

Is There a Sociologist in the Room? Raising the Sociological Voice in Educational Spaces

Sari R. Alfi-Nissan
University of Oxford, UK

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.21.4.02>

Keywords:

Sociological Research;
Discourse Analysis;
Education; Space;
Qualitative Research

Abstract: Educational spaces are both material and human sites. While people design and build the physical space of educational institutions, these spaces also shape human behavior, interaction, and thought, playing a crucial role in the articulation of discourse. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in educational research tends to rely primarily on document and text analysis, often overlooking the spatial dimensions of discourse and how social actors interpret the spaces they inhabit. This article presents the use of semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces as a methodological tool for studying discourse in institutions where ethnographic access is limited. Drawing on a qualitative study conducted in twelve Israeli state schools, this article examines how global discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration, which promote an ideal of a future-oriented and self-managing individual, are expressed and interpreted in everyday school settings. Through observations, walking interviews, and semiotic analysis, the study demonstrates how spatial articulations, wall texts, and visual displays work together with educators' interpretations to shape and sometimes contest dominant ideals. The analysis merges critical spatial semiotics with a pragmatic approach to everyday meaning-making, offering a methodologically innovative and reflexive approach to discourse analysis in education.

© by the author, licensee Lodz University—Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Funding Information: Not applicable. **Conflicts of interest:** None. **Ethical Considerations:** The author assures that no violations of publication ethics have occurred and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication. **The percentage share of the author in the preparation of the work is:** SRAN 100%. **Declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** ChatGPT for proofreading.

Received: 2025-01-08 **Verified:** 2025-04-25 **Accepted:** 2025-08-28



Sari R. Alfi-Nissan is a postdoctoral fellow at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies (OSGA) at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on discourses of entrepreneurialism, youth aspirations, and the formation of self and identity in the iGeneration era in school education and among young people. During her Ph.D. studies at Bar-Ilan University, she was awarded the Presidential Doctoral Fellowship of Excellence and the Rector's Award of Distinction, and won the University Presidential Award for Article Publications. She is a member of the Critical Sociology and Philosophy of Education (CRISP) research group at the University of Helsinki. Sari is also a novelist and a lecturer specializing in research methods and Storytelling of Knowledge.

@ Sari.alfi-nissan@area.ox.ac.uk

id <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9947-8038>

Michel Foucault claimed that “every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it” (Foucault 1996 [1971]:352). This perspective has contributed valuable scholarship to the sociology of education, examining both schools and higher education as sites where the articulation of discourse carrying knowledge and power occurs (Ball 2012). Materiality and space carry knowledge and power and are crucial to the analysis of discourse in organizations (de Saint-Georges 2004; Griswold, Mangione, and McDonnell 2013). For Foucault, space is “both a means to organize actions and an outcome of those actions” (Hardy and Thomas 2015:684), as “a whole history remains to be written of spaces, which at the same time would be a history of powers...institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations” (Foucault 1980:149).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology primarily associated with Norman Fairclough,

which has become a dominant approach in educational research (Billig 2003; Rogers et al. 2005). While originally inspired by Foucault, CDA tends to rely mostly on texts and linguistics, largely neglecting the analysis of space (Hardy and Thomas 2015). However, discourse in a Foucauldian sense is not only texts and linguistics, but rather a much broader definition of socially and culturally constructed thought and practice (Ecclestone and Brunila 2015), designing and designed by knowledge and power in spatial context (Crampton and Elden 2007).

This study takes a socio-spatial approach, recognizing that “the social is spatial, and vice versa” (Fuller and Löw 2017). I follow de Certeau's (1984:117) claim that space is always social as it is a “practiced place.” From this perspective, educational spaces should be viewed as both material and human sites. While people design and build the physical spaces of educational institutions, these spaces also shape human behavior, interactions, and thought, and play a crucial role in the articulation of discourse. Therefore, I argue that if we wish to examine educational spaces as “political means of maintaining or of modify-

ing the appropriation of discourse" (Foucault 1996 [1971]:352), we also need to examine their physical settings as the scenery where "human action is being played out before, within, or upon it" (Goffman 1959:13). Moreover, I suggest that merging CDA with a pragmatic Goffmanian approach allows us to study both the articulation of discourse in spaces and social actors' interpretations of socio-spatial semiotic codes in their everyday lives, in institutions with no substantial access to ethnography.

The analysis presented in this article is based on research conducted in twelve Israeli state schools. These educational spaces were selected as institutional sites where national policies and global discourses are translated into everyday spatial practices. The research focused on how discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration are expressed through the material and symbolic dimensions of school spaces, such as wall displays, architecture, and spatial layout. These discourses promote an ideal of a future-oriented, autonomous, ambitious, accountable, and employable individual, and have become part of everyday educational practice in many countries (Ecclestone and Brunila 2015; Morrin 2017; 2022; Alfi-Nissan and Pagis 2023; Alfi-Nissan, Guzman-Carmeli, and Werczberger 2025). The aim of the research was not only to reveal how space conveys these discourses, but also to explore how educators and other actors make sense of and sometimes contest these discursive constructions in their daily environments. In this article, I ask: How are discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration articulated within the physical spaces of Israeli state schools? How do social actors construct, shape, and interpret these discourses in educational spaces? What are the tools for examining and analyzing discourse in the encounters between a school's "stage," "scenery," and "behind the scenes?"

The article presents the process of analyzing semiotic codes in educational spaces, which involves observing these spaces and engaging in discussions with social actors who design and work in them to gain a deeper understanding of the articulation of discourse in these spaces. By examining space and social actors' interpretations of spatial discursivity, it presents an open-ended, polyphonic discourse analysis that integrates the voices of both researchers and participants within educational spaces.

Discourse Analysis of Educational Spaces

Discourse is a central concept in Foucauldian theory, which has been subject to various interpretations. This also may be due to various articulations of this concept by Foucault himself (Mills 2003). Drawing on Foucault (1996 [1971]), discourse can be defined as both language and practice, which constructs knowledge and power that shape our understanding of truth. Foucault (2013 [1972]:54) stresses that discourse is not merely linguistic semiotics presented "as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations)" but rather "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak...It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this 'more' that we must reveal and describe." Foucault's theorization of discourse offers a critical lens for examining signification in educational spaces, as these spaces are replete with signification, including texts, symbols, colors, shapes, layouts, and designs, all of which carry cultural and social power. From a Foucauldian perspective, these spaces are both shaped by discourse and shape/reshape discourse.

This research employs a socio-spatial approach to examine educational spaces, recognizing that "the

social is spatial, and vice versa” (Fuller and Löw 2017). I rely on the notion that space, as a “practiced place” (de Certeau 1984:117), is always social. To borrow de Certeau’s (1984:117) metaphor of space as discourse, “space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conversations.” Accordingly, in the analysis of discourse as social language, practice, and thought, the semiotic power carried in the articulation of discourse in educational spaces should be considered.

The scholarship of discourse analysis in educational research has followed Norman Fairclough (2003) methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, presented with uppercase letters and the abbreviation CDA (Billig 2003). While originally inspired by Foucault, Fairclough’s approach has been claimed to be “fundamentally incompatible with Foucault’s immanent critical thought” (Curtis 2014:1759). As a “textual oriented discourse analysis,” CDA as a methodology “focuses on how language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge” (Rogers et al. 2005:367). This methodology has largely overlooked the analysis of space and has been associated with the analysis of texts and policy documents (Hardy and Thomas 2015). It deals mainly with the use of language, in an attempt to reveal “concealed interest in domination [which] lurks in the spoken word,” while abstracting from the way materiality serves to articulate discourse (Keller 2022:38). As CDA tends to neglect materiality in general (de Saint-Georges 2004) and visual materiality in particular (McCullough and Lester 2023), physical surroundings of educational spaces are rarely observed to examine discourse articulations.

