Running head: *Student scholarliness*

Referencing as evidence of student scholarliness and academic readiness

Robert A. Ellis[a*], Mark Freeman[b] and Amani Bell[b]

[a]Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching), University of Sydney

[b]Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Sydney

F07 - Carslaw

The University of Sydney

NSW 2006 Australia

Email: rob.ellis@sydney.edu.au

Referencing as evidence of student scholarliness and academic readiness

Abstract

This exploratory study investigates the student experience of referencing a law essay in a first-year undergraduate business degree. Over two hundred students took part in the study which identifies qualitatively different ways of thinking about, and approaching, referencing in essay. Variations in the student experience of referencing are logically and positively related to academic achievement. The study provides a rich description of the variations which have implications for teachers who seek to improve how teachers teach, and how students understand, the importance of referencing as evidence of the scholarly nature of student learning.

Introduction

First-year university business law students can find the experience a daunting one; exposure to legal concepts such as case extracts and precedents, legislation, provisions, rulings and authorities, sanctions and penalties, can be an overwhelming. Add to this academic concepts such as the structure of essays, primary and secondary sources, and referencing, then it is perhaps not surprising that some students miss out on developing the necessary understanding in first year to make the most of their following years. One key area that students must master is referencing for their academic texts. In a comprehensive first-year experience of law, a student's ability to master referencing in legal essays is a key indicator of their ability as an apprentice lawyer seeking to enter the profession.

A knowledge of how to approach referencing appropriately in university essays focusing on legal issues does not simply arise from understanding academic or legal concepts, rather it is a combination of the two. How to approach referencing in an appropriate way can often be a difficult task for teachers to explain, and difficult for students to understand. In some universities, a misunderstanding of the importance of, and appropriate approach to, referencing could result in students being refused admission to the law profession if they have been charged with academic misconduct during their studies. This type of outcome is possible in universities, especially those who are developing a legal approach to managing the regulatory framework of student conduct (Pedley and Goldblatt, 2007). Much of the confusion surrounding referencing is often related to not only legal or academic expectations, but also to the particular topic of the essay, under consideration. Given the difficulties associated with this key aspect of the education of law students, some evidence of how and why students

experience referencing in their essays is necessary if we are to help them deal with their academic and legal responsibilities appropriately.

To better understand these issues and to understand why some students may approach referencing in ways that are in appropriate, this study explores an experience of referencing in university law essays written by undergraduate students. It looks at what students say they think they are learning through referencing and how they report approaching referencing for a first-year essay in business law. The particular topic is about contract law and employment contracts. While the research site is quite contextualised, the researchers found that the experience reported by the students, points towards emergent indicators of what successful approaches to referencing look like more broadly, and how they are related to what students say about the meaning of referencing for them.

Prior research into student experiences of referencing

Students writing essays, reports and other texts as part of their university experience are usually required to link their thoughts and ideas to established sources and writers in the field, most typically through using one of the referencing systems such as in-text citations with a reference list at the end of the text citing author details. To get to the stage where they are able to cite relevant authors, students need to have received the writing task, completed some type of literature search and reading, planned and drafted their text and worked out how their argument can be supported by the ideas and arguments of others. Relevant research into the student experience of referencing seems to be indirectly related with the main focus of studies predominately being on other topics such as information searching, writing and learning.

Research related to referencing includes studies into experiences of information searching. One comparatively early study (Nelson and Hayes, 1988) identified significant differences in the amount of time students would allocate to the process of selecting appropriate authors. Students with low-investment strategies started the research process 2-3 days before the due date of the essay. They wrote detailed notes from the sources and used these to guide their paper's content and organisation with only minor text-level revisions. Students with high-investment strategies started the process several weeks before the due date, took brief notes according to a predetermined plan or questions, interacted with and evaluated sources and ideas while taking notes, did exploratory drafts and holistic revisions for meaning and structure. A longitudinal study (Kuhlthau, 1988) studied the perceptions of students about the information search process over the length of a university course. The students were interviewed at the beginning of their last year of high school (n=26) and then again at the end of their last year of university (n=20). Her study revealed several changes in student perception over time. With time, students came to perceive the research process not as simply citing familiar names, but as a chance to further their scholarly development, and as a chance to become more engaged in a topic as a result of the information-searching processes. The university students also expected their understanding of the topic to change and a theme to evolve over the course of the information-search process. Related research (Kuhlthau, 2005; Nelson, 1993) found that when searching for ideas for topics, successful researching was driven by a focus and purpose related to the topic, rather than an attempt to find anything remotely related to the topic. The more successful students talked about "forming a point of view and gaining a personal perspective of the topic." (Kuhlthau, 2005 p. 2).

