

# **A Dynamic Perspective on Language Teachers' Different Learning Pathways in a Collaborative Context**

## **Abstract**

The chapter considers student teachers' construction of Grammar Awareness in a collaborative context. Two contrasting case profiles are presented based on interaction data, diaries, and interviews immediately following the course and 15 months later.

In analysing learning as a complex process (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron 2008), the Engagement With Language framework (Svalberg 2009) allowed us to consider the interdependent cognitive, affective, and social aspects of engagement. A multidimensional perspective on two radically different pathways to learning and contrasting learner identities (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001) is presented. The discussion includes broader considerations of impact on post-course professional identities in TESOL.

## **Introduction**

This study examines how two student teachers on an MA programme at a UK university develop their knowledge about grammar (KAG). One was an experienced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructor and a native speaker of English. The other was a novice teacher with English as a second language. They both took a course called Grammar Awareness, which aimed to enhance the students' KAG. The course consisted of lectures, workshops and supporting materials on Blackboard (a virtual learning environment). The study was concerned with learning in a workshop environment and sought answers to the following questions:

- RQ1.        How do features of the individual agents either facilitate or hinder the construction of knowledge?
- RQ2.        What evidence is there (if any) of enduring effects of the workshops on the participants as teachers?

'Features of individual agents' means, for example, the individual participants'

strategies, personality traits and attitudes. To allow an in-depth understanding of the individual pathways they had chosen and factors which may have impacted on those choices, each participant was analysed as a separate case from a complex systems perspective (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2010; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008).

Below we will review some of the literature on teachers' KAG, teacher/learner autonomy, and teacher/learner identity. We then discuss engagement with language (EWL; Svalberg, 2009) as a model of the awareness raising process. This is followed by a rationale for the complex systems approach taken and details of how the study was conducted are provided. The findings are presented in the form of two separate case profiles, which are subsequently discussed and compared, before some brief concluding remarks.

## **Literature Review**

### *Autonomy*

It is widely accepted in English Language teaching (ELT) that learner autonomy is a good thing but what it means in the context of language classrooms is less obvious and has been the subject of considerable debate (Oxford, 2003). It could be interpreted as meaning that learners should be able and encouraged to learn independently, for example with the help of self-access materials. This early interpretation was, however, challenged by the 'Bergen definition':

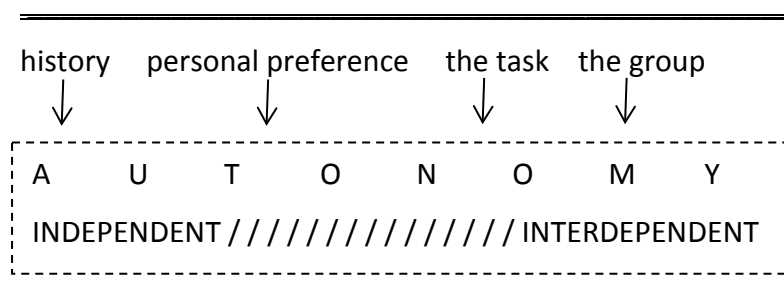
Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's own needs and purposes.

This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a social and responsible person. (Dam, Eriksson, Little, Millander & Trebbi, 1990, p.102; see also Smith, 2008)

The autonomous learner's preference for independent or interdependent learning may be influenced by, for example, task design and group dynamics, and they may choose to combine the two modes of learning. Figure 1 seeks to capture some of that complexity.

FIGURE 1

The dynamic autonomy continuum.



At a particular point in time a learner's behaviour may sit in a different place on the autonomy continuum than that of their overall, individual preference. The autonomy continuum will be referred to and further explored in the case studies below.

### *Learner and teacher identity*

The notion that the learner comes to a language classroom with certain defined and generic aspects of personal identity has been challenged in recent scholarship (Breen, 2001). More specifically, static conceptualisations of learner affiliations have been augmented by understandings of the multiplicity of roles a learner can draw on at any given time (Duff, 2012). Recent scholarship has also tried to understand the contours of emerging second language teacher *professional* identities, with an emphasis here on the dynamic interplay of available resources that contribute to teacher development:

The nature of identity means that it is continuously co-constructed in situ, using many resources including personal biography, interactional skills, knowledge, attitudes and social capital. That is, preservice teachers have a repertoire of resources they can deploy and 'test' as they negotiate and build their professional identities in social and institutional contexts.

(Miller, 2009, p.175)

The current study explores the manner in which the two participants manage the various challenges they encounter in a particular teacher education environment.

