

Sentence composition: Developing teaching materials in collaboration

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The 2022 curriculum specifies that English language teaching should offer students opportunities to learn how to express themselves in English and communicate effectively in speech and writing. Teaching in the English subject should therefore cover sentence construction as well as revision strategies that enable students to render their writing clear, varied, and precise. In the higher grades, teaching in the subject should additionally cover how stylistic devices are used to achieve communicative purposes in texts of various kinds and promote the use of stylistic devices in students' own production. Although this progression refers to effective communication on the sentence level, teachers of English commonly lack the pedagogical resources they need to cover this content and help their students meet curricular goals. English teachers are rarely trained in sentence-based pedagogies; and textbooks rarely treat the sentence, let alone stylistic devices for enhancing expressive ability on the sentence level.

This close-to-practice project aims to remedy this problem by developing materials and practices for teaching sentence composition, a branch of composition studies focused on helping developing writers master the sentence. In exercises of various kinds, developing writers practice using sentence patterns of various kinds and experiment with using new structuring devices. They learn how to chunk sentences, thereby enhancing language awareness; combine sentences, thereby acquiring procedural knowledge of new constructions; and imitate sentences, using model texts as scaffolds for crafting sentences beyond their current level of proficiency. Research has repeatedly shown that, when incorporated into writing instruction, sentence composition can help learners acquire targeted sentence-level skills and make effective choices about their writing.

In a pilot conducted in 2021, English teachers explored questions of application, adapting sentence composition exercises to the needs of their students in secondary and upper-secondary school. It soon became clear that, in addition to materials and adaptation protocols, teachers of English need guidelines for working with sentence-based pedagogies. To this end, the 2022 project will apply an approach to writing instruction that George Hillocks calls the "environmental mode," which aims to promote active learning of writing strategies. Teaching in the environmental mode is characterized by explicit objectives, problems and materials that make writing processes operationally clear, and collaborative tasks and activities focused on problem solving. It is a good match for sentence composition, which requires explicit explanation as well as classroom activities that give learners opportunities to practice using new sentence structures and stylistic patterns.

Our primary goal for 2022 will be to explore how teaching sentence composition in the environmental mode enhances learning of targeted sentence-level compositional skills in secondary and upper-secondary school. Researchers and teachers will work together to identify, explore, and articulate best practices (*beprövad erfarenhet*) for teaching sentence composition in the environmental mode. We will consider questions such as the following. What are the best practices with respect to student-teacher interaction, educational design, and classroom management? Which practices encourage students to take a playful approach to solving problems of expression on the sentence level? What kinds of learning activities engage students' communicative competencies and how are these best incorporated into lesson plans? The project consists of two phases, materials development in the spring term followed by lesson and learning studies in the fall, when materials and practices will be incorporated into lesson plans; implemented in classroom interventions; and evaluated and refined. Both phases of the project will be collaborative in nature, involving a core group of teachers in the spring and an extended group in the fall.