On the other hand, the “spatial turn” in the social sciences has stimulated inquiry into institutional spaces in various fields (Fuller and Löw 2017), expanding the understanding of “how linguistic and visual texts mediate ideological reproduction of space” (Björkvall, Van Meerbergen, and Westberg 2023:210). This standpoint looks at “the built and designed environment, as semiotic resources with social meanings” (Ericsson 2023:313), while calling to “analyze spaces as semiotic assemblages where meaning is derived from the joint work performed by different semiotic resources” (Björkvall et al. 2023:210). Consequently, there has been greater emphasis on the articulation of discourse in public spaces using such methods as Spatial Discourse Analysis (SpDA), to study spaces from everyday urban public places (Ericsson 2023) to airports (Björkvall et al. 2023), to Disneyland (Heberle, de Souza, and Horbach Dodl 2020). In SpDA, the architectural structures and the ways in which social actors use these spaces are examined. The method relies on a social-semiotic approach, which acknowledges the importance of context in processes of meaning-making and utilizes the analysis of physical space to understand these processes (Ravelli and McMurtrie 2015).

The literature on educational spaces emphasizes the relationship between space and pedagogy, examining forms of learning and teaching (Sasson et al. 2022), as well as the effects of physical space on student well-being and health (Sayfulloevna 2023), and on academic achievements (Cayubit 2022). The current research assumes that “every social order, every institutional order, every symbolic order of materialities is the result of complex historical production processes where, in particular, communicative elements of action and interaction play a central role” (Keller 2022:39). When I entered the field to examine the discourses of entrepreneurialism and

aspiration in Israeli state education, as I did not have access to ethnography, due to restrictions of ethical guidelines and limited resources, I planned to utilize a critical discourse analysis of the data collected in observations of educational architectural spaces. However, it became apparent that the semiotic analysis needs to take into account the interpretations of the social actors who design and live within these spaces. A critical methodology needs to be “reflexive and self-critical about its own institutional position and all that goes with it” (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999 as cited in Billig 2003:36). Therefore, I decided to speak with social actors who design and/or live within these educational spaces about their everyday sceneries, to allow for a critical and reflexive discourse analysis of educational spaces.

Toward an Actor-Oriented Discourse Analysis of Educational Spaces

Semiotics, as “the study of meaningful signs,” can be analyzed in a “top-down” semiotic analysis, interpreting signs through “their social and epistemological context” (Lawes 2019:252). From this standpoint, relying on an interpretive actor-oriented position can be understood as “outsourcing the task of generalization to the informant, who rarely possesses the necessary analytical rigour” (Haapanen and Manninen 2023:419). However, the assumption that people of the same cultural and social context will necessarily interpret signs in the same manner is questionable. Interpretations of signs are not idiosyncratic but reflect articulations of various discourses and thus can be polyphonic and contradictory (Swidler 2001).

Sam (2019:335) claims that Foucauldian discourse analysis is a “top-down” approach in the sense that

it focuses “on broader political, ideological, or historical issues as they relate to power and knowledge through discourse.” This type of critical approach is dominant in the sociology of education as a means to reveal inequalities, as “inequalities are morally and politically wrong and it is academics’ duty to understand these wrongs and address them” (Guhin 2021, 382). For Foucault, the purpose of critique is “not simply to explain the various historical processes that have led to the current conjuncture of why we are, behave, or think in a particular way, but rather...to defamiliarize and destabilize that conjuncture, to explain how it was produced and, by doing so, open it to the possibility of its being otherwise” (Golder 2020:36-37). Accordingly, to initiate critique, which can raise the sociological voice in educational spaces to induce change, one should converse with social actors who design and inhabit these spaces.

Semiotic codes analysis usually focuses on “the codes that define what is possible to say, rather than on the particular thoughts or utterances of individual speakers” (Swidler 2001:162). However, in educational institutions, there tends to be a decoupling of declared ideologies and everyday life practice (Hallett 2010; Morrin 2022). A Goffmanian position allows us to analyze “how context structures meaning” (Swidler 2001:260). In the case of the analysis of discourse in educational spaces, merging the theoretical frameworks of Foucault and Goffman is complementary not only in the sense of merging “top-down” and “bottom-up” perspectives to discourse analysis (e.g., Hacking 2004:278), but also in the sense of bringing forward the importance of space to the articulation of discourse. In his groundbreaking work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) uses the theatre stage as a met-

aphor to explain how identity is formed through social interaction. Goffman (1959:22) stresses that the physical surroundings where social drama occurs are crucial, as “first, there is the setting.” This involves “furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action” (Goffman 1959:22).

The semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces examines educational spaces as “political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse” (Foucault 1996 [1971]:352), by studying educational architectural settings as the scenery where “human action is being played out before, within, or upon it” (Goffman 1959:13). The method allows for both a critical semiotic analysis and a pragmatic interpretive discourse analysis of space by analyzing semiotic codes in educational spaces and conversing with social actors to understand their interpretations of their everyday life sceneries.

Discourses of Entrepreneurialism and Aspiration in Education

Discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration encompass both language and practice, which foster the ideal of a future-oriented, calculated, autonomous, ambitious, hardworking, employable, and accountable self (Alfi-Nissan and Pagis 2023; Brunila and Siivonen 2023). These discourses have become part of everyday educational discourse in various countries.

The literature on the discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration can be divided into two main approaches: critical and pragmatic. The former tends

to draw on a Foucauldian approach while addressing these discourses as part of what Rose (1998:164) terms “neoliberal vocabulary of enterprise” (e.g., Spohrer, Stahl, and Bowers-Brown 2018; Brunila and Siivonen 2023). The latter draws on sociologists such as Swidler (2001) and Lamont (2019) to emphasize interpretative perspectives on these discourses through ethnographic data (e.g., Frye 2012; Zilberstein, Lamont, and Sanchez 2023). In the sociology of education, the critical approach is mostly utilized to analyze these discourses. Research, for instance, from Australia (Savage 2017), Finland (Brunila and Siivonen, 2023) and the UK (Spohrer et al. 2018) shows how education promotes neoliberal, autonomous, and adaptable subjectivities aligned with contemporary labor market demands.

This article proposes a socio-spatial approach to discourse analysis, integrating Foucauldian and Goffmanian concepts to interpret the discursive practices in-between space, discourse, and social actors. I adopt a critical approach to discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration in education, which seeks to go beyond the linguistics of discourse as it “aims to bridge a symbolic-material distinction and signals the always political nature of ‘the real’” (Ecclestone and Brunila 2015:502). In her work on discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration in education in the UK, Morrin (2017; 2022) conducted a critical ethnography, which included the examination of the articulation of discourse in educational spaces and social actors’ spatial practices as forms of tactical resistance to these discourses. The current article builds on Morrin (2017; 2022) and presents a process that can be applied in research with limited access to ethnography. In line with critical feminist scholars of discourse analysis, who differ in their methodological approaches but nonetheless

wish to bring forward “the in-between spaces of everyday life” (Morrin 2017:16), the current research calls for analyzing both space and social actors’ interpretations of space within a discourse analysis process.

