

<b>Institution:</b> University of Exeter
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Education
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping Policy and Practice in the Teaching of Grammar and Writing
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Two successive ESRC studies by Myhill and Jones have shaped national policy and practice in the teaching of writing in the UK and internationally, by establishing an appropriately evidenced rationale for grammar in a pedagogy for writing. Rapporteur A (Study 2) noted that <i>'the grant-holders should be congratulated for their activities in ensuring that relevant policy-makers are aware of and take in to consideration appropriate empirical evidence that they have gathered'</i> and Rapporteur B believed that the research <i>'has had more impact than any other UK educational project'</i>. Specifically the two studies have had an impact by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> shaping national and international policy on grammar and the teaching of writing;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> developing teachers' understanding of, and practice in, the teaching of grammar and writing;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> influencing the work of a commercial organisation, <i>Pearson Education</i>, developing new materials &amp; CPD;</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> stimulating practitioner and public debate about grammar and writing.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Key researchers: Debra Myhill – Lecturer (1999); Senior Lecturer (2001); Professor (2004); Susan Jones – Research Fellow; Lecturer (2006); Senior Lecturer (2011)</p> <p>Learning to write is about learning to be powerful: writing is a core skill for academic success and for socio-economic wellbeing. Thus the development of writing in school-aged children has been the focus of intense international debate in recent years for two key reasons: writing is the aspect of literacy least responsive to state reforms; student attainment in writing, both in the UK and internationally, has increased at a far more modest rate than in reading. The <i>Centre for Research in Writing</i>, directed by Debra Myhill, focuses on research addressing these issues.</p> <p>In 2003, Myhill was awarded £117,000 by the ESRC to investigate the linguistic characteristics of secondary students' writing at sentence and text level. The first stage of the study was a systematic statistical and qualitative desk analysis of writing samples for their linguistic characteristics at sentence and text level. The second stage involved a sub-sample of these writers, with classroom observations of their composing processes, and interviews with them about their understanding of linguistic and composing choices made. The findings of the first stage informed the observations and interviews in the second stage. The study found that: age differences are less significant than ability differences in linguistic development; gender is not a significant factor in trajectories of linguistic development; metalinguistic understanding is stronger in more able writers; and metacognitive understanding of composing processes is stronger than metalinguistic understanding of text design. The findings led to the creation of a model of linguistic development at text and sentence level, (Myhill 2008) and demonstrated that clear developmental trajectories in writing can be determined, thus presenting opportunities to shape teaching techniques accordingly (Myhill 2009a; 2009b).</p> <p>A second £250,000 ESRC research project (2008-2011), for which Myhill was PI and Jones co-investigator, investigated whether explicit embedded grammar teaching would improve students' attainment in writing. Introducing grammar in a way that was relevant and meaningful to the learning of writing, it combined a large-scale randomized controlled trial (RCT) with classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and analysis of writing samples. The study, involving 744 children in 31 schools across Southwest England and the Midlands, explored the impact of teacher subject knowledge and contextualised grammar teaching on students' writing and metalinguistic understanding. This study was the first internationally to demonstrate a positive effect for the teaching of grammar in context, as opposed to grammar taught as a discrete body of knowledge (Jones et al 2012). The RCT also revealed a differential effect, benefitting more able writers more than weaker writers, and a mediating effect of teachers' linguistic subject knowledge on the success of the intervention (Myhill et al 2012). Findings from the qualitative data indicated the significance of teacher subject knowledge of grammar on the effect of the teaching; the beneficial effect of the explicitness of the teaching schemes; the beneficial effect of opportunities for discussion and experimentation with effect; and the development of metalinguistic awareness in the intervention group (Myhill 2011).</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**3. References to the research****Key outputs:**

