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Can Grammar Graphics Impact Grammar Knowledge and Collegiate Writing?

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Dr. Mark Zablocki is an assistant professor in the Department of Special Education and a Chicago native. He obtained his Ph.D. in special education from the University of Maryland in 2009 where he was also a research associate for the National Center for Education, Disability and Juvenile Justice (EDJJ). Prior to that he spent 10 years as a special educator in K-12 public schools. His research interests include literacy instruction for at-risk youth, urban education, the school-to-prison pipeline, and teacher preparation.

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Dr. Christy Borders received her Ed.D. in Special Education from the University of Cincinnati in 2009. Christy has spent considerable time identifying gaps in literature and potential interventions for use with the population of students who are deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH) with additional disabilities, particularly autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Her research stems from personal classroom and clinical experiences that involved this particular population. Christy has extensive academic and clinical experience and training with over 10 years of clinical, classroom, and administrative experience working with D/HH students with disabilities.

Carrie Anna Courtad

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Dr. Carrie Anna Courtad is an Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education at Illinois State University. Prior to pursuing a career in academia, she was a classroom teacher for 10 years, six of those years in Austin Independent School District, working with middle school students with disabilities in a high poverty, inner-city school. Carrie Anna completed her PhD at Michigan State University where she was a Special Education Technology Scholar (SETS). Her areas of interest include preservice teacher preparation, assistive technology, literacy and policy.

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Dr. Stacey Jones Bock has spent the past 20 years researching the area of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and supporting children and youth and their families. Her formal training in ASD came from the University of Kansas where upon completion of her dissertation, she coauthored the Asperger Syndrome Diagnostic Scale in 2000. In the past five years she has spent a great deal of time expanding her research to children and youth with a comorbid diagnosis of ASD and hearing loss. Her passion for the area came from supporting children with a dual diagnosis, their teachers, and their families.

Grammar Graphics is a visual system for teaching English syntax. It has the potential to influence ways in which teacher candidates may teach grammar to their K-12 students in the future as well impact their own syntactic knowledge. This system teaches visual symbols for each part of speech with rationale for the symbol itself. We investigated the impact of explicit instruction in grammar with Grammar Graphics on teacher candidate knowledge of syntax as well as their confidence to instruct their future K-12 students in grammar. We further assessed the impact of explicit instruction in grammar with Grammar Graphics on collegiate writing.

Can Grammar Graphics Impact Grammar Knowledge and Collegiate Writing?

Mark Zablocki, Christy Borders, Carrie Anna Courtad, & Stacey Jones Bock
Department of Special Education

Rationale

Writing is an important skill that cuts across all disciplines, and one that most future teachers will have to teach at a proficient level. A deeper understanding of this skill is particularly important for future special education teachers as they teach students with language delays that directly impact their use of grammar. As special education teachers undergo training at the undergraduate level, it is imperative they learn (or re-learn) grammar so that they can teach this content to their future students. At the same time this importance is being recognized, college professors are lamenting that college students' writing is actually getting worse (Aalai, 2014). Aalai associates some of the writing problems to the use of technology and social media but further cites another educator, McGuire (2014) who correlates poor writing with a lack of students being taught the basic grammar skills they once were taught. Therefore, Zablocki, Borders, Courtad, and Jones Bock hypothesize that quick, short grammar lessons provided to teacher candidates in literacy courses will have an impact on their knowledge and use of grammar. The purpose of this study was two-fold, 1) to investigate the extent to which explicit instruction in grammar with Grammar Graphics has on teacher candidates' knowledge of syntax as well as their confidence to instruct their future K-12 students in grammar; and 2) to assess the impact of explicit instruction in grammar with Grammar Graphics on collegiate writing.

What is Grammar Graphics?

Grammar Graphics is a sequential language program that bridges the gap between identifying parts of speech and writing. Additionally, Grammar Graphics explicitly teaches English syntax systematically through the use of scaffolded lessons using visual supports. Parts of speech and basic syntax structures (nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions) are taught sequentially. Grammar Graphics uses visual aids and concrete materials to help students master the content.

