A case study observing the effect the teaching of grammar has upon pupils’ independent writing.

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This project examined the effect of the teaching of grammar upon pupils’ independent writing. The writing of two year 1 children was scrutinised through the introduction of independent writing journals and a child conference. The research found an inconsistency between the use of grammar in teacher led activities and the use of grammar in writing journals. Furthermore, it was evident that the standard of writing changed between writing in English books and the writing in writing journals. The research concludes by highlighting the importance of cross-curricular writing and the limitations of this study.

Introduction
Grammar is a subject that has been argued about for decades (Andrews et al, 2006) with Clark (2010) stating that there is a revolution occurring regarding the teaching of grammar. Historically, grammar was approached in a fluid, flexible and broad manner with ancient scholars in the Roman era aiming to produce habits of language to support students in becoming successful and productive citizens (Murphy, 2012). As the English language expanded in the Elizabethan era, the role of grammar developed with the definition narrowing to only encompass the skill of speaking correctly, before then adapting and viewed as a tool which made no difference to the standard of children’s writing. This then lead to a rejection of grammar teaching by teachers in the late fifties as it was seen as suffocating instead of fostering an interest in language (Myhill, 2006 and Hunt, 2000). With no explicit focus on grammar in primary schools (Kolln and Hancock, 2005; Myhill, 2006; Hunt, 2000 and Gartland and Smolkin, 2016) the vacuum in this subject led some politicians and educationalists to identify this lack as having a negative impact on pupils’ literacy development and more. In 1985 MP Norman Tebbit discussed the correlation between grammatical standards and crime rates stating that

‘If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English…these things tend to cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there is no imperative to stay out of crime.’ (Norman Tebbit, MP Radio 4, 1985 cited in Jaspers et al, 2010)

A similar view to those held by teachers in the fifties and sixties about the teaching of grammar was made by Elbow (1981) who argues that nothing helps writing more than learning to ignore grammar, evidencing an inconsistency in viewpoints about the current teaching of grammar.

Grammar in schools has recently hit news headlines again due to the introduction of the spelling, punctuation and grammar test in May 2013 (Marszal, 2012; Sellgren, 2012) which has illustrated that ‘1 in 4 children are leaving primary school without a firm grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar.’ (Department for Education and the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss, 2013)

In light of the previous research, this small scale study shall focus on the contested argument revolving around the teaching of grammar; particularly whether primary school children use their grammar subject knowledge in their everyday writing. To answer this question, this research will firstly explore the definition of grammar, followed by the approaches to teaching of grammar and previous research into the correlation between the teaching of grammar and effect on writing before exploring the methodology and findings associated with the case study conducted.
Literature Discussion

What is grammar?

Wyse (2001) argues that an initial problem with the teaching of grammar is attempting to define it; Batstone (2006) argues that ‘grammar is not a single, homogeneous object but an immensely broad and diverse phenomenon’. This is an argument supported by Myhill et al (2013, p.103) who suggests that grammar instruction is complicated by ‘the multiplicity of meanings and connotations that the word evokes’, agreeing that there is still no universally agreed definition. Due to the diverse nature of this subject, debates often confuse descriptive grammar: a set of rules based on how language is actually used in different contexts and settings (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005; Wyse and Jones, 2007) and prescriptive grammar: a set of rules about how language should be used (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005; Wyse and Jones, 2007).

Andrews et al (2006) propose the definition of grammar as referring to written sentence grammar which includes the study of syntax, clause and phrase structure and the classification of parts of speech. Alternatively, Hartwell (1985) identified five meanings of grammar:

1. The set of formal patterns which speakers of a language use automatically to construct and construe larger meanings;
2. The scientific study (description, analysis and articulation) of the formal patterns of a language;
3. A set of rules governing how one ought to speak or write;
4. The grammar taught in schools;
5. Grammatical terms and concepts used to help teach prose style.

