

Hamline University

DigitalCommons@Hamline

---

School of Education and Leadership Student  
Capstone Projects

School of Education and Leadership

---

Fall 2017

## Using The Focus On Form Method To Create A Grammar Resource Book For ELL Teachers

Julia Milne  
*Hamline University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_cp](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Milne, Julia, "Using The Focus On Form Method To Create A Grammar Resource Book For ELL Teachers" (2017). *School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone Projects*. 61.  
[https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse\\_cp/61](https://digitalcommons.hamline.edu/hse_cp/61)

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education and Leadership at DigitalCommons@Hamline. It has been accepted for inclusion in School of Education and Leadership Student Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Hamline. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@hamline.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@hamline.edu).

USING THE FOCUS ON FORM METHOD TO CREATE A GRAMMAR RESOURCE  
BOOK FOR ELL TEACHERS

by

Julia E. Milne

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

December 2017

Primary Advisor: Susan Manikowski  
Content Reviewer: Bette Blaisdell

Copyright by  
JULIA E. MILNE, 2017  
All Rights Reserved

To my family and colleagues for your guidance and support throughout this capstone project. It would not have been possible without your patience, encouragement and advice. Thanks also to the Capstone Committee and everyone else at Hamline who has offered their assistance during this process. Finally, I huge thanks to my husband, who kept the kids fed and the house clean these last six months!

“Your grammar is a reflection of your image. Good or bad, you have made an impression. And like all impressions, you are in total control.”  
- Jeffrey Gitomer

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my Hamline professors. This has been incredibly rewarding journey.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....	9
Overview.....	10
Journey to Capstone.....	10
Stakeholders.....	14
Rationale.....	15
Summary.....	15
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	17
Introduction.....	17
History of Grammar.....	19
Grammar Translation and Audio-Lingual Method.....	19
Presentation-Practice-Production Model.....	21
Krashen Theory & Communicative Based Approach.....	22
The Case For Explicit Instruction.....	24
Focus on Form.....	26
Evolution of Focus on Form.....	28
Theory Into Practice.....	30
Focus on Form Tasks.....	31
Summary.....	34
CHAPTER THREE: Project Description.....	37
Introduction.....	37
Background and Explanation of resource book Components.....	38

Introduction and Literature Review.....	39
When and How to Use resource book.....	40
When to Teach Task.....	40
Brief Explanation of Each Task.....	42
Lesson Materials.....	42
Setting and Audience.....	42
Implementation.....	42
Assessing Project Effectiveness.....	43
Standards.....	43
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER FOUR: Reflection.....	45
Introduction.....	45
What I've Learned.....	45
Literature Review.....	48
Policy Implications.....	49
Project Limitations.....	50
Recommendations for Research.....	51
Benefits of this Work.....	51
Summary.....	52
REFERENCE LIST.....	53
APPENDIX.....	56



Milne, J. Focus on Form for Grammar Tasks for Elementary ELL Students (2017)

The research conducted in this capstone discusses appropriate methods of teaching grammar to ELL students. The project arose from the author's realization that explicit grammar instruction was seldom taught and in many cases omitted completely during instructional time. Furthermore, the author realized that there was a great deal of confusion about the appropriate role of grammar within the curriculum. This led the author to study the history of grammar instruction in order to understand the various methodologies that have been implemented throughout the years. The goal was to try and gain a better understanding of the different schools of thought and arrive at a conclusion about what is now considered 'best practice' with regards to grammar instruction. This research led the author to the Focus on Form method of grammar teaching, a methodology that combines various aspects of previous methodologies. The author then goes on to describe the various 'tasks' that can be used within the classroom in order to implement the Focus on Form method.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Teaching grammar is a subject that elicits various opinions from educators, particularly in the English Language (EL) context. What is the best method for teaching grammar to English language learners (ELLs)? How do we ensure that students can recognize and use correct grammar in the short teaching time we have available? These questions are more relevant than ever due to the fact that EL program models are requiring teachers to align their curriculum with the general education standards. The curricular load for EL teachers has become wider and “choosing” what to teach in the short time they have can be very overwhelming. Because of this, time management and efficiency is becoming increasingly paramount with regards to instructional delivery. With so much to teach, we have to prioritize certain areas at the expense of others. And because there is no consensus view regarding grammar instruction, it is often a component that is pushed aside. Therefore, finding the most effective and time-efficient method for teaching it is essential. While there is growing research on new methodologies for grammar instruction, the direct application of this research into the classroom has still not fully materialized. In order to accommodate the busy schedule of EL teachers, new practices need to be adapted in an easy to use “curricular format”. After extensive research I have concluded that the Focus on Form methodology would be the best way to implement grammar instruction in the classroom. Therefore the objective

of this project is to utilize the Focus on Form methodology to create an accessible, and ready-to-use resource book which teachers can incorporate into their curriculums.

## **Overview**

In this chapter I will discuss how grammar has become a subject which is often overlooked and in many cases abandoned. I will also discuss my own teaching experiences, and how they brought me down this path of viewing grammar as such a vital component of teaching, especially with regards to EL students. I will touch briefly on what current research considers best practice for grammar as well as the various stakeholders in my capstone project.

## **Journey to Capstone Project**

As I stated above, the ever evolving nature of curriculum and societal needs forces teachers to constantly ‘squeeze more’ into their own curriculum plans. In my limited teaching career I have witnessed a steady transition from a separate EL curriculum into a more integrated model, where teachers pull language objectives from the general education curriculum. While the curriculum is clearly still language-focused, there is an added emphasis on grade-level literacy components as well as math and science content that must be integrated. Despite these ‘added’ initiatives, seldom is any content removed or the required minutes for teaching it reduced. Inevitably, teachers are forced to pick and choose which areas of the curriculum are priorities and which areas are expendable. In my experience, this ‘triage’ typically comes at the expense of grammar.

As we design our Language Arts curriculum, the emphasis always seem to be on vocabulary and phonics, especially in the primary grades. This results in a wide variety of resources available to the teacher which in turn makes the teacher more likely to teach them. While both vocabulary and phonics are essential building blocks towards building increased comprehension and fluency, they are not an ends unto themselves. Rather they are merely parts of the system and structure of a language, something we call grammar. And it is my belief that despite being overlooked, grammar should be a crucial component of any Language Arts curriculum.

Recently the 'overlying' approach to grammar has experienced a lot of change, and the message for teachers can be unclear. What is the recent best practice on grammar instruction for ELs and how do we adapt it to our elementary learners? Through the results of my literature review, I will design a grammar resource book that is aligned with the methodology of Focus on Form, which is what I believe to be current best practice.

My interest in grammar began in my first year of being a dual language teacher. I found myself unprepared because suddenly I was in the position of having to teach the standards in two different languages. I spent an inordinate amount of time scrambling for resources as well as constantly shuffling around my schedule in order to accommodate as much of the curriculum as possible. My understanding of teaching began to boil down to an understanding of efficiency. How could I teach both the standards and the language effectively in so little time?

