Self-efficacy In Academic Reading And Writing, Authorial Identity And Learning Strategies In First-Year Students

Moira Maguire
Ann Everitt Reynolds and Brid Delahunt

Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT), Dundalk, Ireland.

Abstract

Increasingly evidence indicates that students' engagement with academic writing and their wider approaches to study are influenced by their beliefs about themselves as writers. To provide effective support for academic writing, an understanding of these beliefs, particularly in the first year, is essential. This study sought to examine beliefs about writing held by first year students in a department of Nursing, midwifery & Health Studies, the relationships between these beliefs and their associations with learning strategies. First- year students were surveyed at 3 points over the first-year. They completed measures of academic reading and writing self-efficacy, authorial identity, learning strategies and the extent to which they saw themselves as novice writers. Findings revealed that, typically, our students had fairly positive beliefs about their writing, although there was considerable variability. Beliefs were associated with student characteristics: mature students and Nursing & Midwifery students reported higher levels of writing self-efficacy,. First-generation students were also significantly more likely to see themselves as novice writers. There were strong positive correlations between all the measures of writing beliefs and in particular between reading and writing self-efficacies. Beliefs about writing were positively associated with deep learning, and, to a lesser extent strategic learning. Only a minority of students could be compared at different points in the year. Where this was possible the beliefs were stable with the exception that positioning as a novice writer showed a significant increase. The implications are discussed.

Keywords: academic writing, academic reading, self-efficacy, authorial identity, first year.

URL: http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/[111]

1. Introduction

Writing remains the primary medium through which students of most academic disciplines engage with the knowledge base of those disciplines. Academic writing is important in the transition to HE and plays a major part in developing an academic identity (Krause, 2001; Sommers & Saltz, 2004). It is also challenging for many students and supporting students in their development as writers is an important challenge for educators. It is increasingly clear that students' beliefs about themselves as writers play an important role in determining how they approach and engage with their writing. In other words, these beliefs play a key role in self-regulation around writing (Hofer, Yu & Pintrich, 1998; Pajares, 2003). '*There are a number of different models of self-regulated learning…but all have in common the basic assumption that students can actively regulate their cognition motivation or behaviour and through these various regulatory processes achieve their goals and perform better.*' (Hofer, Yu & Pintrich, 1998, p. 57). This has wider implications as evidence indicates that students' beliefs about their writing are related to the broader learning strategies they adopt (Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010). The first year in HE is an important transitional period and one in which students begin to form new beliefs about themselves within their disciplines, yet there is little work that examines this process.

1.1 Self-efficacy.

A key component of self-regulation is an individual's belief in his or her capabilities (Bandura, 1977, 1986,1997; Pajares, 2003). Self-efficacy refers to our own belief in our ability to do something, such as write a good essay or to paraphrase material effectively. Self-efficacy was developed as a construct by Bandura (1977) and is one of the most important constructs in contemporary psychology.

There are four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). The first is previous experience. '*Outcomes interpreted as successful raise self-efficacy; those interpreted as failures lower it'* (Pajares, 2003, p. 140). The second source is vicarious experiences. This refers to our observations of others who are doing the same thing and includes social comparisons and peer modelling. The third source refers to social messages. Encouragement and positive persuasion increase self-efficacy whereas negative criticism will decrease self-efficacy. Finally physiological and emotional states impact on self-efficacy. For example, anxiety decreases it. Evidence does show that writing self-efficacy is negatively associated with writing anxiety (Martinez, Knock & Cass, 2011).

Self-efficacy beliefs mediate between factors such as previous experience and subsequent behaviour. As such these efficacy beliefs affect motivation, persistence, resilience and emotional responses (Bandura, 1977) and this explains the link with behaviour. A student who has high self-efficacy for academic writing is likely to try hard to improve his or her writing and to persist even in the face of setbacks.

The evidence is very clear that self-efficacy is associated with, and predicts, behaviour, in many domains. Academic self-efficacy has been shown to predict academic performance. While a lot of the early work in this area focused on mathematics, a body of work has developed that examines writing self-efficacy in schools and higher education (Pajares, 2003). Writing self-efficacy has been shown to independently predict writing outcomes (Pajares, 2003) and to be negatively associated with plagiarism and cheating (Finn & Frone, 2004). In a recent study of psychology undergraduates in the UK, Prat-Sala (2012) found both reading and writing self-efficacy positively predicted actual writing performance.