Methodology

This paper is part of a larger qualitative research project conducted in Israel between January 2017 and April 2023. Israel has a free K-12 mandatory state education system divided into streams based on linguistic categorization, which intersect with ethno-national, religious, and geographical aspects reflecting social inequalities. The state school system is divided into Hebrew and Arabic, with the Hebrew sector further subdivided into non-religious and religious state schools. This research focuses on the non-religious Hebrew state school system, the mainstream branch of schooling in Israel, which encompasses more than half of the student population.¹ The research questions were: How do global discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration form and translate within the Israeli education context? And how do social actors use and interpret these discourses in everyday life practices?

To answer these questions, I employed a multifocal approach that included various methodological tools, as well as diverse sites of inquiry and perspectives of social actors. The data included twelve school physical site observations (five elementary schools, two junior high schools, and five high schools), eight walking interviews with teachers, principals, and architects, and twenty-eight in-

depth interviews with educators, as well as content analysis of social media publications by ministers of education, school websites, teacher blogs, official ministerial educational programs, and autoethnographic data.

Observations of schools’ educational spaces were conducted with the authorization of the principal or during open school visits, and took between one and three hours. The observations included photography of the school facilities and walls, as well as field notes. After conducting the observation, I analyzed texts presented on school walls, following their origins as well as their physical presentation to answer questions such as: Who is quoted? How and where are they quoted? Why are they quoted? This analysis was performed in conjunction with non-verbal semiotic analysis, examining the graphic design, colors, shapes, and layouts of classrooms and school buildings.

To learn about the social actors’ analyses of their everyday sceneries, I used walking interviews, as well as in-depth interviews. Most (eight of twelve) of the observations included walking interviews (Jones et al. 2008) with the school principal (three), a teacher (three), or the school architect (two). In the in-depth interviews with educators (thirteen) from the schools where the physical surroundings were observed, participants were asked to give their interpretation of an exemplary picture of a wall in their school that had been found in the first stage of analysis to reflect discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration. To deepen my understanding of the voices “behind the scenes” of processes of designing educational spaces, I also conducted in-depth interviews with five Israeli architects of “innovative educational spaces” in Israeli state education.

¹ The study does not address educational institutions in settlements or the occupied Palestinian territories.

I first conducted ethnographic research in an Israeli state primary school in central Israel, including observations of the school's educational spaces and six in-depth interviews with the school principals and five first- and second-grade teachers. In addition, the research included interviews with seven school principals (three from other primary schools, one from a junior high school, and three from high schools), and eight teachers (two from other primary schools, one from a junior high school, and five from high schools). As the school in the preliminary ethnographic research was located in a neighborhood of middle-upper socio-economic status, the snowball sampling for the second round of interviewees was also conducted in the social-geographical periphery of Israel and included seven educators from low or middle-low SES schools, five from middle-class schools, and three from upper-middle-class schools. All interviews lasted between one and two and a half hours and were structured as a conversation with a purpose, asking open-ended questions and requesting specific examples. The questions addressed future trajectories for today's pupils, as well as questions regarding the ideal school graduate and person, from the participants' point of view. The other eleven school observations of educational spaces (four primary schools, two junior high schools, and five high schools) were all located in central Israel. Most of these schools (8 out of 11) were defined either by the Ministry of Education and/or key actors in the field as "innovative" and/or "entrepreneurial." This purposive sampling was guided by my research question to examine schools that explicitly identify with or are publicly associated with the entrepreneurial discourse.

The research received approval from the Bar-Ilan University IRB and adhered to the ethical guidelines for qualitative research. The collected data and

analysis were in Hebrew, and excerpts were translated into English for the purpose of this article. All names of participants and schools are pseudonymous.

Semiotic Codes Analysis of Educational Spaces

In the earlier stages of research method design, I presented the process of semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces to undergraduate and postgraduate students in qualitative methods courses. Inspired by the dramaturgical theory of Goffman (1959), I presented the process of *semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces* through a social-dramatic three-scene script. The first, titled "the critical sociologist enters," enables a critical semiotic analysis of the educational space, the second, titled "the voices behind the scenes," offers a pragmatic interpretive analysis by relying on participants' interpretations, and the third, titled "getting it right together or there is no (one) 'right,'" allows a reflexive-participatory multi-voiced discourse analysis using the space, critical theory, and participants interpretations. The students and I collected data on signs and signification in the physical space of the higher education institution using photography and field notes, and then shared our interpretations in a group discussion. I realized that my own interpretation of the given educational space depended on when, how, and with whom I was conducting the observation of the space. Through this process, I found that the participatory nature of students' interpretations of the articulation of discourse in the educational space allowed paradoxes and clashes of meanings to emerge during analysis. Moreover, as the aim of the process is to bring forward the messiness of social life into discourse analysis, and since the process of data collection and analysis within this approach is, in fact,

spiral in practice, the findings will be presented in a non-linear manner, which the three-scene script presented above may create.

The process of semiotic codes analysis will be presented through examples from a research project examining the translation of global discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration into the local context of Israeli state education. The first section presents the case of transparent classrooms as an example for spatial non-textual semiotic codes analysis. The second exemplifies the analysis of semiotic codes on school walls through an examination of texts and images related to entrepreneurialism and aspiration. The third examines how semiotic codes analysis reveals the hybridity of global entrepreneurial and local ethno-national discourses in Israeli schools by combining spatial observations with educators' interpretations.

Transparent Classrooms: Between Innovation and Surveillance

To better understand how discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration are articulated in educational spaces, I observed the architectural spaces of schools labeled as "entrepreneurial" and "innovative" by both state/local government authorities and social actors working within these spaces. Most of the schools (7 out of 12 observed) had transparent classrooms, where instead of a wall dividing the class from the corridor, there was a huge window, enabling the children and teacher in the room to see and be seen. The architectural concept of school transparency is part of a current global trend in educational architecture that promotes "21st-century" school environments, also evident, for instance, in Scandinavia and the UK (Leiringer and Cardellino 2011). Interviews with Israeli architects reveal that

this is a main spatial theme in today's architectural design of innovative educational spaces in Israel.

I joined an open-to-the-public tour in a state school in central Israel, located in a high SES neighborhood. The school comprises two buildings, referred to by the principal as the "vintage" school building and the "boutique" school building. The guided tour took place in the latter, which houses first- and second-graders. In this building, classrooms were demarcated by floor-to-ceiling glass panels. A young teacher spoke in front of a class of first-graders while a group of twenty visitors watched. The teacher and students did their best to ignore us. Soon enough, my critical sociological voice spoke up: it is a panopticon. In his seminal work, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault discusses the design of prisons by Bentham to "illustrate how power can be expressed and managed through architecture" (Lawes 2019:254). The panopticon is outfitted with windows, and as prisoners never know if and when they are being watched, they self-surveil their behavior. Through this design, Foucault explains how we as modern subjects surveil ourselves.

Long before transparent classrooms came on the scene, Foucault linked panopticism to educational spaces. "The practice of placing individuals under 'observation,'" he argued, "is a natural extension of justice imbued with disciplinary methods and examination procedures...Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?" (Foucault 1975:227-228). This critical Foucauldian voice emerged as I observed the transparent classrooms, where I noted multiple instances of surveillance. In one elementary school, nearly all the classrooms were transparent, as were the teachers' lounge and the secretary's office. The only room with a curtain was the principal's office,

which allowed the social actors inside to decide on the degree of transparency. Another indication of the surveillance practice that recurred in various school spaces was the social actors' obscuring of these transparent classrooms. Some placed a large cloth over the glass, while others had attached large pieces of paper over it from the inside. Such acts of covering appeared to be improvised by social actors and were rather unaesthetic. The round window of one teacher's office had been brushed with blue paint; a piece of paper attached to the door's exterior quoted Janusz Korczak's *The Child's Right to Respect*: "A hundred different hearts beat under shirts of the same sort and in each case, there are individual difficulties, individual exertions, individual sorrows and troubles."

