



“Grammar of Character”: Culture-Infused Grammar Tasks for Mixed-Age, Bilingual Classrooms

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Abstract

This paper presents the Grammar of Character framework as a decoding system of reading, designed for mixed-age bilingual classrooms. Drawing on theories of situated learning, attachment, and multiple intelligences, the framework integrates grammar, music, and character education to create embodied and contextualized learning. Through long-term observation of children—including the case of Andrew, whose development from prenatal musical sensitivity to early reading and historical commitment offers a living example—the study demonstrates how musical intelligence supports bilingual literacy, fosters intrinsic motivation, and enables children to transform classical texts into lived experience. The study highlights theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural implications, and proposes directions for future interdisciplinary curriculum design.

Keywords: *musical intelligence, decoding system, early childhood language learning, grammar of character, bilingual pedagogy, culture-infused education*

1. Introduction

Language is humanity’s most delicate form of breath. Before children learn to write, they have already spoken with the world through cries, laughter, murmurs, and imitation. Language acquisition is not simply about symbols and rules but is deeply rooted in context, attachment, and the musicality of rhythm. Traditional language education often ignores these life-giving sources, reducing language to blackboard symbols, textbook sentences, and test blanks. This study originates from both the call of educational reform and the researcher’s lifelong practice: over thirty years devoted to two central questions—why do some children fail to learn, and why do some lose the will to learn? Exploring multiple intelligences theory, the study identifies intelligence as a lens of understanding—like the monk and priest in *Dream of the Red Chamber*, weaving heaven’s abstract knowledge with human context into a fabric of understanding. Texts such as *Dream of the Red Chamber* and the *Book of Job* remind us that education is not merely about accumulating knowledge but about repeated trials of life, calling learners to find understanding where knowledge and context meet.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Context

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize situated learning, insisting that learning must occur in real-life contexts rather than abstract drills. This study embeds language learning within stories, games, and music, immersing children in sensation before introducing rules.

2.2 Multiple Intelligences and the Loom Metaphor

Gardner (1983) defined intelligence as a bio-psychological potential activated within cultural contexts. Here, intelligence is framed as a loom: heavenly warp (knowledge) and earthly weft (context) woven into the fabric of understanding. Musical intelligence, bridging linguistic, mathematical, bodily, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences, is especially crucial in early childhood.



2.3 Mathematics, Music, and the Fabric of Time and Space

In the Quadrivium, arithmetic is numbers, geometry is numbers in space, music is numbers in time, and astronomy is numbers in the cosmos. Music links these abstractions to lived experience.

2.4 Music, Language, and Ethos

For Plato and Aristotle, music shaped ethos—courage, temperance, grief, or freedom. Music's moral power suggests that grammar, too, must be linked with character.

2.5 Character Education and Language

Grammar is not merely structural but ethical. Character Grammar highlights the cultivation of virtue within the practice of language.

2.6 Flow Theory and the Metaphor of Star-Picking

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) emphasizes clear goals, balance of challenge and feasibility, and immediate feedback as keys to intrinsic motivation. This study emphasizes these conditions as central to classroom design, enabling children to climb ladders toward their own stars.

2.7 Character Grammar Framework

In the Character Grammar framework, each part of speech is reinterpreted through cultural figures and ethical metaphors. This redefinition transforms grammar from a merely structural system into a moral and aesthetic map of human experience.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative action-research approach. The researcher, also the teacher, designs, implements, and reflects on lessons to explore how Character Grammar supports language, music, mathematics, and character development.

The research setting, the PLUS classroom, simulates a home-like, mixed-age environment built on context, belonging, and cycles of demonstration, invitation, and encouragement. Participants included four students (grades 1–8), whose interactions formed a small community of practice.

Data collection involved classroom observation, occasional audio/video recording, student work, teacher journals, IXL practice records, and AI-generated classroom snapshots. AI acted as recorder, audience, and companion—affirming children through recognition, affirmation, and awakening.