### *Teachers' and learners' KAG*

In the literature, KAG has many names. Both Language Awareness (LA) and Knowledge About Language (KAL) are frequently used terms (Svalberg, 2007) but they can also refer to, for example, pragmatic, phonological, and intercultural awareness. Andrews (2001, 2003) refers to 'subject matter cognitions' which he considers a core component of Teacher Language Awareness. In his analysis, the latter also includes 'pedagogical content knowledge'.

As Sanchez & Borg (2014, p.46) point out, teachers need to know how to best 'explain grammar content in order to make it accessible to the learners'. They also need to assess the level of linguistic challenge of tasks and understand and predict learners' difficulties. Student teachers' own learning experiences can have a powerful influence on both how they themselves subsequently teach and the manner in which they engage with teacher development courses (Borg, 1998; Roberts, 1998). The explicit focus of the grammar course was, however, on KAG (Sanchez, 2012; Sanchez & Borg, 2014) that is, on subject matter cognitions. At the same time, we hoped the pedagogy of the Grammar Awareness course would serve as a model to be drawn on in the students' own practice, when appropriate. We were particularly keen to model an awareness raising, collaborative approach, described in some detail below.

Many studies have shown teachers' KAG to be inadequate, but there is considerable variation. Bloor (1986) compared test results of potential future language teachers' (UK undergraduate students') knowledge about parts of speech, grammatical functions and rules with what UK school teachers were officially expected to know and found their low scores concerning. A number of studies have used Bloor's test items, and sometimes added to them (Alderson & Horák, 2010; Alderson, Steel & Clapham, 1997; Andrews, 1999). Alderson & Horák (2010) found no improvement in KAG since Bloor's (1986) study. This is most likely linked to the relative lack of explicit grammar in UK schools. More recently, grammar has become more prominent in the school curriculum and it is up to future research to show whether this results in improved KAG among teachers.

Where speakers of English as an L2 have been included, they tend to have more grammar knowledge than English L1 speakers (e.g. Alderson & Horak, 2010; Andrews, 1999). This is not surprising as many international students have experienced explicit grammar instruction both as learners of English and in L1 language classes, and sometimes in another L2 as well.

In Brazil, Bailer, Nogueira, D'Ely & Souza (2014) found that the KAG of ten EFL teachers was better than expected.

Teachers can sometimes learn grammar 'on the job', for example from the text book, or they may instead avoid teaching grammar altogether. On the basis of a longitudinal study (1996-2004) of three Hong Kong teachers, Andrews (2006, p.14) concludes that 'it is clearly not the case that years of experience of teaching grammar necessarily lead to expertise.' If that is so, teachers who do not get opportunities to enhance their KAG during teacher education may never feel competent nor confident in this essential area of language teaching.

### *Engagement with language*

The conscious reflection on grammar exemplified by the interaction data discussed in this paper is an example of EWL, defined as follows:

In the context of language learning and use, *Engagement with Language* is a cognitive, and/or affective, and/or social process in which the learner is the agent and language is object (and sometimes vehicle).

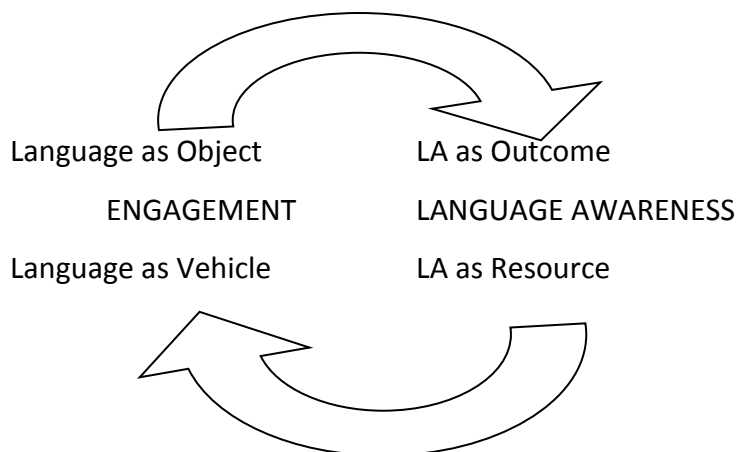
- *Cognitively*, the engaged individual is alert, pays focused attention and constructs their own knowledge.
- *Affectively*, the engaged individual has a positive, purposeful, willing and autonomous disposition towards the object (language, the language and/or what it represents).
- *Socially*, the engaged individual is interactive and initiating

(Adapted from Svalberg, 2009, p. 247)

As a short-hand, the maximally engaged individual can be characterized as *focused*, *willing* and *interactive*. The engagement is with the language, it is not simply social participation, and it helps the learner construct language awareness (LA) which is then available for them to draw on in further EWL, in an iterative cycle.