Initially I started the curriculum the same way as my non-dual language co-teachers did, with a heavy focus on comprehension, decoding, and fluency. This seemed to work for a while, but more and more I found my students were making simple

grammar mistakes. I also began to notice that grammar played a bigger role in the Common Core standards my district was phasing in. I started to discuss this with co-teachers as well as supervisors in the district, but I was always given the same response: grammar should be wholly contextualized, and not taught explicitly. That I should teach ‘some’ grammar during writing, but mainly it should be inserted into a lesson as it becomes relevant to some other aspect of the curriculum. However, I began to form a different opinion based on what I was witnessing in my classroom. I felt that the one or two times a month I taught grammar was simply insufficient for my students, particularly my EL students who had serious grammar issues that weren’t being addressed. I noticed that while their vocabulary and comprehension skills were improving, my ELLs were still making the same basic grammar mistakes. By this point my EL students were in their third year of dual language instruction (which most experts agree is the most effective path to fluency) yet they were making mistakes more typical of primary students. This seemed strange to me. I started to become more fascinated by this notion of teaching grammar as some sort of taboo, something that wasn’t worthy of its own time and place within the curriculum. How did this come about? I remembered being in new teacher training and hearing about Direct Oral Language and how it wasn’t considered best practice. So I knew that at one point it was being taught. So what happened? How did grammar, such a crucial component of language, end up on the back-burner?

Over time I began to learn and understand more about the pendulum swings in education. How things that were common a generation ago would be phased out only to be reintroduced and repackaged as something new and vital to student learning. Unfortunately it seemed to me that the grammar pendulum was still swinging in only one

direction. I was of the belief that there should be some sort of re-balance, with grammar occupying at least a portion of the Language Arts curriculum. I began to research materials for teaching grammar, but much to my dismay all I found was antiquated and boring resource books. While potentially helpful, they didn't seem very engaging or authentic. What I wanted was something that was both, and I couldn't find it. To compound the problem, whatever I did find was too involved to incorporate into a jam-packed curriculum. How could something that was a Common Core Standard be so hard implement?

Then I took the Advanced Linguistics Analysis course at Hamline which introduced me to the concept of Functional Grammar. Functional Grammar takes a more pragmatic approach to grammar and explains it in a more contextualized way. The terms that were used had a tendency to make more sense which in turn made me believe it would be easier to teach to my students. The downside though, was that while the concepts were more 'user-friendly', the idea of having to introduce new and more 'wordy' terms could be challenging for primary learners. Undeterred, I continued to read and learn more about Functional Grammar. I quickly became inspired, and decided to pursue this concept for my capstone project.

When beginning my capstone, however, I found that there was very little recent research done on Functional Grammar in the EL context and even less still that focused on the primary grades. So I put functional grammar to the side and I began to incorporate a wider search parameter by simply looking for recent grammar 'best practice' for primary students. I learned that originally, grammar was taught explicitly, in a prescriptive manner. We are now learning that teaching it in context is most effective.

However, this presents a unique problem for primary classroom teachers with EL students. Unlike traditional students, or even older EL students, primary EL students don't have a strong model for language in their own native language. In addition, involved grammar terms are overwhelming for these students who may be still learning letters or how to read. While this branching out of my research resulted in more available journals, the research began to spread out over different grammar areas as well as different age ranges. It was difficult to ascertain any pattern or best practice. My original idea was to do a literature review and attempt to accumulate as many ideas on best practice as possible. However, the capstone project allowed me to put this research into action by creating a resource book with my findings geared towards primary EL teachers.

### **Stakeholders**

The principal stakeholders for this research are teachers, EL students, and their families. With the rigorous language demands of the Common Core and the ACCESS tests, EL teachers need effective and efficient language curriculums to help them satisfy the needs of their students. While many domains of EL instruction, including phonics and vocabulary, have extensive resources available, grammar tends to be the component that is lost in the shuffle. Without this core aspect of language being addressed, students are not able to fully improve their oral and written language development. As these students mature and grow into adulthood, a mastery of grammar becomes more than just useful, it becomes essential. Whether it is filling out a job application or finishing a college thesis, a proper understanding of grammar fundamentals will play a huge role in a student's life. However, this task becomes more difficult if the teacher does not have

access to quality resources. If teachers are unable to find these resources, or they are receiving mixed messages about the importance of grammar, they in turn will become more restrained from teaching this vital concept.

### **Rationale**

My project will hopefully serve two purposes. The first will be to give EL teachers a resource to utilize in their curriculum planning. As I stated previously, the amount of content a teacher must fit into a given day continues to increase. Therefore a quality resource that is readily available and easy to implement in the classroom is essential. Furthermore, this resource should be as engaging to the students while at the same time incorporating best practice with regards to grammar. The second reason for doing this project is to inspire conversations about the role of grammar in the classroom. As a relatively new teacher who is surrounded by more experienced colleagues, it's possible that many of them have already considered this question and disagree with my assessment on the importance of teaching grammar. However, I would like to further this discussion on behalf of newer teaches like myself who feel that the lack of emphasis on teaching grammar is quite puzzling.

### **Summary**

In chapter 1 I discussed how the role of grammar in the elementary classroom is steadily diminishing. It has gone from something that was explicitly taught to something that should be taught contextually. The reasons for this diminished role are twofold: first, there is an ever increasing amount of content that a teacher must fit into his/her day. This



inevitably leads to a situation where a teacher is forced to pick and choose which parts of the curriculum need to be emphasized and which parts are 'expendable'. The second reason is simply a lack of quality resources. If a teacher must choose between two content areas, it is natural that he/she would choose the one with the more readily available and engaging resources. I also discussed how my own unique teaching experiences helped me to arrive at the conclusion that grammar is a critical component of an effective Language Arts curriculum. I saw that despite making gains in fluency and comprehension my students were still making simple grammatical mistakes more typical of younger students. I then discussed how this realization piqued my curiosity and lead me to research the history and current best practice of grammar. I learned that the available resources were conflicting as well as confusing. I also discovered a lack of quality materials available to teachers. Finally I discussed the stakeholders with regards to my capstone project.

In Chapter 2 I will conduct the literature review. I will describe the history of grammar and the various methodologies that have evolved over the years. I will demonstrate how these methodologies have converged into what is known as Focus on Form, the theory that is the basis of my capstone project. I will also describe the various tasks associated with Focus on Form and what these tasks look like in practice.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Grammar is a fundamental component of language, yet its specific role within the classroom has been the subject of much debate throughout the years. The debate has not so much focused on its importance, but rather the best method by which to teach it. As our knowledge of pedagogy has evolved so too have our methods and ideas about grammar. The objective of my capstone project is to gain a thorough understanding of the latest research in grammar pedagogy to create an efficient, effective, and purposeful resource book which teachers can utilize with their ELL students.

### Preview

I believe that the best way to understand the current ideas about grammar is to give a brief history on the various methods of teaching it that have been adopted throughout the years. Through this lens we are able to not only see the merits of each school of thought, but also understand that education is a constantly evolving process in which we, the educators, play a pivotal role. In this literature I will discuss the origins of grammar instruction and how its initial role in education helped to establish the first schools of grammatical thought.

The first method I will discuss is the Grammar Translation method. I will explain how the Grammar Translation method evolved from Latin being taught in the schools and how eventually this method proved insufficient with regards to teaching EL students.

Next I will focus on the Audio-Lingual method, which was a natural evolution of the Grammar Translation method. As the flaws of these ‘explicit’ methods of teaching grammar became apparent, I will show how the pendulum swung in the opposite direction towards methods that focused less on structures and more on the ‘social context’ of language.

The first of these ideas is the Presentation-Practice-Production method, or PPP. This method, which is widely used in language classes around the world, focuses more on the ‘social context’ of language as opposed to the underlying structures. As much as the PPP was a step forward in grammar instruction, it ultimately suffered from a lack of ‘authentic’ language experience. Recognizing ‘authenticity’ as a crucial component of L2 acquisition, the Communicative Approaches began to take shape. These approaches held the belief that ‘real-world’ applications of language were paramount to achieving proficiency.

