

***Discovering a Concept of Man and the World:***  
***A report on adult native-speaker grammar instruction in the Pacific Northwest***

***[Presented as a Work In Progress.....research continuing]***

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**Sabbatical research report**  
**Sabbatical research conducted**  
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**This report contains only the abstract, outline, and reference list for the main paper produced in this study, which will be submitted for publication upon completion.**

## **ABSTRACT**

This report covers sabbatical research from January 2007 through the end of March 2007 on the state of adult grammar instruction in community colleges in the Pacific Northwest. As such, it is not a comprehensive analysis of the state of either pedagogical or linguistic grammar studies, but, instead, is merely laying the foundation for extended studies in this area.

The report covers visits to five community college campuses: South Puget Sound Community College in Olympia, Washington; Centralia College in Centralia, WA; Pierce College in Lakewood/Tacoma, Washington; Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, Washington; and Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon.<sup>1</sup> The report also covers a preliminary review of the literature in both linguistic and pedagogical approaches to the arguments over grammar instruction, including an in-depth analysis of three of the main voices in this debate and their writings: Richard Hudson, chair of Linguistics at University of London; Rei R. Noguchi; and Constance Weaver.<sup>2</sup>

The report comes to two conclusions with two recommendations. The first conclusion deals with the much-vaunted “grammar wars” over the inclusion of grammar-in-isolation in educational curriculum. First presented is a summary of arguments from all (there are more than two) sides of the debate. We then conclude that all sides have failed to ask one important question: even if we cannot prove whether or not grammar instruction improves writing ability, we must ask the question: *what does it do for cognitive/analytic ability?* As the classical trivium (including grammar, logic, and rhetoric) emphasized their interaction in advanced cognition, perhaps it is time for us to re-evaluate the place of each of these in improving adult cognitive function, especially in the light of growing calls for improved training in critical thinking.

The second conclusion (the most important of this study) has to do with pedagogical methods. In the review, there seem to be three predominant forms for instruction of grammar in isolation:

- a “writer’s grammar” (Noguchi) – a much-reduced emphasis on structure and review of only basic forms in the context of writing – called by Noguchi “operational grammar” – focusing on how words serve a purpose in communication
- a “discovery grammar” (Hudson) – recommended for the British National Curriculum in the 90s – students are led to ‘discover’ a set of rules about how their native language works through the functionality of those words in communication
- “grammar in context” (Weaver) similar to Noguchi’s emphasis, but the grammar instruction develops out of an examination of the purpose served by words in the context of meaning – i.e., in the context of a piece of writing

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 for descriptions and demographics of each campus

<sup>2</sup> See Bibliography for much more extensive list of references cited and reviewed – this research conducted at the libraries of the University of Oregon, The Evergreen State College, St. Martin’s College, and

The similarities between these methods are obvious – all emphasize the notion that students already know how to use their native language, and they can discover the “rules” of grammar by observing how the words they use serve a purpose in communication. This assumption – that native speakers have an inherent understanding of their language – seems self-evident. However, there is a fundamental flaw in the reasoning that leads to this question: *how valid is this fundamental assumption when it comes to developmental students?*<sup>3</sup>

This research has discovered no study which has asked this question, nor, through the design of the research study or the demographics of those participating, examined it. This is a fundamental flaw in the reasoning which has led to the design of both mainstream and developmental curriculum. While multiple studies exist examining the impact of grammar instruction on writing ability, the majority focus either on adult mainstream college students, or on ESL students, extrapolating the results of ESL grammar instruction on to other populations. A specific study of the impact of instruction in grammar-in-isolation on adult native speakers in developmental classes remains to be done, as far as this researcher can discover.

The third and implied conclusion (following on the second conclusion) is that this research should continue, and the explicit recommendation is that it continue with a focused longitudinal study of the effects of focused grammar instruction on cognitive function and analytic ability for developmental students. Specifically, let us test the assumptions of the nativists as they directly relate to developmental instruction.

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<sup>3</sup> Let’s be clear: the term ‘developmental student’ does not refer to special education students – i.e., students with genetic mental incapacities. ‘Developmental student’ simply means a student who, by virtue of economic class or circumstance, has not been as well prepared for college study as her/his more privileged counterparts.

## OUTLINE OF MAIN PAPER

- I. Introduction – Freire – “Every pedagogical practice implies a concept of man and the world.”
- II. Background: “Never use a preposition to end a sentence with”
- III. Theoretical foundations
  - A. Grammar Wars
  - B. Linguistics
- IV. Summary of pedagogical approaches
  - A. Grammar in isolation
  - B. “A writer’s grammar”
  - C. Discovery grammar
- V. Three theorists
  - A. Rei R. Noguchi
  - B. Constance Weaver
  - C. Richard Hudson
- VI. Conclusions & Recommendations
  - A. Continue research
  - B. Develop & administer test

Appendices include interview text, handouts and notes from class observations, and notations on demographics for each school where classes were observed.

**SAMPLE TEST PAGE**

Student # \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Date administered \_\_\_\_\_

Demographic key \_\_\_\_\_

OPERATIONAL SKILL # 1: The ability to recognize “pronoun” and use appropriately.

In the following sentence, one word or phrase can be replaced with the pronoun in parentheses at the end of the sentence. Circle the word or phrase that you think should be replaced.

Example: Joe and Sally found a new motorcycle when shopping for a car. (he)

Example: The way Samuel talked annoyed Jennifer. (it)

Circle the appropriate word or phrase:

- 1) George and Arthur wanted to form a new league of billiard players.  
(they)
- 2) Marge and Homer found the house a mess, and were sure that Bart  
had done it. (they)
- 3) Four teachers developed the new lesson plan for grammar. (it)
- 4) Cathy and Len both liked to go for long hikes in the woods. (she)
- 5) Finding the lost wallet on the street was the best thing that ever  
happened to Joe. (it)

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(A much longer reference list of works consulted is available)

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