

## English Pathway Session Report 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2002

### Session 5 – Teaching Grammar

*‘Grammar should be regarded as an integral part of the everyday work of the English classroom. It is our aim that, through the activities of speaking, listening, reading and writing, planning, doing and reviewing, our pupils gain confidence in themselves as proficient and innovative users of the English language’*

(Jane Lodge & Paul Evans in Protherough & King, p118)

Lodge and Evans point to the controversial nature of discussions on the subject of grammar and reject the narrow parameters which defined grammar ‘as the analysis of parts of speech and sentence structure’ endorsing a wider definition ‘that grammar is the systematic discussion of language in use.’ (p106) They believe it is possible to deliver national curriculum requirements and to teach ‘in an imaginative and exploratory manner.’ In two illustrative examples of lessons where grammar is a central concern they demonstrate how a year 7 creative writing task (atmospheric horror) and a year 10 analytical assignment (Philip Larkin’s *The Old Fools*) can be used to meet the varying needs of a mixed ability group. (pp107-118).

In line with the previous week’s session the class was presented with something active to begin the lesson – a Track Puzzle comprising a diagram of prints left in the snow following a hit and run accident reported in the *Daily News*. Working in pairs to answer the questions accompanying the diagram illustrated how discussion and analysis of newspaper styles could be stimulated.

The model could be used to introduce questions of bias, e.g. the differing viewpoints which would have been presented by Saxon, Norman or Danish dailies on the details of the Battle of Hastings. By examining examples of newspaper articles a class would come to appreciate that a summary style is not appropriate for a newspaper. A journalist needs to present the most important details first to enable an editor to cut the article by simply removing later paragraphs to meet space restrictions or to present *News in Brief*. Pupils, given the first paragraph, could be asked to write the rest of the story. However emphasis was placed on appreciating the amount of work involved in such a project and to gauge whether there would be sufficient time in the timetable to complete it properly.

Alternatively the activity could be followed with:

- a poem to discuss with a partner
- a discussion of different aspects of newspaper articles such as obituaries
- linking the study with a history project, e.g. the Cuban missile crisis
- the use of the passive voice
- drama connection

The class, again working in pairs, were asked to consider how an old woman from central Europe might describe her life with one person acting as social historian and making a note of the key phrases. Prior to this ten or so words the class associated with the period and the woman's experience were written on the board (poverty, Russian, communism, collective, bombs, snow, cabbage, soldiers, Black Market, sunshine, Trabant).

Roles were swapped and responses noted in order to model a lesson demonstrating how grammar plays an important part when the responses were reported. Examples from the class during the lesson were:

1. The man I was in love with was taken from me.
2. We had to walk to the nearest town to buy salt.
3. I belonged to a secret society that played music against the state
4. I have ten children. They are turnip farmers. One is in the army.

These could have been used as a revision/starter exercise to revise punctuation in dialogue covered previously in primary school or to promote a discussion about indirect speech:

The old woman said that she had ten children and that they were turnip farmers.

Illustrating a change in tense and use of the pronoun 'she', sequencing of tenses often proves difficult for pupils and needs to be taught.

The first sentence proved more difficult as it would need to read 'used to be in love with' – an example of the past continuous. 'Had' in sentence 2 is an example of the past perfect and in 'She said that she had had to walk' of the pluperfect. Pupils studying languages would be familiar with these tenses.

By showing why grammar is so precise tedium is hopefully avoided and in this lesson preceded the introduction of Christopher Reid's poem *What the Uneducated Old Woman Told Me*. The poem, a monologue written in standard English, in its omission of any of the old woman's colloquialisms emphasises the contrast between a garrulous old woman who is not really thinking about what she is saying and the academic nature of the report recording exactly what she has said.

Prior to the Framework various documents had been issued in 1998 and 1999 to address the perception that teachers did not want to teach grammar, however these were not widely circulated or read, leading to the introduction of the more prescriptive Framework which incorporates many of the ideas put forward in these documents. Handouts include examples from:

## **En 1998 The grammar papers – perspectives on the teaching of grammar in the national curriculum**

**Paper 2** gives a summary of the requirements for KS3 and KS4.

**Speaking and Listening - Page 23** - stresses the need to teach recognition of the appropriate use of standard English in the context of both formal and informal situations. This includes recognition that English is constantly evolving and pupils should be shown how it has evolved including dialectal variations. And, in their reading, pupils should be able to ‘recognise, analyse and evaluate the characteristic features of different types of text to determine how attitudes, values and meanings are communicated.’

**Page 24** – Teachers should aim to relate language to reading and encourage confident use of formal and informal standard English. Learning about discourse structure at whole text level, sentence, word and punctuation levels affords pupils the vocabulary to analyse and reflect on their own work. Pupils should be encouraged to use apt or imaginative vocabulary including synonyms and double meanings, using dictionaries and thesauruses to explore derivations and alternative meanings.

