• Paper / Proposal Title:
Un-settled Discourses; Classroom Space as a Sign of Multimodal Design

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• Abstract (300 words):
This paper explores the notion of design in the context of school classrooms through the theoretical prism of multimodal social semiotics (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2016). Multimodality sees classroom space as a topos for active communication, whereby all participants make and share meaning using a complex ensemble of semiotic resources (image, drawing, writing, speech, models, movement, other spatial and embodied modes). In this frame, the processes of learning and teaching are shaped by the social, cultural and material characteristics of the environments wherein they unfold, including all the objects and the complex social phenomena which come to bear on how knowledge is constructed, represented and communicated (Kress et al, 2001). Drawing on research data collected in Greek classrooms, the paper will concentrate on the teachers’ ability to design the social and curricular organisation of the lessons according to pedagogic principles which derive from their interest. The tension between central authority, institutional prescription and teacher agency makes the case of Greek classrooms a particularly interesting one from the perspective of design and contestation over designs (Kress and Sidiropoulou, 2008). To unravel this, we will deploy Kress’s notion of ‘design’ as comprising the configuration of semiotic modes, multimodal ensembles, media and frames in relation to rhetorical /
political purposes, forces of power, the designer’s interests, the characteristics of the audience and the time-place bound character of teaching. Applying this semiotic frame in educational sites of learning, we will further combine Kress’s multimodality theory with Bernstein’s (2000) sociological approach to pedagogy with the purpose of tracing how the ‘official pedagogic discourse’ becomes re-contextualised into different forms of classroom pedagogies (Sidiropoulou, 2015).

My analysis will be illustrated by showing examples of the means of design employed by two teachers in their lessons. While the paper comes from the environment of school classrooms, its arguments and interdisciplinary framework will afford broader connections with educators and researchers exploring the relation of teaching, learning and design across a range of fields and disciplines.

References

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):
Charalampia Sidiropoulou is a Lecturer in Education at the Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, London Metropolitan University. Prior to joining the London Met, she has worked as a Researcher at the Institute of Education, UCL and as a school teacher both in the UK and in Greece. Her research interests include multimodal social semiotic theory and methodology, pedagogy and literacy in culturally diverse educational contexts.