miscue analysis (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 1987).

Applied linguistics course

The applied linguistics course was designed to provide an overview of the structure of the English language through a functional/discourse analytic approach with an emphasis on understanding and applying this knowledge in multilingual/multicultural classroom settings. The course has a service-learning component, which involved pre-service teachers working as tutors for adults enrolled in ESL (English as a Second Language) programs at a local literacy agency. The tutoring sessions were supplemental to the adult English Language Learners' (ELL) classroom instruction. Pre-service teachers spent 40 hours over the course of a 15-week semester working

with participants (one-on-one or in small groups) on listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Though these pre-service teachers were working toward elementary school certification, the adult ESL site was purposefully selected as a useful gateway setting that could help prime the pre-service teachers for the linguistically diverse elementary school placements of their senior year, which potentially would also be their context of professional employment.

Adults will not simply accept the teaching that is provided to them as elementary ESL students are likely to do; they will ask questions and demand clarifications that necessitate that pre-service teachers have a thorough comprehension of grammatical knowledge and be able to effectively explain that content. Much like their elementary-aged counterparts, the adult ELLs' wide range of educational needs challenged these tutors to apply what they knew in the context of real-life situations. Through the applied linguistics course and the service-learning project, pre-service teachers were offered a variety of opportunities to develop grammatical knowledge of the structure of the English language, including lexical, morphological, syntactical, and phonological components, through the lens of linguistic analysis in order to recognise and remediate both oral and written grammatical errors in this ESL instructional context.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To effectively and systematically investigate the impact of the grammar-related experiences and assignments within this cluster of courses on participants, data was gathered through a variety of sources:

- *Pre- and post-surveys and assessment:* Pre-service teachers responded to questions about their perceptions and knowledge of English grammar and their ability to teach this content. In addition, the participants completed a pre- and post 50-point diagnostic assessment of their knowledge and understanding of various English grammatical concepts and common errors made by ELLs.
- *Reflective writings:* Pre-service teachers kept tutor logs of their individual sessions with the adult ELLs and also wrote a final case study report about their experience.
- *Participant-produced materials:* Pre-service teachers created lesson plans for teaching a grammatical concept to elementary-age children.
- *Classroom observation data:* Field notes were taken of conferences with participants during the various stages of the development of their lesson plans as well as their implementation in mock lessons in their literacy block college classroom.

The pre- and post- diagnostic assessments were graded and participants' scores were investigated through descriptive statistics to determine initial and final levels of declarative grammar knowledge and to compare the two. The pre- and post- surveys were analysed using (a) descriptive statistics to depict responses to Likert-scale items, and (b) thematic coding focusing on the participants' awareness of language meta-knowledge and of methodology skills to represent short-answer responses.

Subsequently, the results of the pre- and post- administrations were compared. Qualitative thematic analysis was also employed to examine participants' reflective writings and assignments (tutor logs, case study papers and lesson plans) and the classroom observation data. This data was scanned through the lens of the research questions using focused descriptive-coding (coded through *HyperResearch*) and were organized into two groupings: language metaknowledge and functionalist methodology skills.

RESULTS

Language metaknowledge

The acquisition of metaknowledge about language, including terminology, is considered by many to be crucial in teacher preparation (Andrews, 1999; Borg, 2001; Johnston & Goettsch, 2000; Meyer, 2003). However, in our experience, teacher educators who try to introduce such content in their courses often encounter significant resistance by their students. The early data from the pre-course survey distributed at the beginning of the linguistics course illustrated aspects of this resistance. When asked what concerns they had about the subject of grammar, the majority of the pre-service teachers responded in negative ways, making statements such as “[grammar] is one of the only things I loathed more in high school than trigonometry” or naively, “I will most likely not be teaching dangling modifiers to first graders so I would rather use this class to learn how to teach them what they need to know instead of stressing myself over things I will most likely not use in the future” or even sometimes with hostility, “[I am concerned about] my ability to embrace and enjoy the topic.” The most prevalent response among the students, however, was one of fear: “I’m worried that I may think I understand grammar but it will turn out that I am confused or was misled when it comes to the rules.”

In addition, when asked about their self-perceived attitude toward grammar, 23% of the pre-service teachers indicated that they do not like grammar, 32% indicated that they do like it, but more of them (45%) were undecided. Interestingly, a significant number of students (94%) reported they had had formal instruction in grammar; however, none of them expressed a high understanding of the subject. More specifically, when ranking their understanding of grammar knowledge on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), more than a third (87%) ranked their knowledge as 3 or below. These considerable misgivings about grammar knowledge were verified in a pre-diagnostic assessment seeking to assess knowledge of core grammatical concepts: the average score was 51.6 out of 100 with a range from a low of 35 to a high of 85.

