MAKING MEANING WITH GRAMMAR: A repertoire of possibilities

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The place of grammar in an English curriculum?

The place of grammar in an English or literacy curriculum has long been a source of debate, one in which professionals, politicians and the public have often engaged with unbridled enthusiasm. As such, the debate has sometimes been characterised more by ideology or polemic, than by intellectual engagement with the core ideas. In part, this is because grammar has become inextricably intertwined with notions of correctness and standards. Indeed, Hancock (2009) argues that *'Grammar is error and error is grammar in much of the public mind.'* You can be certain that if the question of grammar is raised, 90% of contributors to the discussion will focus on the niceties of grammatical accuracy, be it dangling participles, split infinitives, or here in England, the linguistics sins of 'estuary English'. Frequently, the debate is not even about grammar but about accent and pronunciation: estuary English, for example, is more about a particular accent than about grammatical variations from Standard English. And before long, the accuracy of our grammatical usage becomes a touchstone by which we measure the morals of the nation. Get your grammar wrong and the very fabric of the nation crumbles around our ears. Nearly a hundred years ago, the Newbolt Report argued for the importance of a corrective approach to language to banish the *'evil habits of speech contracted in home and street'* (Newbolt 1921) and in the 1980's, British Conservative politician, Norman Tebbitt, linked 'bad English' with involvement in crime. The tendency to associate grammatical correctness with *'a more general "struggle" against dark social forces, and specifically as a means to counter the anarchy of the (working class) home and street'* (Cameron 1995:96) is a persistent one.

Perhaps because of this, education policies for English have vacillated over the role of grammar in the curriculum. In most Anglo-phone countries, the rigid exercises, parsing and grammar drills of the 1950s were abandoned in the progressive 1960s because of a dramatic loss of faith in the value of grammar amongst the profession. In particular, it was felt that teaching grammar had no impact upon children and young people's competence in reading, writing and talking, and at best was a body of abstract linguistic knowledge. The prevailing view of grammar is aptly summarised by Dixon (1975:55): *'when we taught traditional grammar we could not, as research showed, claim to affect language in operation. In fact, grammar teachers, both past and present, have been among those most guilty of imposing a body of knowledge which never became a guide to action or a point of reference.'* However, in England, the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1990 re-introduced grammar as a mandated element of subject English. There have been three iterations of the National Curriculum since 1990 (English proved to be the most controversial curriculum subject!) but, although wordings and emphases alter in the different versions, the general thrust of grammar is upon spoken and written accuracy and upon Standard English. The 2007 version, for example, states that in writing, students should *'use the grammatical features of written standard English accurately to structure a wide range of sentence types for particular purposes and effect'*. But this most recent version also draws attention to the potential of grammar as a meaning-making tool: in writing, for example, students are expected to learn how to *'use a wide variety of sentence structures to support the purpose of the task, giving clarity and emphasis and creating specific effects, and to extend, link and develop ideas'*. Nonetheless, at curriculum policy level and professionally, we are a long way from articulating a coherent pedagogic rationale for the inclusion of grammar in the curriculum.

Grammar for writing? What research tells us

In many ways, the decision to abandon grammar on the grounds that it makes no difference to children's language capacities seems wise on the basis of research evidence. Research has tended to focus on whether explicit learning of grammar benefits children's writing and the results appear to be conclusively negative. Indeed, Hillocks and Smith (1991) argue that *'research over a period of nearly 90 years has consistently shown that the teaching of school grammar has little or no effect on students.'* Certainly, a string of robust reviews in the past 50 years (eg Braddock et al 1963; Elley et al 1975; Hillocks 1986; Andrews et al 2006) have concluded that teaching grammar is of no benefit in supporting writing development. There is, however, a major difficulty with almost all of the research that these reviews represent. The studies repeatedly investigate whether various forms of isolated grammar teaching, such as learning transformational grammar, or parsing sentences, improves writing. You might reasonably ask why anyone would think that being able to identify nouns or subject clauses in a sentence on Monday might improve a child's

writing on Friday! Being taught to identify and label the component parts of the combustion engine is of little use if you want to know how to mend your car.