1.2 Authorial identity.

As Pajares (2003) explains, writing self-efficacy is different to writing self-concept. Writing self-concept refers to how one feels about oneself as a writer and has not been well investigated. A related issue is authorial identity '..the sense a writer has of themselves as an author and the textual identity they construct in their writing' (Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox & Payne, 2009, p. 154). Again, there is very little research on students' beliefs about their authorial identity. Pittam et al. (2009) used focus groups to explore psychology students' beliefs about their authorial identities. They also developed a questionnaire to measure authorial identity. The questionnaire has six subscales, three of which, (confidence in writing, understanding authorship and knowledge to avoid plagiarism), reflect beliefs about important aspects of authorship. The remaining three scales represent broad approaches to writing (top-down, bottom-up and pragmatic) and the authors suggest parallels with learning strategies. Their findings suggest that students may have relatively weak authorial identities and this is a good basis for intervention to reduce unintentional plagiarism.

Other work too suggests that students' beliefs about writing and about themselves as writers, are important. The Harvard Study of Undergraduate Writing followed 400 students throughout their undergraduate degree (see Sommers & Saltz, 2004). The findings indicate that those students who improve the most in their writing are those who (i) see themselves as novice writers initially and are open to new ideas, new ways of doing things and to feedback, and (ii) develop an understanding of the wider purpose of academic writing.

1.3 Factors associated with writing beliefs.

There is little work that investigates the relationship between student characteristics and their beliefs about writing, or indeed their actual writing. Gender has received some attention. In a review of the literature on writing self-efficacy, Pajares (2003) explains that evidence suggests that, in school settings girls tend to have higher levels of writing self-efficacy than boys. However Takaku & Williams (2011) found no gender differences in a large-scale study of home and international students at a US liberal arts university.

In the higher education context, other student characteristics are likely to be important. For example, the past two decades have witnessed significant growth in Higher Education internationally. A notable development has been 'widening participation', the significant

increase in HE participation by students who do not fit the traditional profile of 18-22 year old school leavers. Increasingly, many students are accessing HE through non-traditional routes, such as Further Education or Access courses. Often, but not always, these will be mature students. Mature students face particular challenges in HE and evidence suggests they are likely to have more adaptive approaches to study (e.g. Richardson, 1995). 'First-generation students' refers to those among the first generation in their family to participate in HE. First-generation students are generally drawn from socio-economic groups that traditionally have not been well represented in HE. Some evidence suggests that these students have a greater risk of dropout and Keane (2011; 2009) notes than non-traditional entry routes and/or low points are often tied up with more general concerns about declining academic standards. However she found (2011) that, although non-traditional students might have less confidence, their entry routes were often better preparation than school for the independent learning expected in HE.

1.4 Learning strategies.

Learning strategies refer to the ways in which learners approach their studies. The model has it's origins in Marton & Säljö's (1976) work with Swedish students and has been developed and extended by Entwistle & Ramsden (e.g. 1983) and Biggs (e.g. 1987), among others (see Case & Marshall, 2009). This work identified two distinct approaches to learning: the deep and the surface approach. A deep approach to learning refers to learning activities that are focused on understanding and integrating knowledge. In contrast surface learning is primarily concerned with reproducing knowledge, rather than understanding it. Entwistle identified a third approach, strategic learning, which refers to maximizing the outcomes from learning efforts. However there is debate about the extent to which this is in fact a distinct approach (Case & Marshall, 2009).

Learning context influences learning strategy. Heavy workloads, unclear criteria and certain kinds of assessment tend to promote surface learning (Entwistle & Ramsden, 2009). Learning strategies are predictors of academic success and have bi-directional relationships to motives and other beliefs (Richardson, 2007), including beliefs about writing. Prat-Sala & Redford (2010) examined reading and writing self-efficacy, motivational goals and learning strategy in first year psychology students. These variables were measured twice: once at the beginning of semester 1 and again at the beginning of semester 2. They found that students who scored highly on reading and writing self-efficacy were more likely to report deep and/or strategic approaches to learning. Self-efficacy was also linked to changes in learning strategy: those with low self-efficacy were more likely to show a decrease in deep learning between time 1 and 2.