Next I will discuss the resurgence of explicit instruction as a crucial component of language acquisition. I will give examples of journal articles that describe not only the short-comings of a purely communicative approach but also the benefits of concise and focused grammar instruction.

Finally, I will discuss how researchers came to understand that the best approach to teaching grammar was a ‘mix’ of these two traditional methods. This ‘mix’, known as Focus on Form, will be the basis of my capstone project. I will discuss, in detail, what distinguishes this method from others, as well as what Focus on Form looks like in practice. I will also discuss the various Focus on Form tasks and what they look like in

the context of EL education. These four tasks, dictogloss, grammaring, consciousness-raising, and grammar will be an integral part of my capstone project.

### **History of Grammar**

For most of history, grammar was the focal point for teaching and understanding a language. It was believed that a language was merely a set of rules, and with a thorough understanding of these rules one could simply learn the nuance of a language. According to Nassaji “there was a close relationship between the study of grammar and other medieval disciplines (such as law, theology, and medicine), and the idea that knowledge of grammar was essential for the development of rhetorical skills” (2011, p. 3). In other words, the more mastery one had of a language, the more knowledge he/she possessed in a certain field. Over time the study of grammar began to focus on the ‘root’ language of Latin. It was believed that Latin and its various component parts was the perfect language through which to gain a better understanding of the underlying grammatical rules and structures of any other language. This was true through much of the 20th century, as many older Americans still remember Latin being taught in school. This notion that a solid grasp of grammar in one language would be paramount to the learning of another, gave rise to various new grammar-based methodologies such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual method.

### **Grammar Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method**

The Grammar Translation Method was a direct byproduct of the focus on learning Latin in schools. As I mentioned above, Latin was considered the ‘model’ language by

which to gain a better understanding grammar and its structures. This led to the belief that if you understood the rules of one language, you could simply learn another by ‘translating’ it. According to Nassaji “the target language was segmented into various parts of speech (e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives, pronouns, articles, participles, conjunctions, and prepositions), which were taught deductively through an explicit explanation of rules, with memorization and translation from the L2 to the L1” (2011, p. 4). Obviously this approach had its limitations, namely that it focused solely on written texts rather than speaking and listening. Despite its limitations, various forms of the Grammar Translation Method are still used today in foreign language instruction.

As time passed and advances were made in the fields of linguistics and behavioral psychology, another method of teaching, the Audio Lingual Method, rose to prominence. Like the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method placed a strong emphasis on grammar, but unlike the Grammar Translation Method its “focus shifted from studying grammar in terms of parts of speech to a description of its structural and phonological characteristics” (Nassaji, 2011, p.6). Furthermore, it was infused with behavioral psychologist ideas, namely that anything could be learned through repetition and reinforcement. That much like Pavlov’s dog responding to the bell, humans could learn a language through positive and negative reinforcement.

Where the Grammar Translation Method focused mainly on written communication the Audio-Lingual method focused on verbal communication. In the Audio-Lingual method, an instructor would simply model a sentence and then have students repeat it. As the students mastered the various sentences the instructor would then provide students with words that could then be substituted within the sentence. For

example, the students would learn “I see a tree”, and upon mastering the sentence the instructor would provide the students with other nouns to be substitute for ‘tree’, such as car, boat, or plane. The idea was to ‘drill’ the language into the students, which would explain why the Audio-Lingual method is also referred to as the ‘Army’ method. Again, this method had its shortcomings, namely that it focused too much on grammatical structures rather than real-life communication.

### **Presentation-Practice-Production Models**

As researchers began to realize the inadequacies and limitations of both the Grammar Translation and Audio-Lingual methods new ideas were in order. In recent years, perhaps the most common method of teaching a second language is the Presentation-Practice-Production model or PPP. According to Nassaji, the PPP is ‘so widely accepted that it forms the basis of many teacher training courses’ (2011, p. 3). As its name would indicate, the PPP is broken down into three various stages; the presentation stage, the practice stage, and the production stage. The first stage is similar to the Audio-Lingual method where the students are presented with a sentence or phrase which they repeat and commit to memory. The second stage, the practice stage, is where a student is provided with various opportunities to use the new sentence. This can range from a rote conversation all the way to a more authentic, real-world dialogue. The idea is to demonstrate the various contexts in which the sentence or phrase can be applied. If the goal of the practice stage is accuracy, the goal of the presentation stage is fluency. In this stage comprehension is gauged by the ability to use the sentence in a more organic,

natural way. By this point the sentence should be committed to memory and recall and application should be automatic.

### **Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Communicative-Based Approaches**

Ultimately, grammar-based methods of instruction had proven ineffective. The assumption in these approaches is that language is simply a series of ever more complicated parcels of information that simply need to be remembered and recalled. These approaches work for students and teachers in the sense that they can be easily divided into 'chunks' that fit into a typical classroom timeframe. However, as anyone that has attempted to learn a second language can attest, fluency is about much more than a decent grasp of grammatical structures. For one thing, people don't always speak in a grammatically correct manner. This recognition that understanding a language is more than simply understanding its underlying grammar gave rise to Communication-Based Approaches.

This approach had its origins in Noam Chomsky's (1965) concept of 'linguistic competence'. Linguistic competence is defined as a speaker's knowledge of his/her own language. Chomsky specifically referenced 'grammatical competence' as being a large component of this new concept. Linguists Dell Hymes (1972) and Sandra Sauvignon (1972) sought to further expand this definition to include the sociolinguistic aspect of the speaker's language competence, which in turn led to the term 'communicative competence'. Through the work of these linguistic scholars, the communicative approach began to take form. According to Nassaji "The communicative approach defined the aim of language learning as acquiring communicative ability that is the ability

to use and interpret meaning in real life communication, not simply learning formal grammatical rules and structures” (2011, p. 8). In other words, the communicative approach focuses more on the social context surrounding language and less on the grammatical structures. The idea is that the best way to learn a language is to ‘absorb’ it rather than ‘learn’ it.

Unlike the grammar-based methods, the communicative approach has no defined sequence of comprehension and fluency. Rather it assumes that repeated exposure to authentic, ‘real-world’ experiences will ultimately deliver a deeper and more nuanced understanding of a language. As this approach began to gain steam in the academic world, the first casualty was grammar. After all, if the emphasis was solely placed on ‘meaning’, what need was there for ‘rules’?

Further enforcing this notion of focusing on meaning rather than forms were Krashen’s (1982) theories of second-language acquisition. Krashen argue there were two distinct ways to develop competence in a second language. First, through acquisition, which is the subconscious process of acquiring knowledge of language. The second was through learning, which is an actively ‘conscious’ process. Krashen, however, believed that this ‘conscious’ learning of form and rules only played a limited role. Therefore he stressed the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition because as he states “language acquisition does not require the extensive use of grammatical rules” (1982, p. 6). It was through this work that communicative language teaching became a “dominant” theory in language teaching for the last several decades.



## **The Case for Explicit Instruction**

As with many trends in education, the initial ‘glow’ of a new idea often gives way to a more pragmatic understanding of it. Such was the case with communicative-based approaches. In retrospect, it is understandable that people would buy into the notion that language could be acquired by simply being exposed to it. For one thing, it was an incredibly simple solution to a large problem. It emphasized the ‘engaging’ aspects of language learning, such as conversation, while deemphasizing the actual ‘work’ that learners traditionally put in. After all, who would want to study French from a book when it could be learned by simply chatting over coffee in a Parisian cafe?

