

**Towards a Pragmatic Semiotic Perspective on the
Development of Teaching and Learning
Environments for Research Writing in Higher
Education**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential of a pragmatic semiotic perspective to inform the design of research writing programs in higher education. Increasing numbers of international research students have highlighted the need for effective programs that develop the ability to construct research papers and theses. A particular challenge for international students is research from sources, which requires the use of discipline-based genres and texts, as well as the synthesis of ideas into original and meaningful compositions. New educational methods and technologies – such as the use of portfolios and diagramming software – can help to promote such skills, provided their use is informed by sound understandings of the research writing process.

A paradigm shift in educational theory has also brought a range of constructivist perspectives that have challenged traditional approaches in several fields relevant to research writing, including composition studies and educational technology. The two currently dominant theoretical perspectives in these fields are the cognitive-constructivist and the sociocultural perspectives, both of which are largely concerned with the construction of knowledge and meaning. However, neither of these perspectives provides an entirely adequate understanding of research from sources, since they tend to emphasise the individual and social aspects of writing respectively.

This thesis, by contrast, explores the potential for a pragmatic semiotic perspective, based on the philosophies of Peirce, Dewey and Deleuze. Although the perspective has had a limited influence on composition studies, it has been promoted as a way of transcending the dualisms in the field. In Peirce's semiotics and Dewey's pragmatism, all knowledge construction and meaning-making is viewed as semiosis, or the action of signs, which is necessarily both an individual and a social process. The pragmatic semiotic perspective has a growing influence in education generally, particularly in connection with the use of new educational technologies. This thesis

investigates whether it can also provide a more suitable theoretical framework for the design of effective research writing programs.

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Note on the Text

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