Comparatively later studies in information searching (Limberg, 1999; Macdonald et al., 2001; Wu and Tsai, 2005) focus on issues such as qualitatively different strategies of researching, prior characteristics of students, and how epistemological beliefs may be related to strategies for web-based research. Limberg (1999) found that some students focus on fact-finding using easy access to references as a key criterion for choosing which references to use; other students seek to balance the information chosen in order to find enough information to form a personal argument; while the most successful students tend to analyse sources in order to understand the topic in a wider context. Macdonald et al. (2001) thought that variation in analytical skills of students was related to a range of factors such as subject knowledge, previous study experiences, self-confidence, motivation and interest. Wu and Tsai (2005) argue that students' epistemological beliefs were related to how they assessed the accuracy and usefulness of web-based resources. They found that this assessment was significantly related to information-searching strategies. For example, students who used multiple sources to evaluate the quality of web-based materials and who were focussed on the usefulness of the websites were more likely to have an elaborative, exploratory approach to looking for information. In contrast, students who thought that the authority of a website indicated its accuracy and for whom technical / presentation issues predicated usefulness were more likely to search for one or a few relevant websites.

Research into academic experiences of writing occupy an important place in the literature and offer some ideas about student experiences of referencing. Different researchers (Hounsell, 1984; 1997; Nelson, 1992; Prosser and Webb; 1994; Ellis, 2004) identified qualitatively different approaches to writing and associations with conceptions of writing. Significantly, students with deep approaches to writing tended

to use the process as a means of engaging with the content to make meaning and tended to conceive of essays as an argument underpinned by evidence and references. In contrast, students with surface approaches to writing use the writing process as a means of reproducing, restating or regurgitating the ideas collected from a number of sources tended to conceive of essays as an arrangement, a fragmented collection of ideas with little cohesion. Some writers argue that first-year university students have little experience of writing using sources to develop and support an argument (Higgins, 1993). Others maintain that it is the conception that students hold rather than the stage of their academic life that is most relevant. Following Hounsell (1984), Prosser and Webb (1994) identified two conceptions of essay writing: multistructural where the essay was conceived as "being composed of a collection of points" (p. 128) and relational where the essay was seen "as being an argument" (p. 128). Students with a multistructural conception tended to use "isolated facts gained from reading to support predetermined opinions" (p. 128) while other students tended to approach writing by relating sources to the question and to "their own previous viewpoint" to form "an overall argument in favour of a particular viewpoint." (Prosser and Webb, 1994; p. 129). Consistent outcomes can be found in related research (McCune, 2004; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et. al., 2005).

Research directly focusing on the student experience of referencing has focused on a variety of issues. Some studies are more pragmatically orientated, seeking to identify why students do not reference more and under which circumstances students will provide more references. Read, Francis and Robson (2001) investigated the learning experience of 45 final-year students and found that only around 18% of the students were aware that the arguments they were putting forward in their essays needed to be underpinned by evidence from other sources. Robinson and Schlegl (2004) found that

teacher instruction together with a requirement to include a minimum number of scholarly sources (or receive an academic penalty), was related to increasing the number of scholarly citations in student essays, compared to instruction only.

A potential area of confusion for students regarding referencing is the use of internet resources. Conventions of how to select and reference appropriate sources are only starting to become well-known across all disciplines. It is clear that students want more guidance from their teachers about how to search internet resources productively and how to evaluate sources critically (Murray et al., 2005). Not surprisingly, teachers expressed doubts about students' ability to evaluate the quality of internet sources without teacher guidance (McDowell, 2002; Murray et al., 2005). One approach to referencing to be avoided at this stage of the development of the Internet, seems to be an Internet-only approach. We certainly should encourage students to maintain a broad sourcing strategy if they are to access the most appropriate sources as not all sources are on the Internet. Some recent research has found trends that contradict this recommendation. Davis (2003) found an increase in undergraduate students' citation of internet resources over time and a corresponding significant drop in number of book citations.

Finally, relatively recent research into the legal status of the relationship between students and universities offers a context in which to consider the implications of academic misconduct arising from plagiarism. A recent study, (Pedley and Goldblatt, 2007) has raised the issue of the importance of universities putting students in a position of full information of their academic and legal responsibilities as students. This is particularly important for law students who, if found guilty of academic misconduct, might be refused admission into their profession. To better understand

how to support students to approach referencing appropriately in their studies, evidence-based research is required about how and why students reference. This study addresses some of the fundamental aspects of the experience of referencing by university students that can be used to help shape our understanding of how to support students.

The study reported here complements and extends the above research by focusing on the student experience of referencing. It sought a better understanding of what students say they learn through referencing and how they go about referencing. Qualitative differences in the student experience of referencing the law essay are analysed in relation to academic performance. The results provide some implications for teachers in similar contexts with undergraduate students.