Two articles published in the mid-1980’s by Merrill Swain and Richard Schmidt were the first to pump the brakes on the effectiveness of a strictly communicative-based approach. In Swain’s (1985) article, he describes a study involving native-English speaking 6th graders learning French in an immersive setting. All of these students had been studying French for the past seven years. These students were tested for second language proficiency through different grammar, discourse, and sociolinguistic tasks. These same tasks were given to a group of 6th grade native-French speakers in order to compare the proficiency amongst the two groups. To help account for variables such as the immersion students comprehension of the tasks, a listening comprehension task was also administered to both groups as well. The results of the study confirmed that the immersion students performed “appreciably different” (1985, p. 246) with regards to grammar than their native-speaking peers. This seemed to contradict Krashen’s theory which argued that language learners simply need comprehensible input without a need to attend to grammatical structures. These immersion students however, had considerable

input over their previous 7 years in an immersion program, but this study demonstrated that their output didn't compare to a native speaker. Therefore, Swain concluded that comprehensible input is not enough in second language acquisition.

The second study, conducted by Richard Schmidt (1986) similarly called into question the notion that attention to form wasn't necessary in second language acquisition. The study originated from diary entries Schmidt made while chronicling his attempt to learn Portuguese while living in Brazil. Throughout this process Brazilian friends would often point out simple grammatical mistakes that he was making during conversation. Whenever this happened, he found himself focusing more intently on these areas, something he termed 'noticing the gaps'. The article states that "He learned and used what he was taught if he subsequently heard it and if he noticed it" (1986, p. 279). An analysis of his journal showed that when he 'noticed' a structure, it would appear correctly in later journal entries. The article concludes that "corrective feedback that was not noticed by Richard (embedded in ambiguous utterances such as confirmation checks) seems to have had no effect. In order for Richard to profit from correction by native speakers, it seems to have been a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition that he realize that he was being corrected" (1986, p. 312). In other words, the author needed explicit instruction from his Brazilian acquaintances in order to commit to memory certain grammatical structures. The reason for this, the article states is because "One of the advantages of a conscious notice-the-gap principle is that it provides a way to include a role for correction, and instruction in general" (1986, p. 312).

Swain's and Schmidt's articles contradicted both Krashen's theory and the communicative-based approaches tenets that explicit attention to form was unnecessary,

which helped pave the way for further research exploring the role of explicit grammar instruction. By this point it should be obvious that the most effective way to teach/learn a second language was a hybrid approach, which included both grammar-based, 'explicit' methods as well as communicative-based approaches.

### **Focus on Form**

Recognizing the need for some middle ground between the two basic views on grammar, Mike Long created the idea of Focus on Form. Long recognized that the history of second language acquisition could be broken down into two schools of thought; interventionists and non-interventionists. According to Long, interventionists:

interfere with what, left alone, might resemble somewhat the way young children acquire their native language (successfully). Intervention starts with the language to be taught, and involves such practices as dividing it into bite-size linguistic units of one kind or another (sounds, words, collocations, structures, notions, functions, etc.), presenting them to learners one at a time, and practicing them intensively using pattern drills and exercises, with errors "corrected," before moving on to the next item" (2014,p.32)

Obvious examples of interventionist methods would be the Grammar Translation and the Audio-Lingual methods. In the interventionist methods the learner's role is 'synthetic', where "The learner's job is to synthesize the items for communicative purposes" (Long, 2014, p. 35). According to Long "Timing is determined by where a teacher is "up to" in the pre-set syllabus, not where the learners are "up to" in terms of developmental readiness" (2014, p. 36). On the other hand Long identified non-

interventionist approaches, which believe that humans have an innate ability to understand language and in turn it's grammatical structures. In these approaches the learner's role is 'analytical', whereby the "The learner's job is to analyze the input, and thereby to induce rules of grammar and use" (Long, 2014, p. 38).

Long argued that while a non-interventionist approach was better, both strategies were flawed. An interventionist method "leads to lessons which are dry and consist of teaching linguistic forms with little concern with communicative use" (2000, p. 4) while a non-interventionist method "is problematic because it does not lead to desired levels of grammatical development" (2000, p. 4), and "is not based on learners needs" (2000, p. 4). Furthermore, Long identified other problems with non-interventionist approaches. First, they "assume that the capacity for implicit learning remains strong in adults" (2000, p. 5). Second, "implicit learning takes time, and LT needs to be efficient, not just minimally necessary and sufficient" (2000, p. 6). In other words, the amount of time required to learn an L2 is more than the typical classroom allocates. Third Long states:

A purely analytic approach ignores the substantial evidence that L2 instruction that also includes one or more types of attention to language works. It does not change the route of acquisition, e.g., developmental sequences, or acquisition processes, e.g., simplification, generalization, and regularization, but it does speed up acquisition and can improve the level of ultimate L2 attainment in some areas.  
(1983, p. 26)

Long believed that while it should not be the primary focus of language acquisition, knowledge of grammar does play an important role in speeding of the process.

In response to this Long proposed something different, which he termed ‘focus on form’. Long states that:

Focus on form involves reactive use of a wide variety of pedagogic procedures (PPs) to draw learners’ attention to linguistic problems in context, as they arise during communication (in TBLT, typically as students work on problem-solving tasks), thereby increasing the likelihood that attention to code features will be synchronized with the learner’s internal syllabus, developmental stage, and processing ability. (2000, p. 9)

In other words Long believed that grammar should be taught, but it should be taught ‘incidentally’ while the students are learning about something else. For example, Spanish students could be studying the national holidays of Colombia, during which time the teacher takes a moment to discuss subject-verb agreement. The grammar lessons should be small and brief, where the goal is to simply overlay them onto something more contextual and meaningful. The grammar lessons should not be preplanned, but rather should arise only when relevant and appropriate.

### **Evolution of Focus on Form**

Since Long introduced the concept of Focus on Form, many scholars have modified and re-interpreted it. While agreeing with the basic premise of Focus on Form, the role of grammar within it (and how and when to implement explicit grammatical lessons) has been the cause of debate. One of the leading scholars on SLA, Rod Ellis, has weighed in with his own interpretation of Focus on Form. While Long argued that grammar lessons should never be preplanned and only given ‘in the moment’ Ellis

believed that there was a time and place for explicit instruction. He believed that 'salience' to the learner determined what could be learned implicitly. Ellis states "Features that are salient and communicatively functional in context (e.g. lexical items or grammatical features such as plural -s) may be acquired implicitly whereas features that are non-salient and communicatively redundant (e.g. 3rd person -s) may only be acquired if they are explicitly noticed" (2016, p. 407) and that "This raises the likelihood that different kinds of focus on form may be needed to facilitate the acquisition of different linguistic features." (2016 p. 407).

Ellis recognized that there are simply areas of language acquisition that are more relevant to the learner than others. Because of the learner's 'self interest' in these areas, most of the learning could be done implicitly. Conversely, there are areas of language acquisition that are not so pertinent to the learner, and to address this phenomenon explicit instruction might be necessary.

Ellis also believed that preplanned, explicit grammar instruction played a role in successful language acquisition. This was a big break from Long who contended that grammar should only be taught as the need arose. Ellis recognized that in any language setting, there would be grammatical areas where students would be expected to struggle, and in these instances it was best to be proactive with grammar front-loading.

Finally, Ellis recognized that the extent to which a language learner benefits from explicit grammatical instruction depends on their proficiency of the second language. He states "that the effectiveness of reactive and preemptive focus on form also differed depending on learners' language proficiency and class level, with advanced level learners benefiting more from reactive focus on form than less advanced learners" (2016, p. 411).