A close reading of the research opens up new avenues of thinking. The US practice of sentence-combining, an activity in which young writers are shown different ways to combine simple sentences into more sophisticated sentences, using varieties of subordination and conjunction has been the focus of numerous studies. Two recent large-scale reviews of writing research in the US (Graham and Perin 2007) and in England (Andrews et al 2006) both argue that there is evidence of the effectiveness of this technique. It is very much a practical teaching strategy, rather than abstract, conceptual analysis, and Graham and Perin claim that '*teaching adolescents how to write increasingly complex sentences in this way enhances the quality of their writing*' (2007:18). But there are two significant strands of criticism of the sentence-combining approach. First, simply producing longer, more complex sentences does not make better writing; they have to be used appropriately relative to form and purpose. Secondly, several critiques have argued that it is not the sentence-combining strategy itself which works but the accompanying explicit discussion about language possibilities and how language works.

The sentence-combining debate is interesting because it raises important questions about the link between grammar and writing, and about teaching strategies which help writers to develop a repertoire of linguistic structures which might support their writing development. Where research seems to be more consistent in highlighting the value of grammar is where the grammar point is taught in the context of writing, either in the context of the linguistic demands of a particular genre, or the writing needs of a particular child. Of course, in terms of introducing writers to the linguistic characteristics of different genres, Australia leads the way. The work of Beverly Derewianka and Frances Christie (2001; 2009) represents a clear focus on developing writers and writing, with grammar used as a tool to illuminate their understanding of how texts work, and this work has been very influential in the primary English curriculum in England. In the US, Fogel and Ehri (2000) found that explicitly teaching students whose oral tradition was Black Vernacular English about written Standard English and giving them opportunities to transform Black Vernacular sentences into Standard English was a successful strategy. The argument underpinning these approaches is that teaching grammar as a discrete, separate topic, where the grammar is the focus of study is not likely to help writing development because it does not make connections between grammar and writing, or between grammar and meaning.

Our own work in England has taken this premise very much as a starting-point. Decontextualised teaching of grammar which addresses the identification and labelling of word classes and syntactical structures is not helpful in improving writing (though, of course, such linguistic study may have value in its own right). Rather, a writing curriculum which draws attention to the grammar of writing in an embedded and purposeful way at relevant points in the learning is a more positive way forward. In this way, young writers are introduced to what we have called '*a repertoire of infinite possibilities*', explicitly showing them how different ways of shaping sentences or texts, and how different choices of words can generate different possibilities for meaning-making. The goal of such an approach is to support writers in taking control and ownership of the texts they compose, making choices which enable them to voice themselves in their writing, and to shape texts to meet the writer's rhetorical goals. We think of this as helping writers to become designers of text, understanding the warp and the weft of text, its textures and nuances, and able to combine both creative and critical thinking in the process of composition.

Our study

However, given the perennial arguments about the value of grammar, we felt it was important to undertake some robust research which examined the effectiveness of embedded grammar teaching in developing young people's writing. Thanks to funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), we were able to set up a large study. This involved creating three teaching schemes for writing which drew on contextualised grammar to highlight particular aspects of the genre under study or particular features of writing. Our working definition of contextualised grammar teaching comprised the following three key principles:

- The introduction of grammatical constructions and terminology at a point in the teaching sequence which is relevant to the focus of learning
- The teaching focus is on effects and constructing meanings, not on the feature or terminology itself
- The teaching goal is to open up a repertoire of possibilities, not to teach about 'correct' ways of writing.

These principles were developed into a set of pedagogic strategies which informed the design of the teaching sequence:

The grammatical metalanguage is used but it is always explained through examples and patterns

- Links are always made between the feature introduced and how it might enhance the writing being tackled
- The use of 'imitation': offering model patterns for students to play with and then use in their own writing
- The inclusion of activities which encouraging talking about language and effects
- The use of authentic examples from authentic texts
- The use of activities which support students in making choices and being designers of writing

The encouragement of language play, experimentation and games

The three teaching schemes each focused on a different written genre: narrative fiction; argument; and poetry and were designed to cover a three week teaching period in a standard English curriculum. The schemes addressed learning objectives specified in the Framework for English (the policy document used by state schools in England), and provided both detailed lesson plans and all the accompanying resources.

