

The Problem of Grammar Teaching: a case study of the relationship between a teacher's beliefs and pedagogical practice

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Abstract

Through a case study of a first-language English teacher's approach to teaching writing, the significance of conceptual and affective beliefs about grammar for pedagogical practice is explored. The study explores a perceived dichotomy between grammar and creativity, examining a belief that attention to grammar is separate and secondary to the generation of ideas, the creation of meaning and to personal expression. It indicates that, in this case, these perceptions are related to formulaic approaches to the teaching of grammar for writing which separate content and form and reduce attention to grammar to a superficial level. Theoretically, the study provides evidence that beliefs play an important role in influencing pedagogy in contested areas of the curriculum. It demonstrates how affective and conceptual elements of belief can shape practice, particularly when external constraints on teaching are low. It argues that attempts to advance a rhetorical and contextualised approach to grammar, as evident in parts of the English National Curriculum, must therefore take into account the impact of teachers' beliefs about grammar.

Keywords

Writing, Grammar, First language, Pedagogy, Beliefs

Introduction

Clark has argued that “a revolution is taking place... about the teaching of grammar” (2010, 191). This paper explores some of the problems surrounding this “revolution” by investigating the relationship between the beliefs which a teacher holds about grammar and her approach to teaching writing. This is particularly relevant given that recent years have seen an increasing emphasis on grammar in curricular policy in Anglophone countries (Myhill and Watson 2014). There is evidence that beliefs play an important role in shaping how teachers respond to policy (Clandinin 1985), and particularly in dictating how it is mediated in their own classroom practice (Poulson et al. 2001; Twiselton 2002). This paper thus sets out to provide important evidence of the ways in which particular conceptualisations of and affective responses to grammar may influence pedagogical practice, suggesting some of the implications this has for the rising prominence of grammar in the curriculum.

Grammar in the curriculum

The recent history of grammar in the curriculum in England is characterised by long-standing debate (Hudson and Walmsley 2005; Locke 2009; Myhill and Jones, 2011). There remains an ongoing tension between public and political discourses which represent grammar as a tool for maintaining ‘standards’ (Cameron 1994; Pullman 2005) and academic discourses which seek to assert the value that teaching grammar does or doesn’t have for developing facility with language (Micciche 2004; Kolln 2006; Myhill et al. 2012; Wyse 2001). These latter pit arguments that the implicit acquisition of grammatical awareness in native language users renders explicit grammatical knowledge unimportant (Elbow 1991) against arguments that writers benefit from the choice and control that it offers (Carter 1990; Derewianka 2012). Recently, there has been a growing consensus that grammar teaching may be useful if it is contextualised within the teaching of writing (Hudson 2001; Rimmer 2008), and if it adopts a rhetorical approach where grammar is positioned as a tool for shaping meaning (Kolln 2006; Myhill, et al. 2012). The debate is now less concerned with *whether* grammar should be addressed, but more with “what kind of teaching and what theories underpinning it have the greatest chance of success” (Clark 2010, 190; also Locke 2010).

The past two decades have seen increasing attempts to reintroduce some form of explicit attention to grammatical concepts within first-language English teaching, following what Beard characterised as a “growing feeling that grammar teaching has an unfulfilled potential” (2000, 121). In the UK, the most recent iteration of the National Curriculum includes a detailed “Vocabulary, Grammar and Punctuation Appendix” (DfE 2013), outlining terminology and grammatical structures to be taught. The document advances a broadly rhetorical view of grammar (for a definition of rhetorical grammar see Lefstein 2009), explaining that “Explicit knowledge... gives us more conscious control and choice in our language” (DfE 2013, 66). However, there is an implicit tension between the opening assertion that “the grammar of our first language is learnt naturally and implicitly” and the subsequent statement that pupils should “apply and explore” a grammatical concept in “their own speech and writing” only “once pupils are familiar with” it (66). In fact, research suggests that exploration often precedes explicit understanding: experimentation with words and patterns can lead into familiarity with concepts rather than following on from it (Myhill et al. 2012). Similar tensions are evident in the mixture of accuracy-orientated vs meaning-orientated directives presented in the Common Core Standards in the USA (CCSSI 2012; see Myhill and Watson 2014), while the newly developed Australian National Curriculum, in contrast, attempts articulate a clearer theoretical rationale, underpinned by a rhetorical intention to support students in recognising how their choice of “words and grammatical and textual structures” relate to audience (ACARA 2009, 3). Myhill and Watson have thus argued that “the pedagogical rationale for the re-emergence of grammar is not yet fully clear” (2014, 44).

