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Development of first-year students' conceptions of essay writing

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**Abstract**

Findings are presented from a small-scale longitudinal study of first-year psychology students' learning. Three developmental hierarchies were derived in the analysis of the interview data, which described different aspects of the variation in students' accounts of their conceptions of essay writing. Although the findings did suggest that the students made some development in their conceptions, it seemed that by the end of the study many of them were still unable to describe what was expected for their essays in a way which fully mapped onto their tutors' accounts. The effects of advice given to students about their essay writing were also investigated. Students were given help that seemed relevant to developing their conceptions, but there was little evidence in the interviews that this made an impact on their learning and students often described minimal engagement with advice and feedback. Two case studies are presented to give a more holistic perspective on the students' accounts of their essay writing. These cases suggest the limitations of simple categorisations, as they emphasise the complex and idiosyncratic nature of students' development. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), McCune, Velda, E-Mail: velda.mccune@ed.ac.uk