(Hartwell, 1985 cited in Wyse, 2001)

This seminal research evidences the fundamental themes which are embedded within the current National Curriculum which aims to offer children the opportunity to ‘acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language’ (DfE, 2013). Whilst Crystal (2004) states that the study of grammar is about taking language to pieces and seeing how it works, Gartland and Smolkin (2016) develop this by suggesting that grammar is a set of rules that explain how a system operates, a definition which could be used to support the belief that grammar is simply used as a tool for maintaining standards (Cameron, 1994; Pullman, 2005). Whilst Rosen (2012) agrees that grammar is a set of rules to be obeyed, Gartland and Smolkin (2016) identify this definition as a limitation within the teaching of grammar, as the term could be used to define the arrangements of words and phrases (syntax), the study of how words are formed in language (morphology) or the meanings of words and the vocabulary choices we employ (semantics).

Whilst there is no universally clearly agreed definition, for the purpose of this study the teaching of grammar will be defined as the arrangements of words and phrases (Gartland and Smolkin, 2016) as this definition links best with the aims of the National Curriculum (2013) expectations for year 1, to be able to add prefixes and suffixes.

The approaches to teaching grammar

Literature states that the teaching of grammar is predominately taught as either a discrete or an embedded input. Thornbury (2000, p.16) defines a discrete element of teaching grammar as ‘any unit of the grammar system that is sufficiently narrowly defined to form the focus of a lesson or an exercise’ meaning that a discrete lesson stands alone and focuses on one particular element of grammar at a time. On the other hand, embedded grammar is included within the context of the writing. Whilst historically, grammar was taught as a sequence of
discrete lessons or inputs (Barbour, 1901; Barton and Hudson, 2002; University of Glasgow Arts, 2017), recent research by Dombey (2013) illustrates the following view:

‘a wide range of research findings has repeatedly shown it is not useful to divorce technical matters, whether grammatical or secretarial, from the business of learning to compose written text for a range of audiences and purposes.’

This is a view which is supported by both the UKLA (2013) and Halliday and Mathiessen (2013) who state that in order for grammar to make a positive contribution to children’s writing, it must be taught within meaningful contexts, rather than a set of facts or rules. A claim Halliday and Mathiessen (2013) develop by arguing that separating grammar from meaning is fundamentally flawed. Wyse and Jones (2007) note that as children get older the teaching of grammar generally becomes more and more decontextualized, with evidence suggesting that the teaching of grammar purely through controlled exercises may not allow the opportunity for learners to process and retain this knowledge. In addition, this approach is putting children off the learning rather than helping (Lightbown, 1983; Batstone, 2006; Wyse and Jones, 2007).

Since the introduction of the formalised test, the UKLA has found that the time spent on teaching decontextualized grammar has increased significantly (Safford, 2016). Alternatively, Chen and Pickton (2013) believe that grammar lessons can be discrete however, it is imperative that these lessons are part of a teaching sequence and must relate to meaning and that teachers are confident in using the terminology associated with grammatical and language features.

The correlation between grammar teaching and writing capabilities

Dombey (2013) states that currently there is limited research into the correlation between the learning of grammar and the quality of children’s written work. Whilst some researchers argue that there are no benefits to learning formal, traditional grammar upon children’s work (Macaulay 1947 cited in Andrews 2006; Robinson, 1960; Hillocks, 1986; Wyse 2001; Andrews et al., 2006), Wyse and Jones (2007) believe that the right sort of detailed attention to language itself may be more widely beneficial; However, there is no substantial research evidence to show that this is the case (Dombey, 2013). Hillocks and Smith (1991) question the validity of teaching grammar when there is a lack of evidence to suggest the study of grammar impacts on writing equality. McCauley (1947) identified the basic issue that if children struggle with the metalanguage associated with the teaching of grammar it limits a child’s opportunity to choose the grammatical features which may or may not be beneficial to their writing. However, the effect the teaching of grammar had upon their writing was not documented within these studies.