Beliefs and practices in grammar teaching

Accompanying this lack of clarity in policy documents is a general lack of confidence amongst teachers in both the UK (Kelly and Safford 2009; Myhill, Jones and Watson, 2013; QCA 1998) and USA (Hadjioannou and Hutchinson 2010) when it comes to tackling grammar. Many UK teachers follow a literature-based route into English teaching (Shortis and Blake 2010), and this is mirrored in the US (Kolln and Hancock 2005), Australia (Harper and Rennie 2008) and New Zealand (Gordon 2005). A lack of linguistic knowledge, accompanied by the lack of a well-theorised, empirically-grounded pedagogy, has rendered grammar a particular challenge for teachers (Myhill et al. 2013; Watson 2012). In such contested areas, teachers’ beliefs become

particularly significant in guiding their classroom practice (Borg and Burns 2008; Nespor 1987).

The enactment of espoused beliefs in practice may be hindered or complicated by a number of factors: the difficulty of articulating or accessing tacit beliefs (Calderhead 1996); the presence of competing or conflicting beliefs (e.g. Basturkmen 2007; Phipps and Borg 2007); the immediate classroom context (Segal 1998); and external constraints and pressures such as curricula (Lam and Kember 2006). Nevertheless, teachers' beliefs, shaped by prior experiences of teaching and being taught, influence how and what they teach (Hadjioannou and Hutchinson 2009; Poulson et al. 2001; Twiselton 2002). Research indicates that a significant number of English teachers and trainee teachers in the UK display conceptual confusion about grammar and/or espouse negative views, associating it with prescriptivism, deficit views of development and traditional rote teaching methods, positioning it in opposition to creativity and freedom (Cajkler and Hislam 2002; Pomphrey and Moger 1999; QCA 1998; Watson 2012a, 2013; Wilson and Myhill 2012). Teachers have also been shown to value literary aspects of English above linguistic aspects (Findlay 2010; Wilson and Myhill 2012).

While there is a developing body of work which explores teachers' attitudes to grammar, there have been limited attempts to investigate how these attitudes influence pedagogy. The few studies which have investigated recent classroom practice in first-language grammar teaching have indicated that contextualisation often remains superficial, with teachers tending to convey an understanding that a given grammatical feature (e.g. complex sentences) is somehow 'good' regardless of context, meaning or effect (Lefstein 2009; Weaver and Bush 2006; Wyse 2006). Teachers and trainee teachers have struggled to recognise and reconcile prescriptive and rhetorical conceptualisations of grammar (Cajkler and Hislam 2002; Lefstein 2009), and find it difficult to provide meaningful contextualisation and to explain grammatical terms and structures, tending to over-simplify, e.g. by using semantic rather than functional definitions (Cajkler and Hislam 2002; Myhill 2000; Myhill et al. 2013; Paraskevas 2004).

Given the lack of a coherent theoretical underpinning for the place of grammar in the curriculum, the fact that many teachers espouse negative views of grammar and the fact that teachers struggle with the pedagogical challenges outlined above, it is now an apt time to study the role that teachers' beliefs can play in shaping their pedagogical approach to grammar.

Methodology

A case study approach has been chosen to explore beliefs in a multifaceted manner, seeking to provide a contextualised account of how one teacher's espoused beliefs relate to her practices. Recognising that "the uniqueness of each context does not entail uniqueness in every respect" (Pring 2000, 119), the study provides one example which will have resonance for the wider profession.