Thirty-two teachers from thirty-two schools were involved, and the students in the study were aged 13–14. At the start of the project, we surveyed teachers' subject knowledge of both literature and language and then divided them into two groups, ensuring that each group had an even number of teachers with good grammar knowledge, as we knew that teachers' grammar knowledge could be a critical factor. One group, the intervention group, taught the three schemes of work we had created over a period of a year (one scheme per term), whilst the other group, the comparison group developed their own teaching schemes. The comparison group had to address the same three genres, the same learning objectives, and produce the same written assignments; they were also given all the resources that the intervention group had and allowed to use them as they chose. Before the teaching began, all the students wrote a piece of personal narrative, and wrote a further piece at the end of the project. This was marked externally by Cambridge Assessment who developed and marked the national tests in English at Key Stage 3. To determine the impact of the contextualised teaching of grammar, we compared students' writing scores at the start and the end of the study in these pieces of writing. In tandem with the statistical analysis, the research team observed lessons, interviewed teachers and students, and collected samples of writing for each of the genres.

The research results indicate that there was a significant positive effect for students in the group using our teaching schemes. In statistical terms, the effect size was 1.53, which is a very strong result – in layperson's term, the students in our intervention group improved their writing scores by 20% over the year, compared with 11% in the control group. Interestingly, the embedded grammar appeared to be most supportive for able writers as they improved more strongly than weaker writers. This raises questions which we can't answer from our study about whether this difference is because the grammar is too abstract for weaker writers, whether they find it harder to transfer learning into their writing, or whether we were addressing aspects of grammar which were less relevant to their own writing needs. These are important questions which need to be pursued. Our interviews and observations highlighted that there were significant factors in our teaching schemes which seem to explain the positive result:

- The explicit teaching of grammatical constructions: many of the teachers noted that the schemes encouraged them to teach grammar points which they had never taught before;
- The value of discussion about how language works: the observations and student interviews showed that the teaching schemes were encouraging genuine discussion about the effectiveness of different ways of expressing ideas and justifying different choices
- The teacher's grammar knowledge: teachers who were less confident about grammar struggled with the grammar in the schemes, sometimes giving incorrect explanations, and often anxious about handling students' questions. In contrast, more confident teachers were able to take students' responses and develop and extend their thinking.

In the rest of this article, we will share with you some of the teaching strategies and ideas from each of the teaching schemes which we hope will illuminate and exemplify how the grammar teaching was realised in classroom practice.

Grammar as a tool for supporting writing narrative fiction

The overall aim of the scheme of work on narrative fiction was for students to learn how to consciously control, shape and craft their writing, specifically to:

- make links between their reading of fiction and the choices they make as writers;
- understand how writers create settings and develop a character's viewpoint and voice;

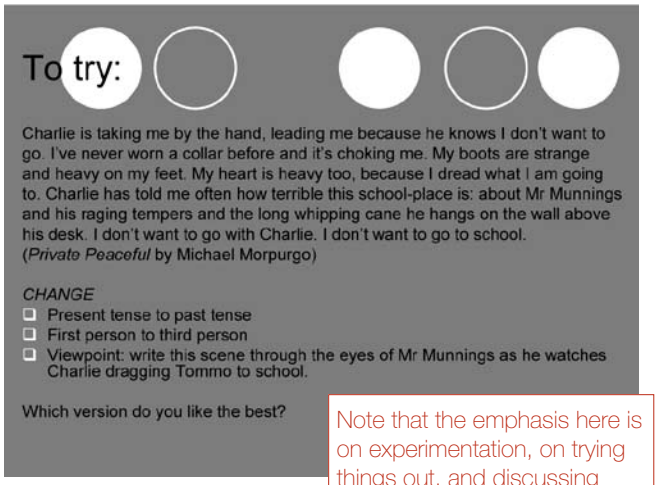
- understand how writers vary vocabulary and sentences for impact;
- experiment with linguistic and literary techniques in their own writing.