1. Jones, S.M. Myhill, D.A. and Bailey, T.C. (2013) Grammar for Writing? An investigation into the effect of Contextualised Grammar Teaching on Student Writing. *Reading and Writing* 26(8)1241-1263 10.1007/s11145-012-9416-1
2. Myhill, D.A. Jones, S.M., Lines, H. & Watson A. (2012) Re-Thinking Grammar: the Impact of Embedded Grammar Teaching on Students' Writing and Students' Metalinguistic Understanding. *Research Papers in Education* 27(2) 139-166 10.1080/02671522.2011.637640
3. Myhill, D.A. (2009a) From Talking to Writing: Linguistic Development in Writing In: Teaching and Learning Writing: Psychological Aspects of Education - Current Trends: *British Journal of Educational Psychology Monograph Series II* (6). BPS, Leicester, UK. pp27-44. 10.1348/978185409X421895
4. Myhill, D. A. (2009b) Children's Patterns of Composition and their Reflections on their Composing Processes *British Educational Research Journal* 35 (1) 47-64. 10.1080/01411920802042978
5. Myhill, D. A (2008) Towards a Linguistic Model of Sentence Development in Writing. *Language and Education* 22 (5) 271-288 10.1080/09500780802152655

**Key grants:**

- Myhill, D.A . Shaping Policy and Practice: (Follow-on) ESRC ES/J00037X/1: £77,339 2011-12
- Myhill, D. A. and Jones, S.M. *Grammar for writing? The impact of Contextualised Grammar Teaching* ESRC RES-062-23-0775: £249,956 2008-2011 (End of Award Grade: Very Good)
- Myhill, D.A *The Linguistic and Compositional Characteristics of Secondary Writers* ESRC RES-000-23-0208: £117,101 2003-2005 (End of Award Grade: Good)

**Research quality:** the outputs all derive from peer-reviewed ESRC-funded research, and both projects received high quality gradings from rapporteurs (see above).

**4 Details of the impact****Shaping national and international policy and policy guidance on grammar in the curriculum and the teaching of writing:**

The two ESRC studies by Myhill and Jones have helped steer the development of the revised National Curriculum for English. Myhill led the advisory group of four writing the Grammar Annex of the Primary English curriculum and advised on the Composition strand<sup>1</sup>; Myhill and Jones were invited to present Study 2 at a DfE<sup>1</sup> seminar in 2011 to the English Curriculum Team and the KS2 English Test team; and Myhill provided expert testimony in two round table discussions of the English curriculum revision with the Minister of State for Schools (Oct 2012 and Dec 2012). The draft Curriculum, published in January 2013, is evidence that Myhill's input, drawing on Studies 1 and 2, had mitigated ministerial desire for a reductionist list of grammar terms. Although a grammar annex is counter to Myhill's advice for a wholly contextualized grammar strand, it is developmental in its progression, signalling contextualizing possibilities, and the preamble to the Grammar Annex includes two sentences written by Myhill, drawing directly on the research: 'Explicit knowledge of grammar is, however, very important, as it gives us more conscious control and choice in our language. Building this knowledge is best achieved through a focus on grammar within the teaching of reading, writing and speaking' (<http://bit.ly/1bi2eQN> p66). Myhill was also one of only two academics invited to a seminar, hosted by Sir Michael Wilshaw, marking the publication of the Ofsted report, *Moving English Forward*. She drew on both studies to inform understanding of the concern noted in the report about poor standards in writing. Study 2 is cited by the DfE in a summary of research evidence on writing (<http://bit.ly/1fHYnMo>) and was also cited by the Education Endowment Foundation as one of the 'promising approaches' in their review of interventions informing their *Transitions* projects: (<http://bit.ly/1eowsDf>). In addition, Study 1 'provided invaluable evidence of students' writing development, particularly in relation to the linguistic demands and expectations of the writing curriculum' for the new Australian National Curriculum<sup>2</sup>. Myhill was a member of the DfE Test Review Group<sup>1</sup>, and provided critical feedback on the design of the new grammar tests for KS2 English, drawing on research evidence from both studies. Myhill's 'detailed report' and her 'concerns with the nature of testing grammar out of context as well as the identification of some technical issues with the content being assessed' is acknowledged in the Technical Report (<http://bit.ly/10e5ue2>).