The participant was drawn from the sample of practitioners used in an ESRC-funded *Grammar for Writing* randomised control trial (Jones, Myhill and Bailey 2013). At the end of that study, all teacher participants were invited to take part in follow-on case studies, and three volunteered. The other two case studies are available in (Watson 2012b). The participant presented here was part of the comparison group in the original study, so was not influenced by materials or training provided in that study.

Theoretical framework

For this study, belief is conceptualised as an element of 'cognition,' in line with Kagan (1990), Calderhead (1996) and Borg (2003). This understanding of 'cognition' does not draw clear distinctions between knowledge, values and beliefs, but rather accepts that these are intertwined (Poulson et al. 2001). This broad definition has been operationalised using a model of belief based on the ideas proposed by Nespor (1987) and developed by Pajares (1992) which conceptualises beliefs as characterised by a number of elements: conceptual, affective, evaluative, and episodic. The model is also informed by Argyris and Schon's distinction between espoused theories and theories-in-use (1974), particularly in the adoption of the term 'espoused' to characterise the beliefs articulated by the participant.

Research Methods

This descriptive case study employed a multi-method approach to data collection in order to capture some of the complexity of beliefs and practices (Kagan 1990; Mason 1996; Silverman 1993). The participant was observed teaching a unit called *Inspirational Writing* to a year eight class (aged 12-13 years). The scheme was created by the participant to show how she thinks writing should best be taught: there was no stipulation that grammar must be included, and no required content or objectives. The unit was nine hours long, delivered over three, 3-hour lessons over the course of three weeks. The observations were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the transcriptions for the first two lessons were given to the teacher to review three days before a stimulated recall interview took place: this was conducted immediately after the final lesson. During this interview, she was asked to explain her pedagogical decisions across the three lessons, discussing both her overall aims and rationale and key moments from the transcripts which were identified by both the researcher and the participant. It was not assumed that this interview would capture what the participant was thinking at the time of recording, but rather in recognition of the fact that such interviews may prompt “post-hoc rationalizations” (Basturkmen, Loewen, and Ellis 2004, 251) it was intended to explore explanations and justifications of behaviour. In the context of this discussion, the participant both explained her thinking and talked about the various constraints or influences on her practice.

The participant also undertook a think-aloud protocol in which she marked two writing samples by unknown year 8 students: one higher-ability and one lower-ability. She was asked to mark the samples and to offer advice for improvement at the end, explaining her thinking as she did so. The verbal report was recorded and transcribed for analysis.

These sources of data were supplemented by material from the earlier *Grammar for Writing* RCT: a participant-validated ‘belief profile’ collating data from three interviews which elicited beliefs about teaching writing and grammar, and observation schedules from three lessons on teaching narrative fiction, argument and poetry writing.

Data Analysis

The analytical process focused on developing a descriptive framework (Yin 2009), in order to create a contextual and holistic account of the participant's beliefs and practice. Firstly, the transcripts of lesson observations were summarised to produce a description of her pedagogical approach which detailed lesson objectives, main activities, use of grammar and explanations of grammar in the observed lessons. Given Borg and Burns' comment that "formal" theoretical "frameworks" for analysing pedagogy often do not reflect "the personal and practical pedagogical systems through which teachers make sense of their work" (2008, 480), pre-constructed frameworks (e.g. 'inductive'/'deductive'; 'focus on form'/'focus on content') were avoided, with pedagogical patterns interpreted inductively instead.

The stimulated recall interview was then inductively coded for the main explanations of pedagogical decisions. These codes were used as themes to organise the rest of the data into a framework created in a Microsoft Word document. Relevant episodes from the lesson transcripts, the think-aloud transcript and the RCT belief profile and lesson observation schedules were added to themes, and the case report below uses these themes as headings. The participant was offered a fuller version of her case report to comment upon and she responded briefly that she was satisfied with how it represented her teaching and her beliefs.