### **Theory into Practice**

As we continue to learn about the effectiveness of the Focus on Forms approach, the question of “What does this look like in practice?” naturally arises. If explicit grammar is to be taught when should we actually teach it? According to Ellis “a form-focused approach is needed initially to construct a basis of knowledge that learners can then use and extend in a meaning-focused approach” (2016, p. 411). Furthermore he states that “learning necessarily commences with an explicit representation of linguistic forms, which are then developed through implicit learning” (2016, p. 412). He believes that learners need some sort of foundation upon which to build language, that explicit grammar lessons should act like rungs on the ladder, serving the twofold purpose of being something to both hold onto and something to reach towards. There is also a more pragmatic reason for teaching grammar explicitly. The reality is that most language learners in a classroom setting will never progress beyond the initial stages of language acquisition, therefore “a task-based approach that caters to the development of a proceduralized lexical system and simple, naturally acquired grammatical structures will ensure a threshold communicative ability” (2016, p. 412).

If grammar is to be explicitly taught, another question that springs to mind is “How much time should we spend teaching a specific structure?” Here the answer is not so simple, least of all because the degree of difficulty is not uniform among grammatical structures. Also, if we are going to teach grammar, is it more effective to teach it ‘intensively’ or ‘extensively’? In other words is it best to focus intensely on a few structures over a long period of time or to explain several structures but in a less in-depth

way? (Ellis 2010) argues in favor of the extensive approach because it “affords the opportunity to attend to large numbers of grammatical structures. Also, more likely than not, many of the structures will be addressed repeatedly over a period of time” (Ellis, 2001). In addition he believes that “this kind of instruction involves a response to the errors each learner makes, it is individualized and affords the skilled teacher real-time opportunities for the kind of contextual analysis that Celce-Murcia (2002) recommends as basis for grammar teaching”

Assuming that there is value in explicit grammar instruction we must also ask the question do we teach it ‘inductively’ or ‘deductively’? In an inductive grammar approach students are simply presented with the grammatical instruction and then asked to arrive at their own conclusions while a deductive approach presents students with the structure and then has them practice it. Here the research is contradictory. Ellis cites three different studies, with one supporting the effectiveness of the ‘inductive’ approach, another supporting the ‘deductive approach’, and a third seeing no real difference between the two. As Ellis states “Perhaps the main lesson to be learned from the research to date is the need for a differentiated approach to both researching and teaching explicit knowledge” (Ellis, 2001).

### **Focus on Form Tasks**

After reviewing the literature on the various methods of teaching grammar, I have decided to utilize the Focus on Form method for my capstone project. More accurately, I will discuss the four different Focus on Form task as outlined by Ellis (2017). The four tasks are consciousness raising, dictogloss, grammar interpretation, and grammaring.



These four tasks allow for the learner to engage in authentic communication activities while at the same time focusing on specific and relevant grammatical structures.

The main component of consciousness-raising tasks is to provide the learners with a specific grammatical structure and attempt to have them process and decipher it.

Rather than explicitly stating the rule, the learners are required to try and decipher the 'rule' on their own. The goal is for the learners to 'notice' the structure, which as Ellis states "Enables learners to develop awareness of the targeted form but also raises their consciousness of it" (2017, p. 509) The goal of consciousness-raising is not to have the students immediately convey accurate output, but rather to produce discussion which leads to recognition of the form during subsequent encounters with it. In my capstone project I will incorporate an example of a consciousness-raising task similar to the one proposed by Ellis (2017). In this task, students will be provided with two identical stories, one written in the past tense and the other written in the present tense. Students will be asked to pay attention to how the verbs are structured in each of the two stories. Students will then generate a list of 'noticings' and discuss their findings. Finally, the students will then be given a third story which will have tense errors which the students can identify and discuss. Again, the goal is not to explicitly state the rules, but rather to discuss and bring attention to their findings.

A dictogloss activity requires the learner to listen to or read a short story, and then attempt to retell the story in their own words. This is first done individually and then in small groups. (Wajnryb, 1990). Later, the whole class will compare and contrast the various recasts of the story. The focus during this portion of the activity is to pay attention to the various grammatical structures used by the students and to discuss them.

The goal is for students to recognize the differences between the grammatical structures in their native language and the target language. As Ellis states “This process, which involves cognitive comparison, tends not only to raise learners’ awareness of certain grammatical structures but also to reformulate their hypotheses of the structures as they modify their output” (2017, p. 512).

A Grammar Interpretation task involves the learner comparing and contrasting the related forms of a grammatical structure. The purpose of this task is to help the learner “interpret the meaning of the text(s), leading to the restructuring of their mental grammar” (Shak, 2008, p. 390). This process allows the learner to internalize the grammatical rules, as his/her own cognitive processes are responsible for deciphering them.

In Gramming “learners are required to extend the use of grammatical structures to attain communicative clarity and appropriacy” (Shak, 2008, p. 390). The focus on grammaring tasks is on output and has typically focused on the use of the past tense. According to Swain “these production-oriented tasks attempt to move ESL learners’ language from a lexical-dependent mode to a more elaborate grammatical mode in their output” (1995, p. 129). A typical grammaring task would be showing the students pictures of various verbs with the past tense form written on the bottom. The students would then have to construct a story around the images. Rather than ‘noticing’ the language structures the learners are supposed to ‘pushed’ towards learning it.[1

## Summary

Perhaps the most obvious take-away from conducting this literature review is that teaching grammar is complicated. Like most areas in education, there are so many external factors that come into play which can affect the outcomes for language learners. How similar/different an L1 and an L2 are, the motivations for acquiring an L2, teacher constraints such as time and resources, as well as a learner's knowledge of grammatical structures in his/her own native language all play a crucial role in learning a new language. As teachers it is our job to recognize these factors and to accommodate them in whatever manner best suits our students needs. Furthermore, there is no general consensus about the role of grammar in the classroom. Throughout my time as a teacher I have asked numerous teachers about their thoughts and attitudes towards grammar and rarely, if ever, did I get similar responses. This is what drove me to do this project. In other content areas, such as mathematics, it is essential to begin with foundational skills. Yet, with something as vital as language, these foundational skills were taken for granted. It was something that I could never quite reconcile.

The next take-away from this literature review is how it served as a reminder that education is an ongoing process, and that there are no silver bullets with regards to education. Just as technology, demographics, and cultural norms evolve so too must our attitudes and beliefs about how best to teach our children. As with any worthwhile endeavor, we must continue to strive to do better. The literature review showed me that despite the flaws of earlier methods they were all created with noble intentions and had their own unique merits. What we consider 'best practice' today will most likely be viewed as 'antiquated' at some point in the not too distant future. This, however, should

not be an excuse to rest on our laurels. Rather we must continue to educate ourselves about the evolving nature and history of education, because despite the shortcomings of earlier methodologies there are still valuable ‘truths’ to be found within them. An understanding of the history of education is similar to providing an artist with a larger palette of colors from which to choose. Ultimately it is up to the teacher to decide which of these ‘truths’ resonate the most with him/her, because it is an accumulation of ‘truths’ or ‘beliefs’ that in my opinion separates ‘good’ teachers from ‘great’ teachers.

Another take-away is that each method of teaching grammar has its pros and cons. Explicit methods of teaching grammar inform students about underlying structures which in turn provide a solid foundation on which to build fluency. On the other hand, they fail to recognize that ultimately language is a social phenomenon, which hinges on communication between actual people. For communicative-based approaches the reverse is true. These methods rely too heavily on providing students with ‘authentic’ language experiences which comes at the expense of grammatical structures. They focus more on the ‘how’ and less on the ‘why’. Even the current ‘hybrid’ method of Focus on Form appears to have its limitations. Despite the fact that I believe it to be the superior method of teaching grammar, its lack of clearly defined curriculum and outcomes may prove too difficult for many teachers.

