**GRAMMAR FOR WRITING: THE IMPACT OF CONTEXTUALISED GRAMMAR TEACHING ON PUPILS' WRITING**

**AND PUPILS' METALINGUISTIC UNDERSTANDING**

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**PROJECT REPORT**

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**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The debate about the place of grammar in the English curriculum has a long history, with research reports and professional arguments on the topic spanning over fifty years. Moreover, it is a debate which crosses national boundaries and is common to most Anglophone countries. Detailed reviews of international evidence for and against the benefits of teaching grammar, stimulated by a renewed emphasis on grammar in the National Curriculum for English and the National Literacy Strategy have been conducted by Hudson (2004), Wyse (2004) and most recently, by the EPPI Review Group for English (2004). It is a debate which has not only been theoretical and pedagogical, but one in which the ‘*public have regularly and enthusiastically participated*’ (Gordon 2005). At the same time, there are international concerns about children’s standards of writing. In Australia, following the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey, the Minister for Schools acknowledged that too many children did not achieve ‘*a minimum acceptable standard in literacy’*, (Masters and Forster 1997). In the US, the call for a writing revolution (NCW 2003) to address the problem of children who ‘*cannot write with the skill expected of them today’* (NCW 2003), has been followed by major policy change in *No Child Left Behind* (US Department of Education 2002). This has reintroduced grammar as part of the ‘raising standards’ agenda.

**2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In tandem with political and ideological constructions of the grammar debate is an academic discussion between linguists and educationalists on the value of explicit and systematic teaching of grammar. Increasingly, linguists draw on the principles of contemporary linguistic theories which are descriptive and socio-cultural in emphasis, or as Carter describes them, ‘*functionally oriented, related to the study of texts and responsive to social purposes.’* (Carter 1990:104). They contend that a better understanding of how language works in a variety of contexts supports learning in literacy. Denham and Lobeck (2005) claim that, in the multicultural, linguistically diverse classrooms of the US, linguistic knowledge is a tool which can inform teachers’ approaches to language study in the classroom. Hudson (2004) examines why education needs linguistics, noting the distinction between traditional prescriptive grammar and the very different approaches of modern linguistics. But teachers and educationalists remain sceptical. The minutes of a recent meeting of the Linguistic Society of America with NCTE, a powerful body representing English teachers, ‘*to discuss how to better integrate linguistics into the English/Language Arts curriculum’* note that NCTE was *‘not eager to step in as partners in such a project (initiated by linguists)’* (LSA 2006:1). Indeed, many educationalists not only lack enthusiasm for grammar teaching but see it as potentially detrimental to children’s language development. Braddock et al’s review (1963) of research into composition concluded that teaching grammar was harmful, and Elbow argued that ‘*nothing helps [their] writing so much as learning to ignore grammar* (Elbow 1981:169).

There are, however, many conceptual and methodological flaws in much of the extant research base used to provide evidence for this debate. Research is repeatedly used selectively to justify a pre-determined position or to support a particular stance. Both Hudson (2004) and Wyse (2004) use research evidence to support their opposing standpoints. Bateman and Zidonis (1966) note that although most research in this area produces inconclusive results, these are then almost always construed as negative results. Tomlinson (1994), critiquing the methodological validity of the research of Robinson (1959) and Harris (1962), noted that the conclusions from their studies were ‘*what many in the educational establishment wanted to hear’* (Tomlinson 1994:26). Indeed, Tomlinson claims that most research into the effectiveness of grammar teaching does not stand up to ‘*critical examination’* and many articles are ‘*simply polemical’* (Tomlinson 1994:20).

The EPPI systematic review of the impact of grammar teaching on writing (EPPI 2004) highlights many of the flaws in this field of enquiry. The research question which informs the study (*What is the effect of grammar teaching on the accuracy and quality of 5 to 16 year olds’ written composition?)* takes an over-simplified view of causal relationships between grammar teaching and written composition. It ignores the multi-faceted nature of learning and the complex social, linguistic and cognitive relationships that shape learning about writing. In particular, it does not engage with some of the key factors related to teaching and learning which might have an effect on the results. Teacher beliefs about the value of grammar, their level of linguistic and pedagogic subject knowledge, and teacher effectiveness in the classroom are important variables which are not considered. The background to the study does note that research might be needed to consider *‘the effect/impact on students’ writing skills of teachers’ grammatical knowledge’* (EPPI 2004:12) but no subsequent account is taken of this. Likewise, there is no adequate conceptualization of ‘grammar teaching’: although the background to the study begins to explore the changes in linguistic theories and the international political and pedagogical trends in grammar teaching, these are not used to reformulate the research question. Thus the review considers research on grammar teaching but ignores the considerable and significant differences between the teaching of grammar in the UK in the early twenty-first century, and the teaching of grammar in different countries, in different decades, and in different contexts. The ‘*clear conclusion’*, that ‘*there is no high quality evidence to counter the prevailing belief that the teaching of the principles underlying and informing word order and ‘syntax’ has virtually no influence on the writing quality of 5-16 year olds’* (EPPI 2004:4) is actually predicated on just three studies rated of medium or high significance, two of which are at least twenty-five years’ old (Elley et al, 1975; Bateman and Zidonis 1966) and none of which were conducted in the UK. One of the review team subsequently reflected that ‘*our published reviews begged a lot of questions*’ (Locke 2005:3)

Although there is a considerable number of international studies purportedly investigating the impact of grammar teaching on writing, there is almost none in which the grammar is taught in the context of writing lessons with a view to developing children’s writing. In many of the studies (for example, Robinson 1959, Elley et al 1975, 1979; Bateman and Zidonis 1966) isolated grammar lessons are taught and the writing used to determine impact is produced in a different context. Fogel and Ehri’s (2000) study is perhaps unique in taking as its starting point an identified writing problem, the tendency of some ethnic minority children to use non-standard Black English Vernacular (BEV) in their writing. The study set out to ‘*examine how to structure dialect instruction so that it is effective in teaching SE forms to students who use BEV in their writing’* (Fogel and Ehri 2000:215) and found a significant improvement in avoidance of BEV in the group who were given both strategies and guided support. They argue that their results demonstrated that the approach used had ‘*clarified for students the link between features in their own nonstandard writing and features in SE’ (*2000:231). The Fogel and Ehri study moves the field forward by beginning to look at the pedagogical conditions which support or hinder the transfer of grammatical knowledge into written outputs. Further research needs to take greater account of the subject knowledge of the teacher and to undertake a more fine-grained analysis of pupils’ linguistic learning.

Concerns that teachers’ linguistic knowledge is insufficient is neither new nor restricted to the UK. Gurrey observed that teachers lacked ‘*a* *thorough training in pure grammar’* (1962:14) and more recent concerns about the level of linguistic knowledge of English teachers have been expressed by Hudson (2004) in the UK, and by Koln and Hancock (2005) in the US, and Gordon (2005) notes teachers in New Zealand recognized ‘*their own, inadequate linguistic knowledge’* (Gordon 2005:50). These latter observations are, however, made by linguists, not teachers. A QCA (1998) survey of teachers in the period immediately following the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy indicated considerable lack of confidence in linguistic knowledge, particularly with sentence grammar, and uncertainty about implicit and explicit knowledge. The report concluded that there was a ‘s*ignificant gap… in teachers’ knowledge and confidence in sentence grammar and this has implications for… the teaching of language and style in texts and pupils’ own writing’* (QCA 1998:35). From a pedagogical perspective, linguistic subject knowledge is more than the ability to use appropriate terminology, as it also involves the ability to explain grammatical concepts clearly and know when to draw attention to them. Andrews suggests that it is ‘*likely to be the case that a teacher with a rich knowledge of grammatical constructions and a more general awareness of the forms and varieties of the language will be in a better position to help young writers’* (Andrews 2005:75), and Gordon (2005) found that teachers who developed more secure linguistic knowledge were able to see beyond superficial error in children’s writing to evidence of growing syntactical maturity. Previously, for these teachers *‘the “writing virtues” of their pupils often went unseen and unacknowledged because of their own lack of knowledge about language*’ (Gordon 2005:63). In contrast, weak linguistic knowledge can lead to an over-emphasis upon identification of grammar structures without fully acknowledging the conceptual or cognitive implications (Myhill 2003) of that teaching. Equally, it can lead to sterile teaching, divorced from the realities of language in use: Applebee, for example, notes two studies in the US which showed that topic sentences and paragraph patterns taught in school bear little resemblance to those found in ‘real’ prose (Applebee 2000:99)

Central to the issue of linguistic subject knowledge and the debate about the role of grammar in developing writing is the question of the value of grammatical terminology and access to this metalanguage. Cognitive psychologists have repeatedly signalled the importance of metacognition (Hayes and Flower 1980; Martlew 1983; Kellogg 1994; Wallace and Hayes 1992;Butterfield et al 1996) in the writing process, because writing is a process which demands self-monitoring (Kellogg 1994:17). Metacognitive knowledge plays a role in every stage of the writing process: in moving planning from an over-emphasis on content to greater consideration of the strategic goals of the task (Hayes and Flower 1980); in supporting the development of ‘*a model of their audience, for reflecting on rhetorical and content probabilities’ (*Kellogg 1994: 213); in the process of revision (Alamargot and Chanquoy 2001); and in developing self-regulation (Englert et al 1992). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982) argue that the benefit of metacognition is that it renders ‘*normally covert processes overt*’ and provides ‘*labels to make tacit knowledge more accessible’* (1982:57) and in summarizing the findings of their intervention study, Englert et al are insistent that ‘*the importance of the students’ increased mastery over the language of the writing process cannot be over-emphasised’* (1992:441): both are thus signalling the importance of a metalanguage, though not necessarily grammatical language. Metalinguistic knowledge is a subset of metacognitive knowledge, though there is surprisingly little empirical research in this aspect of writing. The most comprehensive consideration of metalinguistic knowledge is Gombert’s (1992) model of metalinguistic awareness, designed to inform an understanding of oral development and how children learn to read. He proposes two levels of cognitive control of linguistic knowledge: *epilinguistic*, where linguistic processing is controlled automatically by linguistic organisations in the memory, and *metalinguistic,* when, the individual is in conscious control of linguistic decision-making. Gombert argues that there is a ‘*developmental hierarchy between epilinguistic control and metalinguistic awareness’* (2003) Van Lier (1998), however, contests the hierarchical assumptions of Gombert’s proposition, questioning whether epilinguistic awareness is necessarily a precursor of metalinguistic awareness. Yet this principle of a cognitive shift from implicit to explicit knowledge is a prevalent one, including at policy level. QCA (1998) describe the learning trajectory as moving from implicit knowledge, derived from experience, to analysis, based on grammatical terminology, developing into understanding of function and effect, leading finally to explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is defined as ‘*knowledge that can identify and account for connections and distinctions between different examples of usage, enhance reading and improve writing’* (QCA 1998:20). Van Lier questions the value of metalinguistic knowledge ‘*measured in solitary demonstrations of knowledge’* and argues that being able to articulate metalinguistic knowledge is less important than being able to demonstrate it: the ability *‘to control and manipulate the material at hand’* is more significant than the ability ‘*to describe a linguistic feature using grammatical terminology’* (1998:136). Van Lier’s concern that metalinguistic knowledge is not transferred into linguistic performance is central to the issue of whether grammar supports writing development. Myhill and Jones (2006) found that secondary age writers were often able to articulate explicit choices made during text production, but were not always able to describe these in metalinguistic terms; equally, they found that some proficient writers had automated linguistic decision-making and no longer thought explicitly about metalinguistic choices. On the other hand, Carter (1990) maintains that the demise of formal grammar teaching and with it the absence of a metalanguage in the classroom has been disempowering, preventing learners from ‘*exercising the kind of conscious control and conscious choice over language which enables both to* ***see through*** *language in a systematic way and to use language more discriminatingly’* (Carter 1990:119).

This review of research into the relationship between grammar and writing indicates that as Andrews observed, ‘*there is still a dearth of evidence for the effective use of grammar teaching of any kind in the development of writing’* (Andrews 2005:74). It is evident that there remains a pressing need for robust large-scale research which seeks to establish valid causal relationships, but which also seeks to go beyond simple cause-effect paradigms to understand the complexity of the issue. In particular, research needs to adopt an inter-disciplinary framework, which is cognisant of linguistic, cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives, in order to reflect with validity the complexity of classrooms as teaching and learning contexts. It is important to be mindful of the cognitive demands of writing production, and the challenge all writers face of keeping in mind *‘the conceptual message together with their rhetorical objectives and at the same time appeal to linguistic knowledge to express their ideas correctly and appropriately*’ (van Gelderen 2005:215). However, it is equally important to foreground the linguists’ perspective *‘that terminology and rules are pointless if your mind hasn’t grasped the concepts behind the terminology’* (Keith 1997:12). In addition, the cognitive and linguistic challenges of writing need to be bounded by an acknowledgement that writing is ‘*material social practice in which meaning is actively made, rather than passively relayed or effortlessly produced*’ (Micciche 2004: 719). The study reported here sought to operate within such an inter-disciplinary framework and to answer the research question: *What impact does contextualised grammar teaching have upon pupils’ writing and pupils’ metalinguistic understanding?*

**3.0 METHODOLOGY**

Teaching is a complex, multi-faceted and situated endeavour which resists simplistic causal explanations between pedagogical activity and learning outcome; equally, writing is perhaps the most complex activity learners undertake, drawing on cognitive, social and linguistic resources. Accordingly, this study adopted a mixed-method approach located within an inter-disciplinary conceptual framework, combining a cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) with multi-level modelling and a complementary qualitative study.