The Case study: Clare

Background

Clare had been teaching for ten years. She was employed as an Advanced Skills Teacher in an 11-18 urban mixed academy rated outstanding by OFSTED. She had held a variety of teaching posts since completing her undergraduate Art degree, initially working at a Further Education college teaching Art before moving to a secondary school to teach Drama, gaining qualified teacher status under the Graduate Teaching Programme by training in English as Drama was not a GTP option. She subsequently worked in two other schools teaching English, Drama and Psychology before taking up her current post.

Writing Pedagogy

Clare had written the scheme of work for my visit, using it as “a really good excuse to try and challenge myself and do something a little bit off the wall”. In this respect, it is not necessarily representative of her usual practice, but is more closely aligned to what she would like to be able to do in the classroom. Objectives were not made explicit in the plans, but the aims are given in Table 1.

[Table 1 near here]

Clare’s approach to teaching writing in this scheme was embedded in notions of creativity and personal expression. It was characterised by pedagogical features outlined in Table 2.

[Table 2 near here]

Grammar pedagogy

Clare included some references to grammar throughout the scheme although it was never a key focus. Grammar was typically delivered with a ‘recipe’ approach (Cajkler and Dymoke 2005, 130) at a redrafting stage, when Clare instructed students to include various grammatical ‘ingredients’ in order to make their writing effective. She usually provided brief oral explanations of the grammatical terms used and did not expect students to remember the terminology. The following examples are from lessons one and two:

(1) Clare: What is the best way, in terms of sentences, to grab somebody’s attention?

Student: Short sentences.

Clare: Top banana. [i.e. ‘Great’.]

(2) Clare: Have you got varied sentences? So have we got simple sentences, I clause, maybe at the beginning, which is what I suggested. Complex, has it got loads of commas, maybe semicolons in? Has it got lots of different clauses different things going on? It might even have brackets... Have you got some interesting compound sentences, yeah? Which are linked with and or but or

some kind of connective? You've got to have some kind of variation of all of them. Have you used varied sentence openings?

(3) Clare: adverbs generally end in ly and they're great for starting sentences because they tell the reader straight away the feelings, thoughts and how people are moving, how they're thinking. 'Slowly, he crept along the' 'Suddenly, from above, the Martian landed.' Okay?

(4) Clare: what did I suggest last week that you start with?

Student: An L word

Student: An LY word

Clare: And what's an LY word?

Student: Adverb

Clare: Adverb. Start with an adverb or a very short sentence.

(5) (On powerpoint) To gain a great mark, you must bring the personal experiences to life using powerful vocabulary, varied sentence structures, raw emotion and the use of sophisticated imagery techniques such as metaphors.

Some attention to aspects of grammar (generally at sentence level) was thus integrated into Clare's teaching, often as part of generalised criteria for effective writing (e.g. 2, 4 and 5). Explanation of the effects of different grammatical structures was simplistic and decontextualised, stated or drawn out through closed questioning, rather than being a focus of exploratory discussion (e.g. 1). The references to grammar were most often framed by a general imperative to create a 'variety' of sentence structures (e.g. 2 and 5), although example 3 does include a more specific explanation of the purpose of starting a sentence with an adverb.

The notable exception to this pattern was one explicitly language-focused activity in lesson three where students were asked to invent unusual adjectives to describe the wind. Clare began with an open discussion of the meanings imbued by adjectives she had chosen. Her examples were an amalgamation of literary and linguistic play, including both adjectives which are unexpected descriptors of the wind (flinty; feathery; silver) and nouns used metaphorically as adjectives (tambourine; waterfall).

She drew this distinction briefly when asking the students to come up with their own adjectives:

I want you to pick 2 adjectives, and remember an adjective could be a noun, a tambourine is a noun, isn't it, it's a thing, but a tambourine wind we know that it's that noisy kind of wind. I want you to pick 2 adjectives to put in front of the word wind, and then you're gonna explain to me, so don't just pick random things, like Mercedes wind.

