

GRAMMAR AS CHOICE: TEACHING STUDENTS THE CRAFT OF WRITING

Debra Myhill

The role of grammar in the writing curriculum, or indeed in the curriculum at all, has prompted diverse and passionate arguments for over fifty years, particularly in Anglophone countries (see for example, Braddock, Lloyd-Jones and Schoer; O'Hare; Hudson and Walmsley; Kolln and Hancock). Yet despite these arguments being well-rehearsed, there has been remarkably little research in the *teaching* of grammar and how different pedagogies may support or hinder learning about writing through attention to grammar. Our own research over fifteen years has explored this area in a cumulative series of studies that have ranged from randomized controlled trials to qualitative longitudinal studies, and we have established a deep understanding of the ways in which writing classrooms can incorporate attention to grammar purposefully within the teaching of writing. Our work has much in common with the thinking and advocacy of Vande Kopple, who, in a nutshell, argued for greater and more meaningful use of linguistic understanding in the teaching of writing. This article will firstly outline the theoretical understandings which inform our pedagogical approach, and then illustrate this with practical examples from the classroom, throughout marking the synergies between Vande Kopple's ideas and our own.

The National Curriculum for England, the policy context in which we work, has included grammar in varying degrees since its introduction in 1988. However, it is only the most recent version (Department for Education 2013) that has had significant impact on what teachers teach as, for the first time, it specifies for each age group in primary school what grammar they must learn, and it is

tested in national tests at age 11. The curriculum for primary students represents grammar as a body of knowledge which will enable correctness in writing, but in the secondary phase, there is a little more representation of grammar as knowledge about how texts work. It is, nonetheless, largely a prescriptive and skills-based orientation to grammar. Our own research has adopted a very different orientation: that meaningful understanding of grammatical choice supports writers in the shaping and crafting of text, thus bringing grammar and creativity into the same referential frame. In doing so, we see writing as a creative act that involves “the exercise of a craft, and every craft has its rudiments that must be taught” (Fairfax and Moat 1).

A Conceptual Framework

Firstly, one factor that has often been ignored in the debates about the value of learning grammar is the important distinction between tacit (implicit) and explicit grammatical knowledge. In learning generally, tacit knowledge represents learning we cannot explain and verbalize, whereas explicit knowledge can be shared with others (Polanyi; Ryle). For example, you might be able to balance in order to ride a bike but are unable to explain (or teach someone else) how you maintain that balance. In terms of grammar, all learners except those with severe language impairments have a significant tacit knowledge of the grammar of their first language; otherwise, they could not speak or write. The classic evidence of this is the three-year-old who says ‘*I goed*’ or ‘*I eated*’, showing tacit knowledge of the morphology of past tense formation on regular verbs. But that same three-year-old would not be able to explain the past tense morphology. In the classroom, teaching grammar develops explicit knowledge: in our pedagogical approach, this explicit knowledge includes both knowledge of grammatical terminology, but crucially, also knowledge of the relationship between grammatical choice and its effect in a piece of writing. Accordingly, the framework which underpins our work draws on

conceptual thinking about the role of metalanguage, and grammar as choice.

Grammatical Metalanguage and Grammatical Knowledge

Grammar, of course, has its own metalanguage, the conceptual terminology of language study, and frequently those who are the strongest advocates of grammar teaching simply mean teaching students this metalanguage. At the same time, there is often a conflation of learning grammatical metalanguage and understanding how language works, as though they are synonymous. The learning of grammatical terminology divorced from consideration of how that grammar is used in shaping meaning is unlikely to support learning about effective composition. Of course, Vande Kopple made this very point over twenty years ago when he noted that “some people in our field assume that the only kind of grammar is traditional grammar and that the only way to use it is to teach it as a system and hope that students will somehow connect the analysis of language to the production of it” (1998, 5). But understanding language is much broader and richer than knowing the labels for grammatical items: it involves using that knowledge to explore and understand how texts work. Knowing what a verb is, or the correct formation of a past tense, does not make a student a more proficient writer: what might be more powerful knowledge, for example, would be understanding how the choice of past or present tense in a narrative alters the narrator’s position in relation to the storyline; or how the use of present tense in informational or argument texts implies a universal truth. Moreover, metalanguage is an umbrella concept and grammatical terms are only one strand of this. English/Language Arts teachers are very likely to use the metalanguage of literary analysis in relation to both reading and writing (for example, metaphor, alliteration, caesura), or the language of rhetoric (pathos; anaphora; tricolon), which are also valuable metalanguage. And finally, it is important to note that students can show understanding of language *without* using any metalanguage: the student who says *‘I’ve put that bit at the front of my*

sentence to draw attention to it is making a verbalization of linguistic understanding without grammatical terminology.

And yet, a paradox in England is that many English teachers combine a high level of confidence with literary metalanguage with limited grammatical knowledge. To embed a creative and meaningful attention to grammar within the composition classroom requires that teachers' subject knowledge of grammar needs to be confident, yet many teachers in England were never taught grammar themselves at school. And we are not alone in this. For several decades, there has been a steady stream of studies testifying to the problem of poor grammatical knowledge in teachers of English/Language Arts (Bloor, 1986; Andrews, 1999; Kamler, 1995; Cajkler and Hislam, 2002; Jones and Chen, 2012; Myhill et al. 2013). This position tends to lead to anxiety about grammar teaching (Watson 2012) which only compounds the reluctance to teach it. In our own research, teachers' anxiety has been greatly reduced when they see first-hand in the classroom how purposeful connections can be made between grammar and crafting text.

