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First-year students' (pre)writing experiences: knowledge schema and authorial identity

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Abstract

Academic writing is one of the major challenges that confront first-year undergraduate students. This challenge is most evident in writing-intensive courses like sociology. This study explores the writing experiences of first-year health sciences students enrolled in Sociology as part of their basic sciences curriculum. It tries to find out how the students understood and experienced the process of writing the reflective essay from the pre-writing to the writing process. The study used tutorial response papers and interviews to collect the data. Document and thematic analyses guided the data analysis. The academic literacies framework guided and framed the study. Findings suggested that students' writing experiences are mediated by uncertainty about how to write at university compared to how they used to write in school. This uncertainty is explained through the 'interim literacies' concept. Students draw on their interim literacies and a range of resources and strategies as they grapple with academic writing and begin to develop authorial identities suitable for academic writing, some more successfully than others. In considering and conceptualising the findings, the argument of this research report is that a theoretical conversation between academic literacies and the social-realist perspective suggests that the two perspectives should not be polarised but instead seen as mutually supportive with implications for improving writing pedagogy for first-year students.

Keywords: knowledge schema, authorial identity, student writing, medical education, academic literacies, undergraduate writing, interim literacies, social realist perspective.