1.5 Rationale for this study.

It is clear that self-efficacy beliefs are very important in explaining and understanding how students organise and orient themselves towards their writing and their wider learning. Understanding they ways students think about their writing is important in developing ways to

support students in their development as writers within their disciplines, particularly within the first year. In particular, there has been little attention to the role of demographic factors, apart from gender. Within an Irish/UK context it is important to consider factors such as traditional vs non-traditional student. While writing self-efficacy has been investigated in college students other beliefs have been less so, and it is not clear how writing self-efficacy relates to broader authorial identity.

The evidence reviewed suggests that understanding the purpose of academic writing and seeing oneself as a novice writer who is capable of learning to write in this way is associated with good outcomes. There is a clear need for more evidence regarding the way in which these beliefs develop and change over the course of the first year. In particular given the evidence that links reading and writing self-efficacy to learning strategies in psychology students (Prat-Sala & Redford, 2010), there is a clear need to investigate this with a different student population. This study was designed to make a contribution to answering these questions by examining the beliefs about academic reading and writing held by our own first-year students. More specifically, the aims were to :

- Examine reading and writing self-efficacy and authorial identity in our first year students and consider the effect of course type and student background.
- Explore the relationships between reading and writing self-efficacy, authorial identity.
- Examine associations between learning styles and beliefs about writing
- Track changes in the beliefs about writing across the first year.

2. Method.

2.1 Design.

This was a longitudinal correlational study that sought to measure students' beliefs about their writing and learning strategies at 3 points across the first year. We also measured motivational goals but will not be reporting that data in this paper for reasons of space.

The first data collection point was in November 2011, towards the end of semester 1. At this point all of the students had submitted at least one written assignment and would have been working on others. The terminal exams for the semester were in January so students were not activelyrevising at that point. We deliberately choose the end of the semester, rather than the beginning, as we wanted the students to base their answers on their understanding and experience of academic writing. The second data collection point was weeks 5-6 of semester 2. Again we wanted the students to have had the opportunity to get feedback on their semester 1 work and to be at a point where they were starting semester 2 assignments. The

final data collection point was the penultimate week of semester 2.

2.2 Ethics.

The study was approved by the DkIT School of Health & Science Ethics Committee. Students were notified in advance about the nature and purpose of the study (via email) and the participant information was also included as the front page of the questionnaire. Students were assured that participation was entirely voluntary. In order to ensure anonymity we used self-generated identifiers (see Schnell, Bachteler, & Reiher, 2010). Students were prompted to generate a code based on their mother's date of birth and some of the letters from their name. The same prompt was given each time the questionnaires were distributed. This worked well where students generated the code however 4, 6 and 8 participants did not complete this at times 1, 2 and 3 respectively and so could not be matched.

2.3 Participants.

All 1st year students on our programmes were invited to participate. We offer 6 UG programmes: BSc General Nursing, BSc Psychiatric Nursing, BSc Intellectual Disability Nursing, BSc Midwifery, BSc Health & Physical Activity (HPA), BA Early Childhood Studies (ECS). Data collection was complicated by the fact that our 1st years, (on all but one programme) had work/clinical placements, and at different times. The Nursing and Midwifery students were all on placement for the second half of semester 2. We were able to distribute questionnaires at some, but not all of our clinical placement sites. Unsurprisingly the response rate was considerably lower than when completed in class. The ECS students were on placement for the first half of semester 2 so missed the T2 sweep. Questionnaires were distributed to them when they returned to college for briefings, however only one of these was returned.

In total 77 students (68 women and 9 men) participated at Time 1 (a response rate of approximately 50%), 49 (39 women, 8 men and 2 non-responses)at Time 2 and 45 (28 women, 15 men and 2 non-responses) at Time 3.

2.4 Measures.

2.4.1 Self-efficacy in reading and writing

These were assessed using two 12-item inventories taken from Prat-Sala & Redford (2010): one assessed reading self-efficacy and the other writing self-efficacy. An example of a reading self-efficacy item is 'How well can you identify all the key points when reading a journal of book', and an example of a writing self-efficacy item is 'Before you finish your essay, how well can you make the conclusion relate to the introduction and the essay question?'. Each item is scored on a 1-7 Likert scale, where 1 = not at all well and 7= very well. The overall self-efficacies scores were calculated as the mean for the 12 items on each scale.