The EPPI review of the effect of grammar teaching (EPPI: 2004) concluded by calling for ‘*a conclusive, large scale and well-designed randomised controlled trial’* (EPPI: 2004:49) into the impact of grammar teaching on writing. We would argue that no such randomised controlled trial (RCT) could be conclusive because of the complexity of both the empirical question and the educational context. Instead, this study adopted a mixed methods approach to investigate specifically the inter-relationship between pedagogical support for teaching grammar, teacher subject knowledge and improvement in writing. Whilst the RCT has long been the ‘*design of choice … for evaluations of educational initiatives*’ in the US (Slavin 2002:18), its relevance is more contested in the UK. Proponents of the RCT argue that ‘*the most rigorous quantitative study design for evaluating whether or not an intervention based on a causal question is effective is the RCT’* (Torgerson et al 2004:20). This is epistemologically predicated upon the notion that teaching as an activity is an intervention which has direct causal impacts on outcomes; however, education is ‘*not a process of physical interaction but a process of symbolic or symbolically mediated interaction*’ (Biesta 2007:7). One intervention can be realised in multiple outcomes for learners and one intervention strategy can be multiply interpreted and mediated in the classroom by different teachers. Indeed, as Shadish, Cook and Campbell argue, causal relationships are rarely deterministic: *‘to different degrees, all causal relationships are context dependent*’ (Shadish et al 2002:5). Therefore, to complement the statistical data derived from the experimental study, and to provide in-depth understanding of the theoretical, pedagogical and contextual implications of the statistical data, the experimental component was embedded within a qualitative design. This mixed method approach is important for RCTs conducted in educational contexts: indeed, Moore, Graham and Diamond (2003) argue that ‘t*o undertake a trial of an educational or social intervention without an embedded qualitative process evaluation would be to treat the intervention as a black box, with no information on how it worked, how it could be improved, or what the crucial components of the intervention were.’*  Likewise, Shadish, Cook and Campbell (2002:71) recommend ‘*the addition of qualitative methodologies to experiments*’ to provide better interpretation and avoid errors in applying research outcomes to practice.

The collection of data fell broadly into three categories: the baseline data required before the intervention began; the impact data which measured the effect of the intervention; and the qualitative data which provided interpretative and contextual information. The impact data comprised the pre and post-test writing scores, including both the total scores, and the scores on the sub-components of the writing test. The qualitative data comprised lesson observations of the sample classes, recorded teacher interviews, recorded writing conversations with the sub-sample of pupils, and the writing produced in the teaching episodes.

**3.1 The randomised controlled trial**

In educational settings, conventional RCTs following the medical model are rarely appropriate as frequently interventions are at the level of the school or the class, rather than the individual. Instead, the cluster trial where ‘*randomisation is conducted at the level of the group or cluster’* (Moore, Graham and Diamond 2003:680) is increasingly viewed as a more valid and robust design. This study utilized a cluster RCT where the independent variable was the pedagogical support materials and the dependent variable was the impact of teaching on the quality of writing. The intervention group received detailed pedagogical support materials and were trained in their use, whilst the comparison group received only an outline scheme of work with no pedagogical support.

*3.1.1 The sample*

In this study, as a cluster trial, randomisation occurred at the level of the group rather than the individual (Murray, 1998; Donner & Klar, 2000). Only one class was used from each school to avoid any cross-over effects from one group to another. Neither the teacher nor the class knew there was a distinction being made between an intervention and a comparison group. The teachers and students knew that the focus of the research was writing, but they were unaware of the specific grammar focus. The student sample was 32 year 8 mixed ability classes in comprehensive schools with between 24 and 30 students in each class. As the number and range of abilities in mixed ability classes was varied, attainment data for each class was collected at the outset.

The process of recruiting the schools made use of Local Authority school directories in the South West, including Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset, and the West Midlands; including Birmingham, Dudley and Sandwell. In order to create as representative a sample as possible, an initial process de-selected the small number of schools which were single-sex, selective, or atypical in age range (eg 14-18 age range). This left a sample which comprised mixed, comprehensive schools with an age range of 11-18. Using a random number generator, each school was given a number, creating an ordinal list of the schools. Schools were then contacted in numerical order to invite them to participate in the project. Random sampling continued until at least 16 schools from each area had been recruited. A briefing sheet (appendix 1) was sent to each Head of Department and a Memorandum of Understanding (appendix 2) to the Headteacher for signature and return. Informed consent was sought from each project teacher who in turn sought informed consent from both the focus student and their parents (appendix 3).

Because the study was interested to investigate the impact of teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge (LSK) upon the intervention, the sample of schools willing to participate was stratified first by teacher linguistic subject knowledge in order to avoid accidental bias in either the intervention or comparison group. The linguistic subject knowledge of the teachers was established through a specifically designed test of grammar knowledge in a questionnaire establishing baseline information about the teacher’s professional background and subject knowledge (appendix 4). It included questions regarding professional and academic background; questions focusing on teachers’ perceptions of their own knowledge of English Literature and their beliefs about the use of literature to support the teaching of writing; questions focusing on teachers’ grammar knowledge and their beliefs about the use of grammar to support the teaching of writing. The score for each teacher on the linguistic subject knowledge test was added to the database. The teacher scores were ranked and then in turn allocated to either group A or group B, thus ensuring that each group was broadly matched for LSK. Finally, the two groups were randomly allocated to the comparison or intervention group.

Having established the participating schools, teachers and classes, a comprehensive set of baseline data was collated, as outlined below in Table 1. This drew heavily on national data, collected in all schools, and comparable across the sample. At student level, data on attainment in English was gathered. Students in the UK sit national externally-marked tests at age 11 (Key Stage 2 tests) and are required to report a National Curriculum level for English at age 14 (Key Stage 3). At Key Stage 2, the test score is available as an overall National Curriculum level for English, plus a separate level and raw score for writing. The student data also recorded whether a child was in receipt of Free School Meals or whether English was an Additional Language for them. At teacher level, the baseline data was collected through the questionnaire described above. At school level, the data was drawn from the most recent OFSTED inspection report, which provides comparable contextual information about each school inspected.

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| --- | --- |
|  | Data collected |
| Student | Key Stage 2 English level  Key Stage 2 Writing level  Key stage 2 Writing raw score  Predicted Key Stage 3 English level  Free School Meals or not  English as an Additional Language or not |
| Teacher | Years of service  Initial undergraduate degree subject  Linguistic subject knowledge score |
| School | Free School Meals (average; above average; below average)  Ethnic diversity (average; above average; below average)  % of students achieving 5 GCSEs or more, including Maths and English  % of students with Special Educational Needs  Contextual Value Added Measure  Most recent OFSTED inspection grade  OFSTED Section 10 English result |

*Table 1: Summary of Baseline Data collected*

*3.1.2 The intervention*

The intervention comprised detailed teaching schemes of work in which grammar was embedded where a meaningful connection could be made between the grammar point and writing. Both the comparison and intervention groups taught the same writing genre over a three week period once a term, and addressed the same writing learning objectives from the Framework for English, part of the English government’s National Strategies for raising educational attainment (see Table 2). Both groups were given the same written outcomes for each genre studied: the opening of a story; a written speech; and a portfolio of three specified types of poem. A medium term plan was provided for each group, which outlined the time frame, learning objectives, assessed outcomes, accompanied by a range of relevant stimulus resources. Thus, for both the intervention and comparison groups, the learning focus, the period of study, the learning objectives, and the assessed written outcomes were the same.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time frame** | **Writing genre** | **Learning Objectives for Writing from the Framework for English Year 8** |
| Autumn Term | Narrative Fiction | Developing viewpoint, voice and ideas  Varying sentences and punctuation for clarity and effect  Improving vocabulary for precision and effect  Developing varied linguistic and literary techniques  Using grammar accurately and appropriately |
| Spring Term | Persuasive Writing | Developing viewpoint, voice and ideas  Varying sentences and punctuation for clarity and effect  Improving vocabulary for precision and effect  Developing varied linguistic and literary devices  Structuring, organising and presenting texts in a variety of forms on paper and on screen  Using grammar accurately and appropriately |
| Summer Term | Writing Poetry | Generating ideas, planning and drafting  Varying sentences and punctuation for clarity and effect  Improving vocabulary for precision and impact  Developing varied linguistics and literary techniques |

*Table 2: Learning Objectives addressed in the schemes of work*

The detailed teaching schemes for the intervention group were designed by the project team, and explicitly sought to introduce grammatical constructions and terminology at a point in the teaching sequence which was relevant to the genre being studied; for example, exploring how the use of first or third person can position the narrator differently. The teaching focus was on effects and constructing meanings, not on the grammatical terminology, and the goal was to open up what we have called ‘*a repertoire of possibilities’*, rather than to suggest correct or formulaic ways of writing. A set of pedagogical principles informed the design of the teaching schemes:

* 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

Prior to the commencement of data collection, a separate training day was held for each of the two groups. At both training days, the teaching of writing was the focus; the project was introduced; and the administration and details for the teachers involved were outlined. In addition, both groups discussed the teaching of writing and were introduced to the teaching focus required by the project. In the case of the intervention group, additional training time was allocated to introducing the detailed teaching materials, although because teachers did not know the focus of the intervention was on the impact of contextualised grammar teaching, this training did not include an explanation of the pedagogical principles underpinning the materials.

*3.1.3 Pre and post test writing tasks*

The impact of the teaching on student writing was determined by a pre and post-test sample of writing. Both the pre and post-test writing sample were a first person narrative, drawing on personal experience, and written under controlled conditions. The test design and marking was led by Cambridge Assessment, who were responsible for setting and marking the national Writing Test at Key Stage 3 until 2006. In order to avoid any possible bias created by the precise choice of writing task, the topic was selected to avoid known gender preferences in writing and to avoid any need for having had a particular experience (see appendix 5). To ensure that there was no task bias, a cross-over design was adopted where half the sample completed task 1 as the pre-test and task 2 as the post-test, while the other half of the sample reversed the order in which these tests were taken. Both sample sets were independently marked by Cambridge Assessment. For each set of scripts, Cambridge Assessment provided a first marker's set of marks, a second marker's set and a 'resolution mark', adjudicated by a third senior marker if the first two marks were very different. They indicated which set of marks should be used for the purposes of the study, but allowed us to see any variability in the marking behind those chosen figures. The marking was based on the national Key Stage 3 mark scheme format, the final mark being made up of three components: sentence structure and punctuation; text structure and organization; and composition and effect. Cambridge Assessment devised the training materials for marking; undertook the administration to select and train a marking team; delivered a training day for each marking round; and ensured the usual standardisation checks during the marking. The markers did not know from which treatment group the writing had derived.

The writing samples were also analysed by a Research Assistant with a linguistics specialism, using a purpose-built coding framework (see appendix 6), determining the presence and quality of linguistic structures related to sentence grammar which had formed the focus of the teaching.

*3.1.4 Attrition and fidelity*

Fidelity is a problematic concept in a naturalistic educational setting such as this, as identical implementation of the intervention teaching materials is neither possible nor desirable. Teachers were not asked to follow the lesson plans rigidly; they were allowed to adapt materials to suit the needs of their students, but were also asked to remain as close as possible to the materials. All 32 participating schools remained in the project throughout the year long period of the study, but it was decided to exclude one school’s data from the final analysis because of low fidelity to the study. For example, she taught lessons which were not focused upon writing, and also regularly had other teachers teaching her lessons. Therefore, the final sample used for analysis comprised 31 teachers in 31 schools.

The original student sample was *n=900*, but after removing one class on the grounds of low fidelity, and removing those students who were not present for both the pre-test and the post-test, the final sample was *n=744*, representing an attrition rate of 16.2%. Full details are provided in table 3 below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reason for loss** | **% lost** |
| 1 class removed on the grounds of low fidelity | 2.6% |
| Students who left the school | 1% |
| No pre-test provided | 3.1% |
| No post-test provided | 9.3% |
|  | **16.2%** |

*Table 3: Attrition rates*

**3.2 The qualitative study**

The qualitative data is comprised of four data sets: classroom observations and follow-up interviews once per teacher per scheme of work; writing conversations once per scheme of work with a focus child from each class; and the written outcomes from the teaching of each genre. The full qualitative data set includes 93 lesson observations; 93 teacher interviews; 93 writing conversations, plus the writing samples of narrative fiction, argument and poetry from each class.

For the lesson observations, a schedule was designed (appendix 7), to capture a record of how the teachers taught the three writing genres and how students responded. The schedule recorded the sequence of activities and the grammatical, literary and linguistic terminology used by the teacher, and prompted for comments on:

* teacher interaction: what the teacher says and does; examples provided; the nature of questioning and explanation;
* student responses: evidence of understanding and learning; evidence of misunderstanding or confusion;
* observer’s reflections on contextualised grammar teaching; metalinguistic understanding; teacher practices (which might indicate teacher beliefs); use of pedagogical support materials, if appropriate.