FIGURE 2

The Engagement With Language – Language Awareness Cycle (from Svalberg, 2009, p. 248)



EWL is the ‘construction of knowledge’ process referred to in the research questions introduced above, and the kind of LA it constructs is KAG.

EWL has been studied in the form of ‘language related episodes’ (LREs, e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 2001; Swain, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller, 2002), where language learners talk about language to complete a task. Due to the teacher education context, the purpose of EWL in our study was not learning to use the language but learning about it, and the interaction consisted almost exclusively of strings of LREs. Hence there was no need to distinguish LREs from other types of episodes. The transcripts were instead divided into episodes based on the particular grammar points being discussed.

### **The Grammar Awareness Course**

The course took as its point of departure the notion that grammar is a complex set of meaningful options available to language users (as described by functional grammarians, for example Butt, Fahey, Feez, Spinks & Yallop, 2000), who make choices largely in accordance with conventional rules but also use grammar creatively and in doing so occasionally break rules (or at least rules as formulated in grammar books). The classifications and metalanguage used on the course were, however, to a large extent mainstream following

the set course text (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002), which allowed it to build on the students' prior knowledge.

Another fundamental assumption was that grammar needs to be taught and interpreted in context (Celce-Murcia, 2002). Grammar cannot be reduced to a simple set of decontextualized categories and rules. It was essential for the students to have active experience of discovering and understanding grammar in context from which enhanced KAG could emerge.

There were seven sequences of lecture + workshop; each on a particular topic, for example Noun Phrases. There were supporting materials on Blackboard (the virtual learning environment). Each workshop lasted 50 minutes. The students were divided into two large groups of approximately 30 students. The researchers coordinated the work of one such group each. The students then divided into smaller groups of 5-7 students. Each was required to include speakers of more than one L1 to maximize the use of English in the interaction. Group membership fluctuated to some extent.

The students engaged in consciousness raising tasks on authentic texts. For example, in the second workshop they were asked to underline and analyse all the noun phrases in a page of text from 'Leo the African' (Maalouf, 1994). An analysis of the beginning of the text was distributed ten minutes into the workshop, but no complete analysis was made available. They were asked to formulate, by the end of the workshop, one question from the group for the tutor, who responded to it on Blackboard within a couple of days.

## **Research Methods**

### *A complexity approach*

We approach our data from a complex systems perspective, drawing in particular on Larsen-Freeman & Cameron (2008) who point out that 'variability in data is not noise to be discarded when averaging across events or individuals' (p.204); it is crucial information (see also Ellis and Larsen-Freeman, 2010). We are concerned with the EWL of our two teachers. During the workshop, each participant's EWL can be seen as a sub-system nested in an overall system consisting of the EWL of the workshop group as a whole. (KAG is also a complex system but as it cannot be directly observed we are focusing instead on the process from which it emerges.) Within that overall system, the individual students are agents. Their EWL emerges from complex interactions, for example of prior knowledge, beliefs and

attitudes, the task demands, the interaction in the group, and external influences. It is subject to individual learner differences (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003; Skehan, 1991) which we describe below in terms of cognitive, affective and social orientations. We will also explore how their views of grammar and grammar teaching emerge from their experiences on the course and other interacting factors.

The two case studies below, of Isabelle and Mia (pseudonyms), are based on diary, workshop interaction and interview data.

### *Diaries*

The students were invited to keep learner diaries. Eleven students agreed and handed in diaries at the end of the course. Despite instructions, some diaries provided little information other than a list of the topic and rules discussed in the workshop. Mia's diary, however, provided rich material for six of the seven workshops. Isabelle did not volunteer to keep a diary but was included because unlike the diarists, she was an L1 speaker of English and also very vocal in the workshops. We considered that there was rich data for the construction of Isabelle's case.

### *Interaction*

To allow the students to settle in, the first workshop was not recorded. In each of the six remaining workshops the tutors took turns to record one group. All the group members gave their informed consent before being recorded. Isabelle and Mia belonged to different workshop groups. Isabelle and her peers were recorded in workshops three and four; Mia and her group were recorded in workshops five, six and seven. The interaction was transcribed and divided into episodes, as explained above.

### *Interviews*

Isabelle and Mia were interviewed individually for about 30 minutes each after the end of the course (the first interview) and about a year later (the second interview). The course assessment was completed before Christmas and the interviews took place in spring. Because of this time lapse, a 10-minute extract of interaction where they were a participant was played at the beginning of the interview, and later on they listened to a specific, shorter segment. The interview format was thus what might be called 'stimulated reconstruction,'



in that it aided memory and helped set the reflective focus of the first interview. The questions sought to understand how the students had perceived the workshops and the nature of their participation in them.