My final take-away from this literature review is the belief that grammar absolutely has a role to play within the classroom. Language is such a fundamental part of any person's identity, and a solid grasp of its structures can only prove beneficial. As the world becomes more diverse and globalized, a basic understanding of language will enable people to more readily acquire a second language, which in turn will enhance

social cohesion and overall prosperity. I believe that everyone that makes the decision to move to a new country wishes to learn the language. Not only does it open more doors with regards to the workplace, it also allows people access to the broader society and all the benefits that entails. These days with the ongoing immigration debate, it is important to separate facts from feelings. At the heart of this debate is the idea of integration. I firmly believe that many of the doubts and fears people have can be minimized through language acquisition.

In chapter 3 I will break-down the process of creating my resource book. I will describe how my experience as both a Dual Language and EL teacher provided the background and rationale for creating it. This will be followed by a description of the various components of the workbook, including a concise summary of the history of grammar. I will then describe when and how to use the resource book as well as explain the tasks and the various ways of implementing them. I will explain the audience for my project and the appropriate setting for teaching it.

## **CHAPTER THREE: DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT**

### **Introduction:**

The objective of this project was to utilize the latest research in grammar pedagogy to create a ‘user-friendly’ resource book which EL teachers can incorporate into their curriculums.

In this chapter I will first discuss my thought process for designing the resource book. This will hopefully provide the reader with insight as to why I considered this project a worthy endeavor. Next, I will reference the theory and research behind each component of the resource book. This will demonstrate to the reader that my project is firmly rooted in established academic thought. Finally, I will discuss the intended audience and the process behind the development of the resource book. This will help the reader distinguish if the project is relevant and useful for him/her in the classroom.

### **Background and Explanation of Resource Book Components**

The idea for this project arose from what I perceived to be a lack of available and effective resources for EL and classroom teachers with regards to teaching grammar. Throughout my time as both an EL and classroom teacher, I have had several discussions with colleagues about the role of grammar in the classroom. The general consensus was that everyone believed it was important, but they were not sure when and how to teach it.

The goal of this project was to provide a resource to these teachers who wish to incorporate more grammar teaching in the classroom.

In the following sections I will give a description of each component of the resource book. Next, I will provide my rationale for choosing each component as well as providing theories which support their use. The components I will be discussing are as follows: the introduction and literature review, how the standards are aligned to the resource book, how to choose the appropriate grammar item, when and how to use the resource book, and finally a brief explanation and background on each task chosen for the curriculum.

### **Introduction and Literature Review**

The introduction will be the section in which I will describe the purpose of the resource book, define the audience, and explain the rationale behind the resource book. The purpose of the resource book is to provide a lesson structure template that is derived from recent ‘best practice’ research. The goal is to guide EL teachers when preparing grammar lessons for their students. With more districts requiring EL teachers to align their instruction with the general curriculum, grammar lessons not only need to be brief and focused, but also more contextualized. This resource book is constructed in such a way that fits these parameters. Another purpose of this resource book is to provide a resource that requires a minimal expenditure of a teacher’s valuable time. The resource book is designed in a way that gives teachers flexibility in deciding ‘when’ to implement grammar lessons.

The purpose of the literature review is to inform teachers about current and historical beliefs with regards to teaching grammar. The literature review will provide a concise and comprehensive history of grammar pedagogy so that teachers can see the extensive changes it has undergone throughout the years. All of the grammar methodologies from my own literature review will be mentioned in order to illustrate these changes. I have also included the history of grammar because I believe it clarifies many of the questions teachers may have about the role of grammar in the classroom. As every teacher has their own opinions about grammar teaching, it is important to be able to ‘correlate’ their own thinking with the progression of grammar throughout the years. This will allow them to see how their own thoughts and opinions line up with the research. Finally, I’ve intentionally made the history as concise as possible in the hopes that teachers will not ‘gloss over’ it, because as I’ve found an understanding of the history to be useful, I believe other teachers will as well.

### **When and How to Use the Resource Book**

As I stated above, this resource book is designed to give the teacher as much flexibility as possible when using it. One of the main debates regarding Focus on Form involves teaching grammar preemptively or reactively. That is to say, should a teacher ‘front-load’ some of the concepts or only address them as the need arises? Mike Long (2015), one of the leading scholars on the Focus on Form method, is a proponent of incidental or reactive teaching. He believes that grammar should be taught ‘organically’ in the moment, and that it should only be corrected with a brief explanation. However, there has been research showing that preemptively teaching a grammar point can also be



successful. Since there hasn't been a consensus as of yet, I feel that this should be determined at the teacher's discretion. The resource book allows the teacher to choose whether or not to teach preemptively or reactively.

### **When to Teach the Tasks**

The idea of Focus on Form tasks is that they must be taught in a contextualized manner. In other words, the tasks should be conducted as part of a broader language arts lesson. For example, if the teacher is discussing personal narratives, he/she should pull grammar items that 'arise' within the context of the genre. The genre should drive the grammar instruction, not the other way around. In Long (2015) he reiterates the need to teach grammar incidentally. It must be taught when the error is actually committed. However, Ellis's critical review (2016) compiled research demonstrating that teaching preemptively could also result in positive gains. Therefore, I believe that the tasks in this resource book can either be done prior to or during the lesson. Ultimately it will be up to the teacher's discretion.

### **Brief Explanation of Each Task**

In the resource book, I describe four Focus on Form tasks, as outlined by Shak and Gardner in a 2008 journal article. The reason I chose this article is first and foremost because it had contained a relatively wide assortment of tasks that had all been mentioned in the Focus on Form journals I had read. However, the most significant reason is its "study" of the tasks on primary learners. After each explanation, I will include an

example of the task so that teachers can refer to it when planning the details of the lesson. I will pull the examples directly from peer-reviewed articles since they are “vetted.”

The first task is consciousness raising. This task involves providing the learners with a specific grammatical structure and having them attempt to process and decipher it. The students carry out a task within the context of what they are otherwise studying. They are then instructed to “notice” a specific grammar feature and formulate a pattern. In the example, rather than explicitly stating the rule, the learners are required to try and decipher the ‘rule’ on their own.

The second task is dictogloss. This is where the learner is read a short story and then they must retell the story in their own words. The goal is for students to recognize the differences between the grammatical structures in their native language and the target language.

The third task is grammar interpretation. A Grammar Interpretation task involves the learner comparing and contrasting a similar grammatical structure between their native language and the target language. The goal is to allow the learner to internalize the grammatical rules by using their own cognitive processes to decipher them.

The fourth task is grammaring. According to Ellis, in grammaring “learners are required to extend the use of grammatical structures to attain communicative clarity and appropriacy” (2017, p.62). Grammaring tasks involve ‘pushing’ the learner towards comprehension rather than having them ‘notice’ grammatical structures.

## **Lesson Materials**

For my research the only materials required will be online journals and textbooks. For the actual resource book I made, I used Google docs.

## **Setting and Audience**

EL instructional programming and implementation has evolved considerably over a relatively short period of time. More and more districts are moving away from a decontextualized setting where the EL teacher creates a separate curriculum from a resource book. Currently, EL instruction is pushing towards a more contextualized model where the curriculum aligns more closely with that of the general education requirements. While this is optimal for the student, it can be challenging for teachers to find materials that align with both the students' needs as well as the curriculum standards. This means that the EL and classroom teachers must be experts at finding resources. This resource book was made not only for EL teachers, but also for classroom teachers with EL students, as they share the responsibility of student learning.