The teacher interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule (appendix 8), which explored their pedagogical decision-making in the lesson observed, and their reflections on the lesson and students’ learning. For the intervention group only, this included their pedagogic evaluations of the schemes of work. The specific questions about the lesson observed were not pre-planned but drew on the lesson observation, for example, probing why the teacher gave a particular example, or the teacher’s reflection on a particular student’s response. In addition, each interview sought to generate teachers’ beliefs about writing, through prompts designed to stimulate open-ended discussion. The final teacher interview, following the poetry scheme of work, was an extended interview which directly explored teachers’ beliefs about the value of grammar teaching: this was not directly addressed in the earlier interviews to avoid highlighting grammar as the focus of the study, although many of the teachers did refer to grammar without prompting in the earlier interviews.

The writing conversations with a student were conducted following the lesson observation. In each of the sample classes, one student was selected as a focus student for these conversations; the overall sample of focus students was stratified by gender in order to avoid any data distortions which might be influenced by gendered attitudes towards writing. The writing conversations were shaped by a semi-structured interview schedule (appendix 9) and by stimulus prompts (appendices 10, 11 and 12). The first section of the interview was principally to facilitate engagement by asking broad questions about writing and their own perceptions of learning about writing, but it did include a question which probed their perspectives as learners on the lesson observed. As with the teacher interviews, the precise questions asked at this point were framed by what had been observed in the lesson. The second section of the interview explored students’ metalinguistic understanding of their own and others’ writing. This section of the interview used stimulus prompts to lead the discussion. For each genre, a sample of writing in that genre written by students of the same age was selected, not as a model of excellence but as a starting point for discussion. The interview also used the focus student’s own writing produced during the teaching as a stimulus for discussion.

The qualitative data enabled the study to be sensitive to the complexities of classroom learning, and to provide a more nuanced picture of the way the intervention was realized in practice. It will both ‘*inform future development of the intervention, and also to contribute to theory and understanding of the relation between context, mechanism and outcome’* (Moore, Diamond and Graham 2003).

**3.3 Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations have been informed by the institutional Research Ethics policy, the BERA Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2004) and the ESRC Research Ethics Framework. The original proposal underwent an institutional ethical review and was awarded a Certificate of Approval.

The study sought voluntary informed consent which ensured that ‘*all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported*’ (BERA 2004:6) and their right to withdraw at any stage. To achieve this, several informing strategies were used, ‘*giving as much information as possible about the research so that prospective participants can make an informed decision on their possible involvement’* (ESRC REF:24). The headteacher of each school signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which explained the ethical issues and sought consent. A briefing sheet for school use outlined involvement in the project to inform parents and students about the study. In addition, all teachers, and all students in the interview sample, were asked to sign a consent form, adapted for children to ensure it was ‘child-friendly’. In the preliminary phase, the research team sought to establish a relationship of trust with each school, ‘*fostering relationships in which ongoing ethical regard for participants is to be sustained, even after the study itself has been completed’* (ESRC REF:24) encouraging all schools to contact the research team at any stage with queries or concerns.

However, the blind randomisation design created a particular ethical problem as it was not possible to tell participants which experimental group they were in, or the precise focus of the study. All participants were informed that the study was researching writing, but not that it was investigating the impact of grammar teaching on writing. Thus the ‘informed’ consent was partially compromised. In order to address this, all participants were informed at the outset that all research results and a full outline of the conduct of the research would be communicated to them at the end of the study.

A further ethical problem specific to this study was the need to ‘*minimise the effects of designs that advantage … one group of participants over another’* (BERA 2004:8): half the teachers received pedagogical support which could give their classes an educational advantage/disadvantage. This was addressed in two ways. Firstly, the period of trialling the support materials attempted to remove any threat of negative impacts upon student learning during the main study, and both groups were given matching learning objectives, stimulus resources and written outcomes. Secondly, at the end of the project the outcomes of the study were disseminated directly to participating schools through a teacher conference so that any beneficial impacts could adopted more widely.

During the classroom observations, the researchers adopted as inobtrusive a presence as possible, following procedures used during school visits to PGCE student placements. The interviews took place in an informal setting, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw.

All data was fully anonymised, kept in compliance with requirements regarding the personal use of data specified by the Data Protection Act, filed securely in a project office, and will be destroyed three years after completion of the study. The research team conducted the research mindful of the ‘*important principle that no trial participant should be disadvantaged by taking part in the trial’* (Moore, Graham and Diamond 2003:681) and that the *‘best interests of the child must be the primary consideration’* (BERA 2004:7): the ethics of the research was a standing item at all project team meetings.

**4.0 FINDINGS**

**4.1 Research Question 1: The impact of grammar teaching on students’ writing**

Multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the data using the individual student level data (n=744). Intervention, school and teacher covariate values, according to school or class membership, were attributed to each student. The difference between the pre and post test scores on the writing test for each individual was used as the outcome variable. The explanatory covariates were firstly, whether the individual was in the intervention or comparison group, and then the baseline measures at student, teacher and school level. As the covariates included both categorical measures (eg Free School Meals) and continuous measures (eg linguistic subject knowledge), the multiple regression modelling could be described specifically as a multi-way analysis of covariance.

The analysis indicates that both intervention and comparison groups improved over the time period of the study, with the mean value of the improvement between pre- and post-test scores being 9.24%. For the intervention group (n=412), the mean outcome was 11.52%, which contrasts with a mean outcome of 6.41% for the comparison group (n=332). In other words, those students in the intervention group improved their attainment in the post-test writing test more than the comparison group. Significance was tested using a two sample t-test and found to be highly significant (p<0.001), representing a positive difference of 5.11 percentage marks for the intervention group. This represents the first robust statistical evidence for a beneficial impact of the teaching of grammar in students’ writing attainment.

However, when further analysis was undertaken, the data presents a more nuanced understanding of the effect of the intervention. Stepwise procedures were used to investigate statistically significant variables and interactions, and full residual analyses were used to check the final model, and this identified student, teacher and school level factors or variables which were significant. Tables 4, 5 and 6 below present this data: factors, interactions or variables not reported in these tables were not significant at the 5% level.

*4.1.1 Relationships between the intervention and student writing attainment*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Model coefficient** | **Estimate** | **Std. error** | **t-value** | **p-value** |
| Intercept | -6.1727 | (3.5285) | (-1.739) | (<0.100) |
| **Student level**  Above average writing level  Intervention group and above average writing level | -7.4006 8.1246 | (1.9037)  (1.3863) | (-3.887)  (5.860) | (<0.001)  (<0.001) |

*Table 4: Relationships between intervention and student writing attainment*

Table 4 shows that the intervention had a more marked positive effect on able writers. It also shows that, over the period of the intervention, able writers in the comparison group made less progress in writing than less able writers, whereas able writers in the intervention group made significant progress. The implications of these results are firstly, that able writers receiving conventional teaching of writing may be stalling in their progress at age 14, and secondly, that the attention to how the relationship between grammar and writing may be particularly appropriate to their learning needs. The intervention may have been pitched towards able writers: it drew on understanding of students’ linguistic development from a previous study (Myhill 2008; 2009). Further research would be necessary to establish whether using the same pedagogic strategy of embedded grammar teaching but addressing different aspects of writing more relevant to lower attaining writers’ needs would be more successful. It is also possible that able writers had higher levels of cognitive understanding of the concepts being taught, and that they were more effective in transferring the learning into their own writing.

4.1.2 *Relationships between the intervention and teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge and experience*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Model coefficient** | Estimate | Std. error | t-value | p-value |
| **Intercept** | -6.1727 | (3.5285) | (-1.739) | (<0.100) |
| **Teacher level**  Teacher Linguistic Subject Knowledge (LSK) score  Teacher has 5-10 years experience | 0.5817  5.9832 | (0.2760)  (1.3091) | (2.108)  (4.570) | (<0.050)  (<0.001) |

*Table 5: Relationships between the intervention, teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge, and experience*

The length of the teacher’s experience and the quality of the teacher’s subject knowledge of grammar were both significant in influencing student writing outcomes. The data suggest that, where the intervention was beneficial to students, it was most effective with teachers who had between 5 and 10 years teaching experience (ie neither inexperienced nor highly experienced). This may seem paradoxical but it may be that inexperienced teachers lacked the confidence to use the intervention teaching materials appropriately, whilst highly experienced teachers had more deeply embedded pedagogical practices which they found harder to alter, despite the intervention.

Similarly, there is a relationship between linguistic subject knowledge (LSK) and the impact of the intervention. Students in classes with teachers with lower LSK made less improvement than those with teachers with higher LSK. This is a more predictable finding, as the teaching materials required confident mastery of grammar, and although they aimed to provide good support for teachers, it is possible that the grammar knowledge required by the intervention teaching materials was at too high a level for those with lower LSK to teach effectively. Indeed, the lesson observations show teachers struggling to cope with student questions on grammar and sometimes communicating incorrect information to students.

4.1.3 *School level effects*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Model coefficient** | Estimate | Std. error | t-value | p-value |
| **Intercept** | -6.1727 | (3.5285) | (-1.739) | (<0.100) |
| **School level**  ‘Satisfactory’ result in last School inspection  ‘Good or excellent’ in last School inspection  % Special Educational Needs (SEN) in School | 7.0165  8.3394  0.6411 | (1.9258)  (2.0151)  (0.1610) | (3.643)  (4.138)  (3.983) | (<0.001)  (<0.001)  (<0.001) |

*Table 6: showing coefficient estimates (standard errors, t-values and p-values) at student, teacher and school level for final selected model*

At school level, the baseline data collected aimed to capture both social diversity (ethnicity; number of students entitled to free school meals) and school performance (national examination results; school inspection outcomes and the percentage of students with Special Educational Needs). The analysis indicates that the school inspection outcomes and the percentage of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) were significant factors. The school inspection system in England grades schools through a rigorous process of analysing school performance data on a range of factors, and through observing lessons and grading the teaching quality, and assessing the quality of school leadership. The data indicate that students in high-performing schools benefited more from the intervention than those in lower performing schools. It is important to note that ‘high-performing’ does not correlate with ‘high ability’ students: all the schools in the study were comprehensive schools, which do not select students on ability, and the inspection assessments take into account the baseline performance of students on entry to the school. So a high-performing school could be achieving good results with lower ability students. It is not surprising that the intervention was more successful in high-performing schools as teaching quality is generally lower in lower-performing schools, which is likely to influence how the intervention materials were used. It is less easy to account for the influence of SEN, particularly as the data indicate that it was schools with higher percentages of students with SEN which related positively to the beneficial impact of the intervention.

Overall, then, the statistical analysis indicates a significant positive impact of the use of contextualized grammar teaching on student writing. To date, this is the first large-scale study which has found this result. However, the statistical data also indicates differential effects which are important both for theory, policy and practice. Firstly, the intervention was more beneficial to able writers than weaker writers; secondly, the linguistic subject knowledge of the teacher was a significant influencing factor; and thirdly, that length of teaching experience influenced learner outcomes.

**4.2 Research Question 2: The impact of pedagogical support materials on the teaching of grammar**

In order to understand the impact of the intervention materials on the teaching of grammar, the teachers were invited in their interviews to reflect upon how they had used the materials, what they thought about them, and how students had responded to them. The interviews were analysed inductively using Nvivo and two broad categories were identified: those comments in which teachers reflected on their own practice in using the materials, and those comments which expressed a view about student response. Teacher comments within these broad categories were coded into themes as outlined in Appendix 13.

*4.2.1 Teacher-focused themes:*

Table 7 below indicates how many responses were coded in each theme.

*Table 7: showing the frequency of comments for each theme*

Practical aspects of the materials

Two of the themes (*Resources/Activities* and *Timing)* related principally to the pedagogical materials at a very practical level. A substantial set of responses expressed approval of the quality of the resources or activities chosen to support the learning. Teachers were very positive about resources, such as the visual images used to prompt narrative writing, or the choice of poems in the poetry unit. They also commented on specific activities which they liked, such as a card sorting activity to separate arguments, a counter-arguments game in the argument unit, and annotation tasks in the poetry unit. Frequently the teachers talked about using the same resources or activities with other classes. This set of responses seems to be less integrally related to the intervention than to a more general professional approbation of the overall units of work, as this teacher’s comment implies: ‘*it’s actually been really positive for me, personally, and I think the resources that we’ve had as a result of it have been brilliant to share with the other teachers, and not just solely for year eight but across the year groups: they’ve been brilliant’*. However, it is evident that this approval does link to a view that the resources and activities were motivating and engaging and one teacher, for example, felt that the units provided ‘*source material which I can use with the kids to inspire them to create their own work’*. A further set of responses noted difficulties with *timing* because the amount of material to cover in the lessons was too much.

The explicitness of the materials

A recurring theme in the interviews was the view that the teaching materials had been much more explicit about linguistic aspects of writing than teachers’ usual classroom practice: the words *explicit, explicitly, focused* and *specific* were repeatedly used in reference to the materials. Typical comments in this theme noted the contrast between this explicitness and previous practice, and also indicated changing viewpoints:

* *I’ve changed my mind about this one, it is crucial to teach children explicitly how to write well*
* *I don’t think I would have been this explicit about it*
* *Before these schemes of work, I would teach them explicitly how to write, but I think these schemes go into a lot more detail than I would’ve, so, for example, I probably would’ve done like modal verbs as a starter, but I wouldn’t have developed it into a whole lesson*

One aspect of this explicitness was the use of linguistic terminology and some of the comments in this theme related to the way the schemes used terminology that they would not normally use (particularly modal verbs and determiners): as one teacher reflected ‘ *I never used those terms so specifically, and never said to them, ‘this is a determiner*’’. For this teacher, the use of terminology meant that implicit knowledge was made more explicit: ‘*a lot of them knew stuff but they hadn’t perhaps been given the terminology to be able to express it very clearly’* .

