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INTRODUCTION

The articles published in "Basic Writing and Social Science Research Part I" return to the theme of *JBW*'s inaugural issue—the problem of persistent error in writing: its sources, its effects on readers and writers, and strategies for addressing it.

The first article, a monograph-length study by Mary Epes, presents the results of her study of the sources of persistent errors, in highly motivated adult basic writers, in a variety of places: in nonstandard dialect, in low reading comprehension, in various cognitive, perceptual, and linguistic processes which underlie writing. She concludes that the relationship between nonstandard dialect and error is even stronger and more complicated than basic writing teachers may have assumed. When composing and cognitive skills are on the same level, nonstandard dialect speakers are likely to produce many more errors than standard dialect speakers. Furthermore, differences in reading comprehension skills do not account for differences in the numbers or types of errors. Indeed, there is no correlation whatsoever between reading comprehension skills and errors; exceptionally good readers can be very error-prone writers. Finally, nonstandard dialect patterns account entirely for incorrect whole-word verb forms (*she have, they was*) and hypercorrections (*she droved*)—two of the most stigmatized types of errors—and for a substantial portion of omitted inflections. In the light of these findings, Epes concludes that basic skills courses aimed at improving reading comprehension and writing fluency will not significantly affect the student's ability to perceive errors in his writing and that direct instruction in the grammar of standard English is, for the nonstandard dialect student, necessary. As a way to handle the necessary instruction in grammar without exacerbating the student's insecurity about writing, she suggests separating composing and encoding problems in instruction and separating composing from editing for correctness in the student's writing process. She concludes, in addition, that tests of writing skill must provide enough extra time for basic writers to edit their work.

Looking into the works of cognitive psychologists, Marilyn Goldberg attempts to discover why students and teachers err—why students fail to learn information and concepts to which they are repeatedly exposed, and why teachers have so much trouble structuring instruction more effectively. She finds in Piaget's concepts of assimilation and accommodation an explanation of the importance of achieving a close fit between the student's prior knowledge and the new information to be presented. Polanyi's concepts of focal knowledge (consciously operating perception) and subsidiary knowledge (the knowledge base that informs focal

knowledge) explain the student's inability to focus on meaning when preoccupied by correctness—and, paradoxically, the necessity of focusing on form and correctness at some point in instruction, in order to bring them into subsidiary knowledge, where they can ultimately operate unconsciously. The concepts of habituation and overfamiliarity explain the difficulty students have whenever they are asked to look at structures in language and thought, such structures as generalizations and verbs being so completely familiar and deeply intuitive as to be utterly invisible. They remain invisible unless, by sharp focusing that excises them from context that disrupts the student's intuitive routines, the teacher can raise them to focal knowledge for conceptualization. The concepts of "over-accommodation" and "pseudo-conceptualization" explain how students can *appear* to understand the topic we have presented, by rote memorization, without having worked out the connection between the concept and the data from which it should have been derived. She suggests a number of specific strategies for teaching inductively as the best way for disrupting intuitive routines and minimizing rote learning.

Allison Wilson analyzes the effect of nonstandard dialect errors on teaching strategies, showing four ways teachers have perceived and reacted to error, particularly the errors of Black dialect. In one approach to student error, teachers assume that the nonstandard oral code will meet the needs of written discourse equally well. Thus they ignore most surface feature mistakes, arguing that errors do not seriously impede understanding. In another approach, teachers assume that using "relevant" materials and congenial methods will enable students to tap into their alienated creative impulses and into correct linguistic forms as a concomitant. So this method avoids confronting error also. The third approach, however, focuses on error obsessively. Meaningful assignments in reading and writing give way to endless grammatical analysis and drills, so that the student gains little or no practice solving the larger problems of discourse. In the fourth approach—the one she, like Epes, recommends—teachers separate composing and redrafting from copy-editing in how they structure assignments, thus, in how they encourage their students to write, limiting grammatical instruction to specific problem areas.

Irvin Hashimoto looks at the mistakes we make when we teach basic writing to adult learners. His experiences have persuaded him that adults are sufficiently different from younger college students in their self-directedness; no-frills, goal-oriented pragmatism; prior experience; and rigidity; as to require different teaching methods and materials. Adults will strongly resist instruction where they do not help to define goals or do not see the immediate usefulness of activities and strongly resist instruction which they perceive as condescending or as an attack on deeply entrenched beliefs and values. Hashimoto's excerpts from freshman texts show that much we say (and fail to say) to traditional students unintentionally condescends to or otherwise offends more mature students.

Finally, Tom Reigstad summarizes a number of studies focused on writing anxiety and the basic writer. Highly apprehensive writers are, in fact, usually less skillful than their low-apprehensive counterparts. They drop

writing courses more often. Increases in writing anxiety correlate strongly with the assignment of argumentative essays, with students' increased absenteeism, and with teaching styles and grading procedures students perceive as threatening. He reports on a number of methods which appear to reduce anxiety: intensive "learning-centered" writing tasks in content courses; a student-centered, workshop format for writing instruction; student-selected writing topics; student analyses of their own writing processes; writing anxiety workshops; tightly sequenced, highly structured practice (such as sentence combining) which maximizes opportunities for experiencing success; and delayed grading; among others. He concludes that attempts to build confidence and reduce anxiety must simultaneously address (not simply replace) the task of moving students toward the forms and norms of academic writing.