2.4.2 Authorial identity

We used the Student Authorship questionnaire developed by Pitman et al. (2009) and adapted to replace 'psychology' with 'my studies'. The 18-item questionnaire has six subscales. The first three (*confidence in writing, understanding authorship and knowledge to avoid plagiarism*), reflect beliefs about important aspects of authorship, while the remaining scales represent broad approaches to writing (*top-down, bottom-up and pragmatic*). For the purposes of this paper we will be focusing on the 2 of the authorship subscales *understanding authorship* and *knowledge to avoid plagiarism*. Examples of items on these scales are '*I know what it means to be the author of a piece of written work'* and '*I would never be accused of plagiarism'*. Each item is scored on a 5 point Likert scale, with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The score for each subscale was calculated as the mean for the items loaded on that subscale. Scores for some items were reversed so that high scores indicated endorsement of that scale, i.e. high scores indicate a good understanding of authorship.

Novice writers

We adapted 5 items from the Harvard Writing Survey (Sommer & Saltz, 2004) to assess the extent to which students positioned themselves as novices with respect to academic writing and used these to create a short scale. These items were:

1. '*I have a lot to learn about academic writing'*,

2. '*I expect that my writing will continue to improve throughout my studies*',

3. '*I am prepared to work hard on my academic writing over the next few years'*

4. '*Academic writing at college is basically the same as at school/FE/Access*'

5. '*Once I master the basics I won't need to worry about my academic writing.*

Each item was scored on a 1-7 Likert scale where 1= not at all well and 7= very well. Items 4 and 5 were reverse scored and responses to all 5 averaged. This gave an overall score between 1 and 7 with higher scores indicating that the respondent saw him or herself as a novice writer. The internal consistency for this scale was acceptable (alpha >.72).

2.4.3 Learning Strategies

Learning strategies were assessed using Pettersen's (2010) 18-item version of the Approaches to Studying Inventory. There are 3 subscales: deep learning, strategic learning and surface learning, with 6 items loading onto each. Items were scored on a 1-7 Likert scale where 1= not at all well and 7 = very well. The score for each learning strategy was calculated as the mean for the 6 items that contributed to that subscale.

3. Results

3.1 Beliefs about writing at each of the three time points.

The self-efficacy beliefs and seeing oneself as a novice were all scored on 7-point scales. It can be seen in Table 1 that the mean scores are above the midpoint for these variables, at all timepoints, indicating that on average our students have fairly positive beliefs about themselves as writers. Mean scores are particularly high on the 5-point *understanding authorship* and *knowledge to avoid plagiarism* scales, although there is a high level of variability in these scores. Generally scores are similar and moderate for all of the learning strategies, although deep learning is higher at time 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for beliefs about writing and learning strategiesat each of the 3 time points.

	End of semester 1 (n=77) Mean (SD)	Early semester 2 (n= 49) Mean (SD)	End of semester 2 (N=45) Mean (SD)
Reading SE	4.64 (.78)	4.58 (.77)	4.61 (.8)
Writing SE	4.4 (.92)	4.38 (.77)	4.38 (.77)
Novice	4.85 (.86)	5.38 (.83)	5.21 (.86)
Understanding authorship	4.16 (1.66)	4.42 (1.63)	4.06 (1.37)
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	4.67 (1.32)	4.77 (1.1)	4.53 (1.07)
Deep learning	4.37(.72)	3.33 (.61)	3.3 (.54)
Strategic learning	3.45 (.88)	3.27 (.77)	3.34 (.76)
Surface learning	3.6 (.63)	3.6 (.66)	3.6 (.51)

3.2 Factors associated with writing beliefs at Time 1.

The scores for mature students were compared to those for direct-entry students. Mature students had higher scores on all the measures (see Table 2) and these differences were statistically significant for writing SE, knowledge to avoid plagiarism and confidence in writing at Time 1. First-generation students also scored significantly higher on seeing themselves ($p<.01$) as novices. However, there was overlap between these categories with mature students being significantly more likely than school-leavers to be also first generation students.

Table 2: Scores on the measures of writing beliefs and learning strategies by student categories.