Another aspect of the linguistic explicitness was an awareness that the teaching schemes gave more attention to syntactical aspects of writing than was teachers’ normal practice

* *I’m not sure that I’ve ever placed this much emphasis on different sentences*
* *I think it’s gone into more detail about the sentence types, whereas usually with fiction I’d say talk about do more things like metaphors, similes things like that*
* *I’ve learnt from the scheme to think more, focus on, I suppose, on my sentence level bit, whereas before I’d probably been thinking more about the text and word level … I’d focus on that, or include more of it in the future*

Adaptation and Fidelity

Two of the themes identified, *adaptation* and *fidelity*, related to the way in which teachers adjusted the materials provided. The teachers had been advised to use the teaching schemes as faithfully as possible, but for ethical reasons, we did not feel it appropriate to require absolute fidelity, and they were allowed to make changes where they, as professionals, felt it was necessary. Approximately half of the teachers specifically claimed they had maintained high fidelity to the teaching schemes, in part because of their commitment to the research project, or as one teacher put it, ‘*I’ve tried to be faithful to your project’*. They also appeared content to maintain high fidelity to the intervention because of their approval of the quality of the schemes – ‘*I think the scheme of work is really, really good’*; and the sense that they were being successful with the students – *‘I think the lessons are going really well and I think they’re really learning’ .*

Where adaptations were made, a significant number were pragmatic adaptations in timing, where tasks or activities had to be truncated because of time limitations. However, of relevance to the research focus of the study, is the fact that some of the adaptations were altering or omitting the focus on grammar at the heart of the research because it was felt to be too difficult:

* *I found it really difficult and I adapted it to something else*
* *I just totally left out the clause part of that exercise, the final element because actually, in the scheme so far we haven’t taught, I haven’t taught them anything about clauses, so it would have just completely have gone over their head*
* *I think they would really struggle with ellipsis. I deliberately didn’t use the term, as with a lot of terms in this scheme, saying a term that they’ve not come across before would scare them*

Subject Knowledge Concern

Approximately half of the teachers articulated a problem using some of the teaching materials because of their own lack of confidence with grammar, particularly with explanations and handling students’ questions:

* *I was a bit worried about the lesson to be honest with you because looking at the scheme of work e I wasn’t sure when it said like ‘the riddle’, if that was the right one, and things like that and I don’t know if I was using it in the right context and stuff so I was a bit unsure, whether I’d got it right in that sense*
* *I didn’t find it easy because I’m struggling to get my head round understanding some of these things myself and I think sometimes it shows and I think sometimes the kids know, and sometimes they throw out answers that I’m not quite sure about and I think my unsureness comes across*
* *Subtleties in language are things that I’ll always have to work on because getting 13 year olds to understand those things is very difficult, and I don’t have the experience in my teaching to be able to be as concise as I have been with this scheme and this scheme has given me really good guidance on this is what you need to do, this is how you need to go about teaching it, this will help your students to do x y and z, you know, so it’s helped me in that way, my subject knowledge will always need to be improved*

A similar number of teachers remarked that the teaching materials had given them *confidence*, for example ‘*in the way that I teach imaginative writing’*, but none of the teachers specifically claimed that the teaching schemes had given them confidence in teaching grammar in the context of writing.

4.2.2 *Student-focused themes*

Table 8 below indicates how many responses were coded in each theme.

*Table 8: showing the frequency of comments for each theme*

Understanding of grammatical concepts

One cluster of themes reveals teacher perceptions of how the teaching schemes impacted upon student understanding. One strong view, reported by almost all the teachers, were that some aspects of the schemes were *too difficult* for students: for example, one teacher felt an activity was ‘*going to be too complex’* for her class; another observed her students ‘*struggled with the noun phrases*’; whilst another reported that the concept of viewpoint was ‘*quite difficult to grasp and thy kept saying ‘Is it first person or third person?*’’ For others, it was the terminology which posed a particular problem, with several teachers expressing frustration that students did not seem to remember terms from one lesson to the next, and one teacher suggesting that students give up on the attempt to learn the terms: ‘*I think it is literally just this term that as soon as the term comes in they just go right, not interested, it’s too hard for me, I’m never going to remember this’*

In contrast, another significant theme related to teacher observations of student *understanding* being realized in the lessons. Whilst some of this understanding related more generally to developing understanding of the genre, many of these comments reflected specific linguistic understanding secured through the pedagogic intervention:

* *I think some of them have learned something already. I mean already today some of them said do you want me to write it in first person or third person? … and so I said ‘Well, you choose’, so they’d obviously thought about a writer’s choice and I gave them the choice, but that was picking up on what we’d done last week. So it’s worked, it’s worked well: it’s had an impact on them already, I think*.
* *I know that they’re really getting something from it because I can see the vocabulary starting to happen and the understanding happening, more than it used to be regarding the way language works in the classroom, and that’s because I’m having to use the language and learn it myself*
* *They obviously got the whole thing about connectives as to which ones work best when and why and what have you.*

Importantly, given the purpose of the intervention, teachers were reporting contextualised understanding, rather than simply acquired knowledge of terminology: as one teacher put it, ‘*They’ve far more understanding of what it is they’re doing it and why they’re doing it’.*

The value of discussion

This developing understanding of grammatical concepts and their application in writing may, in part, be attributable to the discussion engendered by the activities in the teaching schemes. Over two-thirds of the teachers made comments about student *discussion,* sometimes simply about ‘*brilliant discussions*’ or ‘*a lot of discussion work’*, but frequently teachers note how the discussion was developing the applied knowledge of the effect of a particular linguistic structure in writing. For example, one teacher recalled a discussion about whether the writer’s ‘*intention was met by the amendment that they’d made*’ whilst another recalled ‘*discussing why it wasn’t just a list any more, and what was so effective about it*’. The teaching materials had set out to create opportunities for students to discuss linguistic points without conveying any notions of rules or formulae for writing: rather the goal was to open up thinking about the possibilities of language. One teacher felt that as a consequence ‘*students were willing to risk opinions about language more’*.

A fundamental criticism of grammar teaching in the past has been its disconnectedness from other aspects of learning about writing, whereas these materials sought better integration and connectness. Students’ understanding of grammatical concepts appears to have been supported by the ways the lessons *made connections* between the grammar and the writing, and developed connections in learning across the sequences of lessons. Several teachers referred to students ‘*transferring the skills’* learned into their writing, and one teacher noted how students were ‘*making a link without me, that if you write in first person then there’s a focus on feelings and empathy, whereas if you write in as someone who’s taking the picture, looking onto the picture, then it was more about description*’. One cited the example of a student applying what she had learned about persuasive speeches into a School Council setting. Other teachers were aware that the integration of punctuation and grammar in ways they did not normally deploy seemed to help students to see the connections between linguistic feature and potential effect. Likewise the way the lessons built and developed learning through referring back to previous learning was acknowledged as supportive of understanding: ‘*I think that’s what they’ve enjoyed or certainly I’ve enjoyed from this scheme of work is being able to make links between every bit of work that we’ve done until we get to the final assessment piece.*’

Student engagement

Two-thirds of the teachers made considerable claims for the way the teaching materials had engaged students. Words and phrases such as ‘*enjoyed’, ‘loved it’, ‘great fun’* were frequently used to describe students’ responses and teachers typically reported higher than usual levels of engagement from the class:

* *I had far more engagement from the class*
* *What’s interesting is everybody is moaning about year eight, and I’m not, and I’m thinking because they’re so engaged with it, they’re really enjoying it*
* *It has maintained their interest and focus*
* Students were ‘*really animated and really interested’*

There are some direct correlations here between teachers’ approval of the schemes and their reporting of high levels of student engagement, and there may be some halo effects here which would not be sustained in the longer term. Nonetheless, the choice of engaging activities which encouraged an explicit focus on how language works was part of the pedagogic rationale for the materials and many of the comments reflect this:

* *‘I really liked the exploded poem task because they responded to it so well, and you get so many creative ideas and they all approach the task totally differently, and I like the fact, as I said during the lesson I think that, as soon as you give them these words, they want to start making sentences. You know it is natural, it’s innate within us, to start shuffling them around like fridge magnets, and seeing what we can achieve, whether that’s funny or whether that’s something that is poetic and more artful, I suppose.*’

Another factor which may account for the student engagement may have been the encouragement to play with language and the *experimentation* which underpinned the teaching schemes. The theme of experimentation was evident in responses from half of the teachers, some of who recognised that providing space for play and experimentation involved ‘*stepping back slightly and letting them come up with the ideas*’ and relinquishing ‘*control a little bit and allow them to just experiment’*. One teacher encouraged her class to look at ‘*the slipperiness of language’,* the *‘mischievousness to words*’, whilst others appreciated the activities which fostered manipulation of language, ‘*the idea of moving things around*’ and the ‘*sense of exploration in this unit’*. One teacher believed that this experimentation had helped her students to be ‘*far more adaptable now when you come to writing sentences, their sentences are far more inventive*.’

Improvement in writing

Over half the teachers made comments relating to their perceptions that the teaching materials were helping their students improve their writing. Once again, some caution is needed here to acknowledge possible halo effects, as the teaching materials and the research project were clearly addressing writing improvement. One teacher, pleased with the final pieces of writing on the narrative fiction, expresses her view of a direct effect of the intervention on the writing: ‘*I do feel that all this work we’ve been doing on working with words, working with sentence structures, working with how you work with these different word classes to enhance your writing, I’m sure that’s fed into it because it was beautiful work*’. Another teacher felt that her students had ‘*really concentrated on their use of language*’. The teaching materials repeatedly emphasised the idea of making choices in writing, and deliberately eschewed conveying any formulaic or rule-bound messages about writing, thus trying to give writers a repertoire of possibilities to draw on in writing. One theme, linked to writing improvement, was teachers’ observations that students were *making informed decisions:*

* *It’s clear that they are thinking about it and they’re making informed decisions*
* *A lot of those students understand the idea that … it is about making choices and making decisions about your reading and your writing*
* *They will say, ‘Right, how does that work in a sentence?’ and they’re going , ’Oh I could do this or could do that’, which is great*.

Surprise

Many of the teachers expressed surprise at the students’ responses to the materials. Some of these comments correspond with teachers’ perceptions of the high levels of engagement with the activities, often contrary to their own expectations. One teacher observed that ‘*I kind of thought they wouldn’t enjoy it that much, but they really have*’ whilst another teacher admitted that ‘*students have engaged at a much higher level than I was expecting first off’*. Some of the comments conveyed teachers’ surprise at what the students were able to do. These comments tended to be more closely focussed on the grammatical aspects of the materials. One teacher reflected that she had ‘*learned a lot from these schemes’* because she had been surprised that students were able to access the materials and be focussed. Students’ ability to cope with the terminology was another issue: one teacher found that ‘*the kids are far more receptive to the grammatical language and lexicon than I would have expected’* and another teacher noted that ‘*when I read the scheme I thought they may struggle with that [viewpoint] but I was actually really surprised in terms of it didn’t take much for them to understand that and they were coming up with some really good ideas*’. An activity in the poetry unit which encouraged students to create playful, nonsensical noun phrases challenged several teachers’ subject knowledge and many teachers assumed students would not be able to cope with it. One teacher reports ‘*I haven’t come across a noun phrase generator game to be honest, and when I saw that first of all, I looked and thought ‘Oh my gosh, get my head round this first, and will they go for that’, and then I was surprised that actually they did go for it.*’

In conclusion, then, the evidence from the teacher interviews suggests two levels of impact of the intervention teaching materials on the teaching of grammar. The first is more generic: the teachers found the materials high-quality and well-resourced, and believed that they stimulated high levels of student engagement. These are qualities which could apply to any teaching materials and are not specific to the grammar intervention. However, it does indicate that it is possible to embed contextualized grammar teaching in planning for writing in ways which are creative, motivational and engaging and, to that extent, this is an important finding. The second level of impact is specific to grammar teaching. The teachers’ comments suggest that some of the pedagogical principles underpinning the planning had significant impact on their teaching. The explicitness of the attention to linguistic features built into the teaching materials and the creation of multiple opportunities for discussion are the most prominent of these, but the emphasis on playfulness and experimentation, and on developing repertoires of possibility through making connections and encouraging informed decision-making are also important. Counter to these positive impacts of the teaching materials on the teaching of grammar are the limitations which are created by teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge. In addition to expressing concern about their linguistic knowledge, some teachers demonstrated their anxiety in practice by avoiding some of the grammar points in the lessons, and their strong sense that the materials might be too difficult for students may reflect their own difficulty as much as student difficulty.

**4.3 Research Question 3: The impact of grammar teaching on students' metalinguistic understanding**

Understanding of students’ metalinguistic understanding was derived principally from the student interviews, particularly the part of the interviews where students talked about their own writing and the prompt pieces of writing. The analysis used Gombert’s taxonomy (1992) of metalinguistic understanding as the basic framework for coding.