The lack of confidence the pre-service teachers had in their knowledge about grammatical concepts was palpable at first, and this was evident early in their service-learning project. During the semester, the pre-service teachers spent 2-3 hours a week working directly with the ELLs and were responsible for submitting tutor logs for these sessions, which provided specific details about their work with the ELLs and what they accomplished during that specific time frame. This tutor log not only provided information about the ELLs' progress, but offered an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to reflect on their concerns, struggles and successes as well as to make connections to the grammatical concepts that were covered in the linguistics course and to consider how their experiences with adult ELL's could inform their

future practice as elementary teachers. The importance of reflection in service learning is well-documented in the service-learning literature (Jacoby, 1996; Silcox, 1993). “The most effective service-learning approaches appear to be those that integrate service experiences with course content and provide for reflection about the service experience through discussion or writing” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 611).

Initially, many students offered that although they had formal instruction in grammar in school at some point, they were unsure of the rules governing the English language and “why things are formed the way they are”. Students expressed the sentiment that they could speak and write well but they were not confident about “how to tell a student why his sentence is correct or incorrect”. One student, in particular, noted that he had “learned all about gerunds and participles and apostrophic rules in middle and high school, but never felt like any of it stuck.”

As the semester progressed, specific references to grammatical metalanguage began to appear in the tutor logs, as well as references to text material and what was covered in class. Students made references to “noticing” grammar more and made connections between the grammatical concepts and how they could help the ELLs understand them.

I noticed that my students often said things like, “Did you see my purse that is purple?” so I decided to do an adjective lesson with them. I made a sheet of sentences like the ones they would use and had them change the words around to directly modify the noun such as “Did you see my purple purse?” I explained about attributive adjectives which occur before a head noun in a noun phrase.

This developing metalanguage was reflected in their references to texts and resources and many of the students began utilising these materials in their individual tutoring sessions.

In one of my sessions, we were focusing on comparatives and superlatives. I brought my grammar book from class and used definitions and examples from the book to help me help them. I went over inequality comparisons with “er” endings and helped them understand that superlatives dealt with more than two.

As a result of these weekly sessions, the pre-service teachers also became aware of their own problems with grammar, and this consciousness helped them to develop empathy and understanding. In their willingness to admit when they were uncertain about a concept, students were also prepared to share their own struggles with understanding the English language system. As one student stated, “I had earlier admitted to [my tutee] that I, too, struggle...and that she is not alone because we were in it together.” Indeed, many of the students confessed that they learned a lot about grammar just by having to teach it to the ELLs.

The pre-service teachers’ feelings of inadequacy originated from the belief that they had never really learned about grammar, even though they had received formal instruction in grammar in elementary and/or secondary school. As one student lamented, “I had many English classes throughout my school years, but I cannot remember having too many direct grammar lessons. I remember lessons about different parts of speech and how to identify and use them, but never *why* we use certain words and structures over others.”

In their final, case-study reflections, the need to have a firm foundation in understanding English grammar was very apparent, despite the fact that many of the pre-service teachers still struggled with this content knowledge. Indeed, many of them began to see how the gaps in their own knowledge could significantly impact their ability to impart this knowledge to the students in their classes:

My eyes have been opened that most Americans read, write, and speak English poorly, including myself. What I am most puzzled about is how can we teach others how to speak or write English correctly, when [we] do not speak or write it correctly?

Some pre-service teachers also saw the parallels between this experience and their own learning journey. As one student stated, “I learned that I am not that different from the adults I tutored. We are all adults trying to learn in order to enhance our futures. They were taking language in, processing it, and responding. I was taking questions in, processing them, and responding. Their goal was English. My goal was grammar.”

The progress observed in the qualitative data regarding language meta-knowledge was to some extent confirmed by the participants’ performance in the post- diagnostic assessment administered at the end of the semester: the overall average for the group was 64.3% in comparison to the 51.6% of the beginning of the semester. Though the overall final scores were still relatively low, suggesting that the study participants still had considerable gaps in their declarative grammar knowledge, the gain of 12.7 percentage points was not negligible.

Developing methodology skills

As documented earlier, pre-service teachers typically started the program lacking significant declarative knowledge about grammar and had serious misgivings both about their understanding of English grammar and their ability to teach it. In the pre-course survey, 97% of the pre-service teachers ranked their ability to teach English grammar as 3 or below; the overall average for the group was 2.5. In addition, though most acknowledged receiving grammar instruction at certain points in their education, they typically described very traditional approaches in which grammatical phenomena were treated in a highly decontextualised manner with an apparent focus on the memorization of trite definitions of grammatical concepts and fill-in-the-blanks worksheets as demonstrations of grammatical knowledge.