The need for grammar to have meaningful context is a theme consistently expressed throughout the research conducted (Knapp et al, 1995; Medwell et al., 1998; Louden et al., 2010; Waugh, Waugh and Warner, 2013). Hunt (2000) documents how the importance of teaching grammar within the context of writing is highly regarded as a positive effect of grammar teaching. There is, though, a lack of robust research about the direct relationship between teaching primary children knowledge about language or grammar having any beneficial impact on their writing (Dombey, 2013).

Through the critical analysis of previous research about the teaching of grammar and the correlation between the teaching of grammar and children’s writing capabilities, there are unanswered questions that have arisen, in particular:

What is the impact of the teaching of grammatical terms in pupils’ independent writing?

Do children use the grammar taught in grammar inputs and English lessons in their own independent writing?

Whilst there are some early indications that the grammatical knowledge learned is not transferring into children’s extended writing (Wyse and Jones, 2007), the sub questions above
and previous research discussed in this literature review will form the basis of this small scale study into the correlation between the teaching of grammar and children’s independent writing in a 21st century primary classroom.

**Methods**

**Research context**

Through the introduction of writing journals, this study aimed to explore the value of grammar teaching and if children are applying their teacher led learning to their independent writing. The research was conducted in a smaller than average, two form entry, Hampshire Infant school in a year 1 classroom. The class contained 27 pupils including 1 child for which English is an additional language, 4 children with SEN and 9 higher than average pupils in various subjects. At the time of the last Ofsted inspection in 2014, the school was graded as ‘good’ with pupil attainment by the end of Year 2 recorded as above average. The report suggested that whilst pupils’ achievement in writing is a strength of the school, relatively few pupils reach higher than the expected standard. As such, a target was set to allow pupils the opportunity to practice their writing skills in their work which corresponds with the Department for Education (2013) belief that pupils’ should be given daily time to write.

**Methodology**

A multi-methods approach to data collection was used and the research was conducted as a case study which would provide a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data. Whilst Bryman (2006) states that ‘the range of concrete examples of multi-strategy research is not great’, Brannen (2006) argues that a multi strategy research approach is a characteristic of a case study in which a number of different methods are embedded. A case study is defined by Thomas (2011) as being a study about the particular, rather than the general. As such, this case study focuses on the use of grammar of two children in their independent writing. By using a case study, this allows the opportunity to build a detailed view of the research and view the study as a whole through the use of one or more methods (Bell, 2005, Bell 2014; Thomas, 2011). A case study was chosen as a suitable research method as it allows the data to be collected on multiple occasions and shows progress over time within a single primary school as opposed to collating evidence from a singular diary entry of multiple children. It should be noted that the limitations of using only two children mean that the results could not be generalised to apply to every child, an argument highlighted by critics of case studies (Denscombe, 1998) although, Bassey (1981) argues that it is more important that the research is relatable for teachers working in a similar situation rather than a studies generalizability.

**Ethical considerations**

Prior to conducting the research, the ethical implications (British Educational Research Association, 2011) were considered and adhered to, to ensure that the values and aims of the research and those involved were promoted (Resnik, 2015). Before the research was carried out, both the rationale and the methodology were explained orally and in writing to both the gatekeeper and the class teacher and permission was provided via a signed consent form. In regards to the pupils’, prior to the introduction of the writing journals, a class discussion about the research was held and the children were also assured of the anonymity of the study. This meant that the children were aware of the research being conducted, which ethically could have influenced the writing as the children may have aimed to please the researcher, the possibility of this occurring was minimalised by introducing these journals on the first day before a rapport was built reduces this possibility. In relation to the child conference, prior to any research being conducted, verbal assent was given by participants.

**Writing Journals**
Characterised as providing children with the chance to develop their own writing style or voice (Johnson, 2000), writing journals are used to give children the freedom to explore writing itself in all its various genres and linguistic formalities. The purpose of a writing journal includes, but is not limited to, meeting specific goals or being wide open, used to polish skills or as an uncorrected form of writing (Hopkins, 2010) but most important, the diary is a tool for awareness-raising and genuine, authentic language use (Little, Dam and Timmer, 1998).