The grammar aspect was downplayed in the later discussion of students' ideas which focused on the meanings they sought to evoke without acknowledging whether they had used adjectives or nouns, or the different effects that might be created by using either. While the majority of students struggled to move beyond more usual adjectives (e.g. roaring, churning), a couple were able to use nouns and explain their intentions: "wall wind...like when you're going and it hits you"; "milkshake wind...it smells nice." It's unclear whether these students had understood Clare's explanation that "an adjective could be a noun", or whether they were copying the pattern of her examples instinctively. This does still present an important counterbalance to her prevailing approach to grammar, indicating that it can be linked to creativity and meaning.

Explanations of practice

Teacher identity, creativity and becoming 'a writer'

Clare frequently reflected on her professional identity, distancing herself from other English teachers by describing herself as "an art stroke music teacher parading around as an English teacher". She wanted to allow students "to be able to try something that maybe they've not tried before" and "to see that English can be taught in a different way." This was expressed emotively as a process of "raging against the dying of the light" in contrast to those "institutionalised" teachers who have become detached from their work:

When's the last time you wrote a scheme of work about something you're passionate about? Because I've probably met about two people from the twenty-two last year.

Clare thus demonstrated a powerful conceptualisation of her identity as a teacher, and showed that her pedagogy is driven by a desire to be different to other English

teachers. This was manifested in the manner in which she spoke about writing, valuing originality, “a brand new crazy word” and urging her students to be “totally random, absolutely random” when inventing nonsense words (*lesson three*).

Clare’s lessons and interviews were also pervaded by her understanding of what it means to be ‘a writer’. She drew a distinction between the functional aspects of writing, “employers moaning about graduates coming out and they can’t write a letter,” and the personal fulfilment of being able to use writing to capture and explore experiences and ideas, “the writing isn’t about letters and newspapers, it’s about seeing something or experiencing something and you just wanna get it down on paper.” She framed her discussion by referring to her own writing experiences, explaining that good writing is not something that can be performed at will, “I can wake up some mornings and I can barely write a thing. I wake up on other mornings and whoosh, I’m doing it.” Her image of a writer as a creative agent, rather than someone who is simply functionally literate, was an important drive in her teaching, with creative writing valued above transactional writing, “I wanna produce writers. I don’t want to produce kids that can write a great letter to their MP about the bin situation in their local area.” Pedagogically, this was evident in her attempts to engage students with a variety of artistic stimulus materials, and particularly in her strong focus on personal response in initial ideas-generation, with concerns about audience, purpose or form removed to a later redrafting stage. She repeatedly instructed her students to use their “imagination” and encouraged them to think of themselves as ‘writers’:

I’m looking for imagination, I’m looking for people that are inspired by music. To be a great writer is to be inspired by everything around you... So be inspirational, be original, be exciting, ok?

In this respect, there was a consistent match between Clare’s espoused desire to foster her students’ creativity and sense of themselves as ‘writers’ and her pedagogical approaches. The strength of the passion behind this desire to foster creativity is particularly significant because Clare positioned it in diametrical opposition to grammar teaching, as discussed below.

Grammar as a secondary concern

Clare initially espoused extremely negative attitudes to grammar, describing it as “dry

as a camel's arse in a sandstorm". Her view was linked to a conceptualisation of grammar teaching which was firmly rooted in a dichotomy between form and content:

People'll say 'Oh actually the content of what they've written is quite good, you know, they can't spell, they can't paragraph, they can't punctuate, they've got poor vocabulary, and it's just lost it, it's rubbish' and I don't agree, personally.

That's what I'd regard grammar to be, all the technical gubbins that goes around.

She also conceptualised grammar teaching primarily in terms of a focus on mechanical accuracy, "anything to do with creative writing is all based on grammar, they're taught rigorously how to correctly paragraph and use sentences and what have you," with a pedagogy based on decontextualised exercises, informed by her experience of teaching grammar-focused starter activities:

You have a core starter, which is always something grammar-based like a homophones worksheet or complex compound sentence worksheet or paragraphing worksheet, or whatever, and kids are just bored.