4.3.1 *Metasemantic and Metalexical Understanding*

According to Gombert, *metalexical understanding* relates to recognising that words are words and being able to select words intentionally; whilst *metasemantic* relates more to the meanings of words and the ability to manipulate words. Thus, this kind of understanding may be related to lexical diversity and vocabulary in developing writers’ texts. At age 12-13, all of the students in this study understood the concept of *word* and were more concerned with what words can do in a text and making choices about which words to use. For example, students discussed which words were most effective in creating suspense in the opening of a narrative. This element of metalinguistic awareness most appears to be the most developed in students of this age with more comments related to vocabulary choice and word effect than any other category. These adolescent writers were very focused upon what words can do in their writing, rather than upon words as language objects.

To an extent, their metalexical understanding was demonstrated in references to explicit choices of particular words, and how they talked about those words. Very common were references to *powerful* words, *descriptive* words, *strong* words and *interesting* words. Metasemantic understanding was evident when writers articulated, or tried to articulate, the effect of word choices on shaping meaning or its intended impact upon a potential reader. Frequently, they pointed to the power of specific word choices to have a marked effect on the reader: ‘*words that are going to sink into the heart’*; ‘*you can make them feel guilty or sad or happy, just by using certain words*’; ‘*makes you feel something that the writer wants you to feel’.* In narrative, students discussed word choices that they thought were more ‘*imaginative’* and which helped ‘*create a picture in your mind*’ or showed ‘*what the person in the story is actually seeing’*.

Another strand of comments considered how word choices could increase the formality of a text, though few writers used the word ‘formal’. Several referred to words as more ‘*posh*’, such as the choice of ‘*older generation*’ rather than ‘*older people’* in the argument model text. Sometimes, the discussion was less about formality, and more about selecting less familiar words: *‘clambered’ is quite a good word instead of just ‘climbed’*; ‘*they’ve used some quite unusual words as well. ‘ I felt a slight pang’— I’ve never heard that before really.’* These discussions often revolve around alternatives, the possibilities that choosing different words offers to the effect of the text on the reader. The poetry prompt text prompts one student to discuss how the use of *urge* rather than *make* creates a stronger imperative to act: ‘*When it says ‘I urge you to stop dead’ it’s a good choice, because obviously they could say ‘I make you stop dead’ but it doesn’t sound the same. It makes you feel like, God, I’ve got to stop now, not just oh, I’ll stop in a second’*. One boy also realised, that being deliberately colloquial can be effective. He chooses to write an argument in the voice of a small child, arguing about pigs as pets, and writes ‘*While people say that a pig makes a lot of mess, I’ve heard they poo outside*’. In the interview afterwards, he initially suggests that if he altered *poo* to *feces* it might improve his text, but decides ‘*it doesn’t really work that well’* and that using *poo* ‘*sounds like a little kid saying it’*.

4.3.2 *Metasyntactic Understanding*

Metasyntactic understanding represents conscious reasoning about the syntax of a sentence and deliberate control over accurate use of grammar. The focus upon accuracy seems to exclude how metasyntactic understanding might contribute to a writer’s ability to craft and design text to meet its rhetorical goals. For the 12-13 year old writers in this study, only the weakest writers would have exhibited grammatical inaccuracies, and only on a few occasions. The teaching focus was upon varying sentences and punctuation for clarity and effect, and students in the Intervention group were taught about the possibilities of short sentences for impact, varying sentence lengths to create textual rhythm, and about altering the syntactical structure of sentences to shift focus. The data suggest that students were considerably less confident in their understanding at a metasyntactic level.

The students’ responses indicate an emerging understanding of why short sentences can be effective, but their understanding was often not clearly articulated. Many spoke of short sentences as ‘*powerful’*, that they ‘*grab attention’* and ‘*makes [the reader] think’,* conveying some understanding that short sentences tend to draw attention to themselves. One writer appeared to be suggesting that a short sentence can create tension: ‘*when it’s like a really frightening story or something a little short sentence is better’*. The most frequently commented upon sentence in the narrative model text was ‘*We had been burgled!!*’ which was singled out as an example of an effective ‘*short and snappy’* sentence, which created dramatic impact and tension. The two comments below show two students’ thinking about this sentence:

*‘He’s got exclamation marks so it’s also a very short sentence, so it’s sort of suddenly whacking you and saying, what’s happening and what you’ve been thinking all along, so I think that’s quite effective’*

*‘It’s sharp, so it just like hits you. When you’re reading a big long sentence, and it’s just dragging on, but then one comes like that, which stops you and makes you think about it.’*

It is also evident that students have grasped an understanding of the concept of variety in sentence length in a text, although they are much less able to articulate how that variety might link with prosody or textual rhythm. Several correctly noted that the argument prompt text used sentences of a broadly similar length, and suggested the writing might be improved by judicious use of ‘*some short blunt sentences’*, though this still shows greater understanding of short sentences than the principle of varying textual rhythm. For many, it was a superficial understanding of the principle of variety, for example, the writer who observed that ‘*I think it’s good to vary it really’.* Some seemed to associate short sentences with interest and long sentences with boredom, thus rationalising that ‘*when you have a long sentence, it’s more likely to be not as exciting as a short sentence*’ as the principle for varying sentence length. Many connect the length of the sentence more with the meaning it conveys, than with the different stresses and emphases that variation can create. One writer observes that ‘*the long ones give you more detail but then the short ones just make you think a bit more’*, but another associates length with reading difficulty: ‘*If there’s a really long sentence you’re probably thinking ,oh well I can’t remember what the beginning of the sentence was’*.

However, metasyntactic understanding about syntactical variety was much more limited, although these writers are able to make some metasyntactic observations which relate to syntactical variation. The teaching scheme had taught about altering emphasis, through using non-finite clauses, adverbials, and subordinate clauses as the start of the sentence. There were significantly fewer comments that addressed syntactical variety. Some noticed that ‘*the sentence structures are the same’* in the Argument model text, and suggested ‘*change them around a bit to make it different*’. Another student said, of the same text, ‘*they’re not all started with the same sort of phrases or words, so they kind of keep your attention, because if they were all started with ‘They ought to make' or, or ‘The elderly’, it wouldn’t be very exciting, it would be really quite boring*.’ In both cases, the writers have not understood how syntactic shifts can move reader focus. One writer, however, was very precise in describing a syntactic variation that he has used: *‘I’ve put the connective at the start like I said before and I wouldn’t normally do that, normally it would be ‘The pig will have nowhere to sleep’ or something like that, but I’ve put ‘Despite the fact that the pig will have nowhere to sleep’*;however, he does not link it to any rhetorical purpose. Sometimes apparent implicit understanding is evident, as in the perceptive discussion about one sentence below:

*‘ ‘All they do is sit in an empty room and do nothing except sit and do nothing’: they put ‘nothing’ twice in that sentence and it doesn’t sound very good, it doesn’t sound like they’ve got a very wide range of vocabulary. So they could put, ‘All they do is sit in an empty room and all they do is sit and do nothing’ because then they wouldn’t have put ‘nothing’ twice.’*

Here the writer offers an alternative which balances the repetition of the main clause on either side of the co-ordinating conjunction with an expansion which emphasises the futility of their situation – ‘*in an empty room’* and ‘*do nothing’*. This alternative removes the awkward repetition of ‘*do nothing’* which she has almost identified, although she has considered it as a metalexical issue. It is possible that this writer, and indeed many of the other students in the study, do not yet have sufficient explicit syntactical knowledge to articulate their emergent metasyntactic understandings.

4.3.3 *Metatextual Understanding*

Metatextual understanding, according to Gombert, moves beyond syntax-level awareness to a more global awareness of the coherence and cohesion of an utterance, which may have multiple syntactic constructions. There was less evidence of metatextual understanding and considerably fewer comments coded as metatextual.

In the current study, poetry was deliberately selected as one of the three writing genres to be taught, partly because it is frequently omitted in studies of writing, but also because the research team hypothesized that it would generate good opportunities to talk about text structure, as this is such a key aspect of poetry. In fact, students found it very difficult to respond to the text level questions about the Poetry prompt text. They were unable to articulate any clear metatextual understanding beyond visual recognition that it was a poem ‘*because of the way it’s set out’*, or by statements which referred to structure in terms of what it was not: ‘*It couldn’t be a story because it’s too short and it couldn’t just be a passage of writing, because each sentence starts the same way*.’ One student correctly observed that the poem was ‘*in rows of four and some poems are in rows of four I think it’s called a quatrain*’. The interviews prompted students to think about whether the line length and layout of the poem served any particular purpose, and beyond simple descriptions of long and short lines, students were generally at a loss how to respond to this.

In argument, the few metatextual comments tended to be about the structuring of the arguments across the text, and how ‘*One paragraph’s on one argument, and the other paragraph’s a different argument’*. A stronger metatextual account of argument took a clearer global view of the text:

*‘They’ve put the important points at the top and important points at the bottom and in the middle they’ve kind of tried to persuade you it’s bad. They’ve put a summary of the whole kind of speech in a couple of sentences at the end which is good, kind of refreshes your memory. They’ve used repetition… you don’t really forget what the speech is about, and it’s putting across the fact that it is about the younger generation putting the older generation in care homes… I can tell it’s an argument mainly because it’s all on one side…they’ve put their point across really strongly.’*

Some students had a clear sense of the textual decisions they were making in their writing and how these related to the overall shape of their unfolding text:

*‘It’s going to be told in first person by one of the tramps called Toby and, he’s going to be like the one that had something really bad happen to him in his past and that’s why he’s been made homeless...*

*It’s going to be present tense because I think if it’s going to be like a diary account then, it will be past at the beginning from like, when he’s telling the story of his past but like towards the main bit it will be present, so it will go from past to present.’*

Students were also able to comment on narrative structure and the development of plot. One student explained how he liked to create suspense by ‘*not giving them the whole story but edging it forward slightly, the actual dilemma folding out, and not give it away straightaway’*. Another had learned that narrative plots can be non-chronological and ‘*you don’t necessarily have to put the opening at the beginning, you can put it in the middle*’.

4.3.4 *Metapragmatic Understanding*

The category of metapragmatic understanding proved more problematic in coding of the student data because Gombert’s definition of it as the ability to reflect on language use in its context described what the teaching intervention was encouraging through its explicit attention to grammar in context. As writers principally considering the effectiveness of their own and others’ written texts, a substantial number of the comments the students made were metapragmatic, particularly in their awareness of their intended audience or reader. Indeed, the majority of the responses already discussed could also have been coded as metapragmatic. For the purposes of this study, then, it was decided to include in this category, those comments not coded elsewhere which showed understanding of language in context.

The decision whether to write in first or third person was addressed in the narrative teaching and a cluster of the metapragmatic responses related to this. In particular, although the term *omniscient narrator* was not used in the teaching, some students seemed to be grappling with articulating the way third person viewpoints permit an all-knowing narrative stance:

‘*I think first person and third person depends on what you’re writing, but I usually try and write in the third person because it’s easier to get in everything and details, and you can sort of like show what everyone else is thinking without actually having to say it…when you’re in third person and you’re looking unseen you can say, well for instance, someone rolls their eyes, you can think whatever has just happened is really, really stupid and you can kind of understand what they’re talking about.*’

‘*If it’s like the narrative viewpoint they know everything, like what’s happened before, what’s going to happen, and if it’s like the person, they know everything as well, what’s happened, but if it’s a person looking at that person they don’t know the full facts so they could interpret it in a different way.*’

Many students seemed confident in explaining their choice to use first or third person perspectives. One student observed that ‘*if it’s first person, you can like pretend to be the character and feel what, you feel like you’re thinking if you’re in his position and I found that easier*’, but for another it was being in ‘*that person’s eyes sort of thing, like seeing what they’re seeing*’. For some, the choice of first person linked with the ability to express feelings more strongly; one student, responding to the Poetry prompt text, ‘*I like the way it talks in first person, ‘I…I’ like a pen’s got personal feeling and it brings everything to life’*.

Many of the writers discussed explicit choices they were making in their emerging writing which showed how they were trying to shape their texts with both audience and purpose in mind. One writer carefully used pronoun choices to position the audience, arguing that ‘*if you use ‘we’ and ‘I’ and ‘our’ and ‘you’, it’s very personal to the audience that you’re talking to, and it makes the audience a bit more involved’.* Another explained her choice of the modal verb ‘will’ ‘*because it sounds more determined and you’re telling your team like you have to win, because we really want this trophy’.*  One boy reflects on the argument letter he is writing and explains how he has shaped his opening with his reader in mind:

*‘ ’I’m writing this letter to tell you that I am very angry about the lack of enrichment week’: that makes him involved, that makes him sort of interested. If you don’t put an interesting line at the beginning then they might say actually I don’t want to read this but if you’ve like showed what you think and then add more information in the other two (paragraphs) then he’ll read it… ‘It is exciting, it’s enjoyable and it entertains us’ gives you three reasons, so it’s not just like one and it gets it into your head that we really, really like it.*’

4.3.5 *Metalinguistic Knowledge without Metalinguistic Understanding*

One category of response that was very evident in the data but not addressed in Gombert’s model was talking about writing with apparent metalinguistic knowledge which was not accompanied by metalinguistic understanding. This knowledge is conscious and directly focusing on talking about language, but is not epilinguistic. In particular, metalanguage was used and revealed either incorrect understanding or an inability to make a meaningful connection between the linguistic terminology and its possible impact in the writing.