Whilst there is limited research into both the use and the effectiveness of using writing journals to research children’s writing, my own experiences with them built an understanding about how these could be used to document children’s independent writing. Hiemstra (2001) researched the effects of using writing journals with adult learners which evidenced the development of skills such as problem solving, personal development opportunities and reflective/critical thinking. These were also similar characteristics identified in the research conducted with the observed children in year 1 as due to the writing journals not be an assessed activity, some children were able to self-assess their own independent writing and the opportunity to write reflectively.

Over the course of 10 weeks, half an hour was allocated every Monday morning to offer children the opportunity to use their writing journals. Whilst there were no limitations set in relation to the writing genre and the subject of the writing, this then proved to be a limitation of this method. Whilst initially giving children the opportunity to write about what they wanted was viewed as a positive factor as there was minimal teacher influence meaning the evidence would be unbiased, due to the age group of children this often provided a writing block for the children as they were unsure what to write. Hiemstra and Brier (1994) note this as an obstacle associated with the writing process and this can also produce feelings of frustration and anxiety towards the work. In order to overcome this limitation from week 2 of the study children were given the objective to write about what they did over the weekend as this was appropriate to the time frame in which the writing was completed. This then presented varying levels of work from all children and overcame the struggle of writer’s block which refocused the study back to the research question.

At the end of each research week, the journals of two children were selected at random from the class list. Random sampling was used to remove any bias within the study due to my knowledge of the pupils’ abilities in the class. The diaries were then analysed and the writing excerpt was deconstructed in relation to the use of grammar taught correctly and incorrectly. This provided a quantitative form of data collection which allowed contrasts and comparisons to be made with the work from teacher led inputs in addition to building an understanding of the use of grammar in the child’s writing as a whole. In order to understand the writing and understand the knowledge obtained by the children from their taught grammar inputs, a child conference was conducted at the end of the research period.

Child conferencing

In order to develop a clear understanding of the children’s retained grammar knowledge child conferencing, an element of the mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), was used. Due to the age of the children and the research questions, it was not appropriate to use formal interviews as Punch (2002) states that younger children may have a more limited vocabulary which then may limit the evidence gained or opportunity for the researcher to impose their perception. Additionally, as this research was conducted in a school, due to the rapport gained with the children, they may feel pressured to give ‘correct’ answers to the research questions asked. The mosaic approach however, offers an effective approach of listening and gathering the child’s perspective.

The mosaic approach was originally developed with three and four year olds and child conferencing has been adapted as one of the tools used in this approach (Clark and Moss, 2001). Defined as a particular form of informal structured interview, conferencing is usually used to gather children’s views of their early childhood provision. In this case study, the
approach was adapted to discuss the writing conducted in the journals of the two sample children. This then helped to build an understanding of the familiarity with the metalanguage used and understanding if children are aware of what they are using, linked closely with the analysis of the journals and the grammar focused work conducted in their formal English books after a teacher led input.

Whilst the method is limited as there is currently no research with five year olds and child conferencing in relation to written work, a successful feature of the mosaic approach was the ability to build a detailed understanding of the child as a whole (Clark, 2001; Clark, Mcquail, and Moss, 2003; Coleyshaw et al., 2012). In relation to the case study, the child conference was conducted as a paired discussion and open questions were asked in relation to the research questions in order to give participants an opportunity to supply explanatory answers which can then be qualified (Gillham, 2000 and Cohen et al, 2011). It was important that the children felt comfortable within the child conference so it was conducted within a familiar area within the classroom after seeking advice from the children about the best place to conduct the conference. It was important to seek this advice from the children as Punch (2002) states that being in their own space can allow children to feel more comfortable but, adults should not assume this as they may prefer that an adult researcher not to invade their child space.