The second interview was conducted 15 months after the end of the course, via an online video call. By that time, both participants were in work as EFL teachers in differing professional contexts. While further reflections on the workshops were captured, the main focus here was an evaluation of the impact of this experience in terms of changes to key classroom teaching priorities and practices.

### Case Profiles

The two cases will be presented below, starting with some background information.

Isabelle and Mia entered the MA programme in October 2011. Table 1 summarizes their backgrounds.

Table 1. The participants' backgrounds, plans, and professional context at Interview 2.

	Isabelle	Mia
Academic Background	BA Business Administration	BSc English with Business
Languages	English L1; French and German at school, Japanese at university and 'home-stay' in Japan	English L2; studied French for 2 years at university
Grammar	Had never studied grammar explicitly; not confident about teaching grammar.	Grammar at school and university by grammar translation; did not enjoy this learning experience.
Teacher training/ education	CELTA	None
Teaching experience	About 5 years, in 2 Asian countries.	Occasional one-to-one tuition during vacation time.
Performance on the final Grammar test	'Excellent' (70% or above)	'Excellent' (70% or above)
Plans/ambitions at interview 1	PhD study, or teacher trainer abroad	English teacher in a private language school
Teaching context at interview 2 (after graduation)	Full-time lecturer in English at UK university; EAP; ESP; IELTS preparation.	Part-time English teacher in private language school in China; General English; IELTS preparation

Below, each of the two teachers' cognitive, affective and social orientations will be analysed in respect to how they might affect their EWL during collaborative task work.

### *Isabelle*

In the extracts below, ... marks a deleted segment and {...} indicates an inaudible portion.

*Cognitive orientation:* A key word for Isabelle in the interviews is *challenge* [eight mentions]. This theme is also implied when she talks about 'problems'. She likes problems and sees the tasks as 'puzzles' to be solved.

Isabelle thinks that the tasks explore grammar in more depth than she has previously experienced. She finds the level of challenge positive:

It was a good opportunity to push your boundaries really – to challenge myself

I think it was good to work with authentic texts – definitely challenging.

[Interview 1]

In her view, the difficulty stimulates discussion in the group:

It was – yeah - challenging – but that was the whole point wasn't it – you couldn't have {...} as much of a discussion if it hadn't been challenging.

[Interview 1]

In the first interview, 'challenging' applies to grammar in relation to the grammar tasks she had to do. In the second interview, Isabelle uses 'challenging' to refer to grammar in the teaching context:

[grammar is] probably the most challenging thing to teach now – erm - I've developed a bit more confidence - probably as a result of the course and the MA as a whole - erm yes - I definitely think it's the most challenging thing to teach - and I'm still learning on the job.

[Interview 2]

Isabelle's fondness for a 'puzzle' is again apparent when she is asked about the MA as a whole:

Again it's just made me more aware - I still haven't got answers to all the questions, but who has? - but it's definitely made me think about them. [Interview 2]

*Affective orientation:* Isabelle reports having been sceptical of the relevance for her practice as a teacher of the KAG she was constructing, so her willingness to engage is likely to stem from her fondness for a cognitive challenge and social interaction (below) rather than an interest in grammar as such.

An affective key word for Isabelle is *confidence* [17 mentions]. In the first interview she indicates that she feels more confident of her knowledge in some workshops than in others. She also refers to the partial analysis provided in terms of the confidence it helped to build 'for us to carry on discussing the rest of the task'.

She says that she was not confident at all about her grammar at the start of the course, and the little knowledge she had was based on her teaching experience. The interviewer asks if that has changed at all over the course.

Definitely made me more aware – generally – I still don't feel confident – it is still probably my weakest area in teaching– but it definitely made me more aware – and I found it very useful. [Interview 1]

At the end of the course, she still lacks confidence in her ability to apply her KAG in teaching. By the second interview, her confidence has increased and she is feeling more comfortable in the classroom:

I'm able to deal a lot better with [grammar] questions now -I don't panic if someone asks me a question - I can deal with the question much more confidently.

[Interview 2]

In the workshops, Isabelle appears to be affectively resilient. She is occasionally wrong, and acknowledges this when she discovers it. She does not seem embarrassed or disheartened by these episodes, an impression which is confirmed by the interview data.

I am kind of aware cause I am a native speaker – I don't know whether they expected me to know more than I did – I think once you get speak – once you get talking they realize that actually they know more than I do – I felt as though – you know – they felt that they could correct me or challenge me if I was wrong – which – which is a good thing.