Grammar as Choice

Our pedagogical approach to developing this explicit and purposeful grammatical knowledge which supports the growth of understanding of how to craft writing has evolved through successive studies to the nomenclature of 'grammar as choice'. This emphasizes that the focus of learning is building students' awareness of the repertoire of language choices available to them when they write, rather than to the rather more narrow view of grammar as a mechanism to avoid error. Carter and McCarthy make a distinction between grammar as structure and grammar as choice, where structure relates to the structural rules of the language system, and grammar as choice relates to the notion that "every choice carries a different meaning, and grammar is concerned with the implications of such choices" (4). The idea of grammar as choice foregrounds the shaping and crafting of text, and growing awareness that "interpersonal choices are choices which are sensitive to the relationship between the speaker/writer and the

listener/reader” (Carter and McCarthy 7). But it also foregrounds authorial intention, inviting students to consider which language choices will help them achieve their own goals for a particular piece of writing. In this way, grammar as choice supports writer agency and independence in decision-making when writing.

One significant aspect of Vande Kopple’s work was his repeated emphasis on the value of functional linguistics, and particularly Halliday’s work, in the composition classroom (Vande Kopple 1983; 1988; 1991; 1996). Our approach also owes a debt to the theoretical thinking of Halliday (1978; 2003), and his development of a functional approach to grammar, making connections between linguistic choice and meaning. He conceived of language as “a resource for making meaning” and the creation of text as “a process of making meaning in context” (Halliday and Matthiessen 3). Historically, the debates about grammar in the curriculum have tended towards being very form-focused, linked to prescriptive views of grammar, and an emphasis on rules. As Vande Kopple observed “many linguists study forms and patterns of forms and then try to relate those forms to meanings. With functionalists, the starting point is with kinds of meanings, not with kinds of structures, and the movement then is toward the ways in which those meanings can be realized in various kinds of structures” (1996, 3). Halliday’s functional approach is not prescriptive and rule-bound but instead sees grammar as “a network of inter-related meaningful choices” (Halliday and Matthiessen 49). By thinking of grammar as choice, we deliberately seek to shift pedagogical attention from grammatical form (what it is) to function (how it is working in the text), and to open up students’ understanding of what we have called the “repertoire of infinite possibilities” (Myhill, Lines and Watson) available to them every time they compose a text.

Grammar as Choice—The Pedagogy in Practice

In what follows, I will outline how the theoretical ideas discussed above are realized in vignettes of classroom practice. Our research has been largely conducted in primary (elementary) and

secondary (high) schools in England, and the examples below reflect this. However, it is important to note that the examples reflect pedagogic principles, rather than fixed practices, and similar grammar points can be addressed for students of differing age groups and differing learning needs by choosing different texts as the source for discussion. They are equally applicable to teaching writing across the disciplines, and academic writing at university.

The LEAD Principles

One consistent thread running through Vande Kopple's work was a desire to change the way grammar is both thought about, and taught in composition classrooms, particularly the fact that many teachers did not use the "insights from linguistic analysis in their teaching of composition" (Vande Kopple 1998, 5). Similarly, our goal as a research team has been to change professional understanding of the place of explicit grammar teaching within the writing classroom, and most of our research projects have involved working with teachers in continuing professional development contexts. We have been keen to avoid the 'tips for teachers' approach, whereby lots of ideas and resources are given to teachers to use. Instead, our aim has been to focus on fostering principled pedagogic understanding so that teachers are enabled to adapt and innovate in how they incorporate grammar within writing lessons, within a clear pedagogic, research-informed framework. We have also shared research findings and theoretical ideas and have resisted any form of 'dumbing-down' for teachers. The teachers with whom we have collaborated have had no difficulty engaging with these ideas, and have actively shared in discussing the pedagogy in practice, and in helping us refine the approach over time.

To support this professional understanding, and drawing on our research findings, we have evolved a set of pedagogical principles to inform the embedding of grammar purposefully within the planning and teaching of writing. Crucially, these are *not* intended as a checklist, or toolkit, to be followed rigidly: rather, it is a scaffold for thinking about how to integrate meaningfully with the composition classroom. Initially, we had seven principles (see

Jones, Myhill, Watson and Lines), but over time this has been refined to four, which we now believe are most critical to this approach. We have called these the LEAD principles, an acronym based on the first letter of each principle. These are outlined in Figure 1 below.