	Mature (n= 32) Mean (SD)	Direct-entry (n= 40) Mean (SD)	Significance	First Generation (n=45) Mean (SD)	At least one parent HE (n= 32) Mean (SD)	Significance
Reading SE	4.79 (.73)	4.49 (.79)	ns	4.7(.81)	4.57 (.74)	ns
Writing SE	4.7 (.91)	4.21(.79)	p <.05	4.57(.99)	4.27 (.78)	ns
Understanding authorship	4.42 (1.74)	3.86 (1.46)	ns	4.27 (1.79)	4.0 (1.44)	ns
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	4.96 (1.36)	4.34 (1.23)	p <.05	4.6 (1.43)	4.83 (1.1)	ns
Novice	5.1 (.74)	4.6(.86)	p <.01	5.1(.78)	4.56 (.89)	p <.01
Deep learning	3.75 (.6)	3.02(.64)	p<.0005	3.52(.73)	3.15(.67)	p<.05
Strategic learning	3.85 (.77)	3.1(.83)	p<.0005	3.5(.93)	3.38(.82)	ns
Surface learning	3.57(.65)	3.56(.6)	ns	3.66 (.61)	3.52(.65)	ns

We then compared the scores for Nursing & Midwifery students (General, Psychiatric and Intellectual Nursing, Midwifery) to those on the other, more traditionally structured, programmes (Health & Physical Activity and Early Childhood Studies). Nursing students had higher mean scores and lower variability on all measures of belief and these were statistically significant for reading and writing self-efficacy and understanding authorship (see table 3).

Table 3: Scores on the measures of writing beliefs and learning strategies by course type.

	Nursing programmes (n= 48) Mean (Sd)	Other programmes (n=27) Mean (SD)	Significance (2-tailed)
Reading SE	4.82 (.66)	4.33 (.9)	p <. 01
Writing SE	4.57 (.69)	4.13 (1.16)	p < .05
Understanding authorship	4.41 (1.57)	3.57 (1.64)	p < .05
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	4.76 (1.4)	4.56 (1.19)	ns
Novice	4.77 (.82)	4.92(.9)	ns
Deep learning	3.42(.71)	3.21 (.73)	ns
Strategic learning	3.66 (.77)	3.07 (.96)	p < .05
Surface learning	3.55 (.59)	3.74 (.65)	ns

3.3 Relationships between beliefs about writing and learning strategies.

Table 4 shows that all the writing beliefs are positively correlated with one another and, with one exception, these associations are strong or very strong and statistically significant. Table 5 shows very strong, highly significant positive correlations between deep learning and all writing beliefs and less strong, but still significant associations, between strategic learning and these beliefs. Surface learning is not closely associated with any of the writing beliefs except *knowledge to avoid plagiarism* which approached, but did not quite reach, significance (p =.052).

Table 4: Correlations (Pearson's r) between the measures of writing beliefs at time 1.

	Writing SE	Understanding authorship	Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	Novice
Reading SE	.72***	.38**	.34**	.26*
Writing SE		.40***	.37**	.36***
Understanding authorship		.38**	.14	
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism		.24**		

*** p<.0005 **p<.01 *p<.05 (all one-tailed)

Table 5: Correlations (Pearson's r) between the measures of writing beliefs and learning strategies at Time 1.

	Deep learning	Strategic learning	Surface learning
Reading SE	.49***	.432***	0.06
Writing SE	.566***	.514***	-0.03
Novice	.483***	.220*	0.03
Understanding authorship	.398***	.274**	0.15
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	.33**	.192*	0.19

*** p<.0005 **p<.01 *p<.05 (all one-tailed)

3.4 Changes in beliefs across the year.

Unfortunately only 9 students completed the survey at each of the 3 time-points. As discussed earlier, this was largely as a result of placements. It was further compounded by the fact that a minority of students did not include the self-generated identifier. We therefore decided to compare the Nursing and Midwifery students' responses from times 1 and 2, and compare times 1 and 3 for the other programmes. The students on Nursing and Midwifery programmes spend the second half of each semester on clinical placement so for them, weeks 5-6 of semester 2 were at the end of their *classroom* semester and all academic written work (bar the clinical portfolio) is submitted before their placement begins (weeks 7-8). We were able to match 21 Nursing and Midwifery students at Times 1 and 2. Table 3 shows the scores for the Nursing and Midwifery students at times 1 and 2. The means are similar at both time points, with only positioning self as a novice showing any increase. This was the only significant difference (t(20) 3.27, p =.004, 1 tailed).

