An innovative approach to grammar instruction in the high school language arts classroom

Robert John Miller

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AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION IN THE HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of California State University, San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in Education: Instructional Technology

by Robert John Miller
March 2007
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ABSTRACT

Can teaching traditional English grammar at the high school level help to improve student writing ability? For decades, a pedagogical debate has raged over whether or not public schools need to teach grammar. During the past decade, the federal government and most states have adopted comprehensive testing of all public school students. These tests evaluate both a student’s knowledge of grammar and a student’s ability to write as well. Therefore, it would be beneficial to determine a method of teaching grammar that does improve student writing.

The purpose of this study was to compare the effect(s) on student writing of two separate approaches to teaching grammar – one traditional, and one non-traditional. Over the course of four weeks, the writing abilities of two high school English classes, similar in composition and academic skill, were compared. One group received traditional grammar instruction, the other received non-traditional instruction. Essays written immediately prior to and immediately following the study period were used for the comparison. Areas of student writing that were compared for this study were sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences.
The results of this particular study did not show that teaching grammar in a non-traditional way improved student writing.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I reflect back nearing the completion of this project, I must acknowledge a few people to whom I am indebted.

First of all, I wish to thank most of the professors and adjunct staff at Cal State San Bernardino’s Palm Desert Campus who helped and guided me through this program. Specifically, I’d like to thank most of all Dr. Newberry, Dr. Baek, and Dr. Leh for all their instruction, guidance, patience, and knowledge. I also would like to thank Ken Decroo, Hank Richards, and Becky Howery, for making their classes interesting and informative.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND

Introduction

Never end a sentence with a preposition. Do not split an infinitive. Never leave a modifier dangling. An introductory phrase needs to be followed by a comma.

For most adults over the age of forty, these are not unfamiliar statements. In the past, teachers instructed students in the way the English language was structured. Ask a high school student today to explain any of these statements, and a confused, blank stare will more than likely be the response.

For the past forty years or so, formal grammar instruction in American high schools has been disappearing. Grammar instruction has done little or nothing to improve student writing, so schools have focused on teaching writing instead of grammar (Mulroy, 2004).

However, times have now changed. The federal government in the form of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and state governments in the form of state-mandated graduation exams and standards tests have brought back the testing of grammar as well as written composition.
National college entrance tests such as the SAT and the ACT have also in recent years added grammar and composition sections to their exams. If students are to be expected to do well on these tests, then it is quite evident that schools must once again return to the teaching of grammar as well as the teaching of writing.

Statement of the Problem

If research has proven that formal grammar instruction does not help students improve their writing, then for what reason are these government agencies and testing companies insisting it be taught? That question is beyond the scope of this research project. The fact is that grammar needs to be taught. Teachers across the country, whose curriculums are already severely impacted by all the standards that must be taught, are wondering where they will find the time to squeeze in formal grammar instruction. How can teachers be expected to help students improve their writing if they are forced to spend valuable class time teaching grammar that has been shown to have no positive effect on student writing?

This is the paradox of the issue and is at the core of this research project. The problem is to figure out a
way to teach grammar that will have a positive effect on improving student writing.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to instruct students in grammar in a fashion that is not the traditional "drill and practice" method but instead focuses on the grammar necessary for good student writing. Based on writing samples taken before and after the grammar instruction, the research study will determine whether the non-traditional grammar approach did or did not cause an improvement in student writing.

Research Question

The SAT and ACT tests, as well as the state standardized tests in Language Arts, all require that students have a clear understanding of English grammar and have the ability to write well. Yet the traditional methodologies for teaching grammar have had little or no effect on improving student writing. Can teaching grammar in a non-traditional way improve high school students' writing when compared to a traditional method of teaching grammar?
Goals

There are four goals for this project. The first goal is to uncover and employ a non-traditional method of instructing students in grammar that might help improve their writing. The second goal is to determine whether this non-traditional grammar instruction causes an improvement in student writing ability. A third goal, assuming goal number two is successful, is to share this method of teaching grammar that improves writing with other English teachers. A final goal, again assuming goal number two is successful, is to bring about an increase in student scores on standardized tests and college entrance tests.

Significance of the Project

With a third of incoming college freshmen requiring remedial writing courses, it is clear that something needs to be done at the high school level to improve student writing (Mulroy, 2003). Yet teaching writing is a long process that takes a great deal of class time. Language Arts teachers do not have this much time to devote exclusively to writing. They have far too much content derived from the mandated state standards that they must cover as well. Teaching grammar also takes up a great deal
of class time that teachers do not have available. In addition, teaching grammar becomes doubly important, as it is required not only by the state standards but also by the SAT and ACT college entrance tests. A practical approach to address all these issues is to find a targeted way to teach students the essential grammar they need to help improve their writing.

In the current educational environment, where secondary schools' futures rest on their standardized test scores and NCLB rankings, discovering ways to cover grammar, improve writing skills, and raise test scores is essential. If this research study utilizing a non-traditional grammar instructional method does indeed improve student writing, then it will be a significant step toward meeting the needs of students, whose writing will benefit; of teachers, whose limited instructional time will allow for grammar instruction and writing improvement; of administrators, whose school test scores will improve; of universities, whose incoming freshmen will be better writers; and of the country, whose next generation of graduates will be better prepared to compete and communicate in a global workplace.
Limitations

During the development of this project, some limitations were noted. These limitations are presented in this section. The limitations involve the time period selected for the research study and the length of the study.

As regards the time period of the study, there are some limitations worth noting. First of all, the research study was conducted during the last month of a standard public school calendar year. The time period was approximately the second week of May through the second week of June. This close to the end of the school year, students and teachers become wearier. In the case of the students, it is possible that the earnestness of their approach to writing two additional essays was not all it could have been. In the case of the teacher evaluators of the essays, it is possible they might not have done as thorough a job either, seeing as the end of the year is a busy time - calculating grades, creating exams, etc. In addition, the research period began, as noted earlier, during the second week of May, when the students had just finished a month’s worth of state and federally mandated tests (STAR testing, SAT testing, CAHSEE testing, ACT testing, SAT II testing, Golden State testing, etc.).
The students might not have been too energized about writing another pair of essays for evaluation.

A second area of limitation would be the length of the study. The study only lasted four weeks, and only contained two non-traditional grammar lessons per week. This was perhaps not a long enough time period to produce adequate results. To get a more comprehensive analysis of the effect of teaching non-traditional grammar and its effects on student writing, the study probably should have lasted over the course of an entire semester.

And finally, another area of concern that might have been a limitation in this study, was the assumption that all the evaluators of the student essays, who were all high school English instructors, had a sufficient working knowledge of sentence structure and grammar to be able to accurately identify and record sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences. One would assume that professional educators in the area of English/Language Arts would have sufficient knowledge, but it is not a certainty.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they apply to the project.
Comma Splice: Two or more sentences separated by only a comma (a type of run-on sentence). (Warriner, Whitten, & Griffith, 1977)

Complex Sentence: A sentence that has one independent clause and one or more subordinate (dependent) clause. (Warriner, et al., 1977)

Compound Sentence: A sentence that has two or more independent clauses but no subordinate (dependent) clauses. (Warriner, et al., 1977)

Compound-Complex Sentence: A sentence that contains two or more independent clauses and one or more subordinate (dependent) clause. (Warriner, et al., 1977)

Run On Sentence: Two or more sentences separated by only a comma or by no mark of punctuation. (Warriner, et al., 1977)

Sentence Combining: The process of taking two or more sentences, clauses, and/or sentence fragments and combining them to create a compound, complex, or compound-complex sentence.