## **Implementation**

The first step in creating this resource book was deciding upon a grammar methodology. I had first considered Functional Grammar as it is what we learned during my Master's coursework. However, there wasn't enough research done in the elementary grades, so I decided against using this methodology. After conducting a substantial amount of further research I've settled on Focus on Form, as it is the methodology that seems to give the most attention to the 'explicit' instruction I feel is needed.

Once it was decided, the next step was to understand how best to implement the methodology in the classroom. I researched the theory behind Focus on Form as well as the tasks associated with it. The emphasis was on tasks that are applicable to the needs of an EL teacher today. As I researched the parameters of the theory and practice behind Focus on Form, the structure of the resource book evolved and took form. I envisioned a layout where there would be a list of tasks that appropriate for certain grammar forms which I explained and gave examples of. I organized the resource book by the grammar focus and in no specific sequence. The idea is that a teacher will be able to ‘pull’ from the resource book as the specific need or focus arises. The examples and tasks I incorporated mirror those that have been previously established in the research, as opposed to using my own limited experience to create them. The resource book was done in a digital format so that it would be more easily accessible.

### **Assessing Project Effectiveness**

In order to assess the project's effectiveness I have created a survey (see Appendix) to be filled out by EL teachers who wish to utilize the workbook. The survey consists of five ‘open-ended’ questions which are to be filled out after implementing a few of the suggested lesson ideas. The purpose of the survey is to gauge the effectiveness of the workbook as well as identify areas in which it can be improved. I will analyze the responses to the survey in order to identify trends which I can use to update the workbook.

## **Standards**

For this component I explained how the resource book is aligned to both the WIDA standards and the Minnesota College and Career Readiness standards. In the appendices I provided a list of the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards as well as the WIDA writing and speaking rubric.

## **Summary**

In this chapter I explained the background for the idea of the resource book. I discussed how in my experience teachers often have conflicting views about grammar implementation and how this created an opportunity to solve a problem. I also described how the literature review was fundamental in the formulation of this project and how a solid grasp of the history of grammar can help teachers who are currently in the classroom. I then discussed who the target audience was, when to use the resource book, as well how to use it. I described briefly the four tasks that teachers could incorporate into their lessons as well as the fact that the tasks are non-sequential. Finally, I described the implementation of the project and how I plan on seeing it to fruition.

In the next chapter I will discuss what I've learned through this process. I will describe the results of my work as well as any new insights I've gathered. I will then discuss the potential policy implications of my research and any limitations I may uncover. I will also describe the beneficiaries of capstone and my recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER FOUR: REFLECTION

### Introduction

The objective of this capstone project was to utilize the latest research in grammar pedagogy to create a ‘user friendly’ resource book which ELL teachers can incorporate into their classrooms. The idea for this project arose when I noticed a lack of explicit grammar instruction for ELL students in the various schools I’ve worked at. I began, to wonder why grammar, such a fundamental component of speaking and language, was viewed as an afterthought amongst ELL teachers. This led me to research the history of grammar in the classroom as well as current beliefs about its role.

In this chapter I will first discuss what I’ve learned throughout this process. I will not only discuss how the research has changed my own personal beliefs about the role of grammar in the classroom but also how difficult it was to read the various journal articles and arrive at definitive conclusions. I will then discuss the literature review and what I perceived to be the most poignant aspects of it. Finally, I will discuss my actual project, what it’s possible policy implications are, what it’s limitations were, and how it may or may not benefit various stakeholders.

### What I’ve Learned

The process of completing this capstone project was long and arduous, but ultimately very fulfilling. I wasn’t aware when I began the project that there were so many conflicting ideas and beliefs regarding grammar instruction. As someone who has

taught all content areas, I began this project under the assumption that the research on grammar would be somewhat definitive, as it appears to be in other areas like Math and Language Arts. I couldn't have been more wrong. I now finally understand why there is so much confusion about grammar instruction and its role within the classroom. I've learned that so much of language acquisition remains unknown. That if we cannot understand how it is that a person acquires a language it prevents us from fully understanding how best to teach it. This is further complicated by the fact that there are just so many variables involved with education, especially with regards to EL students.

After reading about the history of grammar, I've come to understand that our beliefs about how to teach it are not progressing in a linear fashion, but rather they more closely resemble a pendulum, forever swinging back and forth between explicit instruction on the one hand and implicit instruction on the other. Currently the pendulum is caught somewhere between the two ideas, incorporating aspects of both. However, now that I am equipped with an understanding of the history, I can't help but believe that the pendulum will continue to swing thus changing our current beliefs about grammar yet again.

One aspect of this process that was particularly interesting was the complex nature of researching and understanding academic journals. I found myself perpetually going down the proverbial 'rabbit hole', lost in some distant corner of the grammar landscape. The simple choice of typing in a new keyword or combing through an article's bibliography brought me down entirely new paths. I found myself constantly wavering back and forth on my project as each new article would either contradict my beliefs or illuminate some new idea I had not previously considered. Oftentimes the

articles would also offer conflicting views, with one describing the flaws of the other. While there are no concrete answers, there is enough available research on the various methodologies for a teacher to arrive at his/her own conclusions.

In the end, while complete, my project did not turn out exactly as I had envisioned. Initially I thought I had found a methodology that combined the traits of grammar instruction that I had been seeking. This was Functional Grammar. However, I couldn't come to grips with how to 'align' the new terminology associated with Functional Grammar into a curriculum that still required the use of traditional grammar terms. Also, I was unable to find a sufficient amount of research on how to best link Functional Grammar to ELL instruction. Ultimately I had to abandon Functional Grammar in the hopes of finding something more relevant to my project. This led me to Focus on Forms. The two ideas were similar in that they combined aspects of both explicit and implicit instruction but unlike Functional Grammar, Focus on Form seemed to have a sufficient amount of journal articles to back up its claims. However, the same problem persisted: How to incorporate it into an actual classroom. The main issue is that Focus on Form is fundamentally based on communicative tasks, more specifically tasks that evolved around oral language. Since our EL program utilizes the general education curriculum, our work is text-based. Consequently, I found these tasks lacking the depth I required. Fortunately, I was able to adapt some of the tasks into a text-based format, by simply instructing the teacher to find a text that contained the grammar focus. However, as soon as I attempted to incorporate these tasks into our curriculum I was able to see that they were probably not going to be as effective as I would have liked. I would have preferred to have found examples that were text-based rather than oral language-based.



Consequently, it was towards the end of finalizing my project that I started to find articles and textbooks that explained how to use functional grammar in the classroom. I found that these books didn't really focus on the use of the Functional Grammar terminology and focused on a methodology that was genre-based and text-based which is exactly what EL teachers need. By the time, I discovered these books; I was well into my project and was unable to change gears. That being said, it confirms the interest I have in doing research, how much more I can learn, and how important it is to get all the information before you make any decisions. While it doesn't reflect in my project, I am fully convinced now that Functional Grammar works. I would have only arrived at this conclusion after conducting this capstone project.

In the next section I will discuss the Literature Review. I will discuss which parts of the review proved to be the most important for my project and why this was the case. I will also demonstrate some the understandings and connections I was able to make during the process.