Principle	Explanation	Rationale
Links	Make a connection for the learners, which links the grammar being addressed and how it works in the writing being taught	To establish a purposeful learning connection between a grammatical choice and its rhetorical effect in a piece of writing
Examples	Use grammatical examples to teach a grammar point, rather than lengthy explanations	To avoid writing lessons becoming diverted into mini-grammar lessons, and to allow access to the grammatical structure even if the concept is not fully understood
Authentic	Choose authentic texts to model the grammatical choices made by other writers	To show how 'real' writers make language choices and thus to integrate reading and writing
Discussion	Generate possibilities for high-quality discussion about the effect of a particular grammatical choice	To develop rich learning about how a particular grammatical choice is working, and to foster authorial independence

Figure 1: the LEAD pedagogical principles

The four classroom examples below illustrate how these LEAD principles work in practice. Please note, as mentioned earlier, that this approach can be adapted to different ages and writing contexts by changing the authentic text used, and by addressing aspects of grammatical choice relevant to the learning needs of the students. Also, it is important to note that there are always challenges when using grammatical terminology as there is no international agreement on agreed terminology: as Vande Kopple argued, we “use different terms to mean the same thing and one term to mean several different things” (1991,314), and little has changed in the

past thirty years. Therefore, in the classroom vignettes below, I will also try to explain the grammatical terminology used.

Creating Character through Choice of Noun Phrases

When teaching narrative, one possibility is to focus on how characterization can be developed by considering the role that the choice of noun phrase has in establishing character. Traditionally, the noun has received more classroom attention than the noun phrase, but often it is the bigger structure of the noun phrase that is more significant in writing. The noun phrase is a chunk of text that includes all the information linked to the noun being described—in this section, I will consistently underline the noun that the rest of the noun phrase describes. Simple noun phrases comprise the information that precedes the noun, typically adjectives, articles and less commonly, adverbs (e.g. ‘*bright sun*’; ‘*the lazy toad*’; ‘*deliciously creamy chocolate*’). However, English also uses long noun phrases, where information follows the noun, often in the form of prepositional phrases and relative clauses (e.g. ‘*The bright sun at midday*’; ‘*the toad with poisonous warts on its back*’; ‘*the chocolate which tastes best*’). In terms of describing characters, one strong benefit of addressing the noun phrase is that it helps developing writers to realize that adjectives are not the only linguistic resource for description, and that both the careful choice of nouns and the expansion of the noun phrase are powerful descriptive tools.

In the extract below, written by children’s author Michael Morpurgo, the reader meets a new character (Kensuke) for the first time.

He was diminutive, no taller than me, and as old a man as I had ever seen. He wore nothing but a pair of tattered breeches bunched at the waist, and there was a large knife in his belt. He was thin, too. In places—under his arms, round his neck and his midriff—his copper brown skin lay in folds about him, almost as if he’d shrunk inside it. What little hair he had on his head and his chin was long and wispy and white.

from *Kensuke’s Kingdom*—Michael Morpurgo

Morpurgo provides a very strong visual description of Kensuke, achieved largely through the noun phrases. He uses some long noun phrases—a *pair of tattered breeches bunched at the waist*; a *large knife in his belt*; *his copper brown skin*—to convey precise images; but he also uses shorter noun phrases to focus on the physical bodily description—*his arms*, *his neck*, *his midriff*, *little hair*, *his head*, *his chin*. Together the detail given allows the reader to generate a visual image of Kensuke. More than that, however, the visual detail invites the reader to infer about this character: his breeches are *tattered*, so we may infer he is not rich, or that he has been on the island for a long time; he carries a *large knife*, so he may have had to look after himself, or even defend himself; and his skin lies in *fold*s, suggesting he may not have been having enough to eat.

In the classroom, this extract could be used with students in many ways. Prior to looking at this extract, the students would have been working on planning and developing their own narratives, and thinking about their central characters. After reading the passage, students could visualize the character and discuss their visualizations, possibly even creating sketches or paintings of the character. They might discuss what we infer as readers about this character and which particular choices trigger those inferences. They could undertake a paired re-writing of the extract where the noun phrases are changed to create a description of a very different character with different inferences established. At some point in the learning sequence, the teacher would draw attention to the noun phrases (perhaps through listing them on the board; or through highlighting them in color in presentation software) and discuss how they are central to creating these visualizations and inferences for readers. After the sequence, students would write (or revise) a paragraph of description of their character, thinking especially about how their choice of noun phrases enable the reader to visualize the character and to infer what they are like. This writing activity could be followed by focused paired shared reading and discussion about how their noun phrases generate visual and inferential information.

A sequence of learning such as this would fulfil the LEAD principles as outlined below in Figure 2:

Link	A purposeful connection is made between characterization and how noun phrases can help create visual and inferential information
Examples	The noun phrases in the extract are highlighted in color, or presented separately from the text to make them clear
Authentic Text	<i>Kensuke's Kingdom</i> by Michael Morpurgo They also read each other's writing – also authentic texts
Discussion	Multiple opportunities for discussion are given: of character visualizations; of inference; of how Morpurgo's noun phrases help visualization; of their own noun phrases

Figure 2: The LEAD principles in practice in teaching characterization

Of course, there are other aspects of characterization that one might draw attention to from the *Kensuke's Kingdom* extract. Other learning sequences could focus on the use of predicative adjectives to draw attention to some of the visual detail; or on the fact that the extract is narrated in first person, so we are seeing the character through his eyes. And equally, there are other texts which use similar techniques (for example, Dicken's description of Magwitch in *Great Expectations*; or Andrea Levy's description of the African man in the Prologue of *Small Island*). And there are other techniques which authors use to create characters: perhaps, through verb choice (as in Roald Dahl's description of Mrs Trunchbull in *Matilda*) or through dialogue (as in Lennie and George's dialogue in the opening chapter of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*). The crucial point is we are not teaching rules, or formulae, or checklists for characterization: we are drawing attention to the possibilities that grammatical choice can offer them.