These actions by social actors, who creatively generate contractions in response to transparency, can be understood as acts of resistance, involving counter-discourses and counter-physical displays. These social actors change the semiotic codes of the educational space by damaging or decorating it. Vandalism of school space in transparent classrooms can also be understood in the frame of resistance. In one high school that had been outfitted with both transparent walls and venetian blinds, some of the blinds had been damaged in a way that prevented them from opening. This type of resistance can be defined as a tactic as per de Certeau's (1984:37) distinction between strategy and tactic, which is defined as the "art of the weak." Nonetheless, these acts actively change the educational space to reject its transparency.

In each of the schools with transparent classrooms that I visited, I also documented the interpretations of social actors living within these schools, which feature this design. For example, in an "innovative"

elementary school in a low SES neighborhood, Dvora, a teacher, explained that the school is designed with transparent classrooms in the spirit of the high-tech industry, following an American trend of "high-tech high schools." As she clarified:

The person who founded the school [in the US] started a huge high-tech company...He saw that his daughter was studying in a school like in the old days, when the world outside [the school] had already progressed to the mindset of high-tech, and brainstorming, and creative thinking. He...consulted with educators and established a high school in the spirit of high-tech... Then they saw that children who arrive in the sixth grade are already damaged, they are not used to independent thinking, creative thinking, they've already had everything castrated [by the school], so they made these [high-tech] schools for K-12.

The interpretation by Dvora and other participants is that the "old days" schools have today become "spaces adapted to the twenty-first century." Indeed, as revealed in the excerpt above, and in other examples to follow, Israeli educators deny neither the capitalist purpose of schools as training grounds for the business sphere nor the need for surveillance. Building schools that resemble high-tech companies' spaces is based on both these assumptions. However, the participants' interpretations of these spaces also included numerous other understandings of the purpose of schooling, such as inducing independent and creative thinking among children.

The transparency embodies a pedagogical approach promoting innovation and autonomy, positioning children as self-governing "independent workers" within a democratic "openness" that makes classroom activities visible both inside and

out. The same participants who held interpretations of “innovation” and “twenty-first-century spaces” associated with technology and entrepreneurship simultaneously held interpretations of care for children’s well-being and promotion of communal values. Like Dvora, most participants addressed the design of transparent classrooms as a mechanism of “progress” and part of the concept of “twenty-first-century skills.” Yet, the matter goes beyond employability in their view, as the current era is often understood by participants as a “time of uncertainty.” As Riki, a principal of an elementary school, remarked, “This is an era when we don’t know what’s going to happen.” Therefore, social actors believe this transparency can help children feel protected and cared for as well as inspired to be “innovative thinkers.” Transparency, as “openness,” is also strengthened by the theme of flexibility, as “flexible” school spaces and “transparent” school spaces are used synonymously by both educators and architects and are believed to promote flexible selves (e.g., Brunila and Siivonen 2023), “adapted to the twenty-first century.”

In one high school with transparent classrooms, the design was explained by social actors as reflecting innovation as well as “collectivity” and “community.” In a junior high school, Sigal, the architect, spoke of “openness,” which is permitted by transparency, addressed as permitting both surveillance and accessibility:

Everything is transparent. [First], it’s visible from the inside to the outside, [so] that you [the principal] have some control [over the school] while you work... [Second], the students see...that the secretary and the principal are accessible...so there is a more pleasant feeling of transparency that we also see in work complexes.

This expert reveals how social actors are indeed aware of the purpose of surveillance, yet nonetheless regard it as a means of care, protection, and accessibility, in addition to a means for “discipline and punishment.” Moreover, the theme of the job market as an inspiration for this design attests to the resemblance of public institutions in general, and schools in particular, to workspaces.

Nirit, a principal of an elementary school with transparent classrooms, described the transparent classroom design as “Finland in the Middle East.” Using Finland as a reference point for excellent education, Nirit emphasized that “a lot of money was invested” to achieve what she considers the “Finnish” design. Moreover, Nirit described the transparent classroom design as a material reflection of the “pedagogy of care,” which is the main educational approach of the school. In contrast to the neoliberal entrepreneurial narrative, these pedagogies, from the point of view of the principal and teachers in this school, foster a feminist perspective to promote “communal moral action.”

When I asked Maya, an architect of a school with transparent classrooms, about the design, she asked me: “Why would a classroom not be transparent? This is not a private place; this is a public space. A closed room is a private room.” Interestingly, Shlomit, the architect working with her on the design of the school, also explained how “walls made of glass allow for the school to become their home, as it is [the school space] all connected into one. This space becomes their home for the next year, so this gives them an open and living space. A home.” The two architects did not consider these two interpretations of “public” and “home” contradictory, but rather allowed them to coexist in their process of designing the school space.

While institutions give semiotic codes a “coherent logic despite ambivalence or skepticism on the part of individuals” (Swidler 2001:175), transparency is not necessarily only an act of surveillance reflecting power relations. It can also reflect a wish for “openness,” a sense of “home,” or “community.” Of course, from a critical point of view, these notions can be analyzed as part of a critique of post-panoptic neoliberal agendas of surveillance (Gane 2012; Charteris 2022). As Morrin (2017:51) argues, the “openness” interpretation of “entrepreneurial” educational spaces reflects how “where in the Benthamian panoptic model visibility was granted to a powerful few, now visibility is given to the many, allowing for both surveillance and...surveillance from below.”

From a Goffmanian perspective, transparent classrooms can be understood as spaces where the “behind the scenes” is reduced or minimized. Vandalism or the creative obscuring of transparency can be considered from this standpoint as damaging or altering the school’s public “face.” Its performance stage, and the people behind the scenes, appear to have the potential to change it from within. The analysis of the transparent classroom as a panopticon alone, without other “messy” interpretations reflecting various discourses in the field, creates a theory echoing the critical sociologist perspective with which I entered the field. This type of interpretation puts the researcher on a pedestal, as the one who knows the “truth.” But what makes me, as a researcher, more knowledgeable of “truth?” In contrast, the process of semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces allows for various voices of interpretation to be acknowledged, while leaving room for doubt that these are the only interpretations obtainable. Moreover, amplifying and analyzing these various voices is important not only for

the researcher but also for social actors involved in the process of designing educational spaces, such as transparent classrooms, allowing them to raise and consider sociological perspectives in the design process.

The Writings on the Walls: Between Discourse and Aesthetics

As part of the analysis of the articulations of discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration in and by school spaces, I analyzed photos of the texts and images on school walls to understand them in a social, cultural, and political context. A critical discourse analysis revealed how entrepreneurial quotes were mostly attributed to white Anglo-American businessmen. Steve Jobs was frequently quoted on school walls observed. Vague statements, such as “Stay hungry, stay foolish,” appear alongside inspirational ones, like “The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.” Sometimes there was a specific attribution to cyber and technological entrepreneurship, such as “Everybody should learn to code, because it teaches you how to think.”

While a few of the schools observed had English quotes on the walls, most of the quotes were in Hebrew translations, with the name of the quoted persona written in Hebrew as well. For example, on a seventh-grade classroom wall, the statement “A goal without a timeline is simply a dream” appeared with the name Robert Herjavec, a millionaire Canadian businessman from the American TV show “Shark Tank,” who is not a well-known persona in Israel. According to his own Twitter account, this quote is a tweet he wrote in 2015, around the time this school was designed. Similarly, on the social media of the Minister of Education of 2020-2021,

Ifat Shasha-Biton, the Minister appeared with two high school students sitting in a school corridor next to a drawing of a huge lion, under a translated quote by British entrepreneur Richard Branson: "Brave people don't live forever, but cautious people don't live at all."