These attitudes were accompanied by doubt regarding the efficacy of teaching grammar, a reservation shaped by her own experience:

When I was at school we didn't have any explicit teaching of grammar... but I can put together, I like to think, a pretty good piece of work that is grammatically correct, and no one taught me flipping subclauses and 'this is an adverb'...

She also saw her own belief that grammar is inherently dull reflected in her students:

I've yet to find the kid that says 'what's a clause?' And I'm sure there's plenty out there but they're just struck dumb at that point cos they're so bored.

However, in explaining her ideas, she revealed that her beliefs are actually more nuanced:

I haven't got a problem with grammar if it is taught within the context of something. Cos it's not stand alone. How can it possibly be stand alone. To know where to put a full stop, you need to know what to put in the sentence.

There is the beginning of an understanding of contextualised grammar here, but the focus remains on the teaching of grammar for accuracy rather than for developing understanding of writer craft. Elsewhere, Clare briefly indicated a deeper understanding of grammar when she explained that it can help students to shape their ideas:

you see these fantastic brainstorms of the most weird and exotic ideas, but when

they come to write it down it's like a shopping list.

However, this was the only point in the study where Clare signalled that explicit attention to grammar may have an important impact on the form in which ideas are translated into text.

The concept of opposition between content and form was very apparent in Clare's teaching, again showing a close match between espoused beliefs and practice. She explained that she thinks, "ideas are in total juxtaposition to the conventions of grammar," and argued that content must come first, with grammar "secondary to the initial task." Clare worried that attention to form at an early stage could "stifle the flow" of writing, describing writing as a process in which ideas must be expressed and captured in an initial burst before any organisation of ideas occurs:

I think grammar is kind of secondary. I think you can, whatever piece of writing you're doing, get it all out, vomit your words upon the page, and then is the point to go back and, think right how am I going to structure it."

This was played out in practice in the fact that grammar was generally introduced after students had either generated ideas or produced a first draft of their work, at which point they were instructed to look through their work and check, for example, whether they had varied their sentences and started some with an adverb (lesson 1).

The 'recipe' approach to grammar

Clare justified her 'recipe' approach to grammar as a way to ensure that students pay attention to syntax in their writing, explaining her instruction to use adverbs to start sentences by stating that "I would so much rather have 30 essays starting with 'suddenly' and something interesting rather than 'Then I did...'" She claimed that "it is foolproof and it's not pushing them that much, but it's getting them to understand where to put words in a sentence, cos they do use adverbs but they rarely put them at the beginning." The notion of this as a 'foolproof' teaching method implies a successful impact on students' writing despite being formulaic, while there remains a sense of prescription in the notion of "where to put words". This view was repeated in the think-aloud protocol where she advised the writer that "it definitely needs to vary openings." However, as well as characterising the approach as effective, she also related it to her lack of confidence in her linguistic subject knowledge and ability to foster open discussion about grammar:

Clare: if I had been discussing what's the point of having complex sentences... I'm not sure that I'd get the answers that I'd want, and maybe I wouldn't be confident enough to say 'you're wrong' or 'I'm wrong,'

Interviewer: What sort of answers would you want?

Clare: The right ones [laughs]. I dunno.

She explained that the lack of analysis of text models and the superficial level of much of her grammar teaching was influenced by her own lack of interest in the subject and her doubts about its usefulness, drawing a distinction between being able to analyse language and being able to use it effectively:

I've seen teachers give them a piece of writing and go through it and say that's a complex sentence and that's a semicolon... firstly I'd have to go through it myself and I'd probably fall asleep before I got to the end of it, and also, I dunno how important is it to see it in situ, why not have a go yourself rather than seeing an existing piece of work... just cos they can spot a complex sentence doesn't mean they can write one.