Table 6: Differences in writing beliefs among Nursing & Midwifery students between Times 1 and 2 .

	Time 1 Mean (SD)	Time 2 Mean (SD)	Significance
Reading SE	4.68 (.68)	4.76 (.79)	ns
Writing SE	4.45 (.72)	4.48 (.82)	ns
Novice	4.67(.94)	5.23 (.92)	p<.01
Understanding authorship	4.48 (1.55)	4.31 (1.59)	ns
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	4.81 (1.46)	4.91 (1.02)	ns

We were also able to match 15 of the other (ECS and HPA students) at times 1 and 3. Again, the only significant change was an increase in positioning as a novice at time 3 (t(14)=3.14, p<.005).

Table 7: Differences in writing beliefs among the HPA and ECS students between times 1 and 3.

	Time 1 Mean (SD)	Time 3 Mean (SD)	Significance
Reading SE	4.20(1.0)	4.26(.82)	ns
Writing SE	3.92 (1.1)	4.06(.67)	ns
Novice	4.58 (.68)	5.2(.68)	p<.005
Understanding authorship	4.03(1.43)	3.77(1.55)	ns
Knowledge to avoid plagiarism	4.64(1.32)	4.2(1.13)	ns

4. Discussion.

Our findings indicated that on average our students have fairly positive beliefs about their writing although there is a lot of variability in this. The average scores for the understanding authorship and knowledge to avoid plagiarism subscales are higher than those reported for first years by Pittam et al (2009), and indeed are closer to those they reported for MSc students. However the standard deviations for our samples are much larger, indicating much more variability in our students. Prat-Sala & Redford (2010) didn't report descriptive statistics for their self-efficacy scales so we are not able to compare ours to theirs. The relatively positive beliefs about writing may be linked to the fact that we had that year introduced an academic writing induction programme 'Finding your academic voice'. This took the form of three 2-hour workshops which explored : The Nature and Purpose of Academic Writing, Understanding Expectations and Getting Started. These emphasized the 'why' rather than the 'how' of academic writing and encouraged students to see it as an ongoing developmental process.

We found a very close relationship between reading and writing self-efficacy in our students. These in turn are very closely associated with understanding authorship and knowledge to avoid plagiarism. Interestingly, a perception of oneself as a novice was also significantly positively associated with reading and writing self-efficacy and knowledge to avoid plagiarism.

So those who considered themselves to have a lot to learn about writing were also likely to feel the most confident about being able to write. This makes sense in the context of the Harvard Study of Undergraduate writing findings (Sommer & Salz, 2004). It also suggests that the 5 item scale used here has some validity.

These findings highlight the very strong relationship between reading and writing self-efficacies, for our students at least. This has important implications as students get strong explicit messages about academic writing but not always about reading. It is also clear that these writing beliefs are strongly positively associated with deep learning and, to a lesser extent, strategic learning. It seems likely that activities that promote confidence in writing may also promote deeper approaches to learning and vice versa. In terms of implications for our own programmes this has made us consider the importance of focusing on reading as a foundational activity, particularly early in the semester.

Writing beliefs at the end of semester 1 were associated with key student characteristics. In particular mature students reported significantly higher levels of writing self-efficacy, knowledge to avoid plagiarism and seeing themselves as novices. First-generation students did not differ from their peers with the exception that they also scored significantly higher on the novice scale. Both groups also reported significantly higher levels of deep learning than traditional students and mature students also had significantly higher levels of .strategic learning. There is overlap between these groups in our sample, with mature students being significantly more likely than direct-entry students to also be first generation students. Nonetheless our findings do support Keane's (2011; 2009) argument that non-traditional entry routes may prepare students better for HE.

We also found that students on our Nursing and Midwifery programmes had significantly higher scores for both self-efficacy measures and understanding authorship. This is not linked to background as the Nursing students were no more likely to be non-traditional students than the others. It seems likely that this greater confidence is, at least in part, explained by the fact that these students had just completed a dedicated *Learning to Learn* module, while the other students had not. As part of our 5 yearly review of all programmes we are currently developing new first year modules for these two programmes that we hope will foster a greater understanding of the nature and purpose of academic reading, writing and research.