As the Hebrew language specifically designates masculine or feminine voices, social actors chose to "speak male" while using discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration on most school walls observed. For example, on an elementary school wall, the slogan "Future leadership is dependent on prominent leaders" is flanked by a mirror, with the text above reading, "Identify the leader within you." Both the plural and singular of the word "leader" were in the masculine form. At the same time, next to these texts and the mirror, a sign on an office door announced "systems administrator" in the feminine voice.

The masculine entrepreneurial ideal was also portrayed in illustrations that accompanied some of the texts. In a cyber class in a middle-class high school, where all the texts were in English, a silhouette of a young boy pushing the word "push" appeared together with the huge bold text "Push yourself" and the smaller text below, "No one else will do it for you." One illustration stood out, due to its larger size and lack of text. It portrayed the evolution of man, from prehistoric times to a prehistoric human man with tools, to a white man dressed in a suit and holding a briefcase and mobile phone, to a young white man hunched over a computer. I adopted a critical feminist perspective to analyze the data. While this illustration can be seen as reflecting the concept of de-evolution, it nonetheless presents the evolution of humankind in a way that makes it "natural" for the privileged to be entitled to money and suc-

cess not only due to merit and agency as ones who "pushed themselves" to success, but via "nature" as well. All the quotes by white Anglo-American men promoted a similar theme. How, I wondered, did social actors in the Israeli education system, the vast majority of whom are women, come to choose these texts and illustrations?

The observation of the cyber class described took place in an open-to-the-public event. To gain access to the school's "behind the scenes," I interviewed Anna, a teacher at this high school and the designer of this classroom. When I arrived at Anna's class, I saw an object that had not been there the day before: a cardboard box of a large electronic device, covered in students' drawings and texts. Anna explained that this was a "safe space" for her students to inhabit whenever they felt the need:

They paint inside, and they paint outside, and there are all kinds of things [written] that I might not like... so when we had marketing promotion for the school, and principals came here, I put it under the table. But when the counselors [of other schools] came, I left it out. The principal told me, "Anna, you should put it away; it doesn't look good." I told him, "It's not true, you don't understand, we [at this school] accept everyone."

I understood that my visits to school spaces also included this "public relations" theme of advertisement. This also included hiding displays that may carry important semiotic meaning for social actors.

Moreover, I also identified a theme of randomness connected to esthetics. For instance, I asked the architect of the school with the Robert Herjavec quote about its meaning, and she explained that the graphic designer suggested it, and she thought

it was aesthetic. Indeed, many participants emphasized aesthetics. According to Orit, an elementary school teacher, the school's physical appearance is like the "makeup" of the school. In her interview, I presented a picture of a wall found in the previous analysis to reflect the neoliberal ideology promoting the ideal of an "entrepreneurial self." When I asked Orit what this text meant to her, the following dialogue ensued:

Orit: There is no one in the school who can tell you what's written there [on the wall]. Not a teacher. Not a student, if you ask me.

Interviewer: So why is it there?

Orit: [Silence]. Why is it there? Why do you put on makeup in the morning?...it's very beautiful, it's very aesthetic, [cynical] and I'm sure there are very clever things written here...Listen, don't get me wrong...I entered several schools that made me feel so bad...Makeup is very important. If I see it [the wall presented] in front of the teachers' lounge, it is so colorful, and beautiful, and aesthetic, that it doesn't matter what is written on it...It's one of the most pleasant schools to be in, it's beautiful, it's spacious, that... you feel [laughs] you feel that you still have a chance.

Interviewer: As a teacher or as a student?

Orit: Both. Both. I think it's really, really important. What is written here? [Looks at the picture of the wall again]. Why are you even asking that?

Orit insists that the text itself has no importance, as its aesthetics are "doing the talking," making her and the students feel pleasant and believe in a better future. In contrast, when I asked Orna, the principal of Orit's school, what this wall meant to her, she said:

I really connect with what's written [on the wall]. The cognitive aspect ta ta ta [like "blah blah blah"]...

ah... It's... How... education is seen here in the school... how we also make room for cognitive aspects, also the emotional aspects, or everything that is written there, I don't remember exactly...You come home. You see a picture on the wall. The owner of the house put this picture on the wall, because... he loves it, it tells him something... the same here... [decisive tone, with a smile] This is us; this is the school, this is our being.

Neither Orna nor Orit knew what was written on the wall, adjacent to the teacher's lounge, which is next to the principal's office. It is part of their everyday scenery. Moreover, Orna herself had decided what to write on that wall, together with the school designer. Nonetheless, both Orna and Orit spoke of the importance of aesthetics.

Other teachers mentioned that the school space is shaped by visits from Ministry of Education supervisors. Danit, an elementary school teacher from a southern low SES city, spoke in her interview about the walls of the school changing before such a visit; they "clean the school, paint walls, paint blackboards, paint students, paint whatever you want. Decorate all the walls, everything must be top-notch."

Danit wrote a curriculum to be implemented by the school titled "Social Emotional Learning" (SEL), aiming to foster "emotionally skilled," self-managed, and accountable individuals (Segal and Plotkin Amrami 2024). However, this program was not implemented in Danit's school, but rather explained to a few students prior to the inspector's visit, to prepare them for the possibility that she might ask students, "What is 'social emotion' anyway?"

Like other educators interviewed, Danit spoke about the importance of creating programs to pro-

mote a future-oriented subject by teaching students to set goals for future employability from an early age. However, she explained she was busy daily “making sure kids don’t get beaten up and pleasing parents.” Therefore, SEL is part of the school’s “makeup” but not its everyday practice:

We made a huge circle in the middle [of a wall] and wrote “We learn using the SEL method” and then many circles...explaining how to learn through this method and blah, blah, blah...Absolute nonsense... There are magnificent walls, but there is no [learning] process here. But it’s like “if the inspector comes, let’s pretend.”

The texts on Danit’s school walls intentionally reflect discourses promoting neoliberal ideology. However, the manifestation of an “entrepreneurial self” in this school’s everyday life is far from clear. Analyzing only the “face” of the school without its “behind the scenes” does not allow this complexity of intentions and interpretations to come forward. The participants perceived texts and images on school walls as communicative performances of dialogue between various social actors in and outside the school. The themes of “makeup” and insipid content (“blah, blah, blah”) diminish the significance of the text and accentuate the importance of aesthetics as a form of both communication and performance.

Going back to Anna, who designed the cyber class with the illustration of the evolution process. She explained the design:

Anna: It [the cyber class] is a very boyish room... something about cyber is terribly masculine. We’re trying to change that...there is a trend right now to push more girls into the so-called masculine profes-

sions of robotics and cyber, which are professions that attract more boys...

Me: As we are approaching the end of our conversation, I dare to ask, why not use images on the walls that will help girls identify?

Anna: It was done [the class design] before [the new agenda]...the theme of cyber has always been boys, that was the target audience.

One way to amplify the sociological voice in educational spaces is through open conversations between sociologists and educators. Anna identifies as a feminist and uses educational programs to promote critical feminist thought. Our conversation allowed her to reflect on the use of school space to promote her agenda. A few months after our conversation, I observed a new, large sign promoting cyber education at the entrance of the school that depicted a young girl wearing 3-D glasses. This is not necessarily an outcome of our conversation, yet it nonetheless reflects a different discursive practice through signification in this school’s space, addressing cyber and innovation.

