

Visiting Academic in London

1st of February till 31st of May

My choice for a PhD research stay abroad was *UCL Institute of Education (IoE), University of London, Department of Culture Communication and Media (CCMA)*. The institute's main building is located in a typical English neighbourhood in Bloomsbury, right by Russell Square, one of London's green spaces. Here I had both the academical and social enjoyment of staying from the 1st of February till the 31st of May 2015.

The *University of London* is divided into 17 autonomous *Colleges* and 10 research-based specialist *Institutes* with a student society totalling 120.000 students. In addition, the university has about 55.000 students remotely related to international study programmes. Tuition for a Norwegian PhD student like me is £2.550 for four months.

The *Institute of Education* was founded in 1902 and has about 7.000 students and 1.000 employees. There are students here from 111 different countries, and over the last 10 years 10.000 teachers have graduated from UCL IoE.

During these four months in London I have achieved a lot. All my professional expectations were met during my stay, and I can go home with more knowledge, good contacts and a lot of good memories.

Short time accommodation in London was a lot more expensive than I expected. I have been lucky, living in a small apartment between Kensington Gardens and Holland Park. A beautiful, safe and quiet neighbourhood. The building is going to be demolished and rebuilt. I could therefore negotiate the price down to an unusually low level for this area. Travelling time to UCL IoE is between 40 minutes and one hour. I prefer the bus more often than the tube. It is nice to experience the city's bustling life around Kensington Gardens, Hyde Park and Trafalgar Square to Aldwyc, towards Holborn and up to Russell Square.

My PhD-study is a qualitative analytic study of modes and design in weblogs by teacher students studying Norwegian in their 3rd year of Teacher Education. My main aim is to analyse how students use design in their use of modes, to position themselves in relation to their future profession as teachers. The doctoral programme I belong to at The University College of Buskerud and Vestfold is



Pictures from the IoE website: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/>

called *Educational resources and learning processes in kindergartens, schools and higher education*. I am supported economically by my University College (HBV) and by *The Norwegian Research School for Teacher Education* (NAFOL) at NTNU. I chose to travel to London in an early phase of my study. Up until I left for London I had been working on finishing all my obligatory tasks and courses connected to my Norwegian PhD-scholarship.

Professor Gunther Kress has been my supervisor in London. He works within the social semiotic field. *Social semiotics* is a branch of the field of *semiotics* which investigates human signifying practices in specific social and cultural circumstances. *Social semiotics* also tries to explain meaning-making as a social practice.



I have been invited to spend many hours with Kress talking about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. In the beginning of my stay, Kress inspired me to alternate between writing and reading. We agreed about written tasks between our talks, and the content of these tasks became the starting point of our discussions. The tasks could for example be in the form of short studies of theoretical concepts, presentation of questions for my study, justification for selection of concepts in the thesis or justification for the selection of empiricism. Kress was able to make sense of all my rather confused thoughts at this phase, by asking good questions. I got the chance to discover useful perspectives along the way, and to find adequate literature in an excellent library to increase insight in the field. We discussed analytical approaches, looking at excerpts of the empirical material. Then I moved on to working with the descriptions and analysis of screen shots from the weblogs. I have concentrated on two different screen shots, to be able to go home with two clear examples of how it is possible to analyze my material.

When I planned my research stay, I had a thought about being able to write the theoretical chapter for my thesis during my stay. But as I knew in the back of my head, working with a PhD requires quite another approach than following the order of the chapters in a thesis.

I have studied social semiotics in general and discussed concepts like *genre*, *discourse*, *design* and *modes* more specifically. I have been guided through the professional field in a kind, honest and impressively skilled way. All the discussions with Kress have given me thoughts about how to form my study and helping me find a direction.

Sharing an office with skilled PhD-students and researchers that are more experienced has given me the opportunity to discuss thoughts and concepts informally. I have met colleagues from China, Japan, Britain, Italy, Nicaragua, Greece, Sweden and Denmark. I have also participated in the *Visual and Multimodal Research Forum* organized for doctoral students at the *Knowledge Lab* about 10 minutes' walk from the main building of UCL Institute of Education.

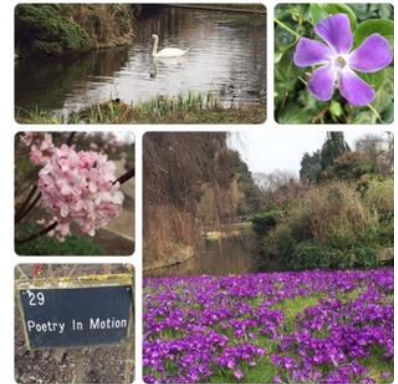


This is a good place to make future collaborative contacts. My PhD-colleague Israel Zeleya also visited London for a few days. We work within the field of social semiotics, but with very different studies. We had a good and helpful workshop, discussing each other's studies. Professor Il, Audrey Osler, at HBV-Drammen has also been here. She kindly invited me to her IoE-talk, and we also had a lovely evening together. Good colleagues are precious.

I have also had a talk with Myrrh Domingo about the platform Wordpress. That was very useful for my work. Domingo has many views on the 'architectural' structure of the platform. In my study, the choice of possible themes, colours and other features can have an impact on positioning. It was therefore an utmost interesting talk we had about the Wordpress research of Myrrh Domingo and Prof. Jeff Bezimer.

I am deeply grateful for my London stay, and for all the discussions, views, perspectives, help, and support Gunter Kress has given me.

Heartfelt thanks also goes out to everyone who has helped me becoming a Visiting Academic at University of London. Always encouraging professor Bente Amotsbakken (HBV) and professor Hildegunn Otnes (NTNU). Head of Department Piotr Garbacs (HBV) and Prof. Anna-Lena Østern (NAFOL-leder, NTNU) and her crew Torill Ryghaug og Monika S. Nyhagen (NAFOL-NTNU). Staff from personal and economics (HBV) Britt Jorunn Langøy, Mari Bogen Sparby and Fredrik Theiste Sirnes moved money to the right places in an utmost helpful way. Thanks also to all my Drammen-colleagues who always create a positive and cheerful tone at work.



Regent's Park

I am going home on the 1st of June 2015. Looking forward to the Rommetveit Summer School, and seeing NAFOL colleagues there.

All the best,

Kari Anne Rustand