**Paper 5 – pages 42-44** -addresses the question of assessing pupils’ use of grammatical knowledge and recommends pupils be presented with a wide range of linguistic models illustrating a range of language varieties, genres and texts. These can be used to demonstrate implicit knowledge and understanding in class or group discussions. It offers examples of activities for assessing pupils’ use of grammatical knowledge:

- Writing up a science experiment offers the opportunity to assess logical sequence and the ability to use verbs in the imperative with no personal subjects
- Use of mystery stories – to read, look at the text, meaning and grammar – assessing range of sentence types
- Using subject textbooks to show how paragraphs are structured to give information and asking class to follow the model to write their own informative paragraph about the local neighbourhood and then to go on to give a one sentence summary of one of the texts
- Letters of complaint, minutes, reports, the formality of public meeting language where conflicting views are represented all illustrate the use of the passive voice and impersonal constructions to frame recommendations

Different levels of formality offer opportunities to explore morphology, e.g. how Latinate words tend to be more formal. More examples are given for different year groups on page 44.

## En 1999 – Not Whether but how – Teaching grammar in English at KS3 & KS4

This paper is more precise in pointing to specific features which can be taught to improve the effectiveness of GCSE writing and demonstrates the necessity of grammatical knowledge to discuss pupils' writing. Referring to the previous practice of teaching grammar without reference to the relevant terminology it argues that the 'teaching of relevant terminology clarifies, rather than obscures.' (p9) Terminology should be part of an 'active English vocabulary' not an end in itself. It should enable more focused and precise descriptions rather than learned in the abstract.

**'Unnumbered Page'** - This points to the dangers of learning terminology for its own sake resulting in a passive knowledge which is not applied in other contexts. Definitions such as 'a verb is a doing word' or 'an adjective is a describing word' demonstrate misunderstanding. Pupils need to know the terminology for a feature of a text before being given the word. The focus is then placed on how grammatical concepts function in different texts, in turn encouraging experimentation, including constructive rulebreaking (e.g. Seamus Heaney's *Trout* where all the 'describing words' are verbs)

Pupils need to realise they are learning more complicated concepts and a verb may better be described as a 'gluing word' applying a cricketing analogy where bowler and batsman are connected by the ball which glues the two together:

John    Mary    -    glued by verbs such as    -    John **hates/kisses/fancies** Mary

Cricket can also become more complicated when the ball is hit with a bat which can be both an object or indirect object! Similarly, adjectives are not only describing words, e.g. wobbled.

Words can be more than one figure of speech, therefore verbs are not verbs until used in a sentence where it behaves as a verb

**Pages 27/28** – demonstrates how to move on from personal narrative/fictional discourse to non-literary discourse, looking at grammatical features of a non-narrative text e.g. NSPCC leaflet. Features are first identified and terminology supplied where appropriate, to ensure the grammatical concept is first learnt in a specific context rather than the abstract.

The modal verbs employed in the leaflet: can, might, should, would, could, may, must, ought to, need to, shall, will and their negatives, lessen the force of the verb they modify. This lends a degree of caution to the statement. It is dealing in possibilities and encoding politeness. The differences in purpose between the leaflet and *The Sheep Pig* are immediately discernable with the difference in the discourse of the NSPCC leaflet bound up with social understanding.

As advocated on the unnumbered page ‘it is likely that a proactive, creative approach to grammar will correct more errors and eliminate more non-standard forms from writing than a remedial preoccupation with mistakes ever will.’

Grammatical features create the discourse of the text and are understood between writers and readers, as playing with styles can demonstrate, e.g. turning a fictional piece into the measured style of the NSPCC text.

**Page 42** offers examples of pupils’ responses to the Gettysburg Address, identifying features of persuasive writing, e.g. how rhetorical devices such as repetition and movement in tenses, from past to present to future, achieve the intended effect

### **En1999 – Improving writing at key stages 3 & 4**

This offers examples of graded work with an accompanying commentary to show why student responses earned a range of grades from A to unclassified and featuring the terminology and strategies/activities from the previous publication and foreshadowing those of the Framework. Useful for modeling with pupils’ who can then have a go themselves.

### **Passages from Travel Books on Gloucestershire**

(Michael Drayton, Daniel Defoe, William Cobbett & J B Priestley)

An example of how language evolves. Pupils’ can be asked to place in chronological order, explaining their conclusions by citing evidence found in the text content and language.

### **Stories About Words**

Useful if a lesson finishes early!

For Jon Davison and Jane Dowson there is much common ground to be found between traditional and progressive approaches to grammar usually portrayed ‘as an area of stark conflict’. They contend that teachers tend to be pragmatists and in practice will use some of each. They reproduce the principles for grammar teaching included in *The Grammar Book* by Elspeth and Richard Bain (NATE 1996) in order to help readers make their own judgement – attached. (pp158-160)

## **Bibliography**

Davison J & Dowson J

*Learning to Teach English in the Secondary School*  
(London: Routledge, 1998)

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QCA

*The Grammar Papers*  
*Not Whether but How*