Sentence Fragment: A separated sentence part that does not express a complete thought. (Warriner, et al., 1977)
Style: Used generally, the way in which a piece of writing is written, the devices the writer uses to express his or her thoughts and convey the work's subject matter. The message or material that the writer communicates to the reader, along with how the writer chooses to present it, produce a writer's individual style, which given the quirks of human personality, necessarily varies from writer to writer. (Murfin, & Ray, 2003)

Syntax: The arrangement - the ordering, grouping, and placement - of words within a sentence. Syntax is a component of grammar, though it is often used, incorrectly, as a synonym for grammar. (Murfin, et al., 2003)
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

To teach grammar or not to teach grammar? What is the point? Does it help improve student writing, or is it a waste of valuable classroom time doing mindless, repetitive drill and practice exercises with endless rules and exceptions? This is the dilemma facing most secondary teachers today. In recent years, state and the federal governments have exacerbated the debate by requiring testing that covers grammar and writing. Therefore, the question now is not Should high schools teach grammar?, but How much grammar should high schools teach and how can they teach it in a way that helps improve student writing?

This seems to be a question without an answer since most studies in the past thirty years have shown that the formal teaching of grammar does nothing to improve the writing skills of students. Teachers today need to discover methods that successfully incorporate the teaching of grammar into the teaching of student writing.
History of the Problem

The instruction of grammar as the core of all other academic learning has a long history. Constance Weaver's research (1996) reports that grammar teaching during the middle ages was considered the "foundation of all knowledge, the necessary prerequisite for understanding theology and philosophy as well as literature" (p. 15). Grammar was more than just a linguistic study; it was also intended to discipline a student's character. The orderly structure of grammar was intended to transfer over into an orderly conduct of his/her life. Any biography on William Shakespeare will report that Shakespeare attended grammar school in Stratford-Upon-Avon where the focus was on Latin grammar and very little else. Even today, many parts of the country still use the terms grammar school and elementary school interchangeably.

In this country, sometime after the end of the Second World War, a shift began to take place. During the 1960s and 1970s, Noam Chomsky (1966) forwarded the notion that much of what people learn about language was acquired naturally at an early age and did not need to be formally taught. His research concluded that human linguistic systems were "hardwired" and that "knowledge of linguistic universals is an innate structure of the human brain," and
thus was at our biological core (pp. 327-328). Exposure to language at an early age and daily use of it makes acquiring language "intuitive, and as such, most speech is correct and natural" (Nunan, 2005, p. 71). During the 1960s and 1970s, researcher such as Harris (1962), Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963), and Elley, Barham, Lamb, and Wyllie (1976) conducted several more studies decrying the need for formal grammar instruction as a necessary component for acquiring language and writing skills. The study by Elley, et al. (1976) concluded that syntax (grammar) teaching had virtually no influence on the language growth of typical secondary school students. More recently Andrews, Torgerson, Beverton, Locke, Low, Robinson, and Zhu (2004) conducted a study testing the findings of the Elley study and concluded that "teaching the principles underlying and informing word order, or syntax, has virtually no influence on the writing quality or accuracy of 5 to 16 year olds" (p. 6).

However, the Braddock report, issued as a result of research by Braddock, et al. (1963), was the most influential of these studies. Called Research in Written Composition, the study’s conclusions confirmed for many educators the already prevalent attitude that grammar had
little effect on writing improvement. In the study's summary judgment, the researchers found that "the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible, or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing" (Mulroy, 2004, p. 53). These findings were later reinforced by an influential study by Hillocks (1986) that concluded grammar instruction led to a statistically significant decline in student writing ability.

The findings of these studies, combined with the social and cultural changes taking place in the latter half of the 1960s, such as the sexual revolution and the Vietnam War, prompted many educators and educational institutions to eschew the teaching of formal grammar that did nothing to improve students' writing (Hudson, 2001).

The form this shift took in the classroom was a refocusing of how to teach and evaluate student writing. Traditionally, teachers taught writing as a process, and grammar was an important part of that process. Teachers graded student writing by pointing out all grammatical errors. Since teachers had instructed students in how to use English grammar correctly, they expected students to write compositions in a similar fashion. Students needed to correct all their errors before their writing was
deemed acceptable. During the 1960s and early 1970s, educators switched to writing instruction that was primarily product based. Writing became a voyage of self-discovery; the content of the students' writing became more important than the way it was written. Educators essentially ignored grammar in favor of the students' message (Martinsen, 2000).

Other research during this time period strove to show that grammar did help improve writing. Specifically, the work of Mellon (1969) and O'Hare (1973) produced some results that seemed to support this. However, other researchers have since called into question Mellon and O'Hare's interpretation of what improvement meant. Vavra (1996) put it this way, "Improvement to Mellon and O'Hare was when students wrote longer clauses, not necessarily more correct ones." In addition, the same researcher noted that O'Hare published a textbook "at least a third of which [was] very traditional grammar" (Vavra, 1996, p. 32).

The studies from the 1960s and 1970s were later bolstered by a resolution passed in 1985 by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). This resolution made unofficial policy out of what had up to that time been individual school or teacher preference. According to
Mulroy (2003), the resolution stated that the “use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research is a deterrent to the improvement of students’ speaking and writing” (p.6).

Further, in the same article, Mulroy contends that the resolution not only advocated the cessation of the teaching of formal grammar but also advocated the “discontinuance of testing practices that encourage the teaching of grammar rather than the improvement of writing” (Mulroy, 2003, p.6).

All of these findings have had a tremendous impact on the elimination of grammar instruction in schools across the nation during the past four decades. With but a few exceptions, teachers did not cry out about the diminution of grammar instruction. Because most American universities did not have classes on how to teach grammar, most teachers did not feel well equipped to teach the subject. Many felt it was tiresome and too regimented. Many did not understand it well themselves and felt ill equipped to teach it. Many felt the students found it dry and boring. Students felt proper grammar and usage was a form of elitism, that people should speak and write in a nonstandard way. Anyone who attempted to do otherwise would be perceived as a snob. In social situations,
students did not consider Standard English necessary, so they did not find it important or relevant. Students also felt that grammar's myriad rules and exceptions had no relevance in their everyday life (Brown, 1996).

Martinsen, in her article The Tower of Babel and the Teaching of Grammar; Writing Instruction for a New Century (2000), found that researchers concluded students felt grammar was difficult to comprehend because as a "metalanguage," it had little significance outside of their own daily use of the language (p. 124). She further found that students disliked grammar because there were so many rules involved and because the social embarrassment involved in breaking of any of them was too great. To say, "I ain't brung no CD's to this party" was to appear uneducated and coarse and was akin to "going to a formal party dressed in dirty work clothes" (p. 124).

With these attitudes from researchers, educators, and students, it is little wonder that student knowledge of grammar has suffered.

Current Situation

Since the 1980s, and especially after the publication of A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform by the National Commission on Excellence in Education
(1983), and through the 1990s with the proliferation of state standards tests and state graduation tests, pro-grammarians have begun to insist on a return to a more thorough instruction in the area of grammar, even if it does not reemerge in its traditional formal state. The public, especially those in the business world, also feel secondary schools should teach grammar, and this further frustrates teachers because they cannot agree on exactly how to do it, or to what extent. As one might expect, two groups have emerged from the fray; one group advocates the return to traditional grammar (the pro-grammarians), and the other advocates replacing grammar instruction with more instruction in writing skills (the anti-grammarians).

The pro-grammarians look beyond the classroom setting. They see the importance of writing for a more formal audience than that of a high school classroom, classmates, and teacher. They contend that there exists in this world a need for writing that goes beyond the recreational. Students need to be able to write in a way that is relevant to the business world, and to do this, educators need to help students develop a solid foundation of the language that is necessary for proper sentence construction and development (Vavra, 1996). Students do not seem to understand that "using incorrect grammar in
their written applications and oral communications with potential employers can be a determining factor in their job search success” (Hutchinson, Mc Cavitt, Rude, and Vallow, 2002, p.39).

