Effective Strategies for Teaching Grammar in the Primary English Classroom

March 2016
English Language Education Section
Curriculum Development Institute
Education Bureau
Objectives:

To enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching grammar in context through the adoption of the Task-based Approach.

To provide suggestions on how to incorporate e-learning resources to facilitate grammar learning and teaching.

To design effective tasks and activities to facilitate grammar learning and teaching.
Myths about Grammar Learning and Teaching

Students’ English is good when they make no grammatical mistakes. So it is necessary to give them plenty of grammar exercises for practice.

When we use the task-based approach, we can’t teach students grammar.

Explaining the grammar rules and asking students to memorise them is necessary.
Grammar Rules / Terms

To teach or not to teach?

Depending on the age of the learners and their cognitive development, teachers may decide to introduce a small number of useful and not overly complex grammar rules and terms to help them develop a conscious understanding of the language forms they are using.

*English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – 6)* (CDC, 2004), p. 163
Effective Grammar Learning and Teaching

• Grammar should be shown as a means to convey meaning/achieve an outcome rather than merely taught as a set of items and rules.

• Grammar learning is only meaningful and purposeful if it is used for effective communication rather than for the mastery of individual language forms.

*English Language Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 – 6) (CDC, 2004), pp. 160 & 163*
Process of language acquisition and its implication on grammar learning
How do children acquire grammar knowledge in their L1?

• I woked up at 7 o’clock today.
• I woke up at 7 o’clock today.
• I wake up at 7 o’clock today.
• I woke up at 7 o’clock today.
• I waked up at 7 o’clock today.
What can we infer from this about children learning their first language?

- Language learners need to be exposed to rich linguistic input.
- Young learners search for meaning above form.
- Young learners instinctively search for and identify patterns in language.
- Young learners are able to deduce rules.
- It can take a long time for language to be acquired.
- Young learners take risks with language in their efforts to communicate meanings.
- Errors in learners’ interlanguage can provide us with important information about their development and current understanding.
- Error-free production is neither a desirable nor feasible goal.
- Teaching does not equal learning.
Stages involved in the learning of grammar

• Exposure
• Noticing and hypothesising
• Restructuring

What about second language learners?

**Comprehensible input** *i+1* (Krashen)
e.g. “I put the paper on the desk.”
“I threw the paper into the rubbish bin.”

**Comprehensible output** (Swain)
• Receptive language (i.e. reading and listening) involves mainly semantic processing (meaning), but **productive language involves grammatical processing**.
Effective Strategies for Teaching Grammar

• Providing rich language exposure through classroom interaction and use of spoken and written texts
What kind of input and exposure?

**Texts as authentic input and response**

- Contextualised
- Natural use of grammar
- Varied text types
- Age-appropriate and with interest-value
- Meaningful texts
- Meaningful and natural interaction with the text

Print and non-print version of Monkey Puzzle

https://youtu.be/yZgZYzmIEx8
Effective Strategies for Teaching Grammar

• Engaging students with the texts or situations provided meaningfully
• Guiding students to notice and identify the forms and functions of the target grammar items and structures through child-appropriate activities
Noticing activities (Cameron 2001: 109)

• Noticing an aspect of form is the first stage of learning
• Attention to form is vital
• Learners need to be helped to notice grammatical patterns of the language
• Once noticed, they are more likely to become part of their interlanguage, their internal grammar
• Noticing is an active process: raise awareness of structure, notice connections between form and meaning
• Learners notice: they do not use or manipulate the language themselves
Effective Strategies for Teaching Grammar

• Designing tasks and activities in which students could apply their language resources and knowledge of language form
(Re)structuring activities

- Focuses on form, meaning and use
- Learners change the form to express meanings
- Language is contextualised
- Grammar at text level (not isolated sentences)
- Makes students think, e.g. make choices in form and think about the meaning communicated through those forms
- Opportunities for students to experience the process of noticing and hypothesising again
- Opportunities for students to use the language and for (re)structuring
- Meaningful and purposeful
- Interesting and relevant to students
- ...
Rich language exposure through classroom interaction and use of spoken and written texts such as stories, songs, articles, recorded material and situations, presented within thematic units. Students engage with these texts or situations meaningfully, i.e. they process them for meaning.

Tasks and activities in which students communicate meaningfully drawing on their language resources and knowledge of language form.

Guided discovery, child-appropriate activities: recalling, selecting, matching, sequencing, categorising, cross language comparison, concept checking questions

- visual representation e.g. timelines
- tabulation of ‘slots and chains’
- highlighting form (e.g. with colours, arrows, etc)
- Introducing grammar “rules” when appropriate

Stages of Grammar Learning
Learning and Teaching of Grammar

- Teaching grammar in context
- Exposing learners to authentic language use
- Adopting an inductive approach
- Engaging learners in communicating in the target grammar item and structure for various communicative purposes
- Meaning-focused activities

- Exposure to authentic texts in various modes of representation
- Collaborative problem-solving tasks
- Creation of multimodal texts

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

- Structure of sentences and syntactic accuracy
- Expressing meaning through the use of grammar
- The impact of grammar on the coherence and structure of a text
- Relationship between language and context
## An example of Learning and Teaching Grammar in Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Providing a context</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input (content/language)</td>
<td>set the scene and activate students’ prior knowledge</td>
<td>become motivated and connect their own experiences</td>
<td>gain ideas and notice some repeated language patterns and how they are used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>expose students to some language samples to illustrate the forms and use of the target grammar items and structures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning through games, activities &amp; exercises</td>
<td>design information gap activities for students to explore the use of the language items and structures in context and make use of the exercises to provide opportunities for students to practise and consolidate the items learnt</td>
<td>gain confidence and internalise the use of the grammar items and structures through the guided/controlled practice</td>
<td>apply the grammar knowledge in meaningful contexts, e.g. to solve problems, express views, or communicate with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>provide a new context for students to apply the grammar knowledge learnt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Explore the use of Open/ Close E-resources to Enhance Grammar Learning and Teaching

• Presenting the grammar items and structures in context through incorporating relevant e-resources to help students understand the use of the target grammar items and structures

Eva’s Cookies
http://zimmertwinsatschool.com

A perfect cup of tea for Gran
http://www.crickweb.co.uk/ks2literacy.html

It’s up to me and you
http://peer.edb.hkedcity.net/unit/261/its-me-and-you
Flipped Classroom

1. Introduce the context in which the target grammar items are used
2. Consolidate students’ learning after the target grammar items are introduced in the lesson
3. Support students’ learning through the use of short videos

https://youtu.be/9aGuLuipTwg
Sharing of good practices by Xianggang Putonghua Yanxishe Primary School of Science and Creativity
Effective Strategies for Teaching Grammar

• Providing rich language exposure through classroom interaction and use of spoken and written texts
• Engaging students with the texts or situations provided meaningfully
• Guiding students to notice and identify the forms and functions of the target grammar items and structures through child-appropriate activities
• Designing tasks and activities in which students could apply their language resources and knowledge of language form
References