Before moving onto the research that links learning to issues of referencing, it is worthwhile to consider what 'scholarliness' means. There has been some debate about how to define the term. Some have defined it as a way to describe differences between the hard sciences and soft sciences (Price, 1970), using narrow indicators such as the number of references of a paper as guide (Windsor and Windsor, 1973). Not all international debate has such a narrow view of scholarly writing. Later studies argue that the concept is much broader including study that considers interrelationships between theory and practice, critical thinking, mastery of a disciplinary knowledge and an ability to engage in philosophical reflection (Meleis et al., 1994). For the purposes of this study, student scholarliness is defined as a willingness by students to engage in research for tasks such as essays in ways that facilitate critical evaluation, synthesis and comprehension.

View of learning

The analysis of data in this study is informed by a view of learning referred to as phenomenography (Marton and Booth, 1997). Phenomenography adopts the position that any phenomenon can be divided into structural and referential aspects; that is, the parts that give its form and the aspects that give its meaning. In terms of student learning in higher education, key parts of the student experience have proven to be what students say they think they are learning (their conceptions) and how they approach their learning (their approaches) (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Marton and Booth, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Biggs, 2003). A feature of the phenomenographic model is its recursive nature. This means that any part of the model can be recursively re-expressed into its structural and referential aspects. For approaches to learning, this means we can understand its key aspects as the strategies that students adopt to learn, and the underlying intention behind those strategies. For conceptions of learning, the structural aspects are the qualitatively different aspects of the concepts that are identified across the population sample, and the referential aspects are the meanings attributed to these aspects by the students as represented by the researchers. Tables 2 and 3 in this manuscript give examples of the structural and referential aspects of the student experience of referencing.

Qualitatively different aspects of the student experience of learning are a significant outcome from over thirty years of research into student learning. While differences in the quality of student experiences can be represented in a number of ways, qualitatively different groups of conceptions of learning and approaches to learning have been identified. Both cohesive and fragmented (multistructural) conceptions of learning have been found in many different learning contexts at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Biggs, 2003). The former tend to

be concepts which reveal some awareness of how the conception is related to a development of understanding, while the latter tends to be concepts which provide a more separated and compartmentalised awareness of the phenomena under scrutiny, typically without an explicit awareness of the understanding involved. Similarly, deep and surface approaches to learning have been identified across many different disciplines. The former typically involve strategies and intentions that help students to unpack the structure and meaning of the phenomenon under study, while the latter are less successful strategies that do not usually reveal an intention or an awareness of the complexity of meanings involved in the phenomenon under scrutiny (Martin and Booth, 1997; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999).

Learning context

Students in a first-year undergraduate business degree in a metropolitan Australian university were required to study a law course. The purpose of the course was to provide the students with an overview of the Australian legal system (sources of law, parliament, courts, doctrine of precedent), including an examination of those provisions in the Commonwealth Constitution relevant to business and commercial activities. A key part of their assessment in the course was the completion of a research essay about contract law. The essay question and instructions were;

> "Examine, with appropriate reference to court decisions and secondary source materials, the following: To what extent (and how) are the ordinary rules of contract law applied differently to employment contracts."

The teachers on this course gave all students the same tuition about the importance and purpose of referencing, including the standards which students were supposed to

follow for cases, statutes and texts. In addition, a guest teacher gave students details about how to approach the essay, particularly correct referencing and how to avoid plagiarism. Students were required to write 1200 words and the essay was worth 25% of their final mark. The other parts of their assessment were tutorial and problem-solving assignments worth 35% and a final exam worth 40%.

Method

Research instruments and administration

Semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used to investigate the student experience of referencing in their law essay. In the last two weeks of their semester, students were asked in their tutorials and lectures to volunteer to take part in the interviews and to complete the open-ended questionnaires. Twelve students took part in interviews and 215 students completed the questionnaires, representing 26% of the population of 800 enrolled students. The sample included 130 females and 85 males, with a mean age of 21 years.

The interviews and questionnaires were designed to complement each other for the purpose of the investigation. The purpose of the interviews was to investigate key aspects of the student experience of referencing in depth. They took approximately 30 minutes to conduct and were fully transcribed for the analyses. About fifteen minutes of class time was provided for completion of the questionnaires. The purpose of the questionnaires was to investigate the distribution of the key issues over a larger population sample. For these reasons, the same key research questions were used in the design of the interviews and questionnaires:

1. What is the purpose of referencing in essays? (student conceptions)

2. From the time you begin researching/preparing for your essay, how do you approach referencing? What do you do and why? (student approaches)

Analysis

The researchers adopted an iterative process of analysis of the transcripts, during which diverse categories of ways of thinking (conceptions) and ways of doing (approaches) referencing became more distinct. The same process was used for student conceptions and approaches. The latter is described below in order to explain the stages in the analysis.

- All of the transcripts and questionnaires were read by the researchers to get a feel for the depth and spread of variation in experiences of referencing in the University course.

- Thirty responses made by students to the question interrogating approaches to referencing were selected in order to maximise the variation.

- These extracts were reread and formed the basis of an in depth discussion amongst the researchers.