The pro-grammarius approach to teaching grammar is to teach it as it has always been taught. As is so cherished by the behaviorists, extensive drill and practice is the key. Writing is viewed as a process, and attention is paid to grammar and sentence structure at all stages in that process. Errors are identified, marked, and expected to be corrected. Grammar is assumed to be “learned during the acts of writing, revising, and editing” (Holden, 1994, p.5). The pro-grammarius assumption is that after all the drill and practice, the students will suddenly understand the concept, and the “correct” way to write will transfer to the students’ writing.

Anti-grammarians argue that since teaching formal grammar does not improve student writing, valuable class time should be spent teaching writing instead. They sense that the negative feelings and attitudes toward grammar by both instructors and students are a primary reason for its failure to produce positive benefits to student writing. Anti-grammarians were not taught how to teach grammar, and therefore, tend to approach it as nothing more than
teaching a bunch of rules (Vavra, 1996). They feel that fluency in student writing should trump rules. What teachers should be concerned with is content – are the students getting across in their writing what they had intended to get across? (Baron, 2003)

Anti-grammarians are more interested in the product, the end result. To them, they need not teach formal grammar. What is important is the extensive production of student writing without concentrating on individual grammar errors. They feel that stressing correct grammar at the expense of content will sap essays of freshness and personality; essays will become "stilted" (Baron, 2003). Grammar mistakes, they feel, can be corrected in the editing and revision stages by students themselves and their peers. Teachers feel what's more important is a student's "personal discovery of meaning" throughout the writing process (Holden, 1994). As succinctly stated in the findings of the study by Andrews, et al. (2005), "In terms of practice, there is no high quality evidence that the teaching of grammar is worth the time if the aim is the improvement of the quality and/or accuracy of written composition" (p. 6).
Both sides of this issue have valid arguments, so what has happened in the past few years to tilt the scales back toward a more traditional approach?

Falling resolutely on the side of the pro-grammarians since the turn of the new millennium, university admissions officials across the country have perceived the lack of student achievement in grammar as an alarming problem. Since the early 1960s, verbal SAT scores have been steadily dropping and continue to remain low. The greatest drop occurred between 1963 and 1979 when the average verbal score fell from 458 to the low 420s. Universities are also quite dismayed that one third of college freshmen arrive requiring remedial coursework in writing (Mulroy, 2003; Hutchinson et al, 2002).

However, schools are not entirely to blame for the lack of grammar and writing skills acquired by today's youth. The public, the business world, and the universities all recognize the abuse of the language perpetrated by television and media and its influence on students' usage (Hutchinson et al, 2002).

In addition to these two prevailing schools of thought on the subject, there exist some middle of the road approaches. One is the group of educators who feel that grammar instruction through the use of computers is
an effective approach to improving student writing. These teachers feel that compositions created at school on computers improve the length of compositions, not only in the number of sentences per composition, but also in the number of words per sentence. In addition, they argue that revision is better because students "continuously revise and edit" at all stages of the writing process (Smith, 2003).

A second middle of the road approach, and by far a more pronounced one, is the group of teachers who advocate for the direct instruction of grammar in the context of teaching writing. It was the work of Constance Weaver, Professor of English at Western Michigan University, that pushed this group's ideas into the mainstream. Her message was that grammar should not be abandoned altogether but should be taught with "guidance and understanding" concentrating on the areas of grammar "most relevant to writing" (Martinsen, 2000). As mentioned by Martinsen (2000), Leila Christenbury, former editor of English Journal, categorized the opinions of the middle ground advocates. She listed their four common categories: grammar cannot be taught effectively in discrete, unconnected units; grammar cannot be taught effectively in massive doses; grammar cannot be taught divorced from
student writing; and grammar cannot be taught effectively if students see no real need for it and if teachers cannot persuade them to see a need.

Grammar and Writing: What Can Be Done?

State mandated graduation exams, state mandated standards tests, the SAT test, and the ACT test all evaluate grammar and writing. If grammar doesn’t help improve writing, why is it tested, and how can teachers be expected to improve student writing if they have to take valuable time out to teach grammar? This dilemma faces secondary educators today.

A report released by the ACT shortly after the turn of the millennium reported that college professors found grammar to be the most important skill for incoming freshmen (Baron, 2003). Because of this, the ACT followed the SAT’s lead and added grammar and a writing section to its test.

With the expectation clear that the states and the federal government desired to see an increase in student grammar knowledge, educators have had no choice but to find some method to teach grammar and at the same time improve student writing. The problem with the current traditional approach to teaching grammar -- self-contained
grammar lessons embedded in standards-based language arts anthologies -- is that they make the grammar seem too simple. These approaches presume that students can learn complex concepts in one or two short lessons and then move on. They are out of context, and the sentences have no relevance to the students (Sams, 2003). These approaches need to be replaced with one that is more relevant to and connected with students' own writing, not simply exercises in obeying rules. As stated by Hutchinson, "During the past fifty years, the way we teach other subjects has changed considerably, yet we teach grammar the same way it has always been taught" (Hutchinson, et al., 2002, p.33).

The critics of educators who teach product-based writing (e.g. those who let the students write without grammatical correction and expect the students will clean it up themselves in the editing and revision stages) contend that students can't do their own editing if they don't recognize mistakes they make in their own writing. Therefore, grammar instruction should be used as a "tool for writing improvement, not as a subject in itself" (Roberts, & Boggase, 1992, p. 4).

In spite of all the negative findings, there is one category of traditional grammar instruction that does seem to help improve student writing. Teaching sentence
combining exercises produces positive results in student writing. The findings of Abrahamson (1977); Hillocks (1986); Mellon (1969); and O'Hare (1973) all deal with this issue. The results conclude that since these exercises are more closely related to the process of writing, the skills transfer more readily (Hudson, 2001). Grammar exercises that teach by developing the concept of sentence construction through analyzing the relationships of additional thoughts and information have proven to be effective in improving writing (Sams, 2003).

What about the connection between written English and spoken English? If, as Noam Chomsky hypothesized, we are hardwired to learn the essential components of a language naturally as children, should these hardwired lessons not transfer naturally to our writing? In support of this, neurological research shows an overlap in the brain between speech and writing. Therefore, another approach to improving student writing might be to teach grammar that emphasizes the similarity between speech and writing (Giordano, 1983).

The focus will return now to the most promising of the middle of the road approaches, the "teach grammar in the context of writing" group. In her article Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing (1996), Weaver
identified five main areas of grammar to teach while engaged in writing activities: the concepts of subject, verb, sentence, clauses, phrases, and related concepts for editing; style through sentence combining and sentence generating; sentence sense and style through the manipulation of syntactic elements; the power of dialect and the dialect of power; punctuation and mechanics for convention, clarity, and style. Although most of these concepts are covered in traditional grammar texts, they are not retained and transferred to student writing. By teaching these concepts using a students' own writing, they will own it more and it will be retained better (Weaver, 1996).

Additionally, in her article To Grammar or Not To Grammar; That Is Not the Question! (2001) Weaver says teachers should strive to reduce a sentence with supporting details down to "an appositive, a participial phrase, or an absolute" for students (p. 17). Teachers can then teach students how to add supporting details, which enables them to create content. How and where students add these supporting details creates a distinctive style and voice to a student's writing.

In his textbook Sentence Sense (1991), Anthony D. Hunter, former professor at the State University of New
York at the College of Technology, Delhi, New York, advocates an approach to teaching grammar that encourages students to "experience how the structure of a sentence influences its meaning" (p. vii). Although his approach deals with grammar, it "discard[s] the inexact definitions in current use" and replaces them with strategies that are "easy, familiar, and fun" (p. vii). For instance, Hunter fills his text with "truths" instead of rules. Instead of teaching helping verbs and where they occur in a sentence, Hunter calls helping verbs "movable starters," and shows how they can be moved in a sentence to create a question if placed at the beginning of a sentence (pp. 128-129).

According to Hunter (1991), changes to the traditional grammatical presentation such as these seem to produce positive results.

