1 Introduction

The transition into Higher Education (HE) is widely recognised as challenging and often alienating for new students (Haggis, 2006; Ivanič, 1998; Wingate, 2006) as “… they do not understand the discourses, practices and procedures of higher education and do not know what standards are expected of them and what they should do differently if previously used strategies are no longer successful” (Tapp, 2014, p. 323). Often this transition challenges students’ existing identity positions (Ivanič, 1998) and embarking on higher education usually requires students to actively reposition themselves and construct new, academic identities. Of particular concern from this perspective is authorial identity, “the sense a writer has of themselves as an author …” (Pittam, Elander, Lusher, Fox & Payne, 2009, p. 154). While this has been noted to be the target of interventions to reduce unintentional plagiarism (Cheung, 2012; Elander, Pittam, Lusher, Fox & Payne, 2010), there is little work on how undergraduate students perceive themselves as writers or authors and how this changes over the course of their studies. Duff (2010) in fact argues this point, suggesting that research on socialization into academic discourse or literacies practice is remiss in terms of our in-depth understanding of the development of novices’ own voices and identities over time. There is a need for more research on students’ writing within specific contexts of transition (Baker, 2011). Most of the existing research focuses on the initial transition into higher education or the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study. We are not aware of any research that specifically examines how students themselves perceive further transitions within undergraduate studies and this is the concern of this chapter.

1.1 Transitions within Higher Education

The transition into HE has been the subject of considerable attention in recent years, particularly in the context of retention. Evidence clearly indicates that the initial transition is an important predictor of student engagement and
achievement (see Thomas, 2012). However, when we speak of transition we are referring to a process that involves multiple changes and adjustments. These include transitions in knowledge and skills, ways of learning, autonomy, self-concept and social integration (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Increasingly, fostering engagement and a sense of belonging are recognised as predictors of making these successfully. As Thomas (2012, p. 15) notes, this requires “developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners.” This is complex. As Wingate (2007, p. 394) points out, “learning to learn” at university can be described as two major areas:

1. understanding “learning” and becoming an independent learner;
2. understanding “knowledge” and becoming competent in constructing knowledge within a discipline.

In most disciplines, academic writing is a key part of this process (Krause, 2001). Academic writing is also an important site of construction for academic identities, as noted earlier (e.g. Ivanič, 1998), and it is clear that it plays an important role in transition.

While the initial transitions may be the most critical these processes of change and development are complex and ongoing. There are also transitions between stages of undergraduate programmes. Academic expectations change and increase, often significantly, as students progress through their studies (e.g. McCune & Hounsell, 2005). In most disciplines these changes are reflected in academic writing, with significant new demands often characterising the final year(s) of programmes, for example, the requirement to write a dissertation. Thus transitions in writing extend beyond the first year.

1.2 Authorship, Integrity and Transition

As noted earlier, belonging is an important predictor of successful transitions. Academic writing is an important means by which students develop an academic identity and sense of belonging to a wider academic community. Unsurprisingly, early writing experiences can also inhibit a sense of belonging. Fears around unintentional plagiarism are very prevalent (Delahunt, Everitt Reynolds, Maguire & Sheridan, 2012) and serve to undermine writing development (MacGowan, 2005).

Described as an epidemic plaguing higher education (Alleyne & Phillips, 2011), plagiarism has become a focus for extensive research (Perry, 2010; Lankamp, 2009; Ellery, 2008; Howard, 2007; Abasi, Akbari & Graves, 2006; Park, 2003). The response of the Irish HE sector to the perceived crisis is similar to that described elsewhere (see McGowan, 2005), with many institutions