[Interview 1]

Despite the limitations of her KAG she is among the most vocal students in the workshops. This indicates a highly motivated individual and tallies with her thirst for knowledge, referred to above.

*Social orientation:* Isabelle is a leader. We take initiation of episodes, that is the nomination of a new topic of negotiation, as an indicator of leadership (Table 2). In these terms, Isabelle shares this role with Megan, another talkative and confident student, in workshop 3. (In workshop 4, Megan was mostly part of an adjacent group but then turned her chair around and joined Isabelle's.) The leadership is more evenly distributed in workshop 4<sup>3</sup>, but Isabelle still initiates the most episodes. (S in Table 2 means 'unidentified student'.)

Table 2. Initiation of episodes in workshops 3 and 4.

	Isabelle	Emily	Megan	Harry	Abigail	Jasmine	Hanna	Sophie	S	Total
Workshop 3	18	5	11	n/a	5	n/a	4	n/a	6	49
Workshop 4	11	7	1	8	1	7	n/a	1	1	36

n/a = Not Applicable (the student did not participate in this workshop)

The episode below illustrates how Isabelle initiates and drives forward the negotiation in the group. The students are identifying and classifying verbs in a text. The first sentence starts '*Our dreams seem so real that ....*', and an adjacent sentence includes the following '*a dream world that can appear astonishingly real*' (LaBerge, 2004, p. 19). Both of the underlined verbs are discussed by the students. (Text in square brackets is the researcher's clarification.)

#### Finite or infinitive episode - *seem*

1. Isabelle: The first one is copula - *seem*

2. Jasmine: What kind?
3. Harry: I think it is a copular verb
4. Sophie: Copula
5. Isabelle: And is it one, two, three or five? [Infinitive, present or present participle.]
6. Emily: Two
7. Isabelle: See I am confused – between one and two [infinitive and present] – you know *appear*
8. Emily: Infinitive comes after a verb – it should be a verb group – if we say for example {...} – I ask you to do something – to do is infinitive
9. Isabelle: Yes – the infinitives don't always come with to - do they? – not always
10. Emily: Not always
11. Jasmine: Not always
12. S: Not always
13. Isabelle: How do we know if it is an infinitive or
14. Emily: I checked on the internet – it says that an infinitive verb has no relation to the subject – the tense - the number {...}
15. Isabelle: Ok

Turns are numbered 1-15 above. Shortly after the start of the workshop, Isabelle reveals a lack of understanding of '*infinitive*' and how it differs from '*present*'. Isabelle introduces the topic (1), puts her question to the group (5); elicits an explanation (7); accepts the explanation but signals that it is insufficient (9); elicits further information (13); and finally accepts the more elaborate explanation (15).

Isabelle does not hesitate to display gaps in her knowledge (7) but instead takes the opportunity to invite her peers to work within her zone of proximal development (ZPD; an area of knowledge which has the potential to be developed with the help of others; Vygotsky, 1978). She already knows that the others, and especially Emily, are likely to know more. The explanations she elicits in this way probably enhance her understanding to some degree, but the 'ok' (15) does not signal a complete grasp of the problem. Nearly half an hour later, Isabelle brings it up again, and is again scaffolded very actively, over 25 turns, by four of the students this time. Towards the end of the workshop, Isabelle returns to the

same problem and this time seems to grasp the difference between present tense and infinitive, though she is still unsure if the infinitive only occurs after a modal verb. It seems clear, however, that her knowledge has been restructured and that she is on her way to a more complete understanding.

The impression we had from the workshops of Isabelle as a talkative, purposeful, interdependent learner constructing her own knowledge, is confirmed by the interview data. There are 29 mentions in total of *talk*, *speak* or *discuss*, with reference to students' talk. As a personality, Isabelle is sociable. She tries to sit with different people each week to get to know more students. In the first interview, she is asked a general question about how she felt during the workshops. Her response shows this side of her:

Generally good - I came out of there – yeah - feeling quite good – as I said – it was a good chance to sit and talk and – talk to other students and I enjoyed it.

[Interview 1]

She admits that it was a social occasion as well as a learning opportunity, especially as she did not usually see her peers between classes. Elsewhere in the same interview she returns to this theme:

I like the workshops – I like – I was going to say it is probably the only chance in the whole [MA] where we have got together and discussed something and put our own opinions – I really enjoyed it – I liked - it is a chance to talk to the other students and share opinions and ideas.