By far the most influential work consulted for this particular research study was that of Rei Noguchi of California State University, Northridge, and his book Grammar and the Teaching of Writing: Limits and Possibilities (1991). Noguchi analyzed the problem associated with grammar and writing by breaking it down into two essential questions: does grammar not improve writing because students and/or teachers lack interest in learning grammar, for which nothing can be done; or is it
because of the way grammar has been taught, for which something can be done? He concluded the latter to be true, and he proposed a method for teaching grammar that focuses on improving areas of writing.

According to Noguchi, the three main components of any student writing are content, organization, and style. Grammar, he concludes, cannot help in the area of content; the cognitive ideas and information generated by a student are completely separate from grammar. Grammar focuses on structure, not meaning. Grammar also cannot help in the area of organization. Although grammar is an essential element of organization on the sentence level, it has nothing to do with the organization of sentences within a paragraph or the organization of paragraphs within an essay. It is in the area of style, he writes, where grammar can help improve student writing, as grammar and style both deal with form. Grammar and style can both be studied and manipulated at the sentence level and thus can contribute to the overall style of the essay as a whole. (Noguchi, 1991).

This, according to Noguchi, is all that grammar can do to improve writing. Grammar has failed to improve writing in the past because people expected it to be able to do too much. He admits that style may not be as
important to writing teachers as content and organization, but it is still an important aspect of writing.

To discover which areas of style could benefit from grammar instruction, Noguchi referred to two studies which examined the most common sentence-level style errors and which of these errors were viewed as most undesirable by employers in the business world. The first study, conducted by Connors and Lunsford (1988), was a comprehensive study of 3,000 graded college essays collected from teachers across the United States. Connors and Lunsford ranked the most frequently occurring formal and mechanical errors. Noguchi notes that in the results of the study "the number of errors related directly or indirectly to sentence or clause boundaries is strikingly high" (p.21). Sentence boundary errors here refer to sentence fragments and run-on sentences, including comma splices. He thus concludes that "the category 'sentence' (or 'independent clause') is one of the basic concepts, if not the basic concept, in not only grammar instruction but, more significantly, in remedying an assortment of stylistic errors" (Noguchi, 1991, p. 22).

Noguchi references the second study to complement the Connors - Lunsford study. Hairston (1981) conducted an attitudinal survey of professional managers and employers
in the business world on common writing errors, and Noguchi cites her results in order to "provide a clearer picture of what people in the business world consider 'serious' errors" (p. 24). The results of the study indicate that the professionals surveyed are "highly aware of and often react strongly to" certain kinds of formal and usage errors (p. 24). Noguchi notes that the most egregious errors were "status marking errors, those errors which indicate a writer's social status, such as the use of brung rather than brought, has went rather than has gone, the use of double negatives, and the use of objective-case pronouns as subjects" (p. 24). Ranked second just below the status marking errors was a group of "very serious" mechanical errors including sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and lack of subject-verb agreement (Noguchi, 1991, p. 26).

Based on the results of these two studies, Noguchi concludes and recommends that teachers should focus on the following areas of grammar to improve student writing: the sentence (or independent clause), subjects, verbs, and modifiers.
Summary

It seems clear from the literature reviewed in this chapter that teachers need to find a way to successfully incorporate grammar instruction that has a beneficial effect on student writing. In the school environment of the twenty-first century, which is grammar-intensive, writing-based, and assessment test driven, teachers need to connect grammar instruction to student writing. The assumption that individual grammar lessons will magically transfer to a student's writing is incorrect. The grammar that instructors teach must deal with the syntax of sentences at the sentence level. When students can construct sentences with a variety of modifiers and levels of complexity, then writing improvement will take place. While it is true that state mandated graduation and standards tests require knowledge of compartmentalized grammatical information, to go beyond that level of knowledge should be the goal of all language arts teachers. We can teach what we know will be on the test, but if we are to improve students' writing so they can be successful in the world of college and beyond, we must teach them what grammar can do to make their writing more mature and more marketable in the world at large.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Three documents the steps used in developing this project. Specifically, this chapter will provide a description of the district, school, and classroom environments involved in the project, a description of the methods and materials used to conduct the study, and a description of the non-traditional grammar materials and essay evaluations.

In most high school Language Arts classrooms across the United States today, grammar, if it is taught at all, is usually taught as a discrete unit focusing on one grammatical concept. Typically, this grammatical concept is taught in conjunction with a work of literature. For example, students might read a short story in the literature anthology. Immediately following the story, there typically would be found some review questions and a short grammar selection. This grammar selection would usually focus on one grammatical concept, for example, what a direct object is in a sentence. The textbook would then provide the definition of a direct object and an example sentence or two from the short story with the
direct object italicized for emphasis. Students would then be given 4 or 5 sentences from the story and asked to identify the direct object in those sentences. This is the traditional approach to teaching grammar. It has no connection to a student’s own writing.

The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching grammar to high school Language Arts students in a manner different than that described above — teaching grammar in a way that targeted important areas of student writing — would improve the students’ writing in those targeted areas.

Population Served

This research study was conducted using students from two eleventh grade English/Language Arts classrooms in a semi-rural school district in southern California. The school district at the time of the study had a total enrollment of approximately 28,000 students. The ethnic makeup of the district was primarily Latino (62%); the next largest ethnic group was Caucasian (28%); none of the remaining ethnic groups represented more than 2% of the district’s population.
The district served an area whose primary economic sources were tourism and agriculture. However, the area was in the midst of a tremendous building frenzy, and the population was growing rapidly, so other areas of economic enterprise, especially in the service industries, were quickly becoming an important source of revenue and employment for the district's service area.

The research study was conducted at one of the district's three comprehensive high schools. The particular high school where the research study was conducted was the oldest of the three and located in the center of the largest city served by the district. The city had a population of approximately 70,000 residents at the time of the study. The high school's attendance boundaries encompassed the entire city and a small community just to its north. The city had a median household income of approximately $33,000 and was predominantly a working class, "blue collar" city. At about 78%, the city's ethnic makeup was predominantly Latino.

The high school itself was a comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12. It was established in 1958, and during the 2005-2006 school year when the study was conducted, it served an area of just under 20 square miles.
and approximately 2700 students. Like the city it served, this high school had an ethnic makeup that was primarily Latino (92%), with Caucasian being the next largest group at 6%. Other ethnic groups comprised about 2%.

The specific students from this high school involved in the study were enrolled in two junior English honors classes. Both of the classes had 26 students. Overall, there were 32 girls (61.5%) and 20 boys (38.5%) participating in the research study.

Since teaching grammar and responding to essay prompts was a regular part of these English/Language Arts classes, there was no problem recruiting the students for the study. The study was explained to the students, and they were able to ask questions about it. When this discussion ended, the students were given a letter of informed consent (See Appendix A). This was then read and discussed. The letter outlined the study in detail and provided students with a method for opting out if they so chose. The students were asked to take the letter home so that a parent/guardian could read and sign it also. The students took the letters home, and within one week, all 51 letters were returned signed by both a parent/guardian and the student. No student or parent/guardian requested that the student be left out of the study.
The study was designed to determine if teaching grammar in a non-traditional way, in a way that focused on improving grammar directly related to students' most common writing errors - sentence fragments and run-on sentences - would help students make fewer of these errors in their writing at the end of the study. In addition, the non-traditional grammar instruction also focused on the creation of complex sentences in writing, which is desirable. So, a second aspect of the study was to see if there was an increase in the students' production of complex sentences in their writing.

Data Collection

The study involved giving all 52 students an essay to write at the beginning of the study. No specific instructions regarding their writing were given to the students before they wrote the essay. For example, they were not told to avoid sentence fragments and run-ons as they wrote. The only instructions given to the students were those printed on the essay prompt sheet (See Appendix B).

Prior to beginning the study with the students, during an English department faculty meeting at the
school, the research study was described to the English teachers. After the explanation, the teachers were asked if any among them would be willing to volunteer to evaluate some of the student essays. Of the fifteen teachers in the English department, nine volunteered to be evaluators for the study.

