

INTRODUCTION

Part II of *Basic Writing and Social Science Research* looks at various applications of psychological theory to the pedagogy of the basic writing classroom.

Gerry Coleman and Anna Berg report an experiment in which students worked on the cognitive skills which undergird academic tasks and writing rather than actually writing essays or drilling grammar rules. These skills included classification of data, hypothesis formation, and hypothesis testing. The data students examined included, but was not limited to, grammatical concepts they would need to copyedit their papers. Students wrote up the processes they had to go through to establish categories and to state and test their hypotheses. The rather astonishing result was that the experimental students did better not only in the end-of-term assessments of cognitive abilities, but on the standardized reading and holistically scored writing tests as well.

Joan Elifson and Katharine Stone examine James Fowler's paradigm for human development, which because of its several dimensions, gives a richer interpretation of human growth than models which trace the form of logic, form of moral judgement, or ability to shift perspectives separately. Fowler places a new emphasis on maturity of the imagination—what he calls "faith" (not to be confused with religious belief)—the ability to formulate complex synthetic constructs which acknowledge and integrate the complexity of real life. While cautioning against an oversimplified view of stage theories and an abuse of them in designing pedagogical sequences, Elifson and Stone see many connections between students' levels of maturity and the kinds of writing it will be appropriate to assign. They present as a tantalizing possibility the notion that writing may present a unique context for stimulating developmental growth, both because writing demands intense concentration and precision and because it interacts so intimately with many aspects of meaning-making.

Annette Bradford reviews the role of self-regulating speech (talking out loud to oneself) in the maturation of the child and in adults in stressful situations, its use among experienced writers testing the sound of their prose, and its usefulness in therapeutic settings as a behavior modification technique. She concludes that self-regulating speech—freely talking out loud to oneself or to others while composing—might be particularly useful to the basic writer in coping with novel or difficult writing problems, in generating and elaborating ideas or pursuing solutions to a problem, and in providing verbal instructions to oneself about such matters as sequencing

the task.

David Rankin suggests an integrated approach to oral reading, listening, and writing which makes use of teacher and student recordings and student transcriptions of professional writing. The proposed sequence not only encourages students to absorb the larger patterns and signals of organization and structure indirectly, but focuses their attention perforce on just those parts of the written code to which they are most blind when reading, and deaf when listening. Rankin encourages direct transcription—word for word copying— of difficult passages as valuable both in teaching subtleties of structure and as a prewriting exercise for "limbering up" one's own fluency. Similarly, recording and listening to their own essays will suggest to students where their sentences are over-long, choppy, or misspelled.

Three articles focus on the problem of persistent misspelling. Frank Parker reviews the literature on dyslexia, concluding that dyslexia seems most likely caused by a specifically linguistic disability rather than a more generalized disability with visual processing, sensory integration, and/or serial order perception. He argues from this conclusion that certain activities are likely to have little value, while other strategies may be pursued aggressively. He particularly recommends direct instruction in specific areas of language structure including word analysis and synthesis, and systematic phonemic and orthographic correspondences.

Amy Richards looks at "writing disability" as a specific kind of learning disability — sometimes connected to a corresponding reading or math disability. She closely analyzes the kinds of "predictable" errors among inexperienced writers, contrasting them with the more anomalous kinds of errors which have characterized students independently identified as learning disabled (the learning disabled writer too, if inexperienced, produces both kinds of error). She includes the spelling, punctuation, and sentence construction errors which characterize these two populations. Over the years, she has seen that learning disabled students can learn to compose long, sustained essays and that many learn to copyedit and use a dictionary successfully; however, some few students are never able to perceive that elements are missing from words or sentences.

Chopeta Lyons zeroes in on spelling as a kind of error in which most students can learn to practice the close observation required in copyediting, can experience rapid improvement, and gain motivation. Her system for classifying errors encourages the student to perceive the problem in terms of its source before turning to the large number of rules necessary in different cases to produce the right letters in the right order.

As this Board of Editors steps down, we wish for our successors the genuine pleasures of editing and we thank our many dedicated contributors. By sharing your experiences and insights, you have greatly enriched our own.