Altering Plot Emphasis through Syntactical Shaping

Another way to address grammar as choice is to help developing writers understand the power of sentence shaping, and how

changing the syntax of a sentence alters how the sentence communicates meaning. The curriculum for English in England has long given emphasis to sentence variety in writing, but our research in classrooms has revealed that, although many students know the expectation that they should vary their sentences, few have any real understanding of *why* this might be a meaningful choice. This is typified by the response from a fourteen-year-old boy in one of our research interviews. He had told us that his learning target was to use complex sentences, and when asked why might complex sentences make his writing better, he replied that ‘*I know that you get a better grade, but I don’t actually know why they’re better*’. Our grammar as choice pedagogy avoids suggesting that you should put certain linguistic features into your writing, but emphasizes instead developing student understanding of the effect of making different choices. And the shaping of sentences is crucially important in writing, and recognized as such by published writers. The poet, Ted Hughes, argued that “conscious manipulation of syntax deepens engagement and releases invention” (1987); and the author, Joan Didion, described how “to shift the structure of a sentence alters the meaning of that sentence, as definitely and inflexibly as the position of a camera alters the meaning of the object photographed” (270). Fostering genuine understanding of sentence shaping and the associated rhetorical or communicative effects is empowering for developing writers (and more mature writers too, including in academic writing).

One way to draw attention to the effect of sentence shaping is to explore syntactical variety, perhaps the effect of where adverbials are positioned. Like the noun phrase, an adverbial is a chunk of text, but instead of describing a noun, an adverbial provides more information about the verb, and can be either a single adverb, or a group of words which modify the verb (for example, ‘*She ran desperately*’, or ‘*She ran into the garden*’). Crucially, adverbials can also modify a clause or sentence, particularly when they are at the start of a sentence. You will be familiar with this in written argument, where common sentence adverbials include ‘*however*’, ‘*on the other hand*’, and ‘*in conclusion*’.

we are looking at the effect of positioning the adverbial at the start of the sentence, as in the two examples below. Both sentences are taken from important moments in the plot action: the first is when the BFG is called to see the Queen of England for the first time; and the second is the climax of the first Harry Potter book, when Harry, Hermione and Ron are fighting Voldemort for the philosopher's stone.

Twenty-four feet tall, wearing his black cloak with the grace of a nobleman, still carrying his long trumpet in one hand, he strode magnificently across the Palace lawn toward the window.

From *The BFG* by Roald Dahl

Facing them, way across the chamber, were the white pieces.

From *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* by J.K. Rowling

The first sentence has three long adverbials (*Twenty-four feet tall; wearing his black cloak with the grace of a nobleman; still carrying his long trumpet in one hand*) before the subject and verb, which foregrounds the physical description of the giant as he walks towards the Queen's window—and, of course, this is her first sight of the BFG. These three adverbials could be edited out of the sentence completely and the sentence would still make sense: what is lost is the visual detail of his appearance.

In the second sentence, there is a similar pattern of two adverbials at the beginning of the sentence (*Facing them, way across the chamber*) but in addition, the subject (*the white pieces*) comes after the verb (*were*). This syntactical shaping creates a sense of delay as the reader waits to see what it is that is facing them across the chamber: it heightens the tension at this climactic moment in the plot. A teacher addressing narrative writing, particularly how to communicate plot action, might explore the effect of linguistic choices like these with a class. A learning sequence might begin with the syntactical chunks of each sentence reproduced on pieces of

card (possibly color-coded to reflect the syntactical structure) for students to manipulate to play with the different versions of the sentence. Central to this would be discussion of the different ways the different versions of the sentence convey the plot moment. The teacher could then deepen this learning by leading a whole class discussion of the author's sentence with one of the other versions, drawing out students' understanding of how changing the syntactical order subtly alters the way it communicates to the reader. Finally, students would look at a plot moment in their own writing and reflect on how the sentence shaping assists in communicating the events in an effective way.

A sequence of learning such as this would fulfil the LEAD principles as outlined below in Figure 3:

Link	A purposeful connection is made between conveying plot events in a narrative and the choice of syntactical order in sentences
Examples	The syntactical chunks of the sentence are reproduced on cards to make the syntax clear (and manipulable)
Authentic Text	<i>The BFG</i> by Roald Dahl and <i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i> by J.K. Rowling
Discussion	Two points of discussion are planned for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Discussion whilst manipulating the sentences about the differences in meaning established; b) Discussion guided by the teacher drawing out the effect of the differing syntactical choices

Figure 3: The LEAD principles in practice in teaching plot communication

Creating Persuasive Emphasis through Short Single-Clause Sentences

Of course, thoughtfulness in sentence shaping is significant in almost all writing, regardless of genre, and fostering a writer's ear for the rhythm of sentences is an important goal for teachers of writing. There are a plethora of ways in which sentence rhythms are created, including many of the familiar rhetorical devices, such

as anaphora, polysyndeton and asyndeton, and alliteration. In the example below, taken from Malala Yousafzai's speech to the United Nations in 2013, there are many of the classic examples of rhetorical persuasion that are commonly taught (in England at least) to secondary high school students. Grammatically, teaching could draw attention, for example, to the persuasive effects of the first-person plural voice, the use of modality, and the use of 'if...then' sentence structure, all of which subtly influence the sentence rhythms.

