



Teaching Grammar in Context

Constance Weaver

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More than fifteen years ago, Constance Weaver's *Grammar for Teachers* (NCTE, 1979) broke new ground by responding to widespread concern about the place of grammar in the curriculum. Suggesting that teachers need to know key aspects of grammar in order to teach writing more effectively, Weaver also argued that students need to be guided in learning and applying grammatical concepts as they revise and edit their writing. Attention to sentence structure and mechanics during the process of writing would result in better products.

With *Teaching Grammar in Context*, Weaver extends her philosophy by offering teachers a rationale and practical ideas for teaching grammar not in isolation but in the context of writing. She begins by introducing some common meanings of "grammar" and provides a historical overview of traditional reasons for teaching grammar as a school subject. After examining those reasons, she questions them, citing decades of research which suggests that grammar taught in isolation has little, if any, effect on most students' writing.

To lay the groundwork for a more effective approach, Weaver considers how preschoolers learn the basic structures of their native language and how second-language grammar is acquired. She goes on to suggest a research-based perspective on the concept of error and on the writing "errors" our students make, concluding with practical alternatives to what Lois Rosen has dubbed "the error hunt." Equally useful is Weaver's examination of the aspects of grammar on which we might focus as we guide our students in writing and revising sentences and in editing selected pieces. Her final chapter addresses the teaching of grammar from the perspective of learning theory.

The appendix includes numerous sample lessons from Weaver's own teaching, illustrating the five broad topics suggested in the text:

- teaching concepts of subject, verb, clause, sentence, and related editing concepts
- teaching style through sentence combining and generating
- teaching sentence sense and style through manipulation of syntactic elements
- teaching the power of dialects and dialects of power
- teaching punctuation and mechanics for convention, clarity, and style.

Teaching Grammar in Context fills a long-standing gap in the literature on teaching writing. It will prove invaluable to all practicing and preservice teachers, especially those at the middle and high school levels, where grammar is taught most intensively.

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