- In the first iteration, key themes of approaches to referencing were identified, both from the point of view of the literature and the experience of the researchers.

- Key themes were grouped into logically related categories and illuminative quotations from the questionnaires were selected to start to identify the real meaning of the groupings.

- Further discussion and debate ensued as the researchers situated the categories of responses in relation to one another. This led to the development of a draft set of categories.

- Two of the researchers then used the draft set of categories to classify the remaining transcripts.

- Transcripts that were difficult to categorise were raised for further discussion amongst the researchers. This led to minor modifications of the draft set of categories to produce a final set of categories of student approaches to referencing.

- The categorisation process drew on the SOLO taxonomy to help structure the hierarchies of the final categories (Biggs, 2003).

The process describing the analysis of the student approaches to referencing was used with student conceptions of referencing. Table 1 shows the percentage agreement of the classification process before and after consultation. The final percentages are within boundaries (Saljo, 1988).

Insert Table 1 here

Results

The following presents the results of the analyses of student responses to their experience of referencing for their law essay. Qualitatively different categories of the conceptions of, and approaches to, referencing are shown. These are identified by letters and labels below and are exemplified by illuminative quotations from the interviews which present some of the key aspects of the category being discussed. These are considered to be the main results of this study.

Conceptions of referencing

Analysis of the student responses identified qualitatively different categories of ways the students reported thinking about referencing: two which were related to higher level conceptions of learning such as reflection and reasoning, and two which were comparatively poorer in conceptualisation.

Category A   Referencing as a way of developing scholarliness through reflection and synthesis

Student responses in this category tended to exhibit a significant awareness of the underlying research-based processes that accompanied referencing.

"Well as far as, like we have one textbook, in the law class, and it probably has all the information you need to learn about employment, but as far as learning about different nuances, and getting better examples to back up certain situations, and just showing evidence of wide reading, not for the purpose of 'oh look at all these books I read', but look at all the material I have consulted so that that I am actually learning a lot more about the subject. I think that is pretty important as far actually achieving something out the course."

"...because like in the future I might look back, I might take a look at my essay again and I probably want to know where I found those sources from, like find that particular sentence or the contents of that essay from. So, yes, it will benefit me when I just read it in future. Also, for university, I guess they care a lot about this stuff...Because you get assessed on your own knowledge, and if you just copy it from other people's work, it's like you haven't really done the actual task they required. I think that's the biggest reason. They want to assess you on your own knowledge, not other people's work."

In this category, the conception of referencing is related to aspects of learning and scholarliness. The experience of referencing is conceptualised as related to wide

reading in order to learn, making distinctions between original thought and ideas developed upon others', gaining weight behind the arguments being made through multiple referencing, and enabling others to assess one's own development of knowledge and understanding. There is a recognition that prior knowledge exists which can be helpful in the structuring of writing and learning processes, but that it is a basis upon which to develop individual ideas and arguments, not an end in itself achieved by collecting and listing the arguments of others. Consequently, the integration of ideas from many sources, well-referenced for easy identification of source, is a key aspect of this category.

Like category A, category B is linked to characteristics of learning and scholarliness.

Category B   Referencing as a way of validating reasoning

"I think the purpose of referencing is to show where you got your ideas because obviously they're not your own because I basically have no idea about law so I had to get it from somewhere. Yeah, and it's to show who I go it from and I guess it adds another layer to your argument. I can't really think of anything else…you'd have to be a lawyer and you'd have to have been involved in contract law for many years to fully understand it and come to your own opinions and that sort of thing… it strengthens your arguments by talking about other people's similar arguments, I guess it strengthens yours and if people can look at what you're referencing and read their articles, read their books, read what they've written they might get a better understanding of what point you're trying to get across. So that adds another layer to your argument I guess."

"…I think it's important in terms of, especially in essays like this if you're writing arguments, it's not always going to be entirely your own anyway and referencing is

basically just to give due credit and support sources used as basis for support of your own arguments. Then a whole lot of proof is a much more logical way of presenting it I think. Yeah, to support it."

Extracts from interviews grouped in this category show an awareness that there is usually a pre-existing body of research upon which students can draw in order to formulate their arguments for their essay. There is a conscious effort to attribute ideas to the work of others, especially in order to make the case being put forward stronger. The difference between this and the previous category is an awareness of the scope of the context underlying the conception. In this category, the context tends to focus more on the essay task itself. The previous category revealed an awareness of a wider context, such as the course or future, something beyond the task itself.

Category C and D are different to the first two categories. They tend not to be prospective, that is looking forward, and are rather retrospective in nature.

