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# Lessons from a Life in Primary Education: Research Close-to-Practice

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# The Process Approach to Writing

Children who are fed topics, story starters, lead sentences, even opening paragraphs as a steady diet for three or four years, rightfully panic when topics have to come from them … **Writers who do not learn to choose topics wisely lose out on the strong link between voice and subject** … The data show that writers who learn to choose topics well make the most significant growth in both information and skills at the point of best topic. With best topic the child exercises strongest control, establishes ownership, and with ownership, pride in the piece. (Graves, 1983:21)

# Criticism of Graves' Research

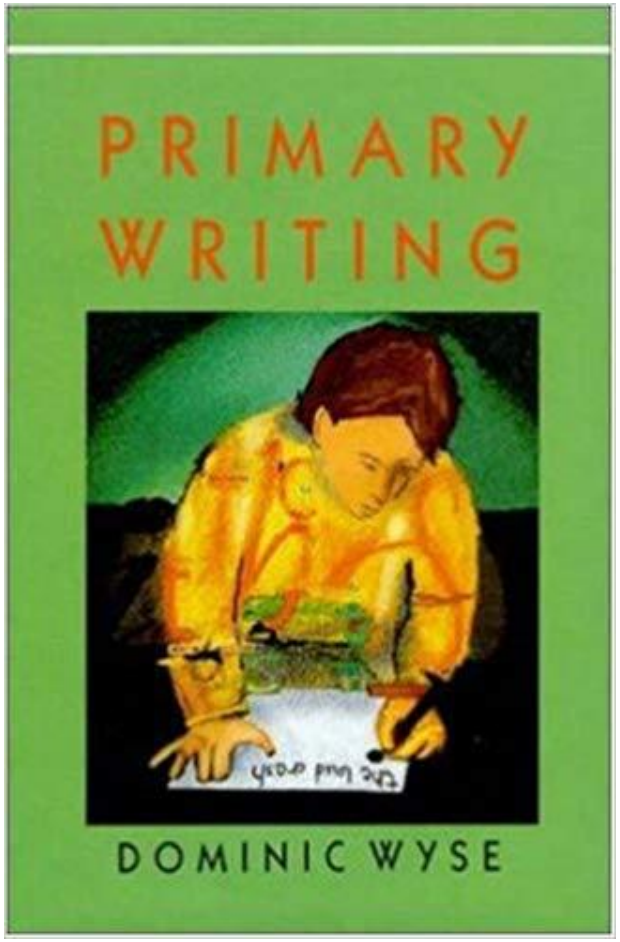
Graves' approach to teaching writing was based on "unstructured expression of personal experiences" … Graves uses his case study of sixteen New Hampshire child as a research base providing proof of the efficacy of this method. However, his observations from this study qualify as reportage more than research. The work of the Graves team in New Hampshire represents a demonstration of teaching ideas that work well under favourable circumstances. Because he never considers negative evidence for the hypothesis he is testing, his work does not constitute research. (Smagorinsky, 1987, p. 331)

to my mum and dad

One day to romens
was going to a
nather Land and the
to romens got
Cart in a tarat and
the PiePoL was the
hoJibs and the
romens was very Sade
and one of the romens
had a arrow went
in his haed the
romen was buring the
other romen.

# A first research project

- Graves' influence continues into MPhil
- Addressed teachers' practice in England, and links with theory and research



# Experimental evidence 20 years after Graves

1. Increase the amount of time spent writing (EF 0.24). **Emphasis on process of writing (EF 0.48)**
2. Create a supportive writing environment in the classroom (Enthusiasm; scaffold learning; pupil independence; clear goals)
3. Develop pupils' skills, strategies and knowledge (planning, revising and editing; knowledge about creativity)
4. Teach pupils about 'self regulation' (pupils reflect on their use of writing strategies)
5. Use assessment for learning techniques (EF 0.87 Adult feedback) (assessment of learning into teaching; encourage pupils' self and peer evaluation)
6. Teach keyboard use as well as handwriting
7. Teach writing across the curriculum (different text structures for different purposes)

See: **Wyse, D. & Torgerson, C. (2017). Experimental trials and 'what works?' in education: The case of grammar for writing. British Educational Research Journal. Vol. 43(6), p, 1019-1047. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3315 (30)**

# Evidence from experimental trials

| Interventions | Studies | Effect size | 95% confidence interval | Grade levels |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Process writing | 33 | 0.34*** | 0.24 to 0.44 | 1-12 |
| Elementary/primary | 18 | 0.48*** | 0.34 to 0.65 | 1-5 |
| Secondary | 14 | 0.25*** | 0.12 to 0.39 | 6-12 |

"All average-weighted effect sizes are for writing quality except effects for Writing about Content Material (content learning measured) and Writing about Material Read (reading comprehension measured) … *** p < .001." (Table adapted from Graham, Harris and Chambers, 2016, p. 211).

# Final Reflections

- The path from school teaching to research.

From *Becoming a Primary Teacher* to *Reflective Teaching in the Primary School* and *Teaching English, Language and Literacy* (5th Edition)

- BERA's work on *close-to-practice research.*

The debates continue: https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/berj.3762

- Education as an academic discipline in universities:

EERA BERA Blog: https://blog.eera-ecer.de/author/professor-dominic-wyse/