Dear brothers and sisters, we want schools and education for every child's bright future. We will continue our journey to our destination of peace and education for everyone. No-one can stop us. We will speak for our rights and we will bring change through our voice. We must believe in the power and the strength of our words. Our words can change the world.

Because we are all together, united for the cause of education. And if we want to achieve our goal, then let us empower ourselves with the weapon of knowledge and let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must not forget that millions of people are suffering from poverty, injustice and ignorance. We must not forget that millions of children are out of schools. We must not forget that our sisters and brothers are waiting for a bright peaceful future.

So let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty and terrorism and let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons.

-Malala Yousafzai

<theirworld.org/explainers/malala-yousafzais-speech-at-the-youth-takeover-of-the-united-nations>

However, a learning sequence could opt to look at how changes to the sentence rhythm are achieved through the punctuation of passages of prose with short sentences. In the extract, there are three short sentences of six words or fewer:

- No-one can stop us.*
- Our words can change the world*
- They are our most powerful weapons.*

Their brevity creates emphasis through stopping the flow of the prose, and thus attention is drawn to them. Moreover, each of these sentences is a single clause statement sentence, making an important point in the speech, building both the logic and the pathos of the argument. Short sentences are not randomly distributed just to create sentence rhythms, they are carefully chosen so the change in rhythm supports the persuasive argumentation. In the context of writing a persuasive text, a learning sequence might first explore the reading aloud of this text in pairs or groups, discussing how it could be read, and how tone, modulation and pace might be used to enhance the persuasiveness of the text. Then the teacher could highlight the three short sentences in red, using a visualizer or presentation package, and invite students to consider both how those three sentences contribute to the argument, and how their short, mono-clausal structure alter the rhythm of the text. To consolidate this understanding, half the class could extend the three short sentences so they are doubled in length, whilst the other half could experiment with making one shorter sentence in the speech by altering the current sentence structure. Students could then discuss the effects these changes made on the rhythm of the text and the persuasive argument. This could lead into students deciding on one to three key persuasive points they would like to make in their own persuasive texts and consider how they might be articulated in short, single-clause sentences.

A sequence of learning such as this would fulfil the LEAD principles as outlined below in Figure 4:

Link	A purposeful connection is made between short single clause sentences, sentence and textual rhythm and persuasive
Examples	The three short sentences being considered are highlighted in red
Authentic Text	Malala Yousafzai’s speech.
Discussion	Multiple opportunities for discussion are planned for: discussing how to read the extract aloud (indirectly exploring textual rhythm); discussing the rhetorical effect of the three short sentences; discussing what happens when changes are made to the length of these sentences or the shortness of others.

Figure 4: The LEAD principles in practice in teaching persuasive emphasis through the use of short sentences

Highlighting Grammatical Choice through Using Dual Texts

In the learning sequences described above, students are sometimes asked to manipulate aspects of a sentence, or to create alternative versions. We have found that this helps students to see the differences more clearly—the comparisons of different versions accentuate the contrasts. In the primary school, where typically teachers of a class teach subjects across the curriculum, we have found the use of dual or hybrid texts a rich resource for promoting the discussion of the relationship between a linguistic choice and its rhetorical or communicative effect. Dual texts are books which communicate their meaning in two ways, typically a narrative and an information text, presented in parallel. Examples of dual texts include Canadian author, Karen Wallace’s book, *Think of an Eel*, or Australian author Claire Saxby’s books, *Big Red Kangaroo* and *Koala*. In these texts, in effect, the same information is communicated in different ways for different purposes, and with teachers we have often approached this by talking with students about writing like a storyteller or writing like a scientist.

The two text extracts below are from the same page of *Big Red Kangaroo* by Claire Saxby, illustrated by Graham Byrne. The book tells the story of one kangaroo, Red, in tandem with scientific information about the life of red kangaroos. The two versions of the text open up the possibilities of comparing how the writer uses verbs and tense differently. Both are written in present tense, but in the narrative, the present tense creates a sense of immediacy, that the story is unfolding in real time; whereas in the information text, it is the universal present tense, typical of this kind text, signaling that the information is not just true in the moment of reading but has been true in the past and will be true in the future. Students' attention could also be drawn to the choice of verbs, which, in the information text draw on the scientific lexis for describing eating habits: *digest; regurgitate; graze; chew*.

Narrative Text:

The heat eases with approaching nightfall. It is breakfast time for Red's mob. Around them, the night orchestra begins. Red rises and leads his mob beyond the shadow line in search of grasses.

Information Text:

Red kangaroos are most active at dusk and dawn, although they will graze throughout the night. The grasses are difficult for their stomachs to digest. When they rest, they sometimes regurgitate their food and chew it again.

From *Big Red Kangaroo* by Claire Saxby

In one of our research studies, a primary school teacher used Karen Wallace's *Think of an Eel* as a shared mentor text to consider writing like a scientist and writing like a poet. This book unfolds the lifecycle of an eel through a lyrical, almost poetical narrative of the life of one eel from birth to death, accompanied by an information text, explaining the lifecycle in more scientific terms. One particularly productive classroom activity made possible by dual texts is 'transforming texts'—shifting a piece of text from one genre

to another. This heightens developing writers understanding of the fact that the same information can be communicated in different ways, depending on the purpose and audience for writing. The extract below, describing the eel's final days, is from the lyrical narrative, complete with the figurative language of metaphor and simile, and alliteration.