[Interview 1]

This surprised us as most courses on the MA provide opportunities for group discussion. But in the second interview Isabelle explains that the grammar workshops were more 'dynamic':

Possibly because the overseas students were more confident in talking about grammar because it's something they've studied in depth for many years ... whereas in the other seminars it was harder to extract ideas and opinions from them.

[Interview 2]

Isabelle is aware of grammar being her weak point as a teacher, and of knowing less than most of the students on the course. Working in a group provides affordances that she is

keen to make use of. She also actively creates affordances by volunteering solutions, even though they might be wrong:

I am aware that they probably know the answers - know more than I do – and when I say things like ‘it is a gerund, isn’t it’ – they actually know what I’m talking about and somebody is going to tell me. [Interview 1]

Isabelle is keen to verbalize her questions and her understanding. She invests in talk, wanting to ‘get her questions out’ in order to learn. At the same time she is aware of being talkative:

I tried not to hog the conversation – sometimes I tend to do that but not because I think I know more than anybody else – it’s that I’ve got all these questions in my head that I want to get out. [Interview 1]

Reining in her propensity to talk a lot seems to be a way of taking responsibility for the quality of the group interaction.

I don’t feel that anybody held back or anybody was afraid to speak or anybody was contributing less – so I think the group – the group dynamics were good.

[Interview 1]

She links this balanced contribution to confidence:

I think them realising that I wasn’t the source of all knowledge maybe gave them a bit more confidence to speak some more.

### *Mia*

*Cognitive orientation:* Cautious and seemingly shy, Mia is not a risk-taker and this is reflected in her minimal verbal contributions in the workshop tasks. This possible limitation is balanced, however, with the very organised approach she takes to managing the broader sequence of learning activities on the course. A key aspect of her preferred learning ‘pathway’ involves private consideration of a given workshop task before testing the limits

or correctness of her current knowledge in the talk that becomes available in her particular group. A key word in Mia's interview contributions is '*think*' in the sense '*think about*':

Before the seminar we can get the task – and first we can think about it by ourselves – first I would do the task before the seminar and then – actually I think – for the group work – for the most of time – I like to listen to others' opinion before express mine.

[Interview 1]

if I think to others' opinion I will get some new idea – and I really think about it – is it right or wrong or something – so.

[Interview 1]

Mia's structuring of her learning involves quite a defined sequence: completing the workshop task on her own before the session, gaining further input and refinement of her knowledge by listening to and judging her peers' contributions, and possibly adding her views. Whereas Isabelle appears comfortable verbalising her occasionally inaccurate understandings of particular grammar features, Mia prefers to consolidate her sense of what is correct before contributing directly to the group discussion:

I think before expressing my idea - I like to cos I think this workshop - and there are some points I'm not sure about it - so I want to check it if it is correct or not before expressing ideas - yeah that's it.

[Interview 2]

Mia's diary entries provide evidence of how the various course tasks offer opportunities to reflect on her past classroom learning experiences and how these contrast with current ones. The following commentary refers to a session with a focus on verb groups:

I think this session is a little bit difficult. Firstly, I need to get to know and to be familiar with the terminology. In China I studied the grammar in Chinese, so there were some terminologies seemed 'new' to me. It makes me think about the role of target language in second language teaching. There's one thing I'm really interested in is how the grammar be taught in the school of UK. In China, students think



grammar is very complicated and hard to learn. What's more, the grammar learning is boring in China. [Learner Diary]

Isabelle's interview reflections centre on an appraisal of her current level of knowledge and the influence of her particular group. For Mia, such reflections are more frequently related to prior teaching and learning experiences. In short, there is some evidence to suggest a quite radical restructuring of Mia's current thinking and priorities based on her interview and diary appraisals of the impact of the grammar course.

*Affective orientation:* Mia's relative lack of classroom teaching experience prior to the course does not appear to limit her sense of learning progress. In particular, her *growing confidence* in her developing teacher identity is marked by an awareness of heightened classroom choices that are now available:

I think I get some new ideas here – and after that – I mean – when I go back to China I can give my students some new ideas about grammar – grammar learning or something – so – I think – I become more confident than before.

[Interview 1]

In the second interview, this growing sense of confidence and professional competence becomes more clearly elaborated to include consideration of the importance of purposeful classroom activity and the value of learner thinking and talking time:

First I think the module gives me a comprehensive understanding about English grammar and the grammar teaching - I don't have much experience of teaching grammar before – because - I don't like it actually - but I think grammar teaching should not be separated from the text - that means I think we should teach grammar in a context, so that's give me this new idea.