While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions given the small sample size and the difficulties matching data, our data suggest that beliefs about writing were fairly stable across the first year, with the exception of positioning as a novice, which tended to increase. This may suggest that these beliefs are fairly well established by the end of the first semester. However our sample was a self-selected one, with a top response rate of roughly 50%. It is certainly possible that those who participated were more interested in, or confident around, academic

writing. Certainly other work with our students (Reference removed) suggests that while some students 'get it' early on, others continue to struggle with writing, so it is difficult to know to what extent this pattern would be applicable more widely. It is also possible that group level data obscures important changes for some students, for example as Prat-Sala & Redford (2010) found that writing self-efficacy predicted changes in learning style. Unfortunately, given the limits to the cases that could be matched across time, we were unable to explore this but certainly more research is needed.

Overall the findings indicate close relationships between how students feel about their writing and how they approach their studies more generally and these merit further investigation. We feel the findings emphasise the complexity of academic literacy and the importance of taking a holistic approach to academic literacy.

5. References

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

Biggs, J. (1987). *Student approaches to learning and studying*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Entwistle, N., & Ramsden, P (1983). *Understanding student learning.* London: Croom Helm.

Finn, K. V, & Frone, M. R. (2004). Academic performance and cheating: Moderating role of school identification and self-efficacy.*. Journal of Educational Research,* 97. 115-122.

Hofer, BK, Yu, S.L & Pintrich, PR (1998). Teaching college students to be self-regulated learners. In D.H. Schunk & Zimmerman, B.J. (Eds) *Self-regulated learning: From teaching to self-reflective practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

Keane, E. (2011) Dependence-Deconstruction: Widening Participation and Traditional-Entry Students Transitioning from School to Higher Education in Ireland, *Teaching in Higher Education,* 16(6), 707-718.

Keane, E. (2009) 'Frictional' relationships ... tension in the camp: Focusing on the relational in under-represented students' experiences in higher education, *Irish Educational Studies,* 28(1), pp. 85-102

Martinez, C.T., knock, N. & Cass, J. (2011). Pain and pleasure in short essay writing: Factors predicting university students' writing anxiety and writing self-efficacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 54*(5), 351-360.

Marton, F. Säljö. R. (1976). On qualitative differences in learning I - outcome and process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 46,* 4-11.

Pajares, F. (2003). Self-efficacy beliefs, motivation and achievement in writing: A review of the literature. Reading & Writing Quarterly, 19, 139-158.

Pettersen, R.C. Validation of Approaches to Studying Inventories in a Norwegian Context: In Search of "Quick-and-Easy" and Short Versions of the ASI. *Scandanavian Journal of Educational Research*, 54(3), 239-261

Pittam, G., Elander, J., Lusher, J., Fox, P. & Payne, N. (2009). Student beliefs and attitudes about authorial identity in academic writing. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(2), 153-170.

Prat-Sala, M. & Redford, P. (2012). Does self-efficacy matters? The relationship between self-efficacy in reading and in writing and undergraduate students' performance in essay writing. Educational Psychology 32, 9-20.

Prat-Sala, M. & Redford, P. (2010). The interplay between motivation, self-efficacy, and approaches to studying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology,* 80, 283-305

Richardson, J . T E. (2007). Motives, attitudes and approaches to studying in distance education. *Higher Education, 54,* 385-416.

Rodel, T.D., Schraw, G., Plake, B.S. (1994). Validation of a measure of learning and performance goal orientations. *Educational and Psychological Measuremen*t, 54, 4, 1013-1021.

Schnell, R., Bachteler, T. & Reiher, J. (2010). Improving the use of self-generated identification codes. *Evaluation Review, 34*(5), 391-418.

Sommers, N. & Saltz, L. (2004). The Novice as Expert: Writing the Freshman Year. *College Composition and Communication* 56(1), 124-49.

Takaku, S. & Williams, J.D. (2011). Gender, writing self-efficacy and help seeking. *International Journal of Business, Humanities & Technology*, 1(3), 46-54.