Child conferencing is the child-centred approach to conducting research which exhibits a true picture of the child’s capabilities, understanding of learning and values their contribution to the discussion (Clark, 2005). It is important to note that the method can be limited by researchers imposing their own perceptions through the analysis of what the children are saying. This is a common concern for qualitative research with children as often they are not used to expressing their views freely or being taken seriously by adults because of their position in an adult dominated society and environment (Punch, 2002). This was reduced in this research by the use of open-ended questions which meant that although it was an adult-led conversation, both children were able to expand and qualify their answers and work collaboratively to express their opinions (Kortesluoma, Hentinen and Nikkonen, 2005).

Findings and Analysis

This section critically discusses the key findings from this research in relation to the research question and the sub-research question identified from the literature review.

What is the impact of the teaching of grammatical terms in pupils’ independent writing?

Do children use the grammar taught in grammar inputs and English lessons in their own independent writing?

In terms of defining the impact of the teaching of grammar, this relates to whether children use grammar at all within their independent writing and if the grammar taught is then used consistently over time. The key findings listed below form the structure of this section and will each be critically discussed. It is important to note that in order to protect the children's anonymity, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Key findings

1. That the children studied were able to use grammar in their implicit lessons.

2. That the children studied were not using their grammar knowledge in their writing journals.

3. Additionally, children were not using the conventions associated with writing, e.g. punctuation, handwriting and phonological knowledge, in their writing journals.
The use of grammar in implicit or teacher led lessons.

Over the period observed, the grammar taught focused on the teaching of suffixes, specifically ‘er’, ‘ed’, ‘ing’ and ‘est’. This was taught through an implicit grammar approach (see figure 1) in which children were changing the root word by adding the suffix. Upon observation and marking of both Julian and Abigail’s work from the lesson focused on the ‘er’ suffix, both children were able to complete the task with no mistakes. This understanding was also supported in the child conference in which Julian identified that you use the ‘er’ suffix when you are comparing three or more things. This was a similar finding when analysing the work based upon the suffixes ‘ed’, ‘ing’ and ‘est’ which was taught in the same manner and so this indicates that children can use grammar in their implicit lessons.

![Figure 1: Example of discrete grammar lesson](image)

There are arguments against the teaching of discrete grammar, with the UKLA (2013) and Halliday and Mathiessen (2013) arguing that it should be taught within meaningful contexts rather than a set of facts or rules. The data from this study shows that after an implicit grammar lesson, children could identify that the suffixes learnt were always added onto the end of the root word and the context of using the suffix, whether it be for comparison or to change the tense of the word. Nonetheless, this teaching approach also may have been a limitation to the children’s learning as when presented with an extension task of using the suffix ending in a sentence, Julian illustrated an understanding the comparative nature of writing sentences with the ‘er’ suffix (‘An egg is sweeter than a sausage’), he then used the suffix to replace the ‘a’ phoneme at the end of the word lava, a word which he had previously spelt correctly in other work. By using the suffix incorrectly to replace all ‘er’ sounds in his writing, this supports Dombey’s (2013) statement that it is in fact not useful to separate grammatical matters from the context or that the repetitive nature of the task, which was used to learn all the suffixes, was to fault for this surface level understanding of how and when to use a suffix.

The use of grammatical knowledge in independent writing.

At the beginning of the research two writing journals were scrutinised. However, this then gave inconclusive results as Julian, a high achieving boy, used the taught grammar of suffixes consistently in his writing which contrasted Abigail, a middle ability girl, who did not. This meant that the research could not provide enough evidence to support whether children were using their taught grammar in their writing journals. Fortunately, due to ethical considerations, all children in the class participated in using writing journals thus allowing three more writing journals to be scrutinised for their use of grammar.
In week 2, Julian wrote:

‘I played on my tablot and I got on to the cacle levall on blue cid 2.’