Typically, students used the metalanguage which had been the teaching focus, but demonstrated mistaken or perhaps partial understanding. One child correctly recalled that connectives are useful in writing argument, but then suggested that ‘*strong connectives...stand out more’*, but ‘*short connectives...you can emphasise them a lot and you can put a lot more expression in*’. Another child argued that she was going to write in the present tense ‘*because it’s easier to understand with the problem and everything, and I might use a bit of past tense in there but I don’t think I would use the past tense all the time because it’s quite hard*’, suggesting a limited grasp of the different purposes of past and present tense. One student believed that good writing could be achieved by ‘*using all different sorts of sentences like, compound sentences, and like short, simple ones like, that stick in your head, using a lot of repetition’,* but one girl thinking about narrative claimed that ‘*you don’t really worry about the amount of nouns because there might be a lot of people in it and you’re not really sort of thinking about the nouns, but the describing words and the adjectives, well the adjectives and verbs and stuff’*.

One strong pattern within this category was that of writers who seemed to think that using a particular grammatical feature had merit *per se,* leading to metalinguistic reflections focused on identifying what was in the writing: ‘*he has done some short ones and some long ones which is quite good, it’s good for a mix and he’s used commas which is good instead of using full stops all the time, and he’s used like exclamation marks and the sentences are quite well spread out’*. The notion of improving writing by adding more of a particular grammar feature was also a common trend, exemplified by the comments below:

*I think I could’ve added, like more sentences or more, more of them words I’ve forgotten what they’re called now*

*They could’ve done bigger paragraphs ... and used more of the modal verbs*

*Making sure that you add in adjectives and like nouns and adverbs and verbs, because like, then you, if you do that then it makes it more interesting because ... it’s like describing the words, the sentence better*

Adding adjectives or adverbs seemed to be one of the most commonly stated ways to improve writing, even though the teaching focus in both narrative and poetry had been on selecting more appropriate nouns and verbs, and using fewer adjectives and adverbs. The misconception that adding adjectives or adverbs was a good strategy is also implicitly evident in comments that reveal approval of rather artificial changes to a sentence, such as ‘*instead of just plain words like, ‘I was kicking my legs back and forth’, you can say, ‘I was hastily moving my legs back and forth*.’

The interviews with students show that, in both comparison and intervention groups, although the declarative knowledge of language of these writers, particularly metasyntactical and metatextual knowledge, may be limited, they are engaged in rich metalinguistic activity as a monitoring and regulatory function that accompanies the act of writing. The primacy of metapragmatic concerns cutting across all aspects of metalinguistic understanding is also a significant characteristic of this dataset, highlighting that writers of this age have developed, to differing degrees, an understanding of the relationship between the writer, the text, and the intended audience. What is clear is that young writers in this study are grappling with complex decision-making and design choices, rooted in socially-determined understandings of texts and audiences; they are developing metalinguistic activity which ‘*leads to knowledge of language that allows its control’* (Camps and Milian 1999:13). In terms of the impact of the intervention, the students in the intervention groups made more frequent and more elaborated comments which revealed their metalinguistic knowledge than their peers in the comparison group.

This interview data also indicate how metalinguistic understanding is developed through socially-constructed encounters with texts and communities of writers. In particular, in this data set, young writers’ metalinguistic understanding is heavily shaped by their teachers’ constructions of what is valuable in writing. Many of the comments coded as metalinguistic knowledge without metalinguistic understanding reflect the teaching focus of lessons, repeated back without meaning. The tendency to see grammatical features rather formulaically as having intrinsic merit, particularly the ‘adding more’ phenomenon, where writers have ‘learned’ that writing is improved by adding more adjectives, or short sentences, or connectives, is learning entirely constructed in the classroom. In the UK, as in other Anglophone countries, the teaching of grammar has not been part of the language curriculum for many years. Our study has also highlighted problems for teachers in their own linguistic subject knowledge and their pedagogical knowledge of how best to teach grammar. As a consequence, the pedagogical spotlight tended to fall on the grammar feature, rather than its possible effects in writing. The greater confidence shown by students in metasemantic discussion compared with metasyntactic discussion may be a direct reflection of the teachers’ knowledge. In general, teaching about vocabulary and word choice was more confident and more explicitly directed towards repertoires of meaning-making possibilities, whereas teachers lacked confidence in teaching about the syntax of the sentence.

**4.4 Research Question 4: The impact of teacher linguistic subject knowledge on the teaching of grammar**

The statistical data, as reported earlier, indicated that teacher linguistic subject knowledge was a mediating factor in influencing student outcomes. The teachers’ scores on the Linguistic Subject Knowledge test were very evenly spread across the cohort (see Table 9) with a mean result of 60% and a fairly high Standard Deviation of 15.8%. Only one of the teachers in this sample had a degree which included a linguistics element, and this teacher, not surprisingly, scored 86%. Given that older teachers may have been taught grammar as part of their own education, the results were analysed to see if there was any relationship between years of teaching experience and linguistic knowledge, but there is no strong evidence that this is so. The top four results do include three teachers with more than 28 years experience, but equally the second lowest result is from a teacher with 23 years experience.

*Table 9: teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge scores*

The lesson observations in particular, but also the teacher and student interviews, provided explanatory evidence of how linguistic subject knowledge impacted upon the teaching. Overall, there were three ways in which a lack of confidence in grammar was realized in the classroom or in reflections on practice:

* Making meaningless comments about grammar
* The use of semantic definitions
* Syntactical confusions

4.4.1 *Meaningless grammar*

Teacher comments to students during observed lessons sometimes included advice to writers which either made no sense at all, or was insufficiently elaborated or explained to be meaningful for students. One teacher told her students that ‘*if you use verbs, adverbs or nouns, you will be able to write a very powerful description’,* which is not helpful – it would be hard to write at all without using verbs, adverbs, or nouns and, moreover, it is perfectly possible to write weak and ineffective descriptions using verbs, adverbs and nouns. Another set of less helpful comments related to the idea of sentence variety, which was a teaching focus of the schemes of work. Teachers regularly advocated the use of variety: ‘*variety is important’*; ‘*make sure you have sentence variety’.*  However, there was rarely any explanation of why this variety was beneficial, and implying that variety, of whatever quality, was a good thing. In contrast, one teacher with good linguistic subject knowledge, gave a more precise and meaningful reason for using varied sentence lengths which made a link between the linguistic feature and how it might impact upon the writing. In the argument scheme of work, she was discussing how students could use contrast in sentence length in different ways: *‘in a long sentence you can detail the cruelty and a short sentence you can refer to sudden death for impact’*.

Another tendency was to promote the use of a particular linguistic feature ‘for effect’:

* *think about where you put your punctuation for effect*
* *use sentences for effect*
* *vary vocabulary for effect*
* *short sentence used for effect*

To an extent, these reflect the teaching materials which repeatedly encouraged discussion about the effects of grammar features, but many teachers lacked the applied linguistic knowledge which allowed them to move beyond the phrase ‘for effect’ to a more text or context specific discussion of the possible effects created.

4.4.2 *The use of semantic definitions*

Another pattern of response which links to lack of confidence in handling linguistic terminology was the strong tendency to give students semantic definitions for word classes, rather than linguistically precise descriptions. So verbs were regularly defined as ‘*doing*’ words, thus leading to student difficulties when they encountered verbs which do not appear to involve any action (for example, *are; will; wonder; consider* ), but especially when they encountered words which were not verbs but which implied an action (as in ‘*I am deeply opposed to hunting’* where many children identify ‘hunting’ as the doing word because of its implied action). Frequently, the semantic definitions offered were partial, such as adverbials are ‘*size words’*, or a noun is ‘*the name of an object’.* Adjectives were regularly defined as ‘*describing words’*, without acknowledgment of the descriptive power of lexical verbs, nouns and adverbs. The tendency to use semantic definitions is influenced by common practice over many years in both primary and secondary classrooms, practice which is often endorsed in commercial materials. Occasionally, however, the semantic definition was completely unique as was the case with the teacher who described an adverb as an ‘*action plus word’*.

These semantic definitions led to some very confused discussions with students because they held on very tightly to the semantic definition and applied it with absolute logic. In one lesson observed, the teacher had earlier suggested that a noun was something you can touch, which resulted in the following exchange:

Teacher: *What are the rules for whether it is a noun or a verb or something else?*

Student: *It’s if you can touch it.*

Student: *Can you touch it?*

Student: *Can you go to it?*

Teacher: *Can you touch hockey? But* hockey *is a noun*.

Student: *You play hockey so it must be a doing word.*

Teacher: *Is* her *a noun?*

Student: *Yes, you can touch* her.

Teacher: *Can* safe *be a noun?*

Student: Safe *is a feeling not a thing.*

Sometimes the students recognised the flaw in these semantic definitions. In one student interview, one girl suggested she could improve her writing by adding more adjectives to strengthen the description, but then added ‘*If you think about it, all words are adjectives because they’re all describing things. A noun is describing’.*

4.4.3 *Syntactic confusion*

The aspect of the Linguistic Subject Knowledge test in which teachers scored least well was the set of questions on clauses and syntax, suggesting this is an area of particular challenge. In the interviews, many teachers articulated a specific anxiety about clauses. In the lessons observed, teachers often chose to focus on sentence variety in terms of sentence length, as this is very easy to handle, and requires no grammatical explanations. Many ungrammatical variations on sentence types were developed, with the grammatical distinctions of simple, compound and complex being extended with concepts such as ‘*more simple’; ‘very complex’; ‘a normal sentence’;* and a ‘*more than average sentence’.*  Linked to the issue of using semantic definitions for word classes, described above, at a syntactical level, the concept of grammatical simplicity was confused with semantic simplicity, so simple sentences were short sentences and complex sentences were long sentences. This led to one student offering this explanation in an interview:

Student: ‘***There was a cat’*** *is a simple sentence; a complex sentence is like,* ***‘There was a slim, something,***

***something ginger cat.’***

In contrast, some teachers demonstrated more confident management of discussion of syntactical features which linked them very explicitly to the way they were working in the specific piece of writing under focus. In the narrative fiction scheme of work, one teacher responded to a student’s draft with the feedback that ‘*I like the way you’ve kept some short sentences in to build the tension’* , and another drew attention to the way adverbials can create a sense of place and setting: *‘We’ve got a real sense of the environment with adverbials in there’.*  On other occasions, teachers deftly drew attention to the subtleties of making changes to the standard Subject-Verb order of a sentence:

* *Look at this and the way it’s been changed. Sometimes you can change the structure of a sentence to make it more interesting.*
* *Look what’s happened by changing the word order. As a writer you can withhold information and build a sense of expectation.*

These data reveal how basic problems with declarative knowledge of linguistic metalanguage, particularly syntactical knowledge, and knowledge about the mobility of word classes in English generate very real problems in working constructively with grammar in the context of writing. Where teachers’ own subject knowledge was limited, there were frequently corresponding applied pedagogical problems in providing adequate definitions or explanations of linguistic terms. The reliance on semantic explanations, rather than functional explanations, often confused students, and teachers sometimes found it hard to handle student questions or conceptual problems with confidence. Significantly for the focus of this study, limitations in linguistic subject knowledge meant that some teachers struggled to make meaningful links for students between a linguistic feature and its effect or purpose in a specific text. Conversely, where teachers had greater command of the linguistic subject knowledge, they were better able to make purposeful connections between grammar and writing, and were more confident managing discussion about effects and possibilities. Teachers with confidence in linguistic subject knowledge helped writers shape text creatively; teachers who lacked confidence provided formulaic recipes for success.

**Implications for theory, policy and practice.**

The study represents the first large-scale study in any country of the benefits or otherwise of teaching grammar within a purposeful context in writing. It stands in contrast to previous studies which were either small-scale or which investigated whether discrete grammar instruction improved writing outcomes, and is significant in combining qualitative and quantitative data to understand the complexities of the issue. The intervention materials were theoretically informed by the principles of writing as design, in which creators of text make design choices from an available repertoire of possibilities. Alongside this, the intervention sought to develop students’ metalinguistic understanding through explicit instruction and through opportunities for discussion. The strong positive effect of the intervention signals for the first time a clearly theorised role for grammar in writing pedagogy. However, the result that the intervention benefited able writers most is also important. Further studies could usefully investigate whether teaching materials designed around the identified linguistic learning needs of less able writers would have a beneficial effect; and whether the use of materials with explicitness and discussion in linguistic focus but without the use of the metalanguage might be more supportive to less able writers.

The study also highlights the importance of teachers’ linguistic subject knowledge in mediating metalinguistic knowledge in the writing classroom. The teacher interviews and lesson observations indicate that teachers need to possess confidence in declarative knowledge of grammar, particularly syntactical knowledge, if they are to be able to handle students’ questions and misunderstandings effectively. This would include an ability to define and explain metalinguistic terminology appropriately. This is an aspect of grammar teaching which has been systematically overlooked at both policy level and in research; there is neither understanding nor agreement about how best to explain grammatical terminology. At the same time, however, the study makes it clear that declarative knowledge alone is insufficient. Teachers need to be able to apply that knowledge to published texts and children’s own writing, identifying significant linguistic features and being able to make connections for writers between a feature and its impact on a text or reader.

