

Teaching Grammar In Context

Florida International University

Teaching Grammar In Context

Abstract

The poster will present the results of an Action Research Plan of teaching grammar in context to a fifth-grade Reading/Language Arts class. By teaching grammar in context teachers have opportunities to extend concepts and include students in the lesson. Students become active participants in their learning.

Statement of the Problem

The incoming fifth grade students spend more than half of their fourth grade year working on writing. Unfortunately they spend almost no time learning grammar. By the time they come to my 5th grade class the students know how to write a proper grabber, a catchy topic sentence, but they cannot write using proper grammar. Most Language Arts teachers say that there is just not enough time in the day to include grammar in their daily lesson. However, time does not seem to be the only issue. Teachers also say that students do not have a good foundation so they need to reteach, or that they just neglect teaching grammar altogether. Lessons that teach grammar in isolation do not allow students to make connections between the grammar principle being taught and how to incorporate it into their own writing. By teaching grammar in context teachers have opportunities to extend concepts and include students in the lesson. Students become active participants in their learning. Once the students get used to this new learning style it becomes second nature and hopefully their grammar and writing will have improved.

Purpose and/or Research Question

The purpose of this study is to find out if teaching grammar in context, will allow my students' grammar to improve, specifically commas. I will focus on three types of commas; commas in a series, combined sentences with a coordinating conjunction, and sentences that begin with a subordinating conjunction.

Literature Review

Most teachers feel at ease when it comes to the conventional rules of grammar. Teachers certainly feel comfortable correcting their students' grammar mistakes. However, many teachers do not feel comfortable teaching grammar, usage, and mechanics. While grammar textbooks are filled with rules, they do not teach students how to transfer these rules to their writing. Even for the most skilled teacher taking the time to teach grammar, explain the rules in depth, provide examples, and allow students to apply what they have learned can be a daunting task. Dean (2011) notes that teachers are comfortable with that perspective of grammar, it is the way grammar has always been taught. "The challenge, then, is to create opportunities for grammar study that are both rigorous and relevant, that prompts students to systematically explore the language in texts that are meaningful to them-both as readers and as writers" (Zuidema, 2012, p 64). Jeff Anderson's grammar lessons involve transferring focus between reading or writing and explicit grammar problems that his students come across. Lessons on a particularly troubling grammar topic are then applied to a larger context so that students see "the story of grammar's power to communicate meaning and beauty" (Anderson, 2006 p 28). Ediger (2011) writes that teachers should make grammar instruction interesting and relevant to their students. Providing activities that are both stimulating and motivating can alleviate lessons that are boring and

uninspiring. Teachers need to get creative with the way they teach grammar especially in today's society of texting.

Research Methodology

I will be implementing my action research plan in a fifth grade Reading/Language Arts classroom. These classes comprise of a mixed population; a few FCAT level 1's, but mostly level 2's and 3's. There are also a number of ESOL students in each of the classes. Three times a week I will instruct the whole class using a power point presentation on the three different types of commas (commas in a series, sentences with a coordinating conjunction, and sentences with a subordinating conjunction). Before implementing my intervention (teaching grammar in context –commas), I will give the students a pre-test on commas. When the 8 weeks are up I will give the students a post-test on commas. The pre and post-test will help me determine whether the intervention, teaching grammar in context, was successful. I will compare the test scores to see if the intervention did in fact improve my students' grammar usage. After completing each lesson, which should take about two weeks for each comma type, I will give the students various assignments and check for correct and incorrect comma usage. Frequency of correct/incorrect answers will be recorded using tally marks. This will help the students monitor their own learning.

Findings

After I complete my action research project I hope to find that my students grammar will improve, specifically commas. The intervention, teaching grammar in context, is a completely new concept for these students. Although teaching grammar in context is a new concept for my students I hope that they are able to grasp the concept and ultimately become more active learners. If the intervention is successful I hope to teach other grammar principles as well.

Implications for the Field

I hope to share these lessons and the idea of teaching grammar as principles not as a set of rules with other Language Arts teachers in my grade level as well as other grade levels. I would like to meet with other teachers and come up with new ideas for how we can incorporate ten-minute grammar lessons into our daily lessons. I know that in high school and college academic style writing is mandatory and that students are struggling with this writing style probably because we have neglected to teach it to them.

References:

- Anderson, J. (2006). Zooming in and zooming out: Putting grammar in context into context. *English Journal*, 95 (5), 28-34.
- Dean, D. (2011). Shifting perspectives about grammar: Changing what and how we Teach. *English Journal*, 100 (4), 20-26.
- Ediger, M. (2012). Studying Grammar in the Technological Age. *Reading Improvement*, 49 (2), 35-37.
- Zuidema, L. (2012). The grammar workshop: Systematic language study in reading and writing contexts. *English Journal* 101 (5). 63-71.