Once the students had written the first essay, which would be used as a baseline, the students' names were cut off their essay papers and replaced with an alpha/numeric code for purposes of anonymity and confidentiality. This was done by the primary researcher, and he was the only person who knew which student received which code. This information was kept in a password-protected file on his home computer. No one else had access to the file, and none of the essay evaluators knew which student's essay they were evaluating.

Once the names were removed and the codes put on the 51 essays completed at the beginning of the study (one student was absent and never completed the assignment), the essays were randomly distributed among the nine teacher evaluators. For each essay received, the evaluators were given an evaluation grid where they could put a hash mark for every sentence fragment, run-on
sentence, or complex sentence found in the essay (See Appendix C).

Over the course of the next four weeks, the students in one class received traditional grammar instruction, either grammar lessons contained within the literature anthology or lessons taught separately from a grammar text or from teacher-prepared handouts. These traditional grammar lessons included work with sentence fragments, run-on sentences, misplaced modifiers, sentence combining, and active/passive voice.

While the first class described above was receiving traditional grammar instruction, the other class received non-traditional grammar instruction. Employing the findings of Noguchi (1991) and Hunter (1991), this class was given four lessons (one per week) working with sentence boundary errors (sentence fragments and run-on sentences). Each week the students were shown sentences or sentence parts (fragments) on the board. They were then instructed in how to create from these sentences or sentence parts a Tag sentence and a Yes-No question. Developed primarily by Noguchi but also used by Hunter, Tag sentences and Yes-No questions can only be created when working with a complete sentence. They can not be
created when working with a sentence fragment or a run-on sentence.

For instance, given the sentence *The ball was placed on the line of scrimmage by the referee*, the students attempted to create a tag sentence, as follows:

**Tag Sentence:** *The ball was placed on the line of scrimmage by the referee, wasn't it?*

The tag "*wasn't it*" at the end of the sentence required of students the knowledge to relate what was done in the sentence and by whom or what. The tag also required that students choose the correct pronoun (*it*) to replace the subject (*ball*) and also demonstrated the students' ability to correctly locate the subject of the sentence (*ball*).

Using the same example sentence, the students then attempted to create a Yes-No question, as follows:

**Yes-No Question:** *Was the ball placed at the line of scrimmage by the referee?*

Creating a Yes-No question required that the students correctly identify the helping verb in the sentence and move it directly in front of the subject in the sentence.

Both of these techniques required that students correctly manipulate the two essentials of a complete sentence - the subject and the verb. Therefore, if a fragment was presented to them, they could not create
either a Tag sentence or a Yes-No question since fragments, by definition, are missing either a subject, or a verb, or both. For example, using part of the example sentence as a fragment:

Sentence Fragment: The ball on the line of scrimmage.

What could possibly be written as a tag for this sentence? Nothing; there is no verb to manipulate.

The Tag sentences and Yes-No questions also helped students recognize and eliminate run-on sentences. An example sentence might be:

Run-On Sentence: The ball was placed on the line of scrimmage by the referee, the Raiders were going for a first down.

As there are two things going on in this sentence, it was impossible to create ONE tag to put at the end of the sentence. Each complete thought in the sentence required its own tag.

The ball was placed on the line of scrimmage by the referee, wasn’t it?

The Raiders were going for a first down, weren’t they?

The same was true for the Yes-No question; it would be impossible to place one helping verb in front of the
first subject in this sentence and have it make sense. If they had tried, the students would have come up with:

*Was the ball placed on the line of scrimmage by the referee, the Raiders were going for a first down?*

By attempting to create these Tag sentences and Yes-No questions and failing, students realized they were working with a run-on sentence that was actually two sentences joined improperly.

During the four week research period, the students in the experimental group were given four separate non-traditional grammar lessons dealing with the creation of Tag sentences and Yes-No questions. During the first week, the students were given a worksheet containing all complete sentences so they could get used to and familiarize themselves with the concept of creating these sentences and questions (See Appendix D). No fragments or run-on sentences were introduced to present problems for the students. A day or two later, the teacher and class went over the sentences and discussed the correct formation of Tag sentences and Yes-No questions for the sentences included in the exercise. During the second week, after an illustration on the board by the instructor of the futility of attempting to create Tag sentences and Yes-No questions with sentence fragments, students were
given a worksheet containing a mixture of complete sentences and sentence fragments (See Appendix E). Again, a day or two later, the sheet and correct answers were reviewed/discussed as a class. During the third week, after an illustration on the board by the instructor of the futility of attempting to create Tag sentences and Yes-No questions with run-on sentences, students were given a worksheet containing a mixture of complete sentences and run-on sentences (See Appendix F). A day or two later, the correct responses were given and discussed as a class. Finally, during the fourth week, students were given a culminating worksheet that contained a mixture of complete sentences, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences (See Appendix G). A day or two later, the correct responses for these sentences were given and discussed also.

After four weeks of working with Tag sentences and Yes-No questions, the assumption was that students would be able to recognize with more precision sentence fragment and run-on sentence errors in their own writing.

To determine whether this was the case or not, at the conclusion of the four week period, the 50 students (one student checked out of school during the four week study period) were given the exact same writing prompt
they received at the beginning of the study (see Appendix B). The students were again given the entire class period to respond to the essay prompt. Also exactly the same were the instructions. No specific instructions regarding their writing were given to the students before they wrote the essay. For example, they were not told to avoid sentence fragments and run-ons as they wrote. The only instructions given to the students were those printed on the essay prompt sheet.

After the students finished writing the essay at the conclusion of the four week research period, the exact same procedures used after the introductory essay were followed to evaluate the results. The names were removed from the essays and replaced with an alpha/numeric code; the coded essays were then distributed among the nine volunteer evaluators; the evaluators indicated the number of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences on a grid; and the essays and grids were returned to the researcher.

Data Analysis

To determine the effectiveness of the study, data regarding the frequency with which students wrote sentence
fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences was obtained from the reader grids completed by the evaluators and submitted to the researcher. Using the grids, the total frequency of these three types of sentence constructs was determined for the essays written at the beginning of the study. This same procedure was followed again using the reader grids from the students’ essays written at the completion of the study. The differences, if any, between the two findings determined the effectiveness of the non-traditional grammar instruction.

Summary

This quantitative research study was designed to assess the improvements, if any, to one group of students’ writing after an exposure to non-traditional grammar instruction.

The study was conducted during the final month of a traditional public school calendar year at a comprehensive high school in southern California. The community served by the school was primarily working class with tourism and agriculture being the major industries. The study involved two separate junior level honors English classes. The two classes were quite similar in size and the overall ratio
of female to male students was approximately 62%/38% respectively.

Once informed consent was obtained from all students, the study began with the students writing an essay from a prompt provided by the researcher. These essays were collected, the student names were removed and replaced with a code, and then the essays were given to English teacher volunteers at the same school to be evaluated. Evaluation involved tabulating the number of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences found in each essay.

During the next four weeks, one of the two classes received grammar instruction in a non-traditional form that focused on grammatical concepts directly related to sentence boundary errors (i.e. sentence fragments and run-on sentences). The other class received traditional grammar instruction in these same basic areas. At the conclusion of the study, students in both classes were again asked to write an essay responding to the same prompt provided at the beginning of the study.

This second group of student essays was then collected, codified, and evaluated by the same group of volunteer teacher evaluators in the exact same manner that they evaluated the first group of essays.
The differences between the initial essays and the concluding essays in the areas of sentence boundary errors provided the results for the study and will be discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This project sought to determine whether teaching grammar in a non-traditional way would help improve student writing. The findings for this project include an examination of the number of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences produced by 11th grade students in two essays written for this study.

The students participating in this project wrote an essay in response to a writing prompt at the beginning of the study. This group of students was divided into two classes. The first received four weeks of traditional grammar instruction and the second received four weeks of non-traditional grammar instruction. Both groups then wrote another essay using the same writing prompt at the completion of the study. A comparison of the frequency with which the students created sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences from the beginning essay to the concluding essay was examined. The intent was to compare the difference in performance between the two groups.
An analysis of the findings will fall into three areas: the results of the initial essay, the results of the final essay, and the differences, if any, between the two.