The perception of grammar as boring and unimportant here is again focused on a dichotomy between grammar and creativity. Clare imagines teaching students to identify grammatical structures without exploration of their effects or experimentation with use in their own writing (both features of rhetorical grammar). These beliefs were mirrored in Clare's pedagogy in the fact that she prioritised providing opportunities for students to write over analysis of existing text models, with very few exemplar or stimulus texts used.

There is a clear tension between the 'recipe' approach, in which students are encouraged to apply formulaic rules to their writing and Clare's desire to foster creativity, spontaneity and originality. Her decision to position grammar as 'secondary' to the process of idea-generation (both in importance and chronologically in the writing process), was not only related to her belief about the relative unimportance of grammatical considerations, but also reflects an attempt to avoid this conflict between creative expression and formulaic writing. Consequently, students were encouraged to be spontaneous, creative and original when generating ideas and producing initial drafts of their writing, but were then encouraged to apply formulaic rules when shaping their writing through subsequent drafts. This recurrent use of a two-step writing process allowed Clare to separate and manage the conflict between

her grammar pedagogy and her values.

Grammar and meaning

The adjective-generating activity in lesson three was the one occasion in the 'Inspirational Writing' scheme which broke this pattern, incorporating grammar into an ideas-generating stage and highlighting the role that adjectives can play in creating evocative images. Clare justified this activity by again referring to her emotive and creative aims, "to have fun... to have a real go at nonsense." She also displayed an attitude to language that runs counter to her espoused negative attitude to grammar, stating that she wanted her students "to realise... how fun language can be." This suggests a clear division in Clare's affective perceptions of language and of grammar, with language perceived as "fun" while grammar is "boring." In practice, the incorporation of grammatical terminology into the 'language' activity blurred this distinction, again suggesting that Clare's beliefs-in-use (Argyris and Schon, 1974) are more nuanced than her espoused beliefs in interview suggest: while grammar is usually "secondary" in Clare's teaching, there is evidence that is sometimes aligned with creativity.

Discussion

This study provides evidence of how negative affect and conceptualisations of grammar, consequences of the contested nature of grammar in the curriculum and the absence of grammar in many teachers' own education, can influence writing pedagogy. While this study focuses on a single participant, Clare's espoused beliefs about grammar resonate with numerous prior studies which suggest that many teachers hold prescriptive or deficit views of grammar (Cajkler and Hislam 2002; Pomphrey and Moger 1999; QCA, 1998) or oppose grammar and creativity (Watson 2012a; Wilson and Myhill 2012). Significantly, this case study shows a close match between espoused beliefs and pedagogical practices. Clare's profoundly negative response to the notion of grammar, identified as boring, unimportant, and opposed to creativity, is allied to a pedagogy which positions grammar as a secondary concern in writing, something which can be addressed formulaically through generalised 'rules' which can be applied to improve the form of students' work. It is ironic that her strongly expressed desire to foster creativity and originality in writing has encouraged

the implementation of a restrictive grammar pedagogy in which grammatical choices are represented simplistically as ingredients of ‘good’ writing, with any explanation or discussion of effects remaining at a generic, decontextualised level, echoing the findings of previous studies which have investigated the challenges of grammar teaching (Lefstein 2009; Myhill et al. 2013; Weaver and Bush 2006; Wyse 2006).

Similarly, the conceptualisation of grammar teaching as a process of identifying and labelling structures, associated with decontextualised exercises and based on her own experiences as a learner and teacher, has interfered with Clare’s ability to recognise that she does sometimes use grammar to support creativity. Her strongly espoused dislike of grammar and the opposition drawn between grammar and creativity were belied in part by the lesson 3 activity, where the grammar (although not the terminology) was integral to the imaginative generation of ideas. This was also reflected in some of the comments made in the original *Grammar for Writing* study, where teachers, considering what they understood grammar to mean in relation to their own teaching of writing, reflected that they were teaching about sentences or patterns of language and their effects while not considering it ‘grammar’ (Watson 2013). Significantly, this study aligns this lack of awareness with a limited grammar pedagogy which does not exploit its potential for developing students’ understanding of the range of linguistic choices which are open to them as writers.