Category C   Referencing as a way of complying with instructions

> *"You reference the case law otherwise it is not valid... A lecturer, he said it wasn't a valid point to just say it and then not cite where you got it from because just for some reason it doesn't count. Whereas if you use information from a website it is different as opposed to the actual case. I don't quite understand the whole concept myself but there is a difference.*

> *"Maybe just know where do you get the source from, and check, did they copy it somewhere I think...Like maybe sometimes the students find something that you never know, and you just want to read the book and see if there is anything special on it."*

Category C does not reveal an awareness of experiences of learning that can arise out of the process of finding and integrating references into an essay. It involves some vagueness about the real meaning of referencing, linking it more to following what the teacher has instructed than for developing a real understanding of the ideas being discuss and the crafting of an argument. Some aspects of this category tend towards worrying about aspects of plagiarism, although a real focus on plagiarism is the focus of the next category.

Category D   Referencing as a way of avoiding plagiarism

"So that teachers know where I got stuff from. So I'm not doing plagiarism and that stuff.…Because I heard you're not allowed to copy write someone's idea. So I think it's safe if I've got the reference there."

" Just you know use the idea but you put a sentence just maybe means the same so that means you've stolen something because it's, you know, in our country we don't need to reference something if we just pick the idea and then we explain by myself. So that not means you… but everybody knows that's not your own idea. Yes, because everybody knows so you didn't need to reference that."

"Well I assume so I guess the marker can see whether it has been plagiarised, whether it is just word for word, totally out of say a textbook or an internet source or something like that. To make sure I guess it is original."

Category D reveals extracts which show concern predominately about plagiarism. The interview transcripts classified in this category did not reveal an awareness of the more prospective benefits of referencing, such as reflection, learning and the elaboration of arguments with support from other writers. Instead, they were limited

to a type of policing conception of referencing, where the main purpose was to ensure that ideas were not taken from another writer. The focus seems to be on ideas such as 'ownership' and 'checking' rather than ideas such as positioning an argument and providing persuasive points of view.

Approaches to referencing

The second research question focused on the way students approached referencing. Approaches are very different to conceptions. They involve strategies, the way students do things, and intentions, the reasons why students do those things. In contrast, conceptions are categorised from the way students talk about the way they think about something.

This results in this section show qualitatively different groups of approaches, some orientated to the development of an argument, and some orientated towards more surface aspects of the experience of referencing.

Category A reveals an approach that is about developing an argument as well as a broader understanding of perspectives on the issues of the essay. Category A describes a deep approach to referencing.

Category A   Using references to develop a broader and deeper
argument and understanding

> *"To make sure I have a wide range of resources, and to increase my knowledge in the assignment topic. To supplement readings with those that may disagree with another author - to define the areas of agreement and disagreement and then form my own argument."*

"I read the question then I thought about it for a while… before I went to the Library and used the electronic database and stuff like that to start getting some resources on employment law specifically because that's what I focused around, getting some information on employment law… a lot of the thoughts were already in my head and I thought about what arguments I needed to get and then because I had all that it's easy to link it together... it's harder to realise if you haven't referenced something .... I don't want to miss it. I don't want to miss anything I suppose. I just reference as I go."

Approaches in category A seem to attach an intrinsic value to references and the processes that accompany their use. There is an awareness that references are more than just the inclusion of an in-text citation indicating another author. There seems to be a structured process that involves planning and relating pre-existing thoughts to the focus of the essay and the ideas in other texts. Such approaches tend to involve different points of view on a topic, integrating and juxtaposing ideas in relation to each other from different perspectives. There also is an awareness of a need to link the ideas underpinning the arguments together, systematically referencing in the process of doing so.

Category B is a deep approach to referencing, one that seems to hold an intrinsic value to the use of references.

Category B   Using references to show credible evidence for the argument

"My initial response to it was to go and talk to…a (second year) mentor about where to find books or journals and what's credible and what's not and things like that because he has done the course before relatively recently …Because there is no point referencing someone who is

not a credible source. If it's someone's opinion it's a lot more important if it's an opinion of a

professor or a lawyer or someone who specialises in that area."

"I use them to give me a further understanding of the topic, and I use them as part of

referencing, quotes to show that I have evidence and to support my argument."

Like category A, category B links the process of referencing to the development of an evidence-base for the arguments being made. There is an awareness of an importance of being able to anchor the arguments outside of the essay to other valued texts and authors. Maintaining a credible position is a key aspect of this approach. Different to category A, this approach does not tend to show as much awareness of alternative perspectives or arguments. Rather it uses references to underpin the main argument being put forward by the student-writer.

The approaches described above seem to hold an intrinsic value towards referencing, one that views the process as adding value to the experience of formulating ideas to create an argument. In contrast, the approaches described below, tend to hold an extrinsic value towards referencing, that is, a view of referencing which seems to attribute its value to an aspect outside of the argumentation process, typically on more surface features such as vague ideas of appearing academic or formulaic processes.

Category C is a surface approach to referencing, extrinsic in nature.

Category C   Using references to appear academic

"Well I guess for a law essay or any essay these days it looks better if you have quotes and it

looks better if you paraphrase something and then have a reference for it… Well it looks more

academic, instead of the stuff that you would have written in a Year 12 economics essay where

you would have just written down your knowledge. Instead you've got the knowledge there

but you've referenced it from someone to say that you got it from somewhere and not just to

say that it's in your head."