To encourage deliberate crafting, students were asked to produce a plan for a whole story but to write only one section. A broad 'adventure' genre was chosen and a bank of still images linked to the genre was provided on PowerPoint to support the generation of ideas and vocabulary and to prompt discussion of setting, character and plot. Teachers were invited to make links between photography and writing, for example by encouraging students to experiment with 'close-up' or 'wide angle' descriptions or to think of narrative viewpoint in terms of who is 'looking through the lens'. Many students are highly visually literate and may profit from linking the concepts of image construction and writing design.

Viewpoint and voice

Activities in the first week of the scheme encouraged students to recognise that writers deliberately choose a viewpoint – the 'eyes' through which we see events – and create a distinctive 'voice' that we hear in our heads as we read. A vocabulary for discussing narrative choices (e.g. first/third person; dual narrative; flashback; present/past tense) was introduced by matching up terms and definitions, and the concepts were illustrated through short text extracts showing a variety of narrative techniques.

For each extract, discussion was prompted by the questions: Whose eyes do we see through? What does their voice sound like? How do you react? Students then worked in pairs to change a text and evaluate effects:



Note that the emphasis here is on experimentation, on trying things out, and discussing possibilites; not on formulaic recipes for good writing

Teacher modelling of short pieces of writing was encouraged and lesson notes included scripts that teachers could use or adapt, related to specific images. For example, Jean Guichard's famous image from his series of photographs of Breton lighthouses was used to illustrate two possible vantage points. An onlooker's view of the lighthouse keeper (as if through the camera lens) produced a third-person narrative:

> *Standing in the doorway, hands in pockets, he looked surprisingly relaxed. The storm raged around him but he hardly seemed to notice. A warm orange light spilled from one of the windows.*

In contrast, the imagined vantage point of the lighthouse keeper himself produced a first-person narrative:

> *I watched the helicopter whirl away, buffeted by the storm. My ears rushed with the roar of water. I felt alone and afraid: how would I survive?*

Students were prompted to give opinions about which voice and viewpoint they found most effective. Role-play and storytelling encouraged students to explore narrative choices. Using the following image and role-play instructions, students created a story told from multiple viewpoints:

You are the person in the picture. Tell us the story of how you came to be here.

You work in a shop nearby and often see this pair when you leave work. Tell us what you think about them.

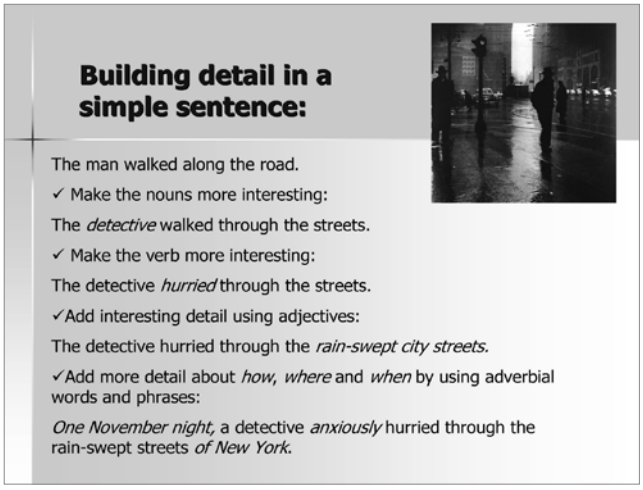
You work as an inspector for the RSPCA. Tell us what you found when you arrived at the scene and what you decided to do.

