

## **Personal Presentation Through Dress as it Relates to Becoming a Teacher**

**Heather McLeod\* and Ken Stevens\***  
**Faculty of Education**  
**Memorial University of Newfoundland**

**hmcleod@mun.ca**  
**stevensk@mun.ca**

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### **Abstract**

In a limited study at the Memorial University of Newfoundland we explored dress amongst pre-service teachers during their internships as they moved towards becoming professional elementary or secondary teachers. We utilized both individual interviews and individual portrait photographs. From the narratives of the participants three common themes emerged: the existence of teacher dress codes, changes in dress, and dress as communication about self. Participants reported feeling very aware of negotiating a balance between dressing for others and dress as a means to communicate about self. We noted an emerging sense that good teaching can be associated