After eighty days' swimming, not eating, not sleeping, eel's long, winding body is worn out and wasted. He spills the new life carried deep in his belly, then sinks through the sea like a used silver wrapper.

From *Think of an Eel* by Karen Wallace

Having shared and enjoyed the whole text together, students are asked to write collaboratively in pairs transforming these two sentences into a parallel information text that is scientifically accurate. They are able to draw on their knowledge about the lifecycle of an eel, gleaned from reading the book. Collaborative writing, particularly when it is a focused task like this, is a highly constructive way of writing as peers have to verbalize their writerly thinking as they negotiate and agree how to transform the text. When the writing is complete, each pair swaps their new information text with another pair, and they are invited to discuss the transformations that have been made to the lyrical description to turn it into a scientific text, and to consider if any further changes could have been made. The teacher concludes the learning sequence by leading a whole class plenary where one transformed text is discussed collectively. Using two columns to list the examples, the teacher draws out the precise linguistic changes made to achieve the transformation.

A sequence of learning such as this would fulfil the LEAD principles as outlined below in Figure 5:

Link	A purposeful connection is made between grammatical choices and writing scientific information texts
------	--

Examples	Two columns are used to collate examples of the different linguistic choices in the lyrical narrative and the information text
Authentic Text	<i>Think of an Eel</i> by Karen Wallace
Discussion	Multiple opportunities for discussion are planned for: the peer decision-making during collaborative writing; peer discussion drawing out the linguistic changes made to transform a narrative into a scientific information text

Figure 5: The LEAD principles in practice in transforming a text from a narrative to a scientific information text.

The Importance of Discussion about Language

In the past few years, our research on the rich potential of grammar as a tool for learning about writerly choices has paid increasing attention to the ‘language talk’ orchestrated by the teacher in learning sequences (the D-Discussion element of the LEAD principles). When teachers are less assured in their management of discussion about language, the efficacy of this approach is compromised (Myhill, Jones and Wilson; Myhill and Newman [Metatalk], Tracey et al.). Our research classroom observations indicate that it is in the language talk conversations that learning develops most strongly, and understanding shifts from being ‘received’ knowledge from the teacher to being the students’ own understanding. So effective talk is critical to building understanding about language and fostering writer autonomy and independence in writerly decision-making.

Effective discussion about language draws on broader empirical understandings about the place of talk in learning (e.g., Barnes; Reznick and Schantz; Juzwik et al.) and particularly dialogic talk (Mercer and Littleton; Alexander; Edwards-Groves and Davidson). In dialogic talk, the teacher’s role is to facilitate open-ended discussion, giving primacy to student thinking. In the context of discussion about writing, this means the teacher has to manage both the authoritative knowledge of grammatical choice and the dialogic exploration of the relationships between grammatical choice and effect, which is a much more interpretive understanding (Myhill and Newman). Effective discussion occurs in what Wegerif calls

dialogic space, where learners are given opportunities for opening, widening and deepening their thinking about linguistic choices, as exemplified in each of the learning sequences above. In whole-class language talk, the teacher not only asks open questions to raise the level of thinking, but follows through the interactions with prompts for further elaboration and justification. In our research classrooms, many teachers used questions beginning with *Why? What if? How?* and *What do you think?* as initiating questions to open up thinking about language choice. Critically, the line of thinking prompted by these initiation questions is pursued, particularly when the student's answer is rather generic. For example, in one classroom of 10-year-olds, the teacher's initiating question '*Why do you think the writer has chosen to do that?*' triggers a student reply of '*To make it more impactful*', an example of an answer that does not verbalize the relationship between a grammatical choice and its effect in the particular text. Rather than moving on, the teacher pushes the student for a more elaborated explanation by asking, '*What impact though? What impact do they want?*' This pattern of a sequence of talk about a particular choice differs from classroom talk focused on right answers and short teacher-student exchanges. It gives primacy to student thinking and verbalization of understanding, and focuses attention on readerly and writerly choices. In the following snippet of classroom talk, the children have been looking at how one child's narrative includes a subject-verb reversal (as in the 'Harry Potter' example discussed previously): the teacher wants to move away from the banal idea that subject-verb reversals are 'a good thing to do' towards greater understanding of what the reversal achieves. The teacher's expertise in managing this exchange results in the child explaining that the subject-verb reversal causes a delay which means the reader does not know what is being referred to until the end of the sentence:

Teacher: *Why is that such a good sentence?*

Student: *They've described it well.*

Teacher: *Yes he has - but from the reader's point of view, what's just happened?*

- Student: *He's made the reader wait.*
Teacher: *Good, but how has he done that, what has he done?*
Student: *He put 'the ring of fine gold' at the end. Not until the end of the sentence do we find out what it is.*
(Myhill and Newman [Metatalk] p xx).

Of course, creating a rich talk environment to explore grammar as choice is not simply about whole-class teacher-led talk, but crucially also about peer-to-peer talk opportunities, such as is afforded by the collaborative writing and peer discussion activities in the vignettes above.