However, the main issue is not researchers “educating” the field, but rather using semiotic code analysis of educational spaces to collaborate with social actors in expanding our analytic perspective. I originally set out to discover articulations of neoliberal discourses promoting entrepreneurial subjectivities on school walls. What I found was that social actors tend to think of the texts written on school walls as makeup. This is an example of the decoupling of discourse and practice (e.g., Hallett 2010) by educational institutions as they adopt globalized trends such as SEL and entrepreneurialism. It has long been argued that schools make “symbolic changes in structure and procedures but decouple these changes from classroom practice”

(Coburn 2004:211). Yet, as social actors' interpretations reflect, these discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration are not just part of a façade, but rather part of educators' ideals and aspirations for the future of education, even if they are not implemented in their present practice.

The political aspects of aesthetics are also worthy of consideration. From a critical perspective, "aesthetic experience identified as universal truth is a paradigm case of ideology—the social misperceived as natural; a conflation of 'taste' with 'truth'" (Dovey 2009:36). However, even if we approach the concept of aesthetics from a critical perspective as a reflection of power/knowledge and not as an arbitrary determination by social actors, it is unclear that there is an intentional indoctrination of neoliberal values via these texts and images. Nonetheless, if we were to address participants' interpretations of texts and images in educational spaces with no critique, we might miss analytic interpretations potentially useful for both researchers and educators. As Swidler (2001:163) suggests, "semiotic codes can be culturally powerful even when they are of recent origin, lightly held, or even widely mistrusted." Put differently, even if people are indifferent or ambivalent to the meanings of semiotic codes, these codes nonetheless can influence action.

Transforming Discourse in Educational Spaces: In-Between Neoliberalism and Ethno-Nationalism

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how semiotic codes analysis revealed the hybridity of global entrepreneurial and local ethno-national discourses in Israeli state education by combining spatial observations with educators' interpretations. I entered the field to examine discourses of entrepreneurial-

ism and aspiration in school spaces, carrying my personal history in such spaces and a critical Foucauldian sociological background. As part of my research, I conducted an observation of my childhood school space. Growing up in 1990s Israel, I attended a local state school. I vividly remember the school's physical space. At the entrance were memorial plaques with pictures of school graduates who had died during their mandatory military service. A red velvet ribbon demarcated the memorial area as a sacred space. The entire school echoed ethno-national and militaristic discourses in its materiality, as evident through, for instance, green army-like tee-shirt uniforms and biblical quotes on the walls. In the context of Israeli education, ethno-nationalism refers to Jewish-Israeli identity formation, which relies on perceiving "the 'nation' not in terms of citizenry, but in terms of ethnicity that is often based on a notion of shared ancestry" (Pinson and Agbaria 2021:737).

When I observed the school space, it had been transformed. Transparent classrooms now predominate, and the slogan "Creativity Based Learning" is emblazoned on the main wall in English. This, I learned, was the current slogan of the school. The transformation of the educational space of my childhood school could have been analyzed under the globalization/Americanization thesis. As Steve Jobs and other entrepreneurs were portrayed as an entrepreneurial ideal on various schools' walls, alongside quotes by American leaders like Benjamin Franklin and John F. Kennedy, at the beginning of my research journey, I analyzed these examples as cases of the Americanization of Israeli culture. However, the participants' interpretations did not fit this perspective. When participants spoke the language of entrepreneurialism, they kept merging it with discourses of ethno-nationalism, under the theme

of the “Start-Up Nation.” This term, coined by Senor and Singer (2011), reflects an ethno-national view of entrepreneurialism as “Israel’s hi-tech, which is a Jewish industry, marketed as such and linked to the mythical Jewish genius” (Preminger 2020:255).

This hybridity appeared in the interpretations of social actors in the school mentioned above, where the design of the school is inspired by the American “high-tech high.” The transparent classrooms and the texts on the school walls “speak” this ideal. However, in my conversations with the principal and teachers, I learned that the school also incorporates the high-tech “spirit” by implementing a project-based learning program that merges entrepreneurial and ethno-national ideals. Each year, students undertake projects selected by school staff to present Jewish curricula, showcasing what educators view as an entrepreneurial, autonomous self. For example, a project named “Cracking the Code of the Heroes” addresses biblical heroes, combining bible studies, language, digital literacy, and art. The annual project chosen for second-grade students was stories from the Book of Genesis. In her walking interview, a teacher from the school pointed out drawings of students that are part of this project.

Another example of entrepreneurial-ethno-national hybridity comes from a junior high school in a high-SES neighbourhood. The school operates two main programs: “Young Entrepreneurs,” which aims to simulate the experience of working in a high-tech company, and “All Israel Are Friends,” which promotes Zionist and civic-democratic education. These programs are presented in the school space through various texts and posters, but appear separately. In my initial analysis of the school’s spatial data, I therefore interpreted the

Zionist content as parallel, rather than hybrid, to the entrepreneurial theme. Sivan, a teacher and the school’s social coordinator, noted in her interview the resistance among parents and students to implementing the program that echoed an ethno-national discourse. To address this, Sivan adopted a strategy of hybrid interweaving between global entrepreneurial discourse and local ethno-national discourse, linking the entrepreneurial program to a theme of “national pride.”

As this hybrid ideal emerged as a key theme, I undertook another cycle of analysis to examine whether, and in what ways, Sivan’s school walls also “spoke” this hybridity. I noted a huge poster depicting an oversized iPhone against a background drawing of a large tree and flowers. A sprout blossomed from the iPhone, and above it was written in large letters (in Hebrew): “Marvel at the wonder of creation.” The word “creation” in Hebrew is associated with the biblical Book of Genesis, while in this poster, the iPhone was portrayed as creating nature. Going back to the principal of the school for interpretation, she explained that the poster is advertising the “Young Entrepreneurs” program.

When discourse is studied using CDA that focuses on texts and signs without considering social actors’ interpretations, the entrepreneurial discourse may be framed as Americanization, and ethno-national discourses as counter-narratives, missing how social actors combine them in practice. Moving between observations of educational spaces and social actors’ interpretations helped reveal a central theme in Israeli education of today, marking social boundaries and perpetuating inequalities, by redesigning a global educational discourse within a socio-political context (Alfi-Nissan 2024).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article proposes a socio-spatial approach to discourse analysis by integrating critical and pragmatic frameworks to explore the interplay between space, discourse, and social actors. Drawing on qualitative research that investigated how discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration are manifested within the physical educational environments of Israeli state schools, it examines how social actors construct, shape, and interpret these discourses in educational settings. To deepen understanding of the analytical tools suited to studying the encounters between a school's "stage," "scenery," and "behind the scenes," this study presents the process of semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces. This method combines the analysis of educational spaces with the perspectives of those who design and inhabit them, revealing complex and sometimes contradictory themes.

Griswold and colleagues (2013:360) call for sociologists to "place greater emphasis on materiality and consider the mediating role objects and environments play in meaning-making." Following this call, I argue that understanding space as a main player in discourse construction and performance is essential in sociological research in education. The findings show that school spaces actively participate in producing and circulating discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration, not merely serving as passive backdrops. The semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces allows researchers to analyze educational spaces as "political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse" (Foucault 1996 [1971]:352), by considering where "human action is being played out before, within, or upon it" (Goffman 1959:13). Crit-

ical Discourse Analysis (CDA), while originally inspired by Foucault, mostly follows Fairclough's (2003) methodology, and tends to focus primarily on text and policy analysis, often neglecting the role of materiality in discourse articulation (Hardy and Thomas 2015). Moreover, it has been argued that studies examining neoliberal discourses from a Foucauldian perspective "generally abstracted from actually existing subject and spaces" (Štremfel 2021:208). Combining Foucault-inspired critical discourse analysis with a Goffmanian perspective enables the examination of both the spatial articulation of discourse and how social actors interpret socio-spatial codes, particularly where or when ethnographic research is limited.

The semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces allows a critical semiotic analysis and a pragmatic interpretive analysis, while leaving room for doubt. Processes of CDA can diminish the polyphonic voices arising in research as these voices "come to be translated by the researcher into a theoretical account" (Thompson, Rickett, and Day 2018:94). In this study, working closely with educators and architects enabled a more dialogical interpretation of the stage, scenery, and behind the scenes, revealing both alignment and tension between the intended and experienced meanings of space. Using the analysis of space and social actors' interpretations of space can assist in creating "a more straightforward analysis" of data, "revealed both in the interview and in ethnographic observation" (Rinaldo and Guhin 2022:47), by examining "the poet's intention" while engaging with "poets" and "readers." From this standpoint, it is also important to acknowledge students' interpretations of their educational spaces (Kellock and Sexton 2018), which I did not have access to in this specific study.

The findings have shown how analyzing everyday sceneries together with participants can assist in creating a reflexive discourse analysis process. Reflexivity plays a crucial role in qualitative sociology. Ethical reflexivity involves researchers' explicit "account of the way in which their personal involvement in social and fieldwork relations shape their data collection, analysis, and writing" as well as "their ethical and political beliefs" (Gewirtz and Cribb 2006:147). As Mizrachi (2022:503) claims, "if your findings always suit your moral stance, doubt your sociology." The process of semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces applies an analytical approach that allows for incoherences to emerge, without being left on the "cutting room floor" of the research, but rather to play an important role in the analysis process. By doing so, it assists critical sociologists in being "suspicious of our suspicion" (Mizrachi 2022:503), by allowing us, as defined by Mizrachi (2024:2), to "go beyond the liberal grammar" of critical sociology; "the unwritten set of analytical and normative principles that guide the interpretative act."

Critical methodologies in general, and those engaged in Foucauldian discourse analysis in particular, can be vague and not clearly applicable (Nicholls 2008; Keller 2022). Moreover, "despite there being no model for discourse analysis qua Foucault, should one claim to be drawing on a Foucauldian framework, there is a very real danger in one's work being dismissed as un-Foucauldian—if one doesn't get it right" (Graham 2011:663). The semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces can assist in teaching discourse analysis in qualitative methods courses and serve as a pedagogical tool by collecting and analyzing data from within both schools and higher education institutions to induce critical and reflexive

thinking, which are also objectives in such courses (Andrzejewski and Baggett 2020).

This article presents the process of semiotic codes analysis of educational spaces, combining observations of architectural design with the perspectives of those who create and inhabit these spaces. This approach reveals surprising, polyphonic, and often contradictory themes, showing how space and materiality can become tools for discourse analysis that merge critical and pragmatic perspectives. School spaces are shown to articulate discourses of entrepreneurialism and aspiration through both design and symbolism, while educators and architects co-construct and reinterpret these discourses, sometimes in tension with their original intent. In doing so, semiotic codes analysis offers access to the stage, scenery, and behind the scenes of institutions that are beyond the reach of longitudinal and intensive ethnography. The article also calls for dialogue between educators, architects, and sociologists of education to amplify the sociological voice in educational spaces. Recognizing that collaboration and critical engagement can foster more inclusive educational environments.

Acknowledgments

The study was carried out as part of a doctoral research project at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. I would like to thank Michal Pagis, Kirsty Morrin, Kristiina Brunila, and the members of the Critical Sociology and Philosophy of Education (CRISP) research group at the AGORA Centre for the Study of Social Justice and Equality in Education at the University of Helsinki, as well as the three anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments.

References

- Alfi-Nissan, Sari R. 2024. "The Discourse of Self-Fulfillment in the iGeneration Era: Ideology and Practice in Israeli Education." Ph.D. dissertation, Bar-Ilan University.
- Alfi-Nissan, Sari R. and Michal Pagis. 2023. "Glitches in the Aspirational Discourse: Between Enterprise and Compromise." *Sociological Forum* 38(3):708-729.
- Alfi-Nissan, Sari R., Shlomo Guzman-Carmeli, and Rachel Werczberger. 2025. "'The Light Within Me': Celebrating the Self through Jewish Holidays in Israeli State Education." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 40(2):239-257. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2025.2520059>.
- Andrzejewski, Carey E. and Hannah Carson Baggett. 2020. "Magic and Hocus Pocus: Teaching for Social Justice in a Qualitative Methods Course." *The Qualitative Report* 25(3):864-875.
- Ball, Stephen J. 2012. *Foucault, Power, and Education*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Billig, Michael. 2003. "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Rhetoric of Critique." Pp. 35-46 in *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity*, edited by G. Weiss and R. Wodak. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Björkvall, Anders, Sara Van Meerbergen, and Gustav Westberg. 2023. "Feeling Safe while Being Surveilled: The Spatial Semiotics of Affect at International Airports." *Social Semiotics* 33(1):209-231.
- Brunila, Kristiina and Päivi Siivonen. 2023. "Preoccupied with the Self: Towards Self-Responsible, Enterprising, Flexible and Self-Centred Subjectivity." Pp. 174-187 in *Neoliberalism and Education*, edited by B. M. A. Jones and S. Ball. New York: Routledge.
- Cayubit, Ryan Francis O. 2022. "Why Learning Environment Matters? An Analysis on How the Learning Environment Influences the Academic Motivation, Learning Strategies and Engagement of College Students." *Learning Environments Research* 25(2):581-599.
- Charteris, Jennifer. 2022. "Post-Panoptic Accountability: Making Data Visible through 'Data Walls' for Schooling Improvement." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 43(3):333-348.
- Coburn, Cynthia E. 2004. "Beyond Decoupling: Rethinking the Relationship between the Institutional Environment and the Classroom." *Sociology of Education* 77(3):211-244.
- Crampton, Jeremy W. and Stuart Elden, eds. 2007. *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.
- Curtis, Rowland. 2014. "Foucault Beyond Fairclough: From Transcendental to Immanent Critique in Organization Studies." *Organization Studies* 35(12):1753-1772.
- de Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- de Saint-Georges, Ingrid. 2004. "Materiality in Discourse: The Influence of Space and Layout in Making Meaning." Pp. 71-87 in *Discourse and Technology: Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, edited by P. LeVine and R. Scollon. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Dovey, Kim. 2009. *Becoming Places: Urbanism/Architecture/Identity/Power*. London: Routledge.
- Ecclestone, Kathryn and Kristiina Brunila. 2015. "Governing Emotionally Vulnerable Subjects and 'Therapisation' of Social Justice." *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 23(4):485-506.
- Ericsson, Stina. 2023. "Equality, Marginalisation, and Hegemonic Negotiation: Embodied Understandings of the Built and Designed Environment." *Multimodality and Society* 3(4):313-335.
- Fairclough, Norman. 2003. *Analyzing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Discipline and Punish*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, Michel. 1996 [1971]. "The Discourse on Language." Pp. 339-360 in *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, edited by R. Kearney and M. Rainwater. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 2013 [1972]. *Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