**Developing teachers' understanding and practice in the teaching of grammar and writing:**

## Impact case study (REF3b)

Study 2 secured ESRC Impact funding to develop Research Action Partnerships (RAPs) in 9 schools, where teachers developed their own teaching materials, and their linguistic subject knowledge. As a result of the RAPs, 92% of participating teachers have altered their professional practice in the teaching of writing. One of the teachers disseminated her work through an article in *Classroom* (Shallcross 2012 *Classroom* 18: 49-51) and the revised teaching materials have been produced by NATE on a webpage dedicated to our research (<http://bit.ly/115ln2j>) with 11,315 downloads at the end of August 2013. The research team has written 14 articles in professional magazines, providing evidence-based practical guidance for teachers (<http://bit.ly/19sHgFY>). An ESRC *Society Today* article reporting Study 2 was reproduced in the GTCNI's termly magazine and circulated to 27,000 teachers in Northern Ireland; and news articles outlining the research have been published throughout the period, including the *Daily Telegraph* (07.09.11;09.07.12), the *TES* (12.11.10; 27.07.12; 9.11.12) and internationally, the *China Daily* (20.10.11) and *Illawarra Mercury* (14.04.11). One article published in the New South Wales professional journal for English teachers was subsequently reproduced in the Western Australian equivalent and finally in the national journal (*English in Australia*). As a consequence, the English and Literacy Team from the New South Wales Curriculum & Learning Innovation Centre have used the teaching materials as part of their response to grammar in the Australian National Curriculum; and in January 2013, Myhill was keynote speaker for a Teachers' Summer School on grammar and literacy in Wollongong, Australia. Keynotes given to English professional associations in Australia (Perth 2011) and New Zealand (Auckland 2012) led to requests for access to the teaching materials from the research and in July 2013, Myhill and Jones hosted a visit from a teacher from Western Australia to visit local schools to see the research in practice, with another visit from a New Zealand teacher planned for 2014. In Sept 2013, the University of Cape Town<sup>3</sup> used the materials for CPD with local teachers and reported it 'a phenomenal success', and now wish to roll it out on a larger scale, with our support, in South Africa. The active dissemination of the research through these multiple outlets has led to unanticipated impact, such as an article<sup>4</sup> by an unknown LA adviser about a project successfully using the approach in a cluster of schools.

These professional publications and news reports have led to numerous requests for the teaching materials and invitations to lead training workshops. A speech and language therapist in NHS Lothian, Edinburgh used the research to support writing in secondary schools. Myhill and Jones have led more than 60 practical training workshops for teachers between 2008 and 2013, (including one in Switzerland) involving over 2250 participants and often in co-operation with Local Authorities. For example, in summer 2012, Myhill led two CPD days (attended by 120 primary and secondary teachers) organized by Worcester LA, and a grammar workshop for the Hampshire LA Primary Literacy Conference; and in Spring 2013, two full day workshops involving 125 primary teachers and an advisory meeting with headteachers were organized by Bolton LA. Course evaluations of these events and unsolicited testimonials consistently record better understanding of how to embed grammar purposefully within the teaching of writing: for example, the teacher who wrote that she found a CPD workshop 'inspirational and have discussed it, and the changes I am making to my teaching, with many members of my school'<sup>5</sup>. Teachers using our materials and pedagogical approach report wider acknowledgement of the impact of their usage: two teachers were given Outstanding OFSTED grades when observed using the teaching materials. One London teacher reported that she 'was observed today by the Federation Head and Head of School using the project materials and was given a resounding 'outstanding' from both of them. It was agreed that these plans very definitely modelled the sort of practice we'd like to see throughout the school'<sup>5</sup> (email: 14.06.13) and a Birmingham teacher reported that 'We also had our writing moderated by the local authority. They were particularly impressed with my grammar knowledge and took photos of my marking as they said it was the best they'd seen. It's great to know the project has already had an impact'<sup>5</sup> (email:16.06.13). Further evidence of the impact of these CPD events is in the number of follow-on requests for additional in-school training requested by delegates at these events (eg in Bromsgrove, Portsmouth and Winchester schools) and the number of CPD schools willing to become project schools for our current EEF-funded study into year 6 FSM writers. Rapporteur C, in the ESRC evaluation of Study 2, noted 'the real difference made to classrooms and the teaching of English' as a highlight of the research, noting that research presentations rarely have the same impact as practical CPD workshops, such as these.