"In the library I firstly find out all the books relating to the topic. If most of the content in the

book includes the information I am looking for I will check out the book. If the book only has a

few pages I want I will photocopy those pages... referencing shows the ability of reading and

research all kinds of sources. It also gives the marker a general idea of how much research

has the student done relating to the topic."

Category C places more importance on form rather than substance. It is not so much about the meaning of the references and how they relate to the argument being made by the student-writer, but on how a use of references might appear to a teacher/reader who is looking for evidence of scholarliness. Approaches in this category and the next have completely missed the point about referencing. They do not seem to have an intention which is about the development of ideas and understanding that can arise from a scholarly use of referencing. Rather they seem to use references to impress the teacher.

Category D is also a surface approach, extrinsic in nature.

Category D   Using references as a way of following a formula

"Because I wanted to write the right way as our teacher requires."

> *"Get the books which include many references with same topic, so that I can get references easily. (It's) the easiest way to start the assignment."*

> *"When I use the library book, I paraphrase the sentence of the book or change the structure of the sentences. For the internet source, maybe I will choose the proper source that are allowed to use in an assignment. Because if I didn't use it, I will get a penalty on my assignment."*

> *I use internet resources because it is convenient & easy to access.*

Approaches in category D are formulaic in nature, seeming to reproduce references in essays for reasons such as how easy they are to get and how many can be included. There seems to be little thought into how the references can add to the argument of an essay, and no awareness that there is a process underpinning referencing that can develop a broad understanding of the issues being discussed in the essay. It seems to attribute its value to extrinsic sources, such as some perceived value or magic formula of inserting references mechanically without real thought or integration, often because a teacher expects it. It is similar to approaches in C but different in it is more concerned about getting it done efficiently, not bothering to worry if it actually appears academic to the teacher.

The results reported above are the qualitative analysis of the student experience. The following tables provide some quantitative analyses of the qualitative categorisation process.

Quantitative analyses

Three tables present the quantitative analyses. Table 2 shows distribution of the categories, table 3 shows associations amongst conceptions of referencing and

approaches to referencing, and table 4 shows associations between the experience and achievement as measured by the mark given for each essay.

Insert Table 2 here

Table 2 is divided into five columns. Columns 1 to 3 show the structure of conceptions and approaches, including the labels and letters. Column 4 shows the number of student responses in each of the categories and column 5 shows the percentages. In both aspects, the percentage of student responses in the comparatively higher categories is around a third, either a little lower or higher (31% and 37%), leaving around two thirds in the relatively lower categories.

Insert Table 3 here

Table 3 shows the associations between the qualitatively different categories of the experience of referencing. A little over a half of the responses categorised as indicating a fragmented conception were also categorised as displaying a surface approach to referencing (109 responses) and a little under a fifth of responses categorised as indicating a cohesive conception were categorised as displaying a deep approach (39 responses). Overall, table 3 indicates that there is a logical and positive relationship between the qualitatively different categories, that is, cohesive conceptions tend to be related to deep approaches and fragmented conceptions tend to be related to surface approaches in the students' experience of referencing.

Insert Table 4 here

Table 4 shows distribution of student conceptions of referencing in relation to the essay mark. A little less than a third of the responses categorised with a cohesive conception of referencing were related to a statistically significantly higher mark for the essay. In other words, cohesive conceptions of referencing tend to be related to statistically significant higher achievement. It should be noted that no relationship between approaches and achievement were found in this study.

Limitations of this study

To interpret the results appropriately, some limitations of this study should be noted. Its sample is from one undergraduate law course in a business degree, investigating how students experienced referencing in the course with particular reference to one of their key assessment essays. While the sample is comparatively large for a qualitative study (n=215), a more robust interpretation of the data could be made if a further study was undertaken across a wider range of courses, in the sciences and humanities, including some postgraduate experiences. Despite these limitations, the results offer sufficient promise to report them here and discuss them further.

Discussion

This study was designed to provide the beginning of a way to talk about significantly varied experiences of referencing in university essays. Two hundred and fifteen first-year students volunteered to take part in the study reporting how they think about referencing in essays and how they approach referencing in their law course. All students completed questionnaires with a dozen also completing interviews to probe more deeply into their experience. The data collected was used by the researchers in an iterative process of analysis that resulted in the identification of categories, labels and illuminative quotations for each of the categories. Although the sample is

restricted to a humanities course, they show sufficient promise to warrant further studies into a broader sample, both in the humanities and sciences, as well as in later years of the student undergraduate or postgraduate experience.