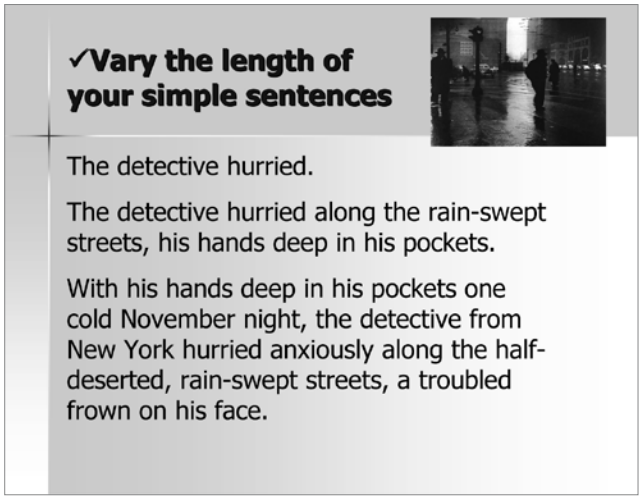
You are the dog. Tell us about your life with your owner.

Students used a cut-up extract from Peter Benchley's Jaws to re-sequence the viewpoints of the boy afloat on his lilo and the circling shark, before inventing a third viewpoint and choosing where in the story to insert their additional paragraph.

Sentence building

The focus of the second week of the scheme was on creating varied and interesting sentences. Many students think that a 'simple' sentence is a 'short' sentence and either overdo these, in the belief that short sentences automatically create tension, or avoid them as the mark of an unsophisticated writer. Again using an image to prompt vocabulary, a PowerPoint resource aimed to show that simple (i.e. one-clause) sentences can be short or long, 'spare' or very detailed, and that interesting descriptive detail can be created by making small changes: strengthening nouns and verbs and adding adverbial phrases, rather than piling on adjectives, as weaker writers tend to do.





A later lesson used sentence combining to create a variety of simple, compound and complex sentences, while a simple cut-up resource encouraged students to explore the subtle changes of emphasis and effect created by moving subordinate clauses into different positions within a sentence. This offered a chance to show how punctuation is used to mark off clauses. In the final week of the scheme, closer attention was paid to a range of punctuation: groups of students rehearsed and read aloud a short extract from a novel, using the writer's punctuation to guide the tone of voice used and to emphasise meaning, before experimenting with effects for themselves.

Combine the main clauses and subordinate clauses in as many different ways as you can. Which version sounds the scariest?

Main clauses	Subordinate clauses	Punctuation
the cottage was ancient	seemingly deserted	, , , , , . . .
	its thatched roof covered by ivy	
	lit by eerie shadows	
a woman stood in the doorway	beckoning me to follow her	
	holding a candle in front of her	
	smiling	

Grammar as a tool for supporting writing argument

Many teachers told us that they were more comfortable with paying attention to grammar when teaching argument writing than when teaching narrative fiction and poetry. They also, however, frequently commented on their tendency to take a formulaic approach: "*I think we have a habit of teaching it quite mechanically, rather than [students] thinking for themselves 'what effect am I going to have?'*" This scheme aimed to move beyond the sort of simple checklist approach in which students tick off persuasive devices as they use them in their writing; instead, it encouraged them to explore the effects of nuances of words and patterns of language in arguments. The scheme also made links between speaking and listening and writing, with short oral games used to generate ideas and arguments which were then translated into more formal and crafted written work.

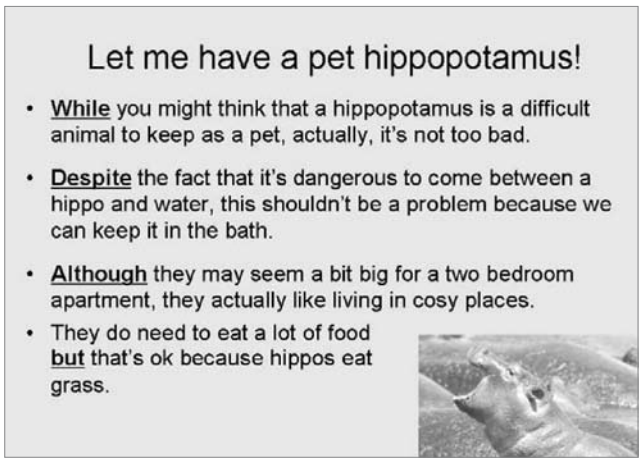
Using counterarguments

This lesson focused on anticipating and dismissing any objections to an idea before they could scupper an argument. The idea was introduced with a version of the 'Yes, but…' game, where pairs have to argue against

but not negate each other's statements. Person A plays a character desperate to get into a building while person B is a bouncer determined to refuse them entry. Person A begins the argument 'I need to get inside' then the argument proceeds in turns with each player starting 'Yes, but…' The teachers modelled this with a volunteer student first, starting something like this:

> A: I need to get inside.
>
> B: Yes, but I'm afraid you can't because a bomb is about to go off in there.
>
> A: Yes, but I'm a bomb-disposal expert and I need to defuse the bomb.
>
> B: Yes, but this is a bomb-testing site and we want it to explode…

This activity then lead into an explanation of counterargument, noting that we can use a whole range of connectives (not just 'but') to introduce and dismiss them. Students were given an example of an argument to keep a dangerous animal as a pet. Using a card sort which they could mix and match in lots of different ways, students experimented with the impact of using different connectives to subordinate or coordinate clauses, discussing the effect of placing connectives at the start or in the middle of sentences, and exploring the different patterns of emphasis created by placing main clauses at the start or the end of a sentence. Their aim was to decide which patterns dismissed the negative points and emphasised the positive points most successfully.



lions might seem a bit dangerous to keep as a pet	the fact that it's dangerous will make it an excellent guard-cat, ready to scare away any burglars	while
they have been known to eat people	if we keep it well fed, it probably won't try to eat us	despite the fact that
in the wild lions live together in big groups	it will soon learn to think of us as its 'pride'	although
they are rather big to keep as a pet	their size means that they have lots of soft fur to cuddle up to	but

This also provided an opportunity for the differences between subordinating and coordinating connectives to be discussed, including conversations about how subordinating connectives can be particularly helpful in making some clauses seem less important than others, as well as a chance to remind students of the need to use a comma when starting a sentence with a subordinate clause. This led into students writing entertaining pieces which argued that they should be allowed to keep a dangerous animal as a pet, focusing on pre-empting any arguments that might be used against them.

Modal verbs

This lesson focused on exploring the nuances of different modals and how they can affect the tone of a sentence: the ways in which they express degrees of possibility, how they can muse or suggest, wheedle or bribe, or sound strong, definite and inspirational. Extracts from political speeches from Churchill to Obama were used initially, with students discussing the effect of repetition and patterns of modals. Churchill's famous "we shall fight them on the beaches" provoked plenty of discussion about the difference in effect between 'shall' and 'will'. While no one claimed to have found a definitive answer, suggestions included differences in 'formality' and 'strength,' a 'fairytale' or 'soft' sense to 'shall' and a blunter, sharper or more simple feel to 'will'. Students were then asked to choose modals to fit into examples of sentences, and discuss and explain their reasons for their choices:

can	ought to	could	must
shall	May	might	will
To threaten	You…… give that back to me or I will scream.		
To bribe	If you take me to the cinema then I …… tidy my room.		
To predict / motivate	Things …… get difficult but we …… make it out alive.		
To ask permission	…… I borrow your scarf, just this once?		
To reassure	You …… think that this is difficult, but it's not really.		

This then led into students writing a half-time 'pep talk' for a losing sports team aimed at motivating them to win, paying attention to the modals they were using. This lesson was frequently mentioned in our interviews with teachers: they generally said that they would not usually have taught modals in this depth, but also stated that the students found the close attention to the impact of the words very worthwhile, with one teacher commenting, *"some [students] have actually come up to me out outside of lessons and said, 'we've really used some of the ideas, especially the modal verbs.'"*

Grammar as a tool for supporting poetry writing

At the heart of the teaching of the poetry scheme of work was the idea of playing with words. This is particularly appropriate for poetry, which stretches language to its limits and breaks the boundaries of conventions. But it was also appropriate to the way we were encouraging these writers to think about grammar – as a tool for playing with language.