**Influencing the work of a commercial organisation, developing new materials and CPD:**

Pearson Education have adopted the research findings and associated pedagogy 'as its defining

## Impact case study (REF3b)

*pedagogical method for improving literacy standards*<sup>6</sup>, resulting in a new series, *Skills for Writing* (SfW - <http://bit.ly/12vUaZL>). Myhill and Jones are acting as research consultants in the development of these teaching materials, ensuring that the materials accurately reflect the research findings. The Pedagogy Guide, outlining the research findings, was post mailed to 4762 Heads of English (almost all in the country) and a digital version emailed to 190,000 English teachers. A video clip outlining the research received 1893 hits (<http://bit.ly/YafH7u>), with 13,373 hits on the SfW webpage. 268 English departments requested to pilot the materials and 1561 teachers have registered interest in evaluating them. Pearson anticipate that a minimum of 1000 UK secondary schools will adopt SfW, and the International division has also received interest in SfW: two very large schools in India will join the pilot next term, followed by schools from Latin America and the Middle East. Cybergrammar ([www.cybergrammar.co.uk](http://www.cybergrammar.co.uk)) developed by Myhill to support teacher knowledge of grammar and incorporating the findings of both studies 1 and 2 is being redeveloped by Pearson as part of their ActiveLearn materials. Pearson have commissioned two CPD contracts with Exeter, (for KS3 Writing and Literacy in Science), to develop teachers' confidence in teaching grammar in the context of writing, and Myhill and Jones are 'training the trainers' to develop capacity within Pearson. In 2014, it is anticipated that approximately 800 teachers will participate in this SfW CPD. Pearson have also funded two research studies, (£77K) investigating the impact of the research approach on weaker writers, (with 463 downloads of the research report) and on GCSE writing. The primary English team have produced a series of video clips drawing out the implications of the research for the new primary Curriculum (<http://bit.ly/1eoAU5b>). This adoption of the research to inform a programme of teaching materials, CPD and research represents an investment of approximately £750,000 by Pearson.

### **Stimulating practitioner and public debate about grammar and writing:**

The findings of both studies, but Study 2 in particular, have stimulated debate about the role of grammar in the curriculum, particularly given the contested nature of traditional approaches to grammar. Myhill was invited to contribute a position piece on grammar for the June 2011 edition of *English Drama Media* magazine, considering the future of English, and to the *Heart of English* ([www.heartofenglish.com](http://www.heartofenglish.com)) discussion pieces on the proposed National Curriculum. She contributed to a United Kingdom Literacy Association position paper on writing and the research is cited in the UKLA Writing Fact Cards, designed to support practitioners in understanding the debate about teaching writing (<http://bit.ly/1aV0mPC>). *Better*, a UK/US magazine publishing plain English summaries of research, featured Study 2 in 2011 (<http://bit.ly/14sCgdh>). A hotseat discussion was hosted by Myhill and Jones for the National College for School Leadership in March 2012, answering teachers' queries about the research. A stakeholder conference involving teachers, teacher educators, researchers, examination boards, and professional associations was held in February 2012 to discuss the implications of Study 2, which resulted in follow-up requests for CPD or further keynotes with specialist groups (eg OCR; NAAE). A public lecture was given at the University of Oxford in October 2012 and the DfE Team Leader for English & Foreign Languages cited Study 2 in a Westminster Forum discussion of the draft English Curriculum to counter the perception that the curriculum advocates teaching '*grammar in isolation*' (<http://bit.ly/13ryKwS>). The Chair of NATE referred to the Exeter research in his counter-response to Gove's criticism of the English subject association: (<http://bit.ly/1cRE4g6>) and Michael Rosen cited it in his critique of Gove's grammar policies (The Guardian 10.05.13).

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (numbers below refer to superscript numbers above)

1	Department for Education	[Name supplied] Team Leader for English & Modern Foreign Languages
2	Corroborating contact in Australia	Factual statement supplied from the Professor of Education, University of Wollongong and a member of the National Curriculum Review Group (Australia)
3	University of Cape Town	[Name supplied] Associate Professor, Schools Development Unit, School of Education, University of Cape Town
4	Article Reference	Hendy, M. (2013) Improving Writing through teaching grammar in context. <i>English 4-11</i> Issue 49pp11-12
5	Email Evidence	Emails corroborating quotations in case study
6	Pearson Education	Factual statement supplied from the Senior Product Manager: Secondary English