- Frye, Margaret. 2012. "Bright Futures in Malawi's New Dawn: Educational Aspirations as Assertions of Identity." *American Journal of Sociology* 117(6):1565-1624.
- Fuller, Martin G. and Martina Löw. 2017. "Introduction: An Invitation to Spatial Sociology." *Current Sociology* 65(4):469-491.
- Gane, Nicholas. 2012. "The Governmentalities of Neoliberalism: Panopticism, Post-Panopticism and Beyond." *The Sociological Review* 60(4):611-634.
- Gewirtz, Sharon and Alan Cribb. 2006. "What to Do about Values in Social Research: The Case for Ethical Reflexivity in the Sociology of Education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 27(2):141-155.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Golder, Ben. 2020. *Foucault and the Politics of Rights*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Graham, Linda J. 2011. "The Product of Text and 'Other' Statements: Discourse Analysis and the Critical Use of Foucault." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 43(6):663-674.
- Griswold, Wendy, Gemma Mangione, and Terence E. McDonnell. 2013. "Objects, Words, and Bodies in Space: Bringing Materiality into Cultural Analysis." *Qualitative Sociology* 36:343-364.
- Guhin, Jeffrey. 2021. "Why Study Schools?" Pp. 381-397 in *Handbook of Classical Sociological Theory*, edited by S. Abrutyn and O. Lizardo. Cham: Springer.
- Haapanen, Lauri and Ville J. E. Manninen. 2023. "Etic and Emic Data Production Methods in the Study of Journalistic Work Practices: A Systematic Literature Review." *Journalism* 24(2):418-435.
- Hacking, Ian. 2004. "Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: Between Discourse in the Abstract and Face-to-Face Interaction." *Economy and Society* 33(3):277-302.
- Hallett, Tim. 2010. "The Myth Incarnate: Recoupling Processes, Turmoil, and Inhabited Institutions in an Urban Elementary School." *American Sociological Review* 75(1):52-74.
- Hardy, Cynthia and Robyn Thomas. 2015. "Discourse in a Material World." *Journal of Management Studies* 52(5):680-696.
- Heberle, Viviane Maria, Felipe Antônio de Souza, and Luiza Horbach Dodl. 2020. "The Happiest Place on Earth: A Spatial Discourse Analysis of Disney's Epcot World Showcase." *Revista Linguagem em Foco* 12(3):405-426.
- Jones, Phil et al. 2008. "Exploring Space and Place with Walking Interviews." *Journal of Research Practice* 4(2):D2.
- Keller, Reiner. 2022. "The Symbolic Construction of Spaces: Perspectives from a Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse." Pp. 36-56 in *Communicative Constructions and the Refiguration of Spaces*, edited by G. B. Christmann, H. Knoblauch, and M. Löw. London: Routledge.
- Kellock, Anne and Julia Sexton. 2018. "Whose Space Is It Anyway? Learning about Space to Make Space to :earn." *Children's Geographies* 16(2):115-127.
- Lamont, Michèle. 2019. "From 'Having' to 'Being': Self-Worth and the Current Crisis of American Society." *The British Journal of Sociology* 70(3):660-707.
- Lawes, Rachel. 2019. "Big Semiotics: Beyond Signs and Symbols." *International Journal of Market Research* 61(3):252-265.
- Leiringer, Roine and Paula Cardellino. 2011. "Schools for the Twenty-First Century: School Design and Educational Transformation." *British Educational Research Journal* 37(6):915-934.
- McCullough, Keiko M. and Jessica Nina Lester. 2023. "Beyond Talk and Text: Visuality and Critical Discursive Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 20(1):74-99.
- Mills, Sara. 2003. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge.
- Mizrachi, Nissim. 2022. "Transcending the Liberal Grammar of Critical Sociology: The Theoretical Turn in Israeli Sociology." *The American Sociologist* 53(4):492-511.
- Mizrachi, Nissim. 2024. *Beyond Suspicion: The Moral Clash between Rootedness and Progressive Liberalism*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Morrin, Kirsty. 2017. "The 'Space' between Reproduction and Resistance in and 'Entrepreneurial Academy.'" Ph.D. dissertation, University of Manchester.
- Morrin, Kirsty. 2022. "The 'Contradictory Space' of the Entrepreneurial Academy: Critical Ethnography, Entrepreneurship Education and Inequalities." Pp. 176-199 in *Inside the English Education Lab: Critical Qualitative and Ethnographic Perspectives*

- on the Academies Experiment, edited by C. Kulz, K. Morrin, and R. McGinity. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Nicholls, David A. 2008. "Putting Foucault to Work: An Approach to the Practical Application of Foucault's Methodological Imperatives." *Aporia* 1(1):1-11.
- Pinson, Halleli and Ayman K. Agbaria. 2021. "Ethno-Nationalism in Citizenship Education in Israel: An Analysis of the Official Civics Textbook." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 42(5-6):733-751.
- Preminger, Jonathan. 2020. "Meritocracy in the Service of Ethnocracy." *Citizenship Studies* 24(2):247-263.
- Ravelli, Louise J. and Robert J. McMurtrie. 2015. *Multimodality in the Built Environment: Spatial Discourse Analysis*. London: Routledge.
- Rinaldo, Rachel and Jeffrey Guhin. 2022. "How and Why Interviews Work: Ethnographic Interviews and Meso-Level Public Culture." *Sociological Methods & Research* 51(1):34-67.
- Rogers, Rebecca et al. 2005. "Critical Discourse Analysis in Education: A Review of the Literature." *Review of Educational Research* 75(3):365-416.
- Rose, Nikolas. 1998. *Inventing Our Selves. Psychology, Power, and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sam, Cecile H. 2019. "Shaping Discourse through Social Media: Using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis to Explore the Narratives that Influence Educational Policy." *American Behavioral Scientist* 63(3):333-350.
- Sasson, Irit et al. 2022. "Designing New Learning Environments: An Innovative Pedagogical Perspective." *The Curriculum Journal* 33(1):61-81.
- Savage, Glenn. 2017. "Neoliberalism, Education and Curriculum." Pp. 143-165 in *Powers of Curriculum: Sociological Perspectives on Education*, edited by B. Gobby and R. Walker. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sayfulloevna, Salimova Shahlo. 2023. "Safe Learning Environment and Personal Development of Students." *International Journal of Formal Education* 2(3):7-12.
- Segal, Aliza and Galia Plotkin Amrami. 2024. "Therapeutic Discourse in Teacher Professional Discourse: On Multidimensionality and Elasticity of Psychology-Based Reasoning." *Research Papers in Education* 39:206-228.
- Senor, Dan and Saul Singer. 2011. *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*. New York, Boston: Random House Digital.
- Spohrer, Konstanze, Garth Stahl, and Tamsin Bowers-Brown. 2018. "Constituting Neoliberal Subjects? 'Aspiration' as Technology of Government in UK Policy Discourse." *Journal of Education Policy* 33(3):327-342.
- Štremfel, Urška. 2021. "European Neoliberal Discourse and Slovenian Educational Space." Pp. 206-222 in *The Impacts of Neoliberal Discourse and Language in Education*, edited by M. Sardoč. London: Routledge.
- Swidler, Ann. 2001. *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Thompson, Lucy, Bridgette Rickett, and Katy Day. 2018. "Feminist Relational Discourse Analysis: Putting the Personal in the Political in Feminist Research." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 15(1):93-115.
- Zilberstein, Shira, Michèle Lamont, and Mari Sanchez. 2023. "Recreating a plausible Future: Combining Cultural Repertoires in Unsettled Times." *Sociological Science* 10:348-373.

Citation

Alfi-Nissan, Sari R. 2025. "Is There a Sociologist in the Room? Raising the Sociological Voice in Educational Spaces." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 21(4):26-47. Retrieved Month, Year (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.21.4.02>