Conclusion

Vande Kopple's work voices the importance of drawing on linguistics and the understandings that linguistics can bring to bear on written composition. He was particularly concerned about the over-emphasis on grammatical form and advocated a more functional approach, creating a unity between form and meaning (Vande Kopple, 1988). Our pedagogical approach of grammar as choice, researched and refined over fifteen years and in different studies, exemplifies Vande Kopple's ideas within professional practice. We have gathered robust evidence that this approach can improve writing attainment in the classroom (Jones, Myhill and Bailey; Myhill, Watson and Newman), but also evidence of some of the factors that compromise its effectiveness. As noted earlier, this approach does require confident grammatical subject knowledge. However, it is not simply knowledge of grammar as a structural system describing language which is necessary, but also the capacity to look at published texts and at students' own writing and see how grammatical choices are working in those texts (Myhill, Jones and Watson). The second key factor which can limit the effectiveness of this approach is when teachers are less assured in the management of rich language talk (Myhill and Newman [Metatalk]; Myhill, Newman and Watson), particularly teachers who tend towards controlling both classroom dialogue and have strong notions of what the right answer should be. These teachers

are less likely to “build conversations about how meanings are constructed by particular grammar and word choices” (Harper & Rennie, 32).

However, where teachers have developed confidence in the LEAD principles, embedding the idea of grammar as choice within the writing classroom alongside the other pedagogical practices which research signals as effective (for example, attention to the writing process; teacher modelling; metacognition and self-regulation) students can progress well in their writing competence and understanding of the power of their choices. Explicit attention to and discussion of how different linguistic choices have different rhetorical or communicative effects in a particular text demonstrates that in every act of writing students have access to a repertoire of infinite possibilities in terms of language choice. It heightens students’ sense of authorial agency, and brings together both creative and critical thinking in the act of composition—a genuine apprenticeship in the craft of writing.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Robin. J. *Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking Classroom Talk*. 5th ed. Dialogos, 2017.
- Andrews, Stephen. “All These Like Little Name Things: A Comparative Study Of Language Teacher’s Explicit Knowledge Of Grammar And Grammatical Terminology.” *Language Awareness*, vol. 8, no. 3-4, 1999, pp.143-159.
- Barnes, Douglas. “Why Talk Is Important.” *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2010, pp. 7-10.
- Bloor, Thomas. “What Do Language Students Know About Grammar?” *British Journal of Language Teaching*, vol. 24, no.3, 1986, pp.157-160.
- Braddock, Richard Reed, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer. *Research in Written Composition*. National Council of Teachers of English, 1963.
- Cajkler, Wasyf, and Jane Hislam. “Trainee Teachers’ Grammatical Knowledge: The Tension between Public Expectations and Individual Competence.” *Language Awareness*, vol. 11, no.3, 2002, pp.161-177.
- Dahl, Roald. *The BFG*. Puffin, 1982.

- Department for Education [DfE] National curriculum in England: English programmes of study—key stages 1 and 2, 2013.
 <www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>. Accessed 15.09.19
- Department for Education [DfE] National curriculum in England: English programmes of study—key stage 3, 2013.
 <www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>. Accessed 15.09.19
- Department for Education [DfE] National curriculum in England: English programmes of study - key stage 4, 2013.
 <www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>. Accessed 15.09.19
- Didion, Joan. *Why I Write*. *New York Times* (December 5) 1976, p. 270.
- Edwards-Groves, Christine, Christine Davidson. *Becoming a Meaning Maker: Talk and Interaction in the Dialogic Classroom*. Primary English Teaching Association, 2017.
- Fairfax, John, and John Moat. *The Way to Write*. Penguin, 1998.
- Halliday, Michael, and Christian Matthiessen. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (3rd Edition). Arnold, 2004.
- Halliday, Michael. "Introduction: On the 'architecture' of Human Language." *On Language and Linguistics: Volume 3 In the Collected Works of MAK Halliday*, edited by J. J. Webster, Continuum, 2003, pp.1-29.
- . *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*. Edward Arnold, 1978.
- Harper, Helen, and Jennifer Rennie. "‘I had to go out and get myself a book on grammar’: A Study of Pre-service Teachers’ Knowledge about Language." *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2009, pp.22–37.
- Hudson, Richard, and John Walmsley. "The English Patient: English Grammar and Teaching in the Twentieth Century." *Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2005, pp. 593-622.
- Hughes, Ted. "To Parse or not to Parse: The Poet’s Answer." *The Sunday Times*, 22 November, 1987.
- Jones, Pauline, and Honglin Chen. "Teachers’ Knowledge about Language: Issues of Pedagogy and Expertise." *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, vol.35, no.2, 2012, pp.147-172.
- Jones, Susan, Debra Myhill, and Trevor Bailey. "Grammar for Writing? An Investigation into the Effect of Contextualised Grammar Teaching on Student Writing." *Reading and Writing*, vol. 26, no.8, 2013, pp. 1241-63.
- , Debra Myhill, Annabel Watson, and Helen Lines. "Playful Explicitness with Grammar: A Pedagogy for Writing." *Literacy*, vol. 47, no. 2, 2013, pp.103-11.