4. Findings

The findings indicate that the CHARACTER framework supports embodied and contextualized language learning. Through Andrew's case, the nine conditions were vividly illustrated:

- **Context:** prenatal education, where the mother shared music, paintings, and stories.
- **Home:** a secure environment where the father's voice became an anchor.
- **Affection:** at three months, his first word was 'love,' which he used to call for his mother's embrace, even singing it as 'ah-yi ai.'
- **Reading Aloud:** at two and a half, he and his brother performed entire children's operas, role-playing characters and reading lines dramatically.
- **Awakening:** at age four, while reading *Judges*, he asked: 'Why did the Israelites keep repeating mistakes?' His mother explained: 'They lived in the moment; you are reading history.' This



marked an awakening of thought.

- **Commitment:** at age four and a half, after completing the *Bible*, he committed himself to becoming a historian, determined to help humanity remember so mistakes would not be repeated.
- **Transfer:** dictating letters to his father, replacing unknown words with symbols, and adapting stories into his own versions.
- **Encoding:** his 'books' were printed and posted on the wall, giving him the dignity of authorship.
- **Recognition:** reading aloud before an audience, where listeners even guessed at his 'codes,' affirming his voice on a public stage.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Building on Gardner's (1983) definition of intelligence as a bio-psychological potential activated within cultural contexts, this study extends his framework through the loom metaphor: knowledge as heavenly warp, context as earthly weft, woven into the fabric of understanding.

This metaphor resonates with the motif of 'descending to earth' (下降) in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. In the novel, immortals leave the clarity of heaven to enter embodied human life, where joy and suffering become the real teachers. Similarly, the C for Commitment in the CHARACTER framework signifies more than clarity; it marks the child's willingness to embody conviction—to 'descend' into responsibility and transform abstract knowledge into concrete action.

Thus, grammar is no longer only an abstract system of rules but a lived fabric: words become flesh, meanings become choices, and stories become decisions. In this weaving, grammar, music, and character are inseparable.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

Activity design replaces conventional lesson plans by integrating grammar with character formation, encouraging tangible contexts and collaborative learning.

5.3 Limitations

Findings are limited by sample size and context. Further testing across cultures and classrooms is needed.

5.4 Future Research

Future work could expand to different age groups, cross-cultural contexts, and digital tools (e.g., AI-assisted stories, multimodal assessment).

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

This study reimagines language education through the *Grammar of Character* framework, integrating grammar, music, and moral imagination within embodied, culturally grounded contexts. The findings suggest that when linguistic instruction is woven with rhythm, affection, and context, children do more than decode language—they learn to relate, to listen, and to respond.

Across the nine decoding conditions, learning emerges as a form of resonance: **Context** gives knowledge a place to dwell—through story, where abstract ideas find life and children find their way to meaning. **Home** offers belonging and tools for exploration. **Affection** opens the will to learn. And **Commitment** transforms awareness into ethical action. Through these interwoven strands, language becomes not a mechanical code but a living art of connection.



Over thirty years of teaching in mixed-age and inclusion classrooms have shown that the greatest obstacle to learning is not complexity but fear. When correction replaces connection, curiosity withdraws. But when children are met with recognition, rhythm, and trust, intelligence unfolds naturally—like music finding its key.

Ultimately, education is not the act of bringing stars down to children, but of giving them ladders so they may climb toward light. When knowledge descends into the child's world through story, affection, and play, understanding ascends into character. Grammar, then, is not only a structure of language—it is the rhythm of becoming human.

Author's Note

Although the author is trained in music and early childhood education rather than linguistics, this research represents more than three decades of classroom practice and inquiry. Through working with children often considered “unteachable,” the author sought to explore how musical intelligence could serve as a decoding system for language learning. The *Grammar of Character* framework thus emerges not from theory alone but from lived experience — an intersection of art, cognition, and compassion.

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