Presentation of the Findings

The essay writing prompt did not require the students to write a certain number of pages, paragraphs, or sentences (See Appendix B). However, a typical student paper ran about a page to a page and a half. Furthermore, since this study was concerned only with three types of sentence constructs (sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences), not all sentences written by the students were tallied on the evaluation grids. For instance, simple sentences and compound sentences written by students were not tabulated.

The study determined the total number of these three sentence constructs created by each class as a whole for each of the two essays. The tables and statistics in this chapter reflect raw numbers.

The results for the initial essay will be discussed in this section. The initial essay was presented to both classes of students shortly after all the informed consent
forms were collected. At the time of the initial essay's presentation, both classes had received identical traditional grammar lessons during the year, and so were on an equal footing in that area.

Referring to table 1 below, it is obvious that period 3 created more of all three types of sentence constructs. This class created nearly three times as many sentence fragments as period 5 and produced more than twice as many run-on sentences. For both classes, there were a greater number of complex sentences created than either sentence fragments or run-on sentences, and this is a good thing as complex sentences are desirable in student writing.

Table 1
Initial Essay Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Sentence Fragments</th>
<th>Run-On Sentences</th>
<th>Complex Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 3 Traditional Grammar</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5 Non-Traditional Grammar</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following this initial essay, over the next four weeks, students received four grammar instruction lessons touching on sentence boundary errors (sentence fragments and run-on sentences). These lessons also involved sentence combining exercises to help develop complex sentences. Period 3 received these grammar lessons in the traditional manner, while period 5 received them in a non-traditional way. The non-traditional approach used for period 5 involved identifying and correcting sentence fragments and run-on sentences using Tag sentences and Yes-No questions developed through the research of Noguchi (1991).

The students in period 3, who received the traditional grammar instruction, were given one individual grammar lesson per week. Each lesson consisted of grammar instruction from the teacher on one specific grammatical component followed by example sentences for illustration and then practice sentences for the students to complete. The practice sentences were reviewed and discussed during the same class period after the students had completed the work or the following day if the work was not finished in class.

The students in period 5, who received the non-traditional grammar instruction, also received one grammar
lesson per week, but each lesson had two parts. Early in
the week, the students were instructed on how to use the
concept of Tag sentences and Yes-No questions to recognize
and correct sentence boundary errors. They were then given
a worksheet containing practice sentences so they could
practice this concept. Later in the week, the teacher and
class went over the sentences and discussed the correct
formation of Tag sentences and Yes-No questions for the
sentences included in the exercise. This process was
repeated four times over the four week period.

At the conclusion of the four week period, both
classes were again requested to write an essay responding
to the same prompt they wrote on at the beginning of the
study.

Data from the concluding essay are shown in Table 2
below.

Table 2
Concluding Essay Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Sentence Fragments</th>
<th>Run-On Sentences</th>
<th>Complex Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Period 3 Traditional Grammar</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period 5 Non-Traditional Grammar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results indicate that teaching students non-traditional grammar did not appear to improve their ability to write fewer sentence fragments and run-on sentences in any significant way over the students who received traditional grammar instruction; in fact, the students who received the traditional grammar instruction showed improvement in both of these areas.

The changes experienced by both class periods are shown in tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3.

*Change for Period Three*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sentence Fragments</th>
<th>Run-On Sentences</th>
<th>Complex Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Essay</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Essay</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>-21 (66%)</td>
<td>-5 (6.5%)</td>
<td>-18 (13%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Change for Period Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sentence Fragments</th>
<th>Run-On Sentences</th>
<th>Complex Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning Essay</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concluding Essay</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change</strong></td>
<td>-1 (1%)</td>
<td>+10 (28.5%)</td>
<td>+12 (12%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the area of sentence fragments generated by the students, the data illustrate that the students receiving the non-traditional grammar instruction (period 5) showed only a very small improvement - a decrease from 11 to 10. In contrast, the class receiving the traditional grammar instruction (period 3) showed a significant improvement - a decrease from 32 to 11.

In the area of run-on sentences generated by the students, the data illustrate that the students in the non-traditional classroom actually produced significantly more run-on sentences at the end of the study than they had at the beginning of it - an increase from 35 to 45 run-on sentences. In contrast, the students receiving the
traditional grammar experienced a decrease in the number of run-on sentences created - from 76 down to 71.

The third and final area of analysis, the creation of complex sentences, was the only portion of the data that supported the supposition that teaching students grammar in a non-traditional form might improve their writing. The students in period 5 who received the non-traditional grammar instruction experienced an increase in the creation of complex sentences in their writing - from 102 up to 114. In contrast, the students in period 3 who received the traditional grammar instruction experienced a decrease from 136 to 118.

Discussion of the Findings

It seems clear from the data collected that teaching non-traditional grammar, at least the way it was approached in this particular study, does not significantly improve student writing. In fact, the data illustrate that the non-traditional grammar instruction actually led to an increase in the number of sentence fragments and run-on sentences written by students.

The findings did reveal, however, that non-traditional grammar instruction did lead to a small
increase in the creation of desirable complex sentences in the students' writing.

Summary

This research study, which involved the students of two southern California high school junior honors English classes, was conducted over a four week period at the end of a traditional public school year. The study involved the students working with grammar and required nothing on their part that was outside the realm of normal, daily work in their English classroom.

The study involved teaching grammar differently to each of the two classes involved in the study. One class received traditional grammar instruction, while the other received non-traditional grammar instruction. The students wrote two essays, one at the beginning of the study and one at the conclusion of the four week study period. These essays were used to determine the improvement, if any, in the frequency of the creation of sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences in the students' writing. The study was designed to assess whether the students who were given non-traditional grammar instruction would experience a decrease in the
number of sentence fragments and run-on sentences in their writing and an increase in the number of complex sentences compared with the students who received traditional grammar instruction.

The findings of the study did not support the contention that non-traditional grammar instruction would produce these results in the students' writing. The class that received the non-traditional grammar instruction did not experience a significant decrease in the creation of sentence fragments; the decrease was less than one percent. The findings also revealed that the non-traditional class did not experience a decrease but instead a rather significant increase in the creation of run-on sentences. The one area of study which the findings did support was in the creation of complex sentences. The class receiving the non-traditional grammar instruction experienced an increase in the formation of these sentences.

Significantly, the findings revealed that the student writing in the class receiving the traditional grammar instruction improved more than the student writing in the non-traditional class. The traditional class experienced a significant decrease in the formation of sentence fragments in their writing. They also experienced a slight
decrease in the number of run-on sentences. However, this group experienced a decrease in the formation of complex sentences in their writing.

Since the comparisons developed in this study were never tested statistically, it is difficult to state with confidence that one method of teaching grammar was better or worse than the other. However, based on the results of this particular study, the results strongly suggested that traditional instruction was more effective for the group that received that type of instruction than non-traditional grammar instruction was for the group that received it. Overall, non-traditional grammar instruction appeared to have the most impact in the improvement of complex sentence formation in students' writing and actually had a negative effect on sentence boundary errors (sentence fragments and run-on sentences)
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Included in Chapter Five is a presentation of the conclusions gleaned as a result of completing the project. In addition, the conclusions and recommendations extracted from the project are presented.

At the conclusion of the four week research study period, the results of the students' final essays were compared to the students' initial essays. The essay evaluators tallied on the evaluation grid for each essay every time a student wrote a sentence fragment, a run-on sentence, or a complex sentence. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect on student writing, if any, of teaching grammar in a non-traditional way to one class and teaching grammar in a traditional way to the other class.

As will be noted shortly in the conclusions section of this chapter, the results were mixed as far as the teaching of grammar in a non-traditional format was concerned. It produced a small benefit in one area and was of little benefit in the other two areas of study.
Conclusions

The conclusions extracted from the project are described in detail in this section.