[Interview 2]

Such changes in thinking prompt Mia to review the fundamentals of her teaching role:

And I think I think about the teacher's roles in class - I think for my learning style and my learning experience I think the class sometimes is teacher oriented and

most of the time teacher just talk - but I think I'd like to change that - I want to give students more time to think about the grammar and to practise - so I think I may be give them more time to do something - not just myself talk. [Interview 2]

In her reflections, Mia thus displays a positive curiosity and willingness to take on new ideas that restructure her view on major teaching priorities in her professional context.

*Social orientation:* In the context of the group interaction, Mia's focus on '*thinking*' means that she does not contribute as freely as Isabelle, and does not view the social benefits afforded by the verbal interaction as especially significant for her learning process. Below is an extract which illustrates Mia's approach. The students are analysing tense in the following sentence: '*I did not say this to Mahjoub, though I wish I had done so, for he was intelligent; in my conceit I was afraid he would not understand*' (Saleh, 1962, p. 2). They refer to the common use of past perfect for '*before past*', in other words, an action before another point in the past, and how that might apply after the verb '*wish*'.

### The wish episode

23.36

1. Amelia: I think er just in this just for in this case
2. Olivia: aha
3. Amelia: you can understand like *I wish* definitely is for the speaker is at present *I wish* and *I had done* er just leave that alone - look the end of sentence - *in my conceit I was afraid he* - I was afraid - was afraid is at past - then at past right?
4. Jessica: yes
5. Mia: yeah
6. Amelia: then at past - then what's before the past is *I had done* something
7. Jack: But *I didn't say* - *I had* - I should but he didn't do that
8. Amelia: yes so it's before the *I was afraid*
9. Mia: yeah so it's er before past
10. Jessica: What about *I wish*? You know we should follow by the er object

11. Jack: there's a phrase yeah - for example - I say 'I wish I could do something' but before the present time - maybe it's a past but not now - maybe I didn't do that as well - I'm just I'm regret about something
12. Mia: oh yes yes
13. Amelia: yes
14. Jessica: Oh all right I understand ok ok ok
15. Mia: Yes it's for the situation is different with the
16. Jessica: Ah 'I wish I hadn't do - done that'
17. Amelia: Yes

Mia takes four out of 17 turns, and contributes 21 words out of 187. In (5), Mia simply accepts Amelia's view. Likewise, in (9) she consolidates her peers' views. Jack suggests that '*I wish I had...*' expresses regret about something that didn't happen (11). Mia agrees (12) and tries to develop Jack's suggestion (15).

The sparsity of Mia's verbal contributions in the workshops could lead one to the conclusion that she is not engaging with the task at hand and that she lacks autonomy as a learner. Considered together with her interview responses and diary entries, however, her workshop behaviour suggests that despite being quiet, she is in fact highly engaged and resourceful. Her preferred way of working is best described as mainly 'independent' but with her peers as a primer of her learning when required, that is with a degree of interdependence. If her main objective is learning, and not displaying knowledge in the context of the group interaction, this might well be an effective approach.

### **Impact on professional identity and practice**

In the first interview, Isabelle makes it clear several times that she is aware of gaps in her grammar knowledge. She was not taught grammar at school, nor later:

Interviewer: Yeah – ok – and along the way have you studied grammar at all?

Isabelle: The day before when I had to teach it [laughter] – learning on the job.

[Interview 1]

When she is asked in the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview whether her attitude to grammar has changed, she refers back to the 1<sup>st</sup> interview; whereas grammar had then been her 'least favourite thing to teach' it has become 'the most challenging thing to teach'. Being fond of a challenge, she deals with this by continuing to study grammar to make sure she can explain to the class.

Before doing the MA, Isabelle had taught mainly spoken English using a communicative approach without much explicit attention to form and she was sceptical about the need for it. Having completed the MA, she got a job teaching EAP. She feels this type of course requires explicit grammar explanation and considers that the grammar module has empowered her to provide it:

I wasn't sure how much I would use [the grammar knowledge] in my teaching - but now I'm teaching academic English - yeah definitely it's made me more aware of grammatical structures and how to explain the differences between General English or spoken English and academic English - as academic English is very specific style isn't it? - so it's really helped me in the classroom with regards to explaining complex sentence structures - academic styles - just forming passives and subordinate clauses - and just all the stuff that we learnt in that Module I'm actually using now in the classroom. [Interview 2]

Isabelle's plans to pursue a PhD have had to be 'put on the backburner' for the time being but the respect with which an MA degree is treated in her professional context has had a positive effect on how Isabelle feels about herself as a teacher.