The fact that Clare’s espoused beliefs related closely to her practice may have been influenced by several contextual factors. Firstly, she saw the research as an opportunity to teach in the way which she would like to, focusing on something she’s “passionate” about. It was also significant that the year group observed was not subject to high-stakes external examinations, allowing her more freedom (c.f. Lam and Kember 2006). In addition, she explained that her school and departmental context was one in which she was largely “left alone” to teach as she wished. It is also the case that Clare expressed her beliefs in particularly forceful terms, often referring to her teacher-identity as one which opposes the majority, thus demonstrating the significance of teacher identity in shaping practice (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Gee 2001). The research design, focused on eliciting the participant’s post-hoc explanations and justifications of her pedagogical decisions, may also have generated

closer links between practice and beliefs than studies which relate observations of practice to decontextualised expressions of espoused beliefs.

Implications

Previous studies have suggested that particular affective responses to ‘grammar’ (such as Clare’s dislike) may be related to particular conceptualisations (Watson 2013). This study is significant in demonstrating some of the possible pedagogical consequences of such affective and conceptual beliefs, indicating that the negative attitudes to grammar which have been repeatedly observed in the profession (e.g. QCA 1998; Watson 2012a) may hinder teachers’ ability to implement effective grammar pedagogy. Theoretically, the study lends further evidence to the claim that beliefs play an important role in influencing pedagogy in contested domains (Borg and Burns 2008; Nespor 1987), and demonstrates how affective and conceptual elements of belief can shape practice, particularly when external constraints on teaching are low.

While many researchers have recommended comprehensive in-service training in order to tackle deficiencies in teacher linguistic subject knowledge (e.g. Hudson and Walmsley 2005; Kolln and Hancock 2005), this investigation suggests that training will need to go further than tackling subject knowledge and using a simplistic “demonstration and imitation model” (Lefstein 2009, 397) to address pedagogy. Negative attitudes to grammar may well be related to a lack of confidence in linguistic subject knowledge, but the evidence from this case study reveals a more complex picture in which the teacher’s identity as a creative and subversive practitioner, the dichotomy of grammar and creativity in her perception of writing, and her negative experience of grammar pedagogy all play a role in shaping her teaching of writing. The increasing prominence of grammar in the curricula of Anglophone countries must therefore be accompanied by teacher education which takes account of the influence of affective responses and of teachers’ own experiences. The ‘problem’ of grammar for teachers is therefore not simply an issue of a lack of linguistic knowledge (Beard 2000; Hudson and Walmsley 2005; Kolln and Hancock 2005) or pedagogical knowledge (Lefstein 2009; Myhill et al. 2013), but also an issue of tackling the problematic beliefs about grammar that many hold.

Tables

| | Lesson aims (<i>inferred by researcher</i>) |
|--------------|--|
| Lesson one | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respond to music as a stimulus for writing, using imagination to create descriptions and stories.• Experiment with using free writing to generate ideas• Select interesting words or phrases to shape into a story or description. |
| Lesson two | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respond to pictures as a stimulus for writing, using imagination to create descriptions, diary entries and poems.• Experiment with turning informative writing into descriptive writing. |
| Lesson three | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experiment with using nonsense or unusual vocabulary to create evocative images.• Use deduction and imagination to piece together / invent a story from a 'detective' puzzle. |

Table 1: Lesson aims

| Pedagogical feature | Lesson/s |
|---|-----------------|
| Classroom time spent predominantly on pre-writing tasks which stimulate ideas and on individual writing | All |
| Self and peer analysis of writing based on personal preferences | All |
| Attempts to help students to articulate explanations for their preferences | All |
| Redrafting, often using shared criteria for effective writing | Lessons 1 and 2 |
| Metalinguistic terminology (when used) accompanied by explanation by the teacher | All |

Table 2: Pedagogical features

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