The results from the initial essay showed that the students in the two separate classes did not start out with similar patterns of sentence errors. For example, the total number of sentence fragments produced by one class was not similar to the number produced by the other class. The following section will provide a detailed analysis of how each class performed on the initial essay in each of the three areas of analysis.

- Period 5 started out writing significantly fewer (about a third as many) sentence fragments than period 3.
- Period 5 wrote roughly half as many run-on sentences at the beginning of the study as period 3 did.
- Period 5 wrote approximately 25% fewer complex sentences than period 5 did.

After the four weeks of the study, the students wrote their concluding essay. The results of the concluding essay compared to the initial essay will be compared and discussed below.

Period 5, the class that received the non-traditional grammar instruction during the study, remained about the
same in the number of sentence fragments they wrote. In the initial essay the class as a whole wrote 11 sentence fragments, in the concluding essay they wrote 10. There was essentially no improvement.

Period 5 wrote about 33% more run-on sentences in the concluding essay than they did in the initial essay. In the initial essay the class as a whole wrote 35 run-on sentences, in the concluding essay they wrote 45.

Period 5 wrote approximately 10% more complex sentences in the concluding essay than they did in the initial essay. In the initial essay the class as a whole wrote 102 complex sentences, in the concluding essay they wrote 114.

An examination of these results revealed that the teaching of grammar in a non-traditional way to this group of students did not lead to a significant decrease in the number of sentence boundary errors made by the students in their essays. There was virtually no change in the number of sentence fragments written, and the number of run-on sentences written actually increased significantly. In the area of complex sentence creation, however, the results did show that non-traditional grammar instruction did produce a small, yet desirable, increase in the number of complex sentences written by the students.
The next section will examine the results achieved for period 3, the class that received the traditional grammar instruction. This class wrote about 2/3 fewer sentence fragments in the concluding essay than they did at the beginning. In the initial essay the class as a whole wrote 32 sentence fragments, in the concluding essay they wrote 11. This was a significant improvement.

Period 3 experienced a slight decrease in the number of run-on sentences created in the concluding essay than they did at the beginning. In the initial essay the class as a whole wrote 76 run-on sentences, in the concluding essay they wrote 71.

Period 3 experienced a decrease in the number of complex sentences created in the concluding essay than they did at the beginning. In the initial essay the class as a whole wrote 136 complex sentences, in the concluding essay they wrote 118.

An examination of these results revealed that the teaching of grammar in the traditional way to this group of students did lead to a decrease in the number of sentence boundary errors made by the students in their essays. There was an impressive decrease in the number of sentence fragments written by this group, and a modest decrease in the number of run-on sentences they produced.
In the area of complex sentence creation, however, the results did not show that traditional grammar instruction produced a desirable increase in the number of complex sentences written by the students. This type of grammar instruction instead led to a decrease in the production of complex sentences for this group.

The next section will examine each of the three areas of sentence constructs studied in the research (sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences) and analyze the effect of traditional and non-traditional grammar instruction in each area.

The results for this study showed that non-traditional grammar instruction did not decrease the number of sentence fragments written by the students, while traditional grammar instruction decreased them significantly.

The results for this study showed that non-traditional grammar instruction led to a significant increase in the number of run-on sentences, while traditional grammar instruction led to a slight decrease.

The results for this study showed that non-traditional grammar instruction did lead to a small, yet desirable, increase in the number of complex sentences written by the students, while traditional grammar
instruction resulted in an undesirable decrease in their production.

Recommendations

Teaching grammar in a non-traditional way as a means of improving student writing is an area of study which deserves further attention. There were several variables in this particular study which might have skewed the effectiveness of the non-traditional grammar instruction's effect on the students' writing. These variables will be discussed individually below.

One variable to consider is the time of year this study was conducted. This study was implemented during the last month of a traditional school year. At the end of the year, students are eager for school to end and for their summer vacation to begin. They traditionally do not try their hardest or do their best work at the end of the year. Secondly, the study began immediately after the conclusion of almost a month's worth of mandated testing. The students had just completed California's standards tests in several subjects, they had taken tests designed for high school juniors by the California State University system in the areas of language arts and math to gauge
their readiness for college, many of them had just retaken the California High School Exit Exam in language arts or math or both, and nearly all of them had just taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test. With the exception of the California State Standards test, all of these exams involved writing a timed essay. It is quite possible that the students were fatigued and their essay writing for the research study was not the best they could have produced.

A second variable to consider would be the evaluation of the student essays. Although the essays were all evaluated by professional Language Arts educators, the time of year the study was conducted and the differences in the specific knowledge of individual evaluators in the area of sentence boundary errors might have skewed the results. The end of the year may have been a bad time to ask teachers to evaluate several essays. Teachers were very busy at the time finishing up their material before the year ended, determining grades, and creating final exams. Even though all attempts were made to make the evaluations as simple for the teachers as possible, they may not have been able to give each essay the time and concentration necessary. This was evident in the large number of essays that weren’t evaluated and returned until the very last day of school and only after several
reminders from the primary researcher. In addition, it is doubtful that all the evaluators possessed equal skill in their ability to identify the sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and complex sentences in the essays.

A third variable worthy of consideration would be the length of time the research involved. The study only lasted four weeks, and it only involved four non-traditional grammar lessons. This relatively short time period was probably not sufficient to produce a meaningful improvement in student writing.

A fourth variable would be that there was no transition from the sentence boundary work done in the non-traditional grammar lessons to the sentence boundary errors made in the students' own essay writing. In spite of its non-traditional content and approach, the lessons were still out of context of the students' writing.

To address these variables in future studies, the recommendations for improvement will follow.

To eliminate the time of year and duration of the study problems, it would be better to conduct this study earlier in the school year and have the study last an entire semester. The best time to do this would be at the beginning of the year when the students and teachers are newly returned from break and well-rested.
To make sure all the essay evaluations are done with equal skill, it might make sense to conduct a couple practice sessions with the evaluators prior to their receiving the student essays. In these sessions, sample essays would be examined and examples of exactly what the study considered a sentence fragment, a run-on sentence, and a complex sentence to be would be clarified.

Finally, to address the issue of non-transference to a student's own writing, it would be beneficial to do individual non-traditional grammar lessons out of context (as was done in this study) for perhaps a month or two. This should be enough time for students to fully grasp the concept of identifying and correcting sentence boundary errors. After this time, teachers should have students work with essays they have written in class. Using the Tag sentence and Yes-No question techniques learned in the earlier lessons, the student could search for sentence fragments and run-on sentences in their own essays and correct them. They could also search for simple sentences which might be combined to create a complex sentence.
Summary

Chapter Five reviewed the conclusions extracted from the project. Lastly, the recommendations derived from the project were presented.

Despite the research findings of Noguchi (1991) and Hunter (1991) which indicated non-traditional grammar instruction could be beneficial to student writing in the areas of sentence boundary errors (sentence fragments and run-on sentences) and complex sentence creation, the results of this particular study did not show this to be the case.

The students involved in the study who received the non-traditional grammar instruction experienced virtually no improvement in sentence fragment errors and created a far greater number of run-on sentence errors in their essay writing. This class did, however, write more complex sentences after receiving the non-traditional grammar instruction.

In contrast, the students involved in this study who received traditional grammar instruction experienced a significant decrease in sentence fragment errors, and a slight decrease in the number of run-on sentence errors in their essay writing. This class, however, did not improve
in the number of complex sentences created in their writing.

The teaching of non-traditional grammar as a means of improving student writing merits further study. However, the limitations and problems identified with this particular study should be avoided, and the recommendations made in this chapter should be implemented.
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT
LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

The research study in which your son/daughter is being asked to participate is designed to investigate the benefit of using an innovative approach to grammar instruction for the express purpose of improving students' writing. This study is being conducted by Mr. Robert Miller under the supervision of Brian Newberry, PhD., professor of the College of Education, Department of Science, Math, and Technology at California State University, San Bernardino.