Creating picture poems

One activity focused on writing a picture poem, a poem which creates strong visual images of a particular scene at a particular moment. It used Theodore Roethke's poem *Boy on Top of a Greenhouse* as a model. The poem captures the essence of a childhood moment, using a series of noun phrases to evoke vivid images of the scene. The absence of a main clause with a finite verb helps to create the sense of a moment captured and frozen in time: there is no action, just sensation. The lesson began by playing with noun phrases to introduce the grammatical construction at the heart of the poem: students worked together to generate the silliest and the most poetic noun phrase from the *Great Noun Phrase Generator*.

THE GREAT NOUN PHRASE GENERATOR

Determiner	Adjective	Noun	Relative Clause	Non-Finite Clause	Prepositional Phrase
the	bad	dachshund	who was anxious	rushing past	in the meadow
a	baggy	daffodil	that sang out of tune	feeling hurt	under the stairs
her	bald	demon	which stank	being typically irritating	on the garden path
his	balmy	dairy	where the daisies grew	looking around	beneath the attic door
many	banal	damsel	who limped	slipping out	above his station
that	bandy	dance	that stood	running away	behind the sign
some	bright	debt	which leaks	burning bright	in the moonlight
all	black	despair	where no-one goes	left behind	by the barn door
my	beastly	diamond	who stamped	worn through use	under the muck
	bitter	dinner	that gleams like silver	wrecked by storms	over the mountain
	blank	director	which leans over	made of wood	beneath the sack of money
	bleak	donkey	where it's dark	chilling the soul	on time
	bleeding	drawbridge	who burps	searing the mind	by the shoreline
	blushing	duck	that was new	breaking your heart	in the strange room

After sharing recollections of moments of naughtiness from childhood, the students read the poem, and together used the worksheet below to stimulate discussion about their response to the poem and how it is constructed.

They then used the poem as a model to write their own piece, based on an event in their own childhood and using only noun phrases to paint intensely descriptive images of that event.

	Why might the child have climbed up onto the greenhouse?	
How do you think the child feels?	Child on Top of a Greenhouse *The wind billowing out of the seat of my britches,* *My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,* *The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,* *Up through the streaked glass flashing with sunlight,* *A few white clouds all rushing eastward,* *A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,* *And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!* Theodore Roethke	*What do you think the people watching are thinking and shouting?*
The poem depicts six images. What are they?	*Which image is most vivid to you? Is there a particular word or phrase that creates that vividness for you?*	*Wordplay Challenge! Read the poem aloud – it isn't written in standard sentences but is a list of images. Can you re-write it as six separate sentences? You will probably spot a pattern in what you are doing!*

Found poetry

Found poetry is a very playful form of composition, taking words, phrases, even whole sequences of already written texts and re-framing them as poetry. The decisions that need to be made in poetry about line lengths, sentence lengths and layout are useful in developing students' understanding of sentence variety and patterning in prose. In one lesson, we played with an exploded version of Sylvia Plath's poem, *Mirror*, to create a found poem.

Students used the word grid to create pairs of sentences which explicitly played with variations in syntactical structure and with patterning. They were given the following guidance to introduce them to some of the possibilities.

Some ways to play with shaping your sentences:

Experiment with ways of starting the **first sentence** which don't begin with the subject:

non-finite verbs eg *searching, drowned, unmisted,*

adverbs eg *faithfully; immediately*

prepositional phrases eg *after the darkness; on old hands*

Experiment with ways of emphasis in the **second sentence**:

short second sentences eg *The candle flickers.*

verbless sentences eg *Truthful moon.*

one word sentences eg *Darkness.*

repetition eg *Terrible, terrible.*

Example sentences created from the word grid:

Searching my face, I see only tears. My heart reaches for love.

In the silver lake, the moon flickers. Then darkness.