 = Verb

 = Adjective

 = Preposition

 = Demonstrative Adjective

 = Pronoun

Study Implementation

Study Design and Dependent Variables

- **Quasi-experimental design** – Two instructors provided the intervention; One instructor served as the control.
 - Survey – Perceptions of preparedness to teach syntactic structures
 - Assessment – Identification of syntactic structures; specifically, parts of speech
 - Writing Samples – Write in response to a prompt
- **Curricular component** – All students in SED 342 and SED 340 learn about language development and components of language. Intervention groups received instruction via Grammar Graphics while the control group was instructed via typical lecture methods, and without Grammar Graphics instruction. The Grammar Graphics curriculum was taught in addition to the regular early literacy curriculum in both intervention groups, but in varying intensity. In Intervention Group #1, 25 Grammar Graphics lessons were administered across 13 class sessions. In Intervention Group #2, 10 Grammar Graphics lessons were administered across 10 classes (one per week).

Participants

Class	n	LBS	DHH	Dual	Soph.	Junior	Senior
Int. 1	16	0	14	2	9	4	3
Int. 2	18	17	0	1	1	16	1
Control	8	8	0	0	0	7	1
Total	42	25	14	3	10	27	5

LBS- Learning and Behavioral Specialist, DHH- Deaf and Hard of Hearing, DUAL- more than one major

Independent Variables in Intervention Groups

- Grammar Graphics lessons were presented at a pace of 2-3 lessons per week.
- In Intervention Group 1, lessons were taught via writing the sentences on the board and "coding" structures "in real time" with colored chalk.
- In Intervention Group 2, lessons were taught via illustrating "coding" electronically via PowerPoint slides.

Description of control group activities

- Control, parts of speech and syntactic structures were presented via traditional academic readings outside of class time, class lecture, and learning activities.

Data Collection

I Can Teach Grammar!

Please complete the following matrix related to how confident you feel in your ability to teach each of the following areas Pre-K to 12th grade students English syntax, or grammar.

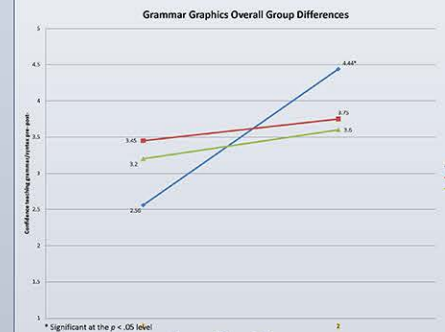
Name: _____ Gender: M/F Year: Fr/So/Jr/Sr/Sa+
Major: LBS/DHH/LVB/Dual If Dual, which areas? _____

Content	1 (What is this?)	2 (I hope I don't have to teach this! It is going to take a lot of review!)	3 (I could teach this but don't feel confident in my accuracy.)	4 (I feel pretty confident teaching this with a little "brush up")	5 (I could teach this tomorrow!)
Nouns					
Subject Nouns					
Direct Objects					
Predicate Nouns					
Indirect Objects					
Possessive Nouns					
Pronouns					
Pronouns					
(The Understood One)					
Possessive Pronouns					
Verbs					
Action Verbs					
State of Being Verbs					
Linking Verbs					
Participles					
Infinitives					
Adjectives					
Adjectives					
Descriptive Adjectives					
Article Adjectives					
Predicate Adjectives					
Adverbs					
Conjunctions					
Coordinating Conjunctions					
Correlative Conjunctions					
Subordinating Conjunctions					
Interjections					
Prepositions					
Prepositions					
Prepositional Phrases					

The survey was administered pre- and post-intervention. It is a self rating scale of the pre-service teacher's confidence in their ability to teach parts of speech and syntactic components. In addition, a grammar and a writing assessment were administered (not pictured) assessing student knowledge of grammar, and their ability to write using correct parts of speech and syntax.

Results

Paired sample t-tests comparing pre- and post-test means of pre-service teachers' confidence in teaching grammar concepts were conducted for all items separately and together. The survey means were then compared by group. There was a statistically significant difference of means from the pre to post survey indicated for Group 1. For Group 2 and the control group, overall gains were observed but were not statistically significant. The graph shows composite means of the individual survey items.



Implications

The ability to teach components of English grammar and the ability to write well are important skills for special education pre-service teachers. The results of our study suggest that Grammar Graphics can be effective for increasing confidence of teaching grammar skills when all lessons are fully implemented. More research with larger sample sizes is needed to validate our findings.

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