In this study your son/daughter will be asked to write two in-class essays and to participate in grammar instruction as presented by the teacher. One essay will be assigned at the beginning of the study; the second essay will be assigned at the conclusion of the study. A full class period will be allowed to write each essay. The grammar instruction will be 2 days a week and will last approximately 4 weeks. The essay responses will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher. Names will not be reported with the essay responses, nor will names be on the essays when they are evaluated. All data will be reported in group form only. You may receive the group results of this study upon completion of the Fall Quarter of 2006. Copies of the essay prompts are available from Mr. Rudy Ramirez, Principal of Indio High School for parental review.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary. A student is free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty and his/her essays will not be used. When the task is complete, your son/daughter will receive a debriefing statement describing the study in more detail. In order to ensure the validity of the study, we ask that your son/daughter not discuss this study with others. There are no foreseeable risks involved in this study. Students will not be asked to do anything outside of the normal Language Arts curriculum and teaching practices. The intended benefit is an improvement in students' writing skills.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or would like to receive the results of the study, please feel free to contact Robert Miller at 775-3550 or Professor Brian Newberry, PhD. at (909) 537-7630.
By placing a check mark in the box below, you (the parent/guardian) acknowledge that you have been informed of, and that you understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and that you freely give consent to have your minor child participate. By placing a check mark in the box below, you also acknowledge that the minor child is less than 18 years of age.

Please place a check mark here □

Student Name __________________
Signature____________________

Parent/Guardian Name _________________________
Signature______________________________
APPENDIX B

STUDENT ESSAY WRITING PROMPT
Controversial Issue
Essay Prompt

You may have the full period to complete this essay. Plan on using about a 15-20 minutes to organize your thoughts, create an outline/cluster/list of your evidence, note the positions on both sides of the issue, and outline your compromise/solution. Use the rest of the time to write the essay. Write the essay on a separate paper.

Contemporary life is marked by controversy. Choose a controversial local, national, or global issue with which you are familiar. Then, using appropriate evidence, write an essay that carefully considers the opposing positions on this controversy and proposes a solution or compromise.
APPENDIX C

ESSAY EVALUATION GRID
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence Fragments</th>
<th>Run On Sentences (including comma splices)</th>
<th>Complex Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

WEEK ONE WORKSHEET: COMPLETE SENTENCES
1. Great literature stirs the imagination.

2. In 1945, the United Nations had fifty-one members.

3. Juan should stop talking and open his book.

4. Tom Sawyer made Becky Thatcher jealous by talking to Amy Lawrence.

5. To retaliate, Becky spent recess with Alfred.

6. Becky later pretended not even to notice Tom when he walked by.

7. Tom and Becky continued to be angry with each other for days.

8. As most couples do, they eventually made up.

9. Becky decided to have a picnic.

10. At the picnic, Tom and Becky visited "McDougal's Cave."

11. They explored the cave and played hide-and-seek.
12. Later, they found a little stream of water.

13. Tom played the role of discoverer and followed the stream.

14. Becky thought this was fun and followed Tom.

15. They wound down through the cave this way and that.

16. They crept from cavern to cavern and found a spring-fed pool.

17. In one cavern, the ceiling was completely lined with bats.

18. The bats swarmed down when Tom and Becky entered the cave with their candles.

19. One of them almost snuffed out Becky’s candle with its wings.

20. Soon, the stillness of the cave began to frighten Tom and Becky’s spirits.

21. They realized that they had gone some distance and might not be able to get back.
22. They had, indeed, become lost.

23. There was no way Tom could remember the route he had followed into the cave.

24. After several false starts, their candles burned out.

25. Becky was sure they were certain to die in the pitch-black cave.
APPENDIX E

WEEK TWO WORKSHEET: COMPLETE SENTENCES AND FRAGMENTS
1. Elizabeth Blackwell graduated in 1849 at the head of her class.

2. After the flood, the barn roof lying in the yard next to an oak tree.

3. Mr. Smith is the custodian in our building.

4. The pocketknife I found in the shed had two dull blades.

5. Waiting for her mother to pick her up.

6. Used by the Argentine navy as a training ship.

7. The new ruler is a woman with much experience in the area of government.

8. At the edge of a grove of pine trees.

9. Her latest book, an anthology of love poetry, received rave reviews.

10. In most people's minds, the month of September is associated with the starting of school.
11. To go with Gail to the game at West Point next Saturday.

12. The heavy fog, driving rain, and cutting winds made flying the small plane quite difficult.

13. Professor Drake, who had been head of the science department for over twenty years, died yesterday.

14. A wristwatch for Jean and a ring for me, please.

15. High school graduates are better educated today than ever before.

16. Helen will either go to Berkeley or Cal State Long Beach next year after graduation.

17. And is now coaching a college basketball team in South Carolina.

18. The Bay Challenge Cup represents the highest achievement in the world of sailing.

19. Without several aggressive competitors, no business can ever hope to maintain constant innovation.
20. The principle that government employees shall not strike has recently been challenged in many courts.

21. I have to travel all the way across town to the airport to meet my sister's plane.

22. Carl, who is a fairly accomplished pianist, has only had three years of formal lessons.

23. We waited at the corner for the bus for over three hours.

24. Because of the severe drought and the potatoes rotting in the field.

25. The Empire State Building is a Depression-era art-deco masterpiece.

26. The final chapters of this book dealing with incorporating technology into the workplace.
APPENDIX F

WEEK THREE WORKSHEET: COMPLETE SENTENCES AND RUN-ONS
1. Jill carefully opened the box she screamed when she saw the diamond ring.

2. Mitchell called me today he is coming for a visit next week.

3. Ira and Joan had a huge argument they broke off their engagement.

4. Rita is eager to leave for vacation she is leaving tomorrow.

5. In the middle of the movie, Eva felt ill, she left the theater.

6. Bob was happy he worked hard, he got an A.
7. Sally and I were so excited, we found good jobs!

8. Give me the name of that book, I want to check it out at the library.

9. Danny nervously entered the bustling airport, it was a hub of activity because of the holiday.

10. Danny checked his watch, his flight was scheduled to leave in less than an hour.

11. After asking for directions, he scrambled down a long hallway, when he reached the gate, he discovered the flight was delayed.

12. Ms. Philo has been promoted, Mr. Alan will remain in his present position.

13. The meeting has been cancelled, it is rescheduled for Monday.
14. The bill was sent more than a month ago, your payment is overdue.

15. The training seminar will be held in October everyone is required to attend.
APPENDIX G

WEEK FOUR WORKSHEET: COMPLETE SENTENCES, FRAGMENTS, AND RUN-ONS
1. Your next door neighbor is going to sell his car for $400.

2. Nancy, who couldn't wait, ripped open the cellophane wrapper on the box.

3. For the past six months, Linda and Sue have run five miles every day.

4. Ed and his cousin will buy two tickets each.

5. You weren't in class for a whole month.

6. Your next door neighbor is going to sell his car for $400 he should sell it for $800.

7. Nancy, who couldn't wait, ripped open the cellophane wrapper on the box the icing of the cake came off with it.

8. For the past six months, Linda and Sue have run five miles every day, they really want to win the city championship badly.
8. Ed and his cousin will buy two tickets each, Hank will buy six.

9. You weren't in class for a whole month, it isn't fair.

10. The Minnesota Twins won the World Series in 1987, then the Los Angeles Dodgers won it in 1988.

11. Bill isn't going to the dance, Mary isn't going to the dance either.

12. The Minnesota Twins won the World Series in 1987, then the Los Angeles Dodgers won it in 1988, now the Oakland Athletics have won it.

13. From the store which sells flashlights and camping equipment.

14. When my mom doesn't answer the phone right away, I worry about her.
15. My gum chewing in class, which I do every day, seems to bother people.


17. Whatever you want to do next week is fine with me.
REFERENCES