At policy level, the study suggests judicious caution about too simplistic an advocacy of or legislation for a specific pedagogical practice. Whilst there is now robust evidence from the data in favour of the use of grammar in an embedded way within the teaching of writing, the study certainly does not suggest that this would be of universal benefit. Rather it emphasis the complex inter-relatedness of many factors in the realization of educational benefit; particularly in terms of learners’ needs, teachers’ attitudes and experience, and teachers’ subject knowledge. Policy development needs to take these interacting factors into account and, in particular, consider how to develop professional pedagogical ownership of policy in ways which foster principled adaptation to meet learners’ needs and interests.

Finally, we think it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study, and especially the RCT design. Whilst there are benefits in the large-scale quantitative data, the RCT may be too focused on causal relationships between an intervention and student outcomes, paying insufficient attention to other factors. In seeking to generalize, it always has the potential to miss the particular. The emphasis on principles such as intervention fidelity, blind randomization and bias can serve to exclude the very variables which are most significant should the intervention be generalized into professional practice. Further studies which build on this study might consider the use of a series of smaller-scale, but nonetheless statistically robust, interventions which combine the testing of the impact of specific interventions with full involvement of the teachers in understanding the pedagogical principles underlying the intervention. In particular, we would recommend that teachers design and develop the teaching materials for any intervention themselves, with guidance from the research team, thus taking ownership of the pedagogical principles which inform the study.

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**Appendix 1**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ESRClogo** | ***THE EXETER WRITING PROJECT*** | **UniLogo** |

**What is it?**

This a major national study, funded by the ESRC to the tune of £1/4 million, looking at the teaching of writing in secondary schools. We are interested in what teachers and students think about writing, and what teachers and writers do in the classroom. In order not to bias the outcomes of the project, you would not be told the precise focus until the end of the project, but attitudes to and practices in writing are the broad focus.

**What will the project do?**

The project will focus on one year 8 class for a whole year. Before the project starts, we would like you to complete a questionnaire about your views on writing and once in each term you would be asked to teach a 2-3 week Scheme of Work on a specific theme addressing specified objectives from the National Strategy. You would also need to be prepared to be observed teaching a lesson, followed by an interview discussing your teaching decisions; and to allow two students to be interviewed about their writing. In addition, we would need you to set aside one lesson in September so that the class can complete a baseline piece of writing, set by the project team, and to devote a further lesson in July to another piece of writing. We would also need performance data at the start about the students in your class.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| September 2008 | Provide performance data about the year 8 class  Allocate one lesson so that students can complete a baseline writing task |
| Autumn Term | Attend a project training day  Teach a 2-3 week SoW on **Fictional Narrative** addressing specified objectives  Allow us to observe one lesson and be interviewed about this lesson  Allow us to interview one child about their writing  Provide us with copies of the final piece of writing from this SoW |
| Spring Term | Teach a 2-3 week SoW on **Argument Writing** addressing specified objectives  Allow us to observe one lesson and be interviewed about this lesson  Allow us to interview one child about their writing  Provide us with copies of the final piece of writing from this SoW |
| Summer Term | Teach a 2-3 week SoW on **Writing Poetry** addressing specified objectives  Allow us to observe one lesson and be interviewed about this lesson  Allow us to interview one child about their writing  Provide us with copies of the final piece of writing from this SoW |
| July 2009 | Allocate one lesson so that students can complete a post-project writing task. |

We will pay supply cover for attendance at the project training day (plus overnight accommodation for the Midlands teachers). In addition, you will receive a nominal £100 fee to acknowledge the additional burden of giving up time to be interviewed and providing us with student data.

**What’s in it for me?**

We hope you will enjoy being involved in a high-profile national project and we know that many English teachers enjoy the chance to be interviewed and talk about their professional views. As a ‘thank you’ for your commitment to the project, all participant teachers will be invited to a day conference in 2010, with supply cover paid, where the practical implications of the project will be disseminated and any resources from the project distributed.

**We need full commitment for the whole year of the project.**

**Appendix 2**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ESRClogo** | ***THE EXETER WRITING PROJECT*** | **UniLogo** |

**About the Project**

This a major national study, funded by the ESRC to the tune of £1/4 million, looking at the teaching of writing in secondary schools. We are interested in what teachers and students think about writing, and what teachers and writers do in the classroom. It is likely that the findings of this research will be of high significance at a policy and practice level and we hope that participation will be of direct benefit to our project schools. We know from experience that to be successful research partnerships like this require not only the enthusiasm of the participating teacher but the full support of the headteacher. Thus we have written this Memorandum of Understanding to clarify and cement this partnership.

1. This Memorandum of Understanding is between Great Torrington School and the University of Exeter in respect of the Exeter Writing Project.

2 The Memorandum is designed to ensure clear understanding of the commitment involved in participation in this research project and to clarify the responsibilities of each party involved.

3 **The University’s responsibilities in the research partnership with schools.**

The University will:

* guarantee that all research is conducted with full ethical consideration, complying with the highest expectations of the British Educational Research Association Ethical guidelines. This will ensure confidentiality and anonymity of all schools, teachers and students involved in the project. It will also seek informed consent for participation from teachers and students.
* ensure that all university staff visiting schools have been subject to an enhanced CRB check.
* pay supply cover for attendance at the Project Day in 2008 and the Project Dissemination Conference in 2010.
* guarantee that all participating schools benefit from the outcomes of the research through feedback provided during the study and a specifically written ‘Good Practice’ document provided at the end of the study.

4 **The School’s responsibilities in the research partnership with the university.**

The school will:

* support the year 8 teacher in fulfilling the requirements of the project as outlined on the Project Briefing Sheet
* release the year 8 teacher for the Project Training Day in 2008 and the Project Dissemination Conference in 2010
* encourage the teacher involved to share project outcomes within the English department to inform subsequent departmental policy and practice
* assure commitment to the project for the duration of the research – from September 2008 until July 2009.

I understand the commitment involved in this research partnership and I am happy to support it.

Signed: ……………………………………………………………………………. Date: ……………………………………………….

(Headteacher)

School: ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**Appendix 3**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ESRClogo** | ***THE EXETER WRITING PROJECT*** | **UniLogo** |

Dear student,

Thank you for being willing to help us with our project. We are interested to find out what you think about your writing and how you write. All the information you give us will be used to write reports and articles, perhaps a book, about secondary students’ writing. We hope that you will enjoy being involved.

In this letter, we ask you to confirm that you are happy to be involved by reading the statement below and signing to confirm your agreement.

I understand that:

* I do not have to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation
* I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me
* any information which I give will be used only for the purposes of this research project: This includes publications and presentations
* The information I give will be shared with other researchers participating in this project in an anonymised form
* Samples of my writing may be used in publications
* All information I give will be treated as confidential, unless I disclose any issue which needs to be reported to the school Child Protection officer
* The researchers will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

I agree that I am happy to be interviewed for this project.

Signed: ………………………………………………………

Date: ………………………………………………………….

Professor Debra Myhill

Project Director

01392 724767

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **ESRClogo** | ***THE EXETER WRITING PROJECT*** | **UniLogo** |

Dear Parent,

Your school has agreed to be part of a research project investigating the teaching of writing. We will be visiting once a term to observe a lesson and interview a teacher and a student. We hope to interview your child and we are writing to request your consent in this. We are interested to find out what young people think about writing and their thoughts on what and how they write. Everything your child says will remain anonymous and no-one will be able to identify them or their school from any of the subsequent articles or reports. In this letter, we ask you to confirm that you are happy for your child to be involved.

I agree that I am happy for .............................. ..............

to be interviewed be the Exeter University research team.

Signed: ………………………………………………………

Date: ………………………………………………………….

Professor Debra Myhill

Project Director

01392 724767

**Appendix 4**

**QUESTIONNAIRE – YOU AS A TEACHER OF WRITING**

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Name: Gender:

School: Degree Subject:

How long have you been teaching? Did you train as an English teacher YES/NO

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **YOUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AS A WRITER** |  |
| Do you write for pleasure in your own time? | YES/NO |
| Do you have a personal blog? | YES/NO |
| Do you enjoy writing? | YES/NO |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **YOUR SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE OF LITERATURE:**  *How would you rate your subject knowledge of each of the areas below:* | | | | |
| **KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LITERATURE** | **Poor** | **Adequate** | **Good** | **Very Good** |
| Shakespeare |  |  |  |  |
| Poetry before 1914 |  |  |  |  |
| Prose before 1914 |  |  |  |  |
| Poetry after 1914 |  |  |  |  |
| Prose after 1914 |  |  |  |  |
| Drama after 1914 |  |  |  |  |
| Multicultural literature |  |  |  |  |
| Non-fiction texts |  |  |  |  |
| Children’s literature |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **YOUR SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT LANGUAGE.**  *Read the extract from Pride and Prejudice below and then answer the questions which follow:* | |
| *Mr Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance and easy, unaffected manners. His sisters were fine women, with an air of decided fashion. His brother-in-law, Mr Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but his friend, Mr Darcy, soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes of his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year.* | |
| What word class is *decided* in ‘*air of decided fashion’* ? |  |
| What word class is *merely* in ‘*merely looked the gentleman’*? |  |
| What word class is *attention* in ‘*the attention of the room’*? |  |
| What word class is *of* in ‘*of his entrance’*? |  |
| What word class is *he* in ‘*he had a pleasant countenance’*? |  |
| Which of the following are noun phrases? |  |
| *‘having ten thousand a year’* | YES/NO |
| *‘a pleasant countenance’* | YES/NO |
| *‘the report which was in general circulation within five minutes of his entrance of his having ten thousand a year’* | YES/NO |
| *‘His brother-in-law, Mr Hurst’* | YES/NO |
| *merely looked the gentleman’* | YES/NO |
| *His sisters were fine women, with an air of decided fashion* | Simple/compound/complex sentence |
| Circle a co-ordinating conjunction in the extract – if you think there is one present | |
| Underline a relative clause in the extract – if you think there is one present | |
| Put a dotted line under a non-finite clause in the extract – if you think there is one present | |
| Cross out a subordinating conjunction – if you think there is one present | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **YOUR VIEWS ON THE TEACHING OF WRITING** | |
| How important do you think it is for students to be able to write literary critical essays? | Very Important/Moderately Important/Unimportant |
| How important is it for writers to know metalinguistic terminology (eg metaphor; pronoun) | Very Important/Moderately Important/Unimportant |
| How valuable do you think knowledge of grammar is for teaching writing? | Very Valuable/Moderately Valuable/Irrelevant |
| What kinds of writing do your students tend to enjoy? |  |
| Beyond accuracy, is there anything your students find particularly difficult about writing? |  |
| Is there any aspect of writing you find particularly hard to teach? |  |
| Open Response:  We are interested in any of your thoughts, concerns, enthusiasms, reflections on the teaching of writing. | |

**Appendix 5**

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SETTING UP THE WRITING TASKs.**

**TASK 1:**

* Support the students in moving into the writing task by discussing the topic first for about five minutes Begin with an example of a challenge you faced – it may help if this is not of the ‘grand adventure’ type but a small personal challenge so that the students realize their everyday experiences are appropriate to write about
* Remind them that the questions are prompts for writing, not personal investigations: they do not have to tell the truth or reveal private, personal information.
* Reassure them that it is not an exam but that they are part of a research project: ask them to do their very best writing.
* Give out the task instructions.
* The students should be given **4O minutes** to do the task **including ten minutes planning time.**
* At the end, we would value feedback on what they thought of the task and whether anything was unclear.

|  |
| --- |
| **Challenges**  Challenges come in many shapes and sizes, from adrenaline-pumping adventures like rock climbing or bungee jumping to more everyday events like starting a new school, overcoming a fear, getting into a team or learning a new skill. Often a challenge is small to someone else but very big to you – for example, having to say sorry for something you have done or meeting someone you don’t know for the first time.  **Write an account of a challenge you have faced in your life so far for a school magazine feature on ‘Challenging Situations’.**  You could:   * Describe the challenge. * Tell the story of how you tackled it and what happened in the end. * Reflect on how you feel about this now * Choose language that will make your account vivid and interesting for someone else to read   You *might* want to start like this:  *At the time, it seemed like the biggest challenge of my life….* |

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR SETTING UP THE WRITING TASK.**

**TASK 2**

* Support the students in moving into the writing task by discussing the topic first for about five minutes Begin with an example of a childhood fear of your own – it may help if this is not a common one such as ‘fear of the dark’ of the ‘grand adventure’ type but something a little more unusual.
* Remind them that the questions are prompts for writing, not personal investigations: they do not have to tell the truth or reveal private, personal information.
* Reassure them that it is not an exam but that they are part of a research project: ask them to do their very best writing.
* Give out the task instructions.
* The students should be given **4O minutes** to do the task **including ten minutes planning time.**
* At the end, we would value feedback on what they thought of the two tasks and whether anything was unclear.

|  |
| --- |
| **Childhood Fears**  All of us get frightened about things from time to time – especially when we are young children. Our fears may be based on something real that has happened or something we only imagine will happen. For example, it could have been a fear of something imaginary, such as serpents under the bed, or a very real fear, such as a fear of flies.  **Write about your childhood fears, real or imagined, for a school magazine feature on ‘Things that frighten us when we are small’.**  You could:   * Choose a time when you were frightened or nervous about something * Describe it in detail * Explain why you were afraid and what happened in the end * Reflect on how you feel about this now * Choose language that will make your account vivid and interesting for someone else to read   You *might* want to start like this:  *I don’t think I have ever been as scared as when…* |