### **Literature Review**

Despite finding the literature on grammar to be somewhat ambiguous, I nevertheless learned a great deal. Perhaps what I found most interesting was the history of grammar. It proved beneficial to my capstone because I was able to see the trajectory and evolution of the beliefs behind it. Preconceptions that I had about how best to teach grammar were reaffirmed as well as disproved. Through an understanding of the history, I was able to see why certain methods had fallen in and out of fashion as well as the pros and cons associated with a particular method. I was able to construct my own beliefs

based upon the reading and going forward I will be able to implement them in my classroom. Furthermore, I now feel that I have a solid enough grasp of the topic to be able to share it with my co-workers. It is an area of teaching that is at the same time a mystery and a necessity, so the knowledge I've gained through this process will be a valuable resource to my colleagues.

I also found the articles by Long and Ellis describing Focus on Form to be particularly useful. One cannot read about the history of grammar and not arrive at the conclusion that the best methodology would be something that occupies the middle ground between explicit and implicit instruction. Michael Long's work with Focus on Form provided a solid foundation for understanding the principles behind it. His work however, was lacking in any sort of practical application of his ideas. This is why Rod Ellis's critical review was an important part of my capstone project. In Ellis's review he expanded on Long's ideas, particularly his preemptive methodology which is the part I felt allowed an EL teacher greater flexibility in implementing it in the classroom. Ellis was crucial in evolving the theory into practice.

### **Policy Implications**

It is difficult to gauge the potential policy implications of this research. Due to the wide-variety of beliefs about teaching grammar, it is hard to imagine that my conclusions are definitive. My hope for this project is that at the very least it provides schools with the knowledge of where grammar pedagogy currently stands. In my experience, most teachers understand how important grammar is, but are mystified about

how and when to teach it. Hopefully my research and project can provide ideas in this regard.

In terms of concrete implications, I plan on conducting a Professional Development seminar at my school to discuss my research. Again, the goal is to simply provide my colleagues with the knowledge of current pedagogical thought as well as practical ways to implement grammar teaching in the classroom.

### **Project Limitations**

I knew from the beginning of this project that it would have limitations. The obvious limitation to any sort of grammar instruction is merely the lack of time in the curriculum. Teachers are constantly being asked to squeeze more and more into a finite amount of time, so adding something else would always prove a challenge. This is compounded by the fact that grammar instruction is more or less left up to the individual teacher, meaning that it would always be the thing to cut in any sort of time crunch. With regards to my particular project, I am aware that it does add more to the teacher's workload because it requires teachers to seek out additional resources which both fit the specific task and align to the curriculum.

Another limitation is the fact that there doesn't seem to be a consensus about the best way to teach grammar. As I mentioned previously, language acquisition still remains somewhat of an unknown, which means it is difficult to prove that any one method is definitively better than another. The result of this is that it can leave a teacher feeling exasperated. As teachers we want concrete solutions, not 'beliefs' which history has proven are likely to change.

**Recommendation for research**

Due to the fact that Focus on Form tasks are mainly oral tasks, they can be difficult to implement in a regular classroom setting, where EL teachers are required to utilize the general education curriculum. Therefore, I've concluded that Functional Grammar is a more effective method of teaching grammar. The problem is that there is very little research explaining the proper implementation of it, especially in the context of EL instruction. My recommendation for future research then would be to find efficient and effective ways of delivering Functional Grammar lessons in the classroom. I found during that my research too many articles focused on the efficacy of any one method, as opposed to the efficacy of specific tasks. My hope for future research is that someone develops clear and concise 'best practice' ideas about Functional Grammar.

**Benefits of This Work**

The initial beneficiaries of my project will be colleagues. My plan is to conduct a Professional Development explaining my research project and findings. The goal of the PD is to highlight what current grammar pedagogy says as well as provide and explain my resource book. As I've mentioned before, I believe that teachers are mostly in the dark with regards to teaching grammar, and hopefully I can clarify what the current research says. If the PD is well received at my school, I plan on taking it to the district level by conducting PD's at the various schools around town. If nothing else, I hope to ease that nagging feeling that teachers have when it comes to teaching (or lack of teaching) grammar. I think teachers can be put at ease by simply being aware of the fact

that not only is there no definitive 'best' method, but also they have a wide palette of options from which to choose from.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, I feel that this project has made me a better, more complete teacher. Despite the fact that my research more or less contradicted my own project, I feel that my increased knowledge about grammar pedagogy will not only be beneficial to my students, but to my colleagues as well. This project reaffirmed the notion that education is an ever evolving process, which constantly seeks to redefine and better itself. This project has also taught me the value of going 'deep' on a subject in order to really understand the underlying issues and conclusions.

## REFERENCES

- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Retrieved from <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Chomsky-Aspects-excerpt.pdf>
- Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen. (2002).  
Doing focus-on-form. *System*, 30(4), 419-432.
- Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S. (2001). Preemptive Focus on Form in the ESL Classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(3), 407-32.
- Ellis, R. (2017). Position paper: Moving task-based language teaching forward. *50*(4), 507-526.
- Ellis, R. (2016). Focus on form: A critical review. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(3), 405-428
- Ellis, R. (2006). Current Issues in the Teaching of Grammar: An SLA Perspective. *TESOL Quarterly: A Journal for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages and of Standard English as a Second Dialect*, 40(1), 83-107.
- Hendricks, M. (2010). Consciousness-Raising and Prepositions. *English Teaching Forum*, vol. 2,., 24–29.

Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. *Sociolinguistics*, 269-293. Available from <https://www.scribd.com/doc/74833626/Dell-Hymes-on-Communicative-Competence-Pp-53-73>

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Retrieved from [http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/principles\\_and\\_practice.pdf](http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/books/principles_and_practice.pdf)

Long, M. H. (2014). *Second Language Acquisition and Task-Based Language Teaching*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons

Long, M. H. (2000). *Focus on Form in Task -Based Teaching*  
New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Long, M. (1983). Does Second Language Instruction Make a Difference? A Review of Research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(3), 359-382.

Nassaji, H. (2000). Towards Integrating Form-Focused Instruction and Communicative Interaction in the Second Language Classroom: Some Pedagogical Possibilities. *Modern Language Journal*, 84(2), 241-50.

Nassaji, H, & Fotos, S.S. (2011). *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms*.

New York, NY: Ruteledge.

Rodney, J., & Lock, G. (2011). *Functional Grammar in the ESL Classroom: Noticing, Exploring and Practising*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schmidt, R & Frota, S. (1986). Developing basic conversational ability in a second language. A case study of an adult learner of Portuguese. *Talking to Learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition*, (237-326). Retrieved from: <http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/PDFs/SCHMIDT%20Developing%20basic%20conversation%20ability%20in%20a%20second%20language.pdf>

Shabani, K., & Hosseinzadeh, S. (2017). A comparative study of the effects of teacher-initiated planned preemptive and reactive focus on form on L2 learners' accuracy in narrative writing. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1-17.

Shak, J., & Gardner, S. (2008). Young Learner Perspectives on Four Focus-on-Form Tasks. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(3), 387-408.

Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some rules of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, (235-253). Retrieved from: <https://usu.instructure.com/courses/415891/files/62278296/download?verifier=O>



GyOSZIPbrnpA8OzKallHHNGYqAmEMrcLiXiYX3n

Swain, M. (1995). Three Functions of Output in Second Language Learning. *Principle and Practice in Applied Linguistics*, 125-144.

Wajnrb, R (2000). *Grammar Dictation*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Widodo, H. (2008) A Consciousness Raising Approach to Teaching Grammar. *English Edu*, 8(1),vol. 8, 1-9.

## APPENDIX

### Focus On Form Survey

What was the most effective part of this	
--	--

workbook?	
What was the least effective part of this workbook?	
Was the workbook set up in easily accessible manner? Why or why not?	
Were the students engaged throughout the lesson? Why or why not?	
What improvements could be made to the workbook to make it more effective?	