According to Cuban (1982) and Clark and Peterson (1986), the instructional models teachers experience in their own schooling can shape their own instruction in significant ways and can be an impediment in the adoption of methodological approaches proposed through teacher training. Falling back into these familiar modes of instruction seems to be particularly true when teachers are working within a subject area such as grammar, for which they do not have adequate knowledge (Shulman, 1987).

In the literacy block, a series of steps were taken in an effort to counteract this trend and to provide a viable, alternative methodological frame. First, the instructor modeled grammar lessons utilising the functionalist approach, and subsequently, the pre-service teachers were asked to analyse the lesson in terms of the instructional strategies used and to compare it with traditional grammar lessons. Invariably, pre-

service teachers expressed relief and surprise at the existence of a model for grammar instruction that departs so significantly from the kind of traditional grammar instruction they had encountered in their schooling, and they described it as a much more comprehensible, meaningful and memorable approach, making particular note of how “seeing the phenomenon in action” solidified their learning.

To help pre-service teachers build on their understanding of the functionalist approach to grammar, they were asked in the literacy block to select a grammatical phenomenon of their choice, study it thoroughly, and create an original lesson plan based on the functionalist approach, teaching an aspect of that phenomenon to elementary-aged children.

The pre-service teachers’ early attempts/drafts at planning for grammar instruction, even after some experience with the functionalist perspective, often remained firmly within traditional grammar instruction. For example, in such lesson plans, nouns were invariably defined as “animals, places or things”, were identified in random subject-verb or subject-verb-object sentences written on the board, and were supposed to be circled by students in equally random and simplistic sentences in worksheets. Though pre-service teachers often tried to dress up these instructional activities through the use of eye-catching colours and images and the deployment of application games that got students moving and talking, their core content remained the same. Notably, none of these attempts at instructional planning involved a treatment of the phenomenon under study within complete, meaningful text nor was there any discussion of what the phenomenon *does* in language, the kinds of text that feature it or of communicative considerations that may influence how (or if) the phenomenon is used.

Through conferencing with classmates and/or the instructor and other opportunities for gentle guidance, the pre-service teachers’ lesson plans showed improvement. By the time the lesson plan was due, some of the pre-service teachers adopted the tenets of the functionalist perspective with enthusiasm and sensitivity and produced very competent lesson plans. In those plans, mentor texts were carefully selected and deftly used in indentifying the selected grammatical phenomenon, exploring its function, and examining the language rules that regulate its use and its formation. In addition, those plans engaged students in substantial opportunities to actively think and talk about language, to consider issues of communicative competence and critical literacy, and to integrate both the deconstruction and synthesis of text with an explicit but not overbearing attention to the function of grammatical phenomena as building blocks of purposeful and effective communication. For example, in a plan on adjectives a pre-service teacher proposed having students work in cooperative groups to examine the dish descriptions in copies of restaurant menus, choose appealing menu selections, and identify words that rendered their selections appealing. In a whole class debriefing activity, the teacher would highlight the words (mostly adjectives) proposed by the students and ask critical thinking questions such as “What role do these words play in the menu entry?” and “Looking at the words we underlined, are there any words or phrases that are better than others? Why? What should these words be helping our reader do?” In the remainder of the lesson plan, after defining adjectives and engaging in guided practice within the menu framework, students would be invited to utilise their knowledge of adjectives and their function in setting and character descriptions in an ongoing, embellished fairytale assignment.

However, despite the eventual dexterity of some of the pre-service teachers in applying a functionalist approach to grammar in their lesson plans, a number of their peers found success more elusive as they worked to bring together a knowledge base that challenged them, emergent lesson-planning skills, and a seemingly exotic methodological proposition. Though a guidance framework developed in class had proven to be a very helpful scaffold, some pre-service teachers tended to apply it naively, incorporating what they perceived as “expected components of the approach” in lesson plans that lacked the necessary conceptual cohesion. In such cases, though aspects of the lesson plans were promising, flaws were often encountered such as introducing a supposed mentor text but then abandoning it for decontextualised grammar instruction, identifying a phenomenon in context but failing to adequately deconstruct it or explore its sociolinguistic implications, moving to independent practice of the phenomenon without sufficient comprehension checking through guided practice, and assigning decontextualised, independent practice activities.

