Re-Envisioning the First-Year Learner and

First-Year Writing Instruction

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Abstract

This presentation reports on the findings of two doctoral dissertation studies. The first of the studies investigated the challenges faced by first-year students as they negotiated the transition from the writing environment of high school to the writing environment of first-year university. The initial research questions were: “what are high school students’ perceptions of their writing environment” and “what differences, if any, do students perceive as different in the writing environment between high school and first-year university?” Data were gathered from both a survey and from individual interviews. Results indicated that high school students perceived a difference in the length and kinds of writing they were required to complete, and in the amount of direction they received from their teachers/instructors. The second of the studies investigated whether the teaching of a particular multi-stage writing model (i.e., the IDDL model) would lead to a better performance in academic writing assignments in a first-year writing intensive course. The initial research question was: “what will be the effect of teaching first-year students single-cue heuristics as measured by their growth in essay writing between a pre – and post-test measure?” Data were gathered from pre-test and post-test writing samples, and from individual interviews. While the results indicated that the control group outperformed the experimental group on all measures, there were a number of confounding variables that require further investigation.