- Juzwik, Mary, Carlin Borsheim-Black, Samantha Caughlan, and Anne Heintz. *Inspiring Dialogue: Talking to Learn in the English Classroom*. Teachers' College Press, 2013.
- Kamler, Barbara. "The Grammar Wars or?: What Do Teachers Need to Know about Grammar?" *English in Australia*, no.114, 1995, pp.3-15.
- Kolln, Martha, and Craig Hancock. "The Story of English Grammar in United States Schools." *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2005, pp.11–31.
- Mercer, Neil, and Karen Littleton. *Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A Sociocultural Approach*. Routledge, 2007.
- Morpurgo, Michael. *Kensuke's Kingdom*. Egmont, 2016.
- Myhill, Debra, and Ruth Newman. "Metatalk: Enabling Metalinguistic Discussion about Writing." *International Journal of Education Research*, vol.80, 2016, pp.177-187.
- , and Ruth Newman. "Writing Talk—Developing Metalinguistic Understanding through Dialogic Teaching." (eds) *International Handbook of Research on Dialogic Education*, edited by N. Mercer, R. Wegerif, and L. Majors, Routledge, 2019, pp. 360-72.
- , Susan Jones, and Annabel Watson. "Grammar Matters: How Teachers' Grammatical Subject Knowledge Impacts on the Teaching of Writing." *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 36, 2013, pp. 77-91.
- , Helen Lines, and Annabel Watson. "Making Meaning with Grammar: A Repertoire of Possibilities." *mETaphor*, vol. 2, 2011, pp.1-10.
- , Susan Jones, and Anthony Wilson. "Writing Conversations: Fostering Metalinguistic Discussion about Writing." *Research Papers in Education*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2016, pp. 23-44.
- , Susan Jones, Helen Lines, and Annabel Watson. "Re-Thinking Grammar: the Impact of Embedded Grammar Teaching on Students' Writing and Students' Metalinguistic Understanding." *Research Papers in Education*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2012, pp.139-166.
- , Helen Lines, and Susan Jones. "Texts that Teach: Examining the Efficacy of Using Texts as Models." *L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, vol.18, 2018, pp.1-24.
- , Ruth Newman, and Annabel Watson. "Going Meta: Dialogic Talk in the Writing Classroom." *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2020, pp. 5-16.
- , Annabel Watson, and Ruth Newman. "Re-thinking Grammar in the Curriculum in Egeland." *Tolfte nationella konferensen I svenska med didaktisk inriktning Textkulturer (SMDI 12)*, edited by B.L., C. Olin-Scheller, M. Tanner, and M. Tengberg, Karlstad, November 2016, pp. 24-25. *Nationella natverket for svenska med didaktisk inriktning och forfattarna*, Karlstad, 2017, pp. 25-44.

- . "Linguistic Choice as Empowerment: Teaching Rhetorical Decision-Making in Writing." *Education & Democracy*, vol. 28, no.2, 2019, pp. 55-75.
- . "Grammar as a Meaning-Making Resource for Improving Writing." Contribution to a special issue *Working on Grammar at School in L1-Education: Empirical Research across Linguistic Regions. L1-Educational Studies in Language and Literature*, vol.18, 2018, pp. 1-21.
- O'Hare, Frank. *Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing without Formal Grammar Instruction*. NCTE Research Report No 15. National Council of Teachers of English, 1971.
- Polanyi, Michael. *The Tacit Dimension*, University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Resnick, Lauren, and Faith Schantz. "Talking to Learn: The Promise and Challenge of Dialogic Teaching." *Socializing Intelligence through Academic Talk and Dialogue*, edited by L. B. Resnick, C. S. C. Asterhan, and S. N. Clarke, AERA, 2015, pp. 441-50.
- Rowling, Joanne. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Bloomsbury, 1997.
- Ryle, Gilbert. "Knowing How and Knowing That." *Papers from the Aristotelian Society*, 1945.
- Saxby, Claire. *Big Red Kangaroo*. Walker Books, 2015.
- Sharples, Michael. *How We Write*. Routledge, 1999.
- Tracey, Louise, Jan Boehnke, Loise Elliott, Kate Thorley, Sarah Ellison, and Claudine Bowyer-Crane. *Grammar for Writing Evaluation Report and Executive Summary*. Education Endowment Foundation, 2019.
- Vande Kopple, William. *Rhetorical or Functional Grammar and the Teaching of Composition*. Paper presented at the forty-seventh Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996. <files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED397408.pdf>. Accessed 16.08.20.
- . "Thematic Progressions, and Some Implications for Understanding Discourse." *Written Communication*, vol.8, no.3, 1991, pp.311-347.
- . "Something Old, something New: Functional Sentence Perspective." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 17, 1983, pp.85-99.
- . *Clear and Coherent Prose: A Functional Approach*. Longman, 1988.
- . *Current Research on Language and Its Status with Composition Teachers*. Paper presented at the forty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Chicago, IL, April 1-4, 1998. <files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED418408.pdf>. Accessed 16.08.20.
- Wallace, Karen. *Think of an Eel*. Walker Books, 1993.
- Watson, Annabel. "Navigating 'the pit of doom': Affective Responses to Teaching 'Grammar.'" *English in Education*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2012, pp.22-37.
- Wegerif, Rupert. *Dialogic: Education For The Internet Age*. Routledge, 2013.