After generating several pairs of sentences, students worked in groups with their collected sentence pairs to compose a Found Poem, before sharing the reading of Sylvia Plath's original version.

a	a	a	a	a	a
after	agitation	am	am	am	am
an	an	and	and	and	and
and	and	and	as	at	back
bends	but	by	candles	comes	cruel
darkness	darkness	day	day	dislike	drowned
each	exact	eye	face	faces	faithfully
fish	flickers	for	four-cornered	girl	god
goes	hands	has	have	have	heart
her	her	her	her	I	I
I	I	I	I	I	I
I	I	I	immediately	important	in
in	is	is	is	is	is
it	it	it	it	it	it
it	just	lake	liars	like	little
long	looked	love	me	me	me
me	meditate	moon	morning	most	my
my	no	not	now	of	of
of	of	old	on	only	opposite
or	or	over	over	over	part
pink	preconceptions	reaches	really	reflect	replaces
rewards	rises	searching	see	see,	separate
she	she	she	she	she	silver
so	speckles	swallow	tears	terrible	that
the	the	the	the	the	the
then	think	those	time	to	to
toward	truthful	turns	unmisted	us	wall
what	whatever	with	with	woman	woman
young					

Conclusion: Questions and implications

Our research has provided strong evidence for the value of using grammar as a way to help young writers develop understanding of meaning-making resources but it has also highlighted some of the broader issues related either to the teaching of grammar or the teaching of writing. In many ways, there was nothing unfamiliar about the teaching approaches used in our teaching schemes. However, there were many comments about the explicitness with which techniques were introduced and then practised. One of the teachers reflected that '*To actually show them a picture and then say, 'you're the person taking this picture and now you're the person in the picture', it just gets the whole point across about narrative viewpoint… some of them said, 'do you want me to write it in first person or third person?' so they'd obviously thought about a writer's choice*'. This awareness of the explicitness of the teaching was often coupled with an acknowledgment that the teaching schemes were drawing attention to language features which teachers did not usually address, such as modal verbs in argument, as noted earlier, or noun phrases in poetry. In the poetry scheme, one activity looked at how the last stanza of Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum est* is just one sentence and discussed how the line breaks imposed upon this sentence might influence our interpretation. One teacher noted that '*I'd never realised that … because I'd not thought about sentence level before I started to look at it and I can see it in poetry now, whereas before I wouldn't, it wouldn't have been something that I would have looked at or looked for*'. Teachers were aware of the experimentation and playfulness of the schemes and how this gave more ownership to students. One teacher observed that a sentence-shaping activity helped students to see '*that people form sentences in different ways and not everyone has the same ideas*'. Another recognised that she had learnt, as a teacher, to hand

over responsibility to the learners a little more: '*I think that was quite a lesson for me ... sometimes to take away that control a little bit and allow them to just experiment*'.

But the explicit attention given to sentence-building in particular proved a challenge for some teachers, with the problem centred on the use of terminology. Several teachers felt frustrated in their attempts to use terminology with students when discussing effects: '*I know they do it in the primary schools but they still come to us bewildered. It would be incredibly useful if you could just say, you know, 'uses the verb,' without having to ask somebody what it means and do an explanation*'. Others worried that terminology was too confusing and that the teaching point could be made without the terminology: '*Some of them had a bit of a fear of the word classes and if I were to teach it again, maybe I'd take out those terms*'. Some teachers found the headings on the noun phrase generator difficult and speculated that they could do the activity and achieve the same outcomes without the grammatical terms. The teachers are raising an important pedagogical question: to what extent is the grammatical labelling necessary in helping young writers see the possibilities of language? We do not know the answer to that question and it merits further consideration. However, drawing students' attention to the repertoire of possibilities available to them does require that teachers' grasp of applied grammar is strong, and it is also true that many teachers in our study were intimidated by the terminology.

Working with the teachers and students in our study was a pleasure and a privilege. The teaching materials that we created proved supportive and successful; however, the real potential of our approach is not the materials themselves but the professionalism of the teachers who use them. We believe an effective pedagogy for writing **should** include attention to linguistic possibilities and that teachers who are confident with grammar themselves, who understand the principles of contextualised grammar teaching, and who are creative and resourceful 'adapters' of published materials are best placed to realise the potential of a focus on grammar. Such teaching would be characterised by high levels of discussion by students about language choices and effects, healthy experimentation, and student ownership of decision-making in their writing. Only then might we enable young writers to access that repertoire of infinite possibilities which is at the heart of creative, critical shaping of text.

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