It is clear from the results that not all students reported thinking about referencing in essays in the same way. Some categories of conceptions, A and B, saw referencing as not simply putting in-text citations in a paragraph and a full reference at the end of an essay. They tended to view referencing as a more complex phenomenon, intrinsically related to the development and substantiation of argument. Demonstration of understanding, building on the works of others, adding weight to argument and proving to the student-writer and others that the arguments make sense were some of the ideas related to this group of conceptions, which were forward-looking or prospective in nature.

In contrast, other categories of conceptions, C and D, seemed to separate the development of understanding, validation of reasoning and scholarliness from the experience of referencing in the essay. These concepts were more closely related to retrospective view of referencing, not searching for a deeper personal understanding and depth of argument, but adhering to instructions of how to successfully complete the essay and how to avoid plagiarism.

Turning to a description of student approaches, the results suggest that not all students approach referencing in the same way. Some categories describe referencing in ways that seemed to intrinsically value the process for its contribution to their understanding. This included approaches which used the research process accompanying referencing to develop an understanding of the topic that is more than

the focus of the essay. These approaches and those whose intent is focused on providing credible evidence for the arguments of an essay seem to have more structure to the experience. The interview process revealed that students reporting an approach consistent with a deep category tended to start earlier in the process, consult a wider variety of hard-print and electronic resources, and reviewed their referencing and argument often.

In contrast, other categories of approaches seemed to have an extrinsic value of the experience of referencing, attributing its value to external features of an essay such as a need to present a text which appeared to be appropriately academic, but whose choice of references were not at all scholarly or based on real reflection. Often these approaches seemed to be quite formulaic in nature, following some sort of structure that was not aligned to the arguments being put forward. This category seems to echo some of the characteristics of approaches to writing essays in earlier research (Prosser and Webb, 1994).

The implications of these findings for university teachers are emphasised in the emerging patterns identified in the quantitative analyses. The results indicate that students whose conceptions were categorised as cohesive, tended to report approaches which were categorised as deep. Similarly, students whose conceptions were categorised as fragmented, tended to report approaches which were categorised as surface. These associations, and the fact that cohesive conceptions were associated to higher marks, indicate that this study has some suggestions to make to improve how students reference in essays. Firstly, around two thirds of the students did not appear to conceive of referencing in a way that would make the teacher confident of their ability to use references. In this particular course, some effort was put in at the

beginning of the semester, but it appears that more effort is needed. Class discussions, the use of textual models and the unpacking of reasoning and processes behind the choice of referencing are some of the things that teachers might need to engage in more systematically. In addition, the results indicate that cohesive conceptions of referencing seem to be related to deep approaches to referencing. If this association holds in other studies, then teachers can help students to think more appropriately about referencing if they improve their approaches to referencing, and vica-versa.

An understanding how to support and shape students' approaches to referencing is essential if we are to take more than a minimalist position on supporting the learning experiences of students. When cases of plagiarism arise, a university should ensure that they have done everything possible to help students avoid such academic misconduct, especially if the consequence is that they may not be admitted into the profession. To support students appropriately, teachers need, as a first step, to be able to describe the circumstances under which students may fail to reference appropriately, the circumstances in which they tend to reference successfully and how to help them experience the latter irrespective of their approach. The categories of description of students conceptions and approaches to referencing in this study can be used to help teachers guide students into more appropriate ways of referencing; avoiding risky strategies such as trying to reference according to some imaginary formula. The descriptions of referencing as a way of making meaning, checking credible evidence and developing an argument could stand, for example, as sound principles on which to base policies for appropriate standards of referencing for students.

Referencing can be thought of as the tip of the iceberg of a scholarly experiences of learning at university. It needs to be underpinned by sound reasoning, exhaustive literature searches, critical evaluation, synthesis and crafting of argument, and an awareness of academic and disciplinary standards. Teachers will help their students to better understand the nature of referencing if they can help students unpack what it means to think about and engage in referencing in more scholarly ways.

References

Biggs, J.B. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university: what the student does* (Philadelphia, Open University Press).

Davis, P. M. (2003). Effect of the web on undergraduate citation behaviour: guiding student scholarship in a networked age, *Libraries and the Academy*, 3(1), 41-51.

Ellis, R. A. (2004). University student approaches to learning science through writing, *International Journal of Science Education*, 26 (15), 1835-1853.

Ellis, R. A., Taylor, C. & Drury, H. (2005). Evaluating writing instruction through an investigation of students' experiences of learning through writing, *Instructional Science*, 33, 49–71.

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

Hounsell, D. (1984). Essay planning and essay writing, *Higher Education & Research,* 3(1), 13-31.

Hounsell, D. (1997) Contrasting conceptions of essay writing, in: F. Marton, D. Hounsell & N. Entwistle (Eds) *The Experience of Learning: implications for teaching and studying in higher education*, 2nd edn, pp. 106–125 (Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press).

Higgins, L. (1993). Reading to argue: helping students transform source texts, in A. M. Penrose & B. M. Sitko (Eds) *Hearing ourselves think: Cognitive research in the college writing classroom*, Ch 5 pp70-101 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Kuhlthau, C. C. (1988). Perceptions of the information search process in libraries: a study of changes from high school through college, *Information Processing & Management*, 24(4), 419-427.