It is important to note that the inputs delivered in relation to suffixes were delivered in week 3, week 4, week 7 and week 8. This means that before the taught input the child had prior knowledge of the suffix ‘ed’ and how to use it to identify something that had already happened. This knowledge may have been gained from previous reading experience that he had encountered or his phonological knowledge of the two letters needed to make the ‘ed’ sound. He is consistent in using ‘ed’ throughout his writing, both before and after the input, with words such as ‘saved, watched and called’ emphasising a secure knowledge of using the suffix ‘ed’. In addition, in week 4 and week 10 he begun to use ‘ing’ correctly when writing the words ‘raining and walking’. However, it is unclear whether this was secure knowledge as ‘walking’ was written before the taught input, whilst ‘raining’ was written almost two months later with no use of suffixes occurring between these dates in the writing journal. Upon analysis of the writing journal, it is evident that Julian is confident in using the suffix ‘ed’ in his writing but there is a lack of evidence to indicate his ability with using ‘er, est or ing’ although he had used the word ‘bigest’ instead of a biggest evidencing that he understood the rules of applying ‘est’. A limitation of this year group was identified as they were yet to learn about some root words changing before adding the suffix as this is something they would not encounter until year 3 and 4.

Abigail evidenced an inconsistent understanding of using suffixes in her writing journal. In weeks 1, 2 and 5, Abigail was using the ‘ing’ suffix to write ‘swiming, having and going’ evidencing a phonological understanding of writing ing and the context in which to use the suffix. Nevertheless, after learning the suffix ‘ed’ in which she appeared confident during the directed task, she was then unable to use this in her own independent writing in the journal (See figure 2). Writing words such as ‘staid’ instead of stayed and ‘wosht’ for watched. This may be due to the use of her phonics knowledge to segment and blend the word rather than knowing how to spell these words. Or it may be a lack of understanding of the correct use of these suffixes, suggesting that teaching grammar implicitly did not impact on her independent writing.

Figure 2: a) An example of teacher led activity (week 3) b) Example 1 of writing journal (week 7) c) Example 2 of writing journal (week 9) .

consistently over the research period, with played becoming ‘plaid’ or ‘playd’; Although, by the end of the term most children were able to self-correct these mistakes. This became a focus in the teacher led writing and children acted upon the feedback given within their English
lessons, one child was still making the same mistakes in his writing consistently. Whilst he could use suffixes in directed task and his own English writing, when it came to independent writing in his writing journal he was not applying his knowledge learnt. This may be due to the lack of marking and feedback in the writing journals which then meant he did not have the opportunity to review and edit his writing or because he now had to apply the skills which were previously learnt in a discrete grammar lesson in his own writing. This supports Hunt’s (2000) study which documents the importance of teaching grammar within the context of writing.

It could be argued that children may not have used many grammatical strategies within their own independent writing due to the limitation of their age. Hunt (2000) documents that enabling children to have the ability to choose their own choice of words is highly regarded as a positive effect of grammar teaching nonetheless, with the age group studied this was shown as a limitation of the study due to the age of the children. As year 1 pupils, the grammar being taught such as suffixes, adjectives and verbs is all new learning and one may argue that in order to be confident in using a feature independently, learning needs to be clarified in a range of contexts until such point when they are confidently able to use such features. Alternatively, Julian who is a confident and adventurous reader has been exposed to a higher frequency of words in which he now transfers into his own writing.

The conventions of writing and writing journals

Whilst the focus of this case study was whether children are using their taught grammar in their independent writing, an unexpected finding was discovered linked to the use of writing conventions associated with using a writing journal. In the school studied, when writing the children are expected to use the ‘non-negotiable’ features such as using best handwriting, using their phonics to spell phase 4 and 5 words and the use of punctuation. It was evident that when moving children from their English books to the writing journals for writing, these ‘non-negotiables’ were seen less frequently. Figure 3 shows an extract from Abigail’s writing journal in comparison to a piece of work written at the same time in her English book. In the writing journal, the words are almost illegible and capital letters are not being used after full stops. Additionally, she was misspelling words such as ‘was’ and ‘come’ which she had previously learnt. In comparison, the work completed within her English book evidenced a use of suffixes, clear and legible handwriting and the use of punctuation. It could be argued that this was because the English work was a teacher led activity in which support was given when required and feedback was given throughout the lesson which gave the children the opportunity to correct their mistakes which is evidenced through the correction of inserting a capital letter in the words ‘lots’ after a full stops. Alternatively, it may also be due to the time of day that the writing occurred; whilst the English writing was written directly after a teaching input which modelled the expectations for the piece of writing, children were given the freedom to write about whatever they wanted in a designated 20 minute slot every Monday morning. By conducting the research first thing on a Monday morning, children were often unfocused on the activity or much of the learning had been forgotten over the weekend and the study may have been supported by a consolidation session before children then are able to use it in their own writing.
Conclusion