**Appendix 6**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CODING FRAMEWORK FOR LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS** | | | |
| **Sentence Variety** | **No.** | **Effect** | **Examples** |
| No of sentences with fewer than 10 words |  |  |  |
| No of minor sentences |  |  |  |
| No of simple sentences |  |  |  |
| No of compound sentences |  |  |  |
| No of complex sentences |  |  |  |
| List all subordinators used |  |  |  |
| No of sentences with embedded clauses |  |  |  |
| **Thematic variety** |  |  |  |
| Subject |  |  |  |
| Subject clause |  |  |  |
| Adverbial |  |  |  |
| Non-finite clause |  |  |  |
| Finite subordinate clause |  |  |  |
| Other |  |  |  |
| **Punctuation** |  | **Error** |  |
| Commas used to separate clauses |  |  |  |
| Commas used to separate a list |  |  |  |
| Commas used as discourse marker |  |  |  |
| Ellipsis |  |  |  |
| Semi-colons |  |  |  |
| Parentheses |  |  |  |
| **Vocabulary** |  |  |  |
| Simple noun phrase |  |  |  |
| Pre-modified noun phrase |  |  |  |
| Post-modified noun phrase |  |  |  |
| Pre- and post-modified noun phrase |  |  |  |
| **Linguistic and literary techniques** |  |  |  |
| Sentence patterning |  |  |  |
| Subject verb inversions |  |  |  |
| Repetition |  |  |  |
| Tricolon |  |  |  |
| **Comments and Observations**  Note particularly effective or ineffective uses in any of the five coding categories:  Note ambitious attempts which may not quite work:  Note anything interesting, problematic, curious that seems to be arising: | | | |

**Appendix 7**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **LESSON OBSERVATION SCHEDULE** | | | | |
| **SCHOOL:** | | **OBSERVATION 1 2 3** | | |
| **Scheme of Work** | Fictional Narrative Argument Poetry | | | |
| **Learning Focus of lesson:** |  | | | |
| **Grammatical terminology used:** |  | | | |
| **Activity** | **Teacher Interaction**  *Note what the teacher says and does; examples provided; nature of questioning and explanation etc* | | **Student Responses**  *Note student responses and non-responses; evidence of understanding. misunderstanding, confusion; evidence of learning etc* | **Comment**  *Contextualised grammar teaching; metalinguistic understanding; teacher practices (which might indicate teacher beliefs); use of pedagogical support materials, if appropriate etc* |
|  |  | |  |  |

**Appendix 8**

**TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

What is the impact of teacher linguistic subject knowledge on the teaching of grammar?  
What is the impact of pedagogical support materials on the teaching of grammar?  
What are teachers' pedagogical beliefs about teaching grammar in the context of writing?

**SECTION 1:**

Main construct: Pedagogical Thinking (about support/own teaching materials)

Related Constructs: Planning: Lesson structure/choice of activity/grouping/ terminology

Learning: Learning objective/teacher input/pupil activities

Assessment: Assessment of learning in lesson/pupil response/follow up lessons

1. The lesson observed.

* Invite the teacher to reflect on the lesson observed, probing each of the three constructs – planning,

learning, assessment.

* Follow up anything which occurred in the lesson which merits further discussion.

2. The scheme of work so far

* Control group: discuss the choices made in the MTP
* Intervention group: discuss effectiveness of MTP thus far and any changes made

**SECTION 2:**

Main construct: Linguistic subject knowledge

1. How confident do you feel teaching fictional narrative/argument/poetry?
2. Is there anything you feel you need to know more about?

*Explain that we are now going to think about writing at word, sentence and text level.*

1. What are the key features of texts that you want writers to understand about fictional narrative/argument/poetry?
2. What are the key features about sentences that you want writers to understand about fictional narrative/argument/poetry?
3. What are the key features about words and vocabulary that you want writers to understand about fictional narrative/argument/poetry?

**SECTION 3**

Main construct: Teachers’ beliefs about writing and about grammar teaching

***Term 1 Interview:***

Introduce the construct we are seeking to explore and display the set of labels for that construct. Invite teachers to talk about and reflect on what those labels mean in terms of their own teaching of writing.

1. The big picture: (red words)
2. Teaching strategies: (blue words)
3. The writing process: (green words)

Closing questions:

* What do you think makes ‘good’ writing?
* What do you think makes a good teacher of writing?

***Term 2 Interview:***

Introduce the construct we are seeking to explore and display the set of belief statements. Taking each statement in turn, invite the teacher to Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, Strongly Disagree and then explore the reasons for that decision.

Closing questions:

* What criteria would you use to describe ‘good’ writing?
* Do the assessment criteria at KS3 and GCSE effectively capture ‘good’ writing?

***Term 3 Interview:***

Introduce the construct we are seeking to explore – teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching.

1. What do you understand by the term ‘grammar teaching’?
2. Can you tell me about how you normally teach or do not teach grammar in the context of writing?
3. What is your personal view about the role of grammar in writing lessons?
4. Are there some elements of grammar which you feel help children become better writers?
5. Are there some elements of grammar which hinder or do not help children become better writers?
6. Is it necessary to teach grammar terminology or can children learn about grammar without the terminology?
7. How confident do you feel in your own subject knowledge of grammar? Probe for confidence in ‘naming’ and identifying grammatical constructions.
8. How confident do you feel in applying your grammatical knowledge to writing contexts? Ie.In what context and why would you, for example, teach about simple and complex sentences or noun phrases?

Closing questions:

* What are you looking for as indicators of quality in writing?
* Do you think KS3 tests and GCSE reward those qualities?

**Appendix 9**

**STUDENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

What is the impact of pedagogical support materials on the teaching of grammar?  
What is the impact of grammar teaching on pupils' metalinguistic understanding?

Pre-interview: interviewee needs time to read the stimulus text and their own text using prompt reflection card provided.

**SECTION 1:**

Main construct: Pedagogical Thinking (pupil response to teaching)

Related Constructs: Planning: Lesson structure/choice of activity/grouping/ terminology

Learning: Learning objective/teacher input/pupil activities

Assessment: Assessment of learning in lesson/pupil response/follow up lessons

1. Did you enjoy today’s lesson?
2. What do you think the teacher was teaching you about writing today?
3. What have you learnt so far about how to write fictional narrative/argument/poetry?
4. What lesson activities do you find helpful in teaching you to write better?
5. Questions which relate to specific activities in the lesson

**SECTION 2:**

Main construct: **Metalinguistic Understanding**

Relate to concepts taught in SoW;

* ability to use terminology
* understanding of effect/applied
* ability to talk about language choices quite explicitly without grammar terms

Stimulus text 1: Use a model text of fictional narrative/argument/poetry to stimulate discussion on Prompt Card).

Stimulus text 2: Own writing from the SoW currently being taught

* How well is this piece of writing progressing? What are you most pleased with?
* Does this have any of the characteristics of the opening of a story?
* What about the sentences? Can you comment on how effective the sentence structures or shaping is?
* What about the word choices? Can you comment on the effectiveness of the vocabulary?
* What would you like to change or improve?

Final Question: what do you think makes good writing?

**Appendix 10**

***THINKING ABOUT WRITING***

|  |
| --- |
| **The Burglary**  It was November 12th, 2007. My family and I had just been to a whole family reunion in Reading. We were nearing the end of our journey home, when finally we pulled up at our house feeling happy and contented, having had a great time. We got out of the car, and walked up to our sturdy, solid gate. As I pulled the latch up and attempted to open the gate, it wouldn’t budge. It wouldn’t move a single inch. My mum said, “Callum, climb up the wall and check the gate from the inside.” I clambered up and saw immediately that the gate was now bolted shut. A little voice in the back of my head told me, ‘that wasn’t bolted when we left this morning.’ This was the thing that first set the alarm bells ringing. I felt a slight pang of fear and hastily unbolted the gate, and let my family through.  On approaching the back door, the security light blazed into being. We were shocked into silence. The bathroom window had been brutally smashed, so had the kitchen’s windows. My mother’s hands were shaking as she unlocked the back door. When my sister had finally traipsed through the door, we all stood stock-still. We had been burgled!! What a devious chap to have bolted the gate from the inside just in case we arrived home early. It would have given him the extra time to make a hasty escape. |

This is the start of a story, written by someone of your age. We want to know what you think about it. Read it and then think about your answers to the following questions. We would like you to be as specific as possible in explaining and justifying your answers.

* How well do you think this opening is written?
* What makes it successful or unsuccessful as an opening for you?
* How can you tell this the opening of a story?
* What about the sentences? Can you comment on how effective the sentence structures or shaping is?
* What about the word choices? Can you comment on the effectiveness of the vocabulary?
* How could the story opening be improved?

***This isn’t a test and there aren’t wrong or right answers – we just want to know what you think and how specific you can be in explaining your judgements.***

**Appendix 11**

***THINKING ABOUT WRITING***

**Fair Treatment for our Elderly People.**

It is awful the way elderly people are treated in this day and age. They should not go to homes just because they’re old.

Firstly, the younger generation owe the older generation because the older generation looked after the youger ones for at least 16 or more years, ever since they were babys. So the younger generation really should invite their parents in to there house to live with them and not be lonely in an old house or be left in some home to die.

Surely a home is no different from a boarding school. Some people argue that the homes are for caring for the eldery. But in their last years alive wouldn’t you want to spend it with your family and not carted to an old home with strangers you’ve never met.

It is disgraceful to see the younger generation sending their families off to old peoples homes. It’s not the younger generations right to control the lives of elders. They ought to make their own desicions on whether they want to go to a home or not. They’ve made their own decisions until now, whats changed?

To think people ever even consider placing their elderly family in a home is beyond me. All they do is sit in an empty room nothing to do exept sit and do nothing. Or the elderly could be having fun at a relitives house. So if they did stay at a home they would get very lonely indeed.

Another important point is that they might only get along with their familys because their familys are the only ones that understand them and if a nurse or someone they didn’t trust or haven’t met they might, not take their medicine and die. But if they were around their family they would trust them.

It is horrible to think that people are doing this, but they are. The homes could be very very dangerous, so let’s end this madness now.

This is an argument, written by someone of your age. We want to know what you think about it. Read it and then think about your answers to the following questions. We would like you to be as specific as possible in explaining and justifying your answers.

* How well do you think this argument is written?
* What makes it successful or unsuccessful as an argument for you?
* How can you tell this is an argument?
* What about the sentences? Can you comment on how effective the sentence structures or shaping is?
* What about the word choices? Can you comment on the effectiveness of the vocabulary?
* How could the argument be improved?

***This isn’t a test and there aren’t wrong or right answers – we just want to know what you think and how specific you can be in explaining your judgements.***

**Appendix 12**

Teacher.

Lesson planner, boredom banner

Moral pillar,  mayhem stiller

Concept thrower, future-sower,

Power dresser,  mug obsessor,

Late night marker, silence-barker,

These two poems were written by young people and we want to know what you think about them. Read them both and then think about your answers to the following questions. We would like you to be as specific as possible in explaining and justifying your answers.

* How well do you think each poem is written?
* What makes them successful or unsuccessful for you?
* How can you tell these are both poems?
* What about the sentences or lines? Can you comment on how effective the structure or shaping is?
* What about the word choices? Can you comment on the effectiveness of the vocabulary?
* How could the poems be improved?

***This isn’t a test and there aren’t wrong or right answers – we just want to know what you think and how specific you can be in explaining your judgements.***

Blame absorber

Stress bin.

**Teacher’s Red Pen**

I give merit where it is due

I give responses to your best guess

I give you the benefit of the doubt

I give you a qualified ‘no’ or a resounding ‘yes’

The hand that holds me makes me tick, makes me cross

The hand that holds me is the voice I am given

The hand that holds me sorts the good from the dross

The hand that holds me writes the words that are written

I inspire you to carry on

I urge you to stop dead

I tell you to ‘see me’

I force you to see red

**Appendix 13**

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| **Teacher-focused themes** | **Definition** | **Number of Responses** |
| Explicitness | Comments claiming the schemes of work were more explicit about grammar or teaching writing than in their normal practice | 41 |
| Resources/activities | Comments about the quality of the resources and activities | 59 |
| Fidelity | Comments which seem to suggest the teacher has stuck to the schemes of work | 10 |
| Adaptation | Comments which refer to things the teacher changed or dropped from the Schemes of work | 57 |
| Subject knowledge concern | Comments which refer to teacher uncertainty about linguistic subject knowledge | 21 |
| Confidence | Comments which refer to how the schemes of work gave them confidence | 7 |
| Timing | Comments which refer to problems with timing or amount of material to be covered | 34 |
| **Student-focused themes** | **Definition** | **Number of Responses** |
| Surprise | Comments in which teachers express surprise at some aspect of students’ work | 19 |
| Making connections | Comments which refer to how the schemes of work or students are making connections between grammar and writing | 26 |
| Making informed decisions | Comments which refer to students making conscious choices in writing | 14 |
| Experimentation | Comments which claim the schemes of work encouraged students to experiment or play with language | 31 |
| Discussion | Comments which refer to the schemes of work provoking student discussion | 41 |
| Writing improvement | Comments about ways in which the writing had improved or not | 11 |
| Student engagement | Comments which refer to activities or resources which engaged the students | 43 |
| Understanding | Comments which refer to students' understanding | 45 |
| Too difficult | Comments which refer to things not taught because of a perception they were too difficult for the students | 58 |