This naiveté was also encountered in the linguistics course, as pre-service teachers entered the service-learning project with varying levels of teaching abilities. Many of them began the project with the natural reaction of a mixture of opportunity and dread, as the recognition set in that they must now be able to teach something they had indicated they knew little about themselves. In the pre-survey given prior to the first tutoring session, many students vocalised their growing awareness of the challenge before them:

I do not have any experience working with anyone with ESL and am very intimidated that we are tutoring people older than we are...I am also not a “grammar master” so I do not know how I will help to teach them grammar aspects if I do not know them myself.

Although most of the students had served as tutors in some capacity prior to the course, and many of these experiences had involved teaching children, very few of them had worked directly with ELLs, particularly adults, and this created some anxiety and apprehension. As one student stated, “To be honest, I am pretty nervous and do not know what to expect...I would feel pretty confident walking into an elementary school classroom, but tutoring a few adults with a different native language makes me nervous.”

Students also entered the experience with some preconceived notions of what to expect, often assuming they will just “get students [who] would come to [them] with questions about assignments or discuss what they were doing in class.” Indeed, as discussed earlier, a number of the students started the experience with almost a blueprint for teaching based on the way they were taught. Even those who had some understanding of classroom diversity struggled with what to do: “I understood that the likelihood of having English language learners in my class was high, but I never thought about *how* to teach them English. I figured teaching basic vocabulary skills and submerging them into an English speaking environment would be enough.” What was discovered was the need to merge the *what* and *why* about English grammar with a functional-linguistic instructional approach, rather than “one myopic strategy” that would work for everyone. As one student discovered early on, “It became very obvious very fast that standing in front of a group of ESL students and lecturing on the necessities of using the proper prepositions was not going to benefit anybody.”

The tutoring sessions were a lesson in patience and understanding. Most of the adult learners were at beginning and intermediate levels, and the initial sessions caused anxiety for the pre-service teachers beyond their lack of understanding of English grammatical concepts, as many of them were also confronted with their lack of ability to determine an appropriate methodological approach to teaching grammar. In their earlier tutor logs, the participants expressed their frustrations: “Was I to cram the entire foundation of English language into [the few hours a week I met with them]?” Questions surrounding what to teach and how best to teach it permeated these early sessions. As one student stated, “My goal is to be prepared to be a teacher of ELLs in the near future, but I didn’t feel I was ready for this yet.” As a result, the students often fell back on traditional grammar instructional approaches:

I started by teaching them nouns, verbs and adjectives. I taught them these by first telling them the definition and then examples for each. For nouns, I told them multiple examples of people, places and things. After, I had them complete a worksheet.

As the weeks went on, these earlier frustrations dissipated for some of the pre-service teachers as they grew more confident not only in their understanding of English grammar and how it works, but in their ability to explain these concepts to the ELLs. And even when the students were confronted with a question they could not answer, many of them made attempts to review the concept so they could go over it with the ELL at the next tutoring session. By the end of the semester, the pre-service teachers began to understand the necessity for not only having metalinguistic knowledge, but for developing the ability to teach this content to all students, including ELLs, and expressed these sentiments in their case study papers. For some of the pre-service teachers, it led to almost a renewed sense of work ethic about learning this content in order to be a well-prepared teacher, as they realised how much more they needed to consider when teaching students, particularly ELLs: “I need to be aware not only of where my students come from, but also I need to dig deeper and really assess where they are in their proficiency so I can guide them better.”

In the latter part of the semester in the literacy block, the pre-service teachers were expected to draw their developing metalinguistic and methodological knowledge and experiences together by selecting a pivotal instructive section in their lesson plans to present in a mock lesson. During this activity, the pre-service teachers got into character and treated their classmates as their elementary class. The need to realise a portion of their lesson plan impelled pre-service teachers to solidify their personal knowledge of the topic to be taught and to consider implementation nuances of instructional procedures to ensure student engagement and attainment of objectives. In addition, though as in their service-learning projects their audience was still adults, the expectation to teach as in an elementary classroom brought about considerations of effective, age-appropriate adaptation of their grammar knowledge. After each mock lesson, the audience provided feedback to the presenter focusing on both what went well and on areas of potential improvement. Already intimately familiar with peer feedback mechanisms such as peer conferencing and authors’ chair events (see Calkins, 1994), the pre-service teachers tended to provide specific and honest feedback.

The mock lesson activity, which was often identified by the pre-service teachers as one of the most powerful events of their literacy block coursework, was characterised

by several notable patterns. First, the presenter's level of comprehension of the grammatical phenomenon at hand became readily visible. In lesson plans, all the pre-service teachers had to do was describe instructional procedures; in the mock lesson, they actually had to make the content comprehensible to an audience. This brought about the realisation to both presenter and audience that cursory content knowledge and inadequate preparation were simply not an option. Second, the cumulative experience of a number of examples of lessons utilising the functionalist approach to teaching grammar helped demystify challenging aspects of the approach, rendered options and variations accessible, and solidified it in the pre-service teachers' instructional repertoire. At this point, it was actually not uncommon for presenters to comment on how experiencing mock lessons and discussions helped them identify weaknesses in their own plans and motivated them to make improvements.

As the semester drew to a close, the students began making connections between the content covered in the courses and the actual application of this material in a classroom-based setting. The most significant associations came in their developing understanding that grammar was not just some abstract and arbitrary set of regulations and conventions.

Teaching English, I learned, doesn't need to be a rote set of rule and exceptions, taught completely devoid of any contextual reference. It can be taught within the frame that is built by my students. They can and should dictate what and when I teach (in the realm of grammar).

However, not all of the pre-service teachers were able to put the pieces of the puzzle together and some continued to struggle with the actual implementation of teaching grammar in context. Part of the problem may have been tied to the fact that many of them still lacked a solid foundation in grammatical knowledge. As mentioned earlier, despite the 12.7% gain found in the post- diagnostic assessment, the final average score of 64.3 out of 100 is still relatively low. This situation created some frustration among the pre-service teachers because they still felt they had a lot to learn. Despite this limitation, however, many of them evolved from the beginning of the semester when they were unsure of what to cover and how to cover it, to understanding that focused and clear instruction is more important than "covering the curriculum", an important realisation in the era of *No Child Left Behind*. As one pre-service teacher stated, "In the end I discovered that the resources are only as good as the teacher presenting them and that when the time comes I will rise to the challenge of teaching to a variety of learning levels and needs."

CONCLUSION

Previous research suggests that pre-service teachers enter certification programs with significant gaps in their grammar knowledge. Findings from this study confirmed these findings and shed light on the growing concern about teachers' lack of formal knowledge about English grammar and their corresponding lack of pedagogical skills. The data examined confirmed that knowledge gaps in core grammar constructs can be an impediment in many ways, not only for the pre-service teachers themselves, but for the learners they will be teaching in their classrooms, particularly English language learners. The implication from these findings points to the need to incorporate some kind of explicit grammar instruction in teacher education programs coupled with an

application component so that pre-service teachers have a firm foundation in basic grammatical knowledge along with the understanding and recognition that this knowledge is an important aspect to their effectiveness as classroom teachers. In addition, the implication for K-12 education is that there needs to be a serious examination of what is being done with grammar in today's schools. Pre-service teachers need to come to college with a solid foundation in English grammar so that faculty in teacher education programs can *build* on it rather than have to teach the fundamental structures and knowledge about grammar before any kind of instruction can take place about applying this knowledge in a classroom setting. The findings from this study point to the significant knowledge gap and the daunting task of trying to bridge this divide as well as build on it in the course of a typical fifteen-week semester.

Furthermore, the research literature suggests the need for pre-service teachers to develop appropriate methodological skills in order to effectively teach grammar from a functional-linguistic approach. Most importantly, the pre-service teachers need to leave their preparation programs with a viable alternative to traditional grammar instruction, which they have invariably adopted through their own experiences as students. The data from this study suggests that to effectively move pre-service teachers away from the comfort zone of traditional grammar instruction, teacher education programs need to provide them with multiple opportunities to (a) experience and reflectively consider the functional-linguistic approach proposed through their coursework and (b) to teach this content utilising the proposed approach so that they have the confidence and expertise to do so in the classroom. Such opportunities should be carefully scaffolded through of series of activities involving coaching, substantive feedback and safe settings for practice. Crucially, these opportunities need to encompass ESL pedagogical knowledge because teachers in today's classrooms have to be able to effectively and efficiently identify the needs of ELLs and know how to address those needs.

Lastly, the research identifies service-learning as a powerful tool in teacher education programs. The data from this study encourages these programs to find ways to incorporate this pedagogy into the existing curriculum in order to provide pre-service teachers with the actual practice of having to not only know grammar but of having to teach it as well. Service-learning embedded in coursework, along with structured and focused opportunities for thoughtful, reflective analysis of this experience, will offer pre-service teachers more than skills and knowledge; it will provide a chance for them to recognise the value and importance of engaging with the community in order to understand issues in education that will have a direct impact on their future roles as 21st-century teachers.

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Manuscript received: June 15, 2010

Revision received: December 2, 2010

Accepted: December 6, 2010