The overarching aim of this research was to distinguish whether the teaching of grammar had any impact upon children’s independent work in their writing journals. A study of two children (through analysis of their writing journals and writing conferences) found that the impact was very much dependent on the attainment and prior knowledge of the children themselves. However, when analysing a further 3 writing journals, there appeared to be no correlation between the use of grammar in a teacher led activity and use of grammar in writing journals with 4/5 children not using the grammar taught in their journals.

Due to the limited size of the study and time constraints, it is important to note that the results found may not be applicable to all settings and further research should be conducted to support the research.

The results suggest that through the introduction of writing journals and from information obtained from the child conference, that the children were not consistently using the grammar taught in their writing journals. This finding is consistent with the research by Wyse and Jones (2007) who state that there are early indications that children are not transferring their grammatical knowledge into their extended writing. It is unclear whether this is due to the discrete nature of teaching which would be supported by the research conducted by UKLA (2013) and Halliday and Mathiessen (2013) who argue that grammar must be taught within meaningful contexts in order to make a positive contribution to children’s writing rather than as a set of facts or rules. Alternatively, the limitations of the age group studied could have affected children’s use of grammar in their journals. Arguably, Year 1 pupils are still learning the conventions of the English language and how to communicate themselves as learners (Saffran, Senghas and Trueswell, 2001) and so grammar will be a new and challenging subject. With this in mind, it would be advisable for further research to be conducted with a larger sample of children of an older age group to observe whether once children are confident and fluent in using grammatical features in their work, if they are then able to transfer this to their independent writing journals.

This case study also identified a discrepancy between the quality of work conducted in formal English books and the work completed in the independent writing journals, specifically the
quality of handwriting, spellings and use of punctuation. This additional finding evidenced the lack of use of transferrable writing conventions when children changed the book they were writing in which may also be linked to why children were not using grammar in their writing journals. All 5 writing journals showed a change in handwriting, spelling and punctuation standards as the children changed books. This study identified that the standards of writing deteriorated in the writing journals compared to children’s English books; it was also evident that standards of writing deteriorated in science books for most children also. This may be due to the relaxed expectations that accompany writing in both the writing journals and science books, it is suggested that due to the high standard of written work that these standards be transferred across the subjects and that writing then became a cross-curricular activity rather than being perceived as an independent topic limited to one book. Previous research suggests that undertaking cross curricular learning can support learners understanding with in the subject and also gives children a clear understanding of the standards expected (Stagg Peterson and Rochwerger, 2006) whilst Ofsted (2010) commended schools in which cross-curricular learning was used successfully to offer the opportunity for students to develop skills and independence.

Although this research was a small scale study, it did begin to explore whether children are using the grammar taught in their independent writing journals, an area for which there is currently limited research. Nevertheless, many additional questions have arisen as a result of this case study and further research would be needed to develop an understanding of the reasons why children are not using grammar in their independent writing and if this is similar for all age groups. This being said, the purpose of this small scale case study was to gain a better understanding of both the teaching of grammar and the transferrable knowledge gained by the children examined. The study allowed teachers the opportunity to observe the children in their class and their independent work through an alternative method to their own assessment records. This then allows teachers to plan for progression of learning and opportunities to consolidate the learning gained in the initial grammar inputs. This assessment for learning (AFL) opportunity would then form another supporting tool to ensure children are showing progression in their writing ability and also develop a level of fluency associated with using these grammatical conventions in their own independent writing thus equipping children with the freedom to choose their own choice of words, a skill which is highlighted by Hunt (2000) as a positive effect of teaching grammar.
Reference list


