

Grammar in context



Elbaum, Sandra. 2001. Grammar in Context 3rd ed. Boston: Heinle & Heinle Publishers. Grammar in Context by Sandra N. Elbaum is an interesting approach to teaching grammar. Elbaum encases grammar in a much more useful mantle by using real life examples of U. S. culture and history.

Grammar is an important part of language, but it is technical, abstract, and boring. In order for a text to engage a student it must be interesting and relevant to their lives. I think Grammar in Context could be effective because it does this by integrating grammar into the real world.

I thought the foreword by the author was very touching. She starts off by giving an example from her own life showing how important it is to include real life contexts into language learning. She tells of being a child and having not only having to explain the language to her Polish born parents but also the culture. This is a fitting start to a language text because; what is a language without culture. They are intrinsically linked. The text starts off with a review. I think this is important because ESL students are not always at the same place in every category of language learning.

Placement tests do their best to place students in an appropriate level, but learning a language is not like other subjects. For example, if you miss the lesson on the Korean War in history class you would still be able to understand a lesson on the Vietnam War. Language is much more integrated. If you don't have a strong foundation it is very difficult to progress. Having a review section in the beginning allows teachers to quickly find weaknesses in any fundamental areas, and address these problems in the beginning of the course.

I liked that lesson one began with creating a resume and cover letter. A resume is a very technical but also very necessary composition for many ESL students. So often the people who emigrate to the U. S. are well educated professionals who are prevented from rising to their full potential because of a language barrier. The key to getting a good job is usually a good resume and by learning this skill early on ESL students who want a successful job will have one less obstacle. The basic setup of each chapter is user friendly.

I like how the chapters begin with a text and the grammar focus of each chapter is highlighted in each text. This gives students a chance to learn deductively, and see grammar in use in real life situations. After the opening text the grammar rules are given and exercises are provided for practice. At the end of each chapter the lessons are summarized to give a final quick look at the content of the chapter. The next section “ Editing Advice” seems very helpful to me. In this section examples are given of the grammar used incorrectly then corrected.

I think correction is an important tool in learning. Knowing what you can't do, or what is incorrect in a language is often as important as knowing what you can do. The last part of the chapter has an important section called “ Outside Activities” this section provides activities that prompt students to look for examples of their grammar lessons in authentic texts outside of the classroom. “ Outside Activities” is a vital section because one failing of all text books is the fact that they cannot stay current.

Things are always changing so fast in life that it is impossible to include authentic texts that are up to date after the publishing process, the

distribution process, and finally introduction into the classroom. By encouraging students to look outside the classroom the most recent and relevant examples of grammar in use are able to be incorporated into the educational process. The section on “ Internet Activities” is similar but encourages students to use the computer to find grammar in context.

This skill could be very useful for less tech savvy ESL students. Providing grammar in context is an important aspect of teaching because it takes a dull but necessary subject and makes it more relevant. ESL students are often very busy, and by combining lessons on grammar and U. S. culture kills two birds with one stone. It would be possible to teach grammar using irrelevant topics, but why would anyone want to do that when it’s so easy to incorporate real life contexts into everyday lessons. Word Count: 723