I think you're more respected as well - as a teacher - just for having an MA - which has a knock-on effect on your confidence in a positive way - so I think those are the main contributions - the respect that you get from others - and the confidence that I've gained with regards to what happens in the classroom. [Interview 2]

Whereas improved KAG and a heightened professional sense of confidence appear central to Isabelle's evaluations of her learning experience, the key issue for Mia seems to be the need for more radical changes at the level of classroom practice, as discussed above (pp. 15 - 18). As a novice teacher, Mia's transition from learner to teacher is marked by an

appreciation of the potential of an expanded role, coupled with a desire to reconfigure her students' learning goals:

I think for myself as a teacher I want to help the student not only pass the exam or get higher marks in the exams, I also want to help them to improve their practical skills. I also want them to talk in their daily life, and I want to help them to express their ideas in English. [Interview 2]

## Discussion

The study explored how, in the context of grammar workshops, the characteristics of two individuals might affect the EWL process and thus their construction of KAG. The two case studies, Isabelle and Mia, were selected because they seemed so clearly different. We found that each employed strategies compatible with their personality and that neither approach was necessarily more or less effective. Table 3 summarizes their characteristics and strategies.

Table 3: Summary of Isabelle's and Mia's characteristics and strategies.

	Isabelle	Mia
Key Words	Challenge, confidence, talk	Think, cautious, curious, check
Personality traits	Talkative, initiating; a risk-taker and leader	Quiet; a listener and thinker; cautious and curious
Strategies	Actively builds knowledge in social interaction; exposes limited knowledge to elicit feedback.	Deliberately attempts to build knowledge by herself; social interaction is for checking her knowledge.

Both seemed highly engaged; focused on the tasks and willing (Svalberg, 2009). Only Isabelle, however, was highly interactive. It appears that sustained and successful EWL does not necessarily involve a great deal of observable interactive behaviour. Mia liked to think before speaking and used the group interaction to check the adequacy of her solutions. She liked to listen to her peers and checking involved her in only minimal verbal interaction. To a large extent, Mia's EWL was independent as she prepared for the workshops on her own.

Isabelle, on the other hand, preferred to display gaps in her knowledge openly, in talk, thereby eliciting needed input from her peers. The resulting negotiations went well beyond the provision of correct answers. Isabelle's EWL was thus interdependent, occurring in interaction with peers. Both Mia and Isabelle were highly autonomous learners, according to the Bergen definition (Dam et al., 1990, p.102), but they enacted very different learner identities. Neither of them was dependent in the sense of relying on the teacher or someone else; they were both taking responsibility for their own learning.

Contextual factors interacted with the participants' internal variables to shape their dynamically changing EWL and developing KAG. Neither Mia nor Isabelle had positive associations with grammar teaching and learning in their pre-course contexts. The nature of Isabelle's previous teaching experience even made her feel sceptical about the need for explicit grammar. What drove her investment was instead the social nature of the collaborative task context, and her intrinsic interest in puzzles. She used the collaborative environment for learning by displaying gaps in her KAG to the group, who would then provide the scaffolding she needed to build new knowledge (and in the process creating affordances for other students' learning). In her post-course professional context, she found that the 'subject matter cognitions' (Andrews 2001, 2003) she had developed made her feel more confident in the classroom and better able to explain the differences between General English and English for Academic purposes. Mia, a novice teacher, already had a good grasp of grammar, albeit in her L1, and instead focused on 'pedagogical content knowledge' (Andrews 2001, 2003). She made use of the collaborative context to check knowledge she had gained through independent study, and to source new ideas from her peers. The course experience stimulated the development of three significant principles Mia was keen to implement in her own professional context. She aimed for a less teacher centred and a more learner active classroom; she wanted to give her learners time to think; and she would teach grammar in context. While part of Isabelle's identity seems to be subject matter expert, Mia comes across as a pedagogic innovator. The workshops thus had a significant yet diverse impact on both participants' developing identities as teachers (Miller, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The approach we have adopted here has both strengths and limitations. It was not possible, for example, to discuss the collaborative aspects of EWL in any depth. Given time and space,

we could also have included more case studies. The two nevertheless illustrate the uniqueness of each individual's learning path and demonstrate, we think convincingly, the importance of allowing individuals to adopt learning strategies which suit their particular orientations and developing needs. What the implications of this are for specific classrooms in specific contexts is for teachers to decide.

It could be objected that the lack of generalizability leaves us with no deeper insight than: 'every learner is different'. Our argument is that the principled, triangulated approach we have taken, analysing the participants' cognitive, affective and social orientations and their observable, interactive EWL behaviour has afforded a context-sensitive lens through which other learners can be observed and understood, be it by researchers or teachers, and this collaborative endeavour can in time lead to insights with wider applicability.

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