Kuhlthau, C. C. (2005). Towards collaboration between information seeking and information retrieval, *Information Research*, 10(2), paper 226. Available online at: http://InformationR.net/ir/10-2/paper226.html (accessed 16 March 2006).

Limberg, L. (1999). Experiencing information seeking and learning: a study of the interaction between two phenomena, *Information Research*, 5(1). Available online at: http://informationr.net/ir/5-1/paper68.html (accessed 8 January 2007).

McCune, V. (2004). Development of first-year students' conceptions of essay writing, *Higher Education*, 47, 257-282.

Macdonald, J., Heap, N. & Mason, R. (2001). "Have I learnt it?" Evaluating skills for resource-based study using electronic resources, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 32(4), 419-433.

McDowell, L. (2002). Electronic information resources in undergraduate education: an exploratory study of opportunities for student learning and independence, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 33(3), 255-266.

Marton, F. & Booth, S. (1997). *Learning and awareness*. (Mahwah, N.J., Lawrence Erlbaum).

Meleis, A.I., Hall, J.M., & Stevens, P.E. (1994). Scholarly caring in doctoral nursing education: Promoting diversity and collaborative mentorship, *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 26, 177-180.

Murray, L., Hourigan, T., Jeanneau, C. & Chappell, D. (2005). Netskills and the current state of beliefs and practices in student learning: an assessment and recommendations, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 36(3), 425-438.

Nelson, J. (1992). Constructing a research paper: A study of students' goals and approaches. Technical report No. 59. Available online at: http://www.writingproject.org/downloads/csw/TR59.pdf (accessed 8 January 2007).

Nelson, J. (1993). The library revisited: Exploring students' research processes. in A. M. Penrose & B. M. Sitko (Eds) *Hearing ourselves think: Cognitive research in the college writing classroom*, pp102-122 (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Nelson, J. & Hayes, J. R. (1988). How the writing context shapes college students' strategies for writing from sources. Technical report No. 16. Available online at: http://www.writingproject.org/downloads/csw/TR16.pdf (accessed 11 January 2007).

Pedley, J. and Goldblatt, V. (2007). The development of a student contract and improvement in student disciplinary procedures at Massey University. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Law and Education*, 12, 1. 73-83

Price, D. J. de Solla (1970). Citation Measures of Hard Science, Soft Science, Technology, and Nonscience, in: C. E. Nelson, & D. K. Pollock (Eds) *Communication Among Scientists and Engineers*, pp. 3-22 (Lexington, MA: Heath Lexington Books).

Prosser, M. & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding Learning and Teaching: The Experience in Higher Education* (Open University Press: Philadelphia).

Prosser, M. & Webb, C. (1994). Relating the process of undergraduate essay writing to the finished product, *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(2), 125-138.

Read, B., Francis, B. & Robson, J. (2001). 'Playing Safe': undergraduate essay writing and the presentation of the student 'voice', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 22(3), 387-399.

Robinson, A. M. & Schlegl, K. (2004). Student bibliographies improve when professors provide enforceable guidelines for citations, *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, 4(2), 275-290.

Säljö, R. (1988). Learning in educational settings: methods of inquiry, in: P. Ramsden (Ed.) *Improving learning: new perspectives*, pp. 32–48 (London, Kogan Page).

Windsor, D. A. & Windsor, D. M. (1973). Citation of the Literature by Information Scientists in Their Own Publications, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 24, 377-381.

Wu, Y & Tsai, C. (2005). Information commitments: evaluative standards and information searching strategies in web-based learning environments, *Journal of Computer Assisted learning*, 21, 374-385.

Table 1 - The communicability of the categories of the experience of referencing

	Student conceptions of referencing		Student approaches to referencing	
	% agreement after initial categorisation	*% agreement after consultation*	% agreement after initial categorisation	*% agreement after consultation*
Researcher 1	75	85	80	90
Researcher 2	80	100	90	95

Table 2 - Distribution of categories of experience of referencing

Categories			n	%
Conceptions of referencing	Cohesive	A	16	31
		B	50	
	Fragmented	C	117	69
		D	32	
		Total	215	100
Approaches to referencing	Deep	A	31	37
		B	48	
	Surface	C	62	63
		D	74	
		Total	215	100

Table 3 - Associations between conceptions and approaches to referencing

		Approaches		Total
		Deep	Surface	
Conceptions	Cohesive	39	27	66
	Fragmented	40	109	149
	Total	79	136	215

phi =.308   chi = 20.46,   p<.001

Table 4 - Achievement and conceptions

Achievement	Conceptions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Significant if P<.05
Essay mark	Cohesive	66	16.99	2.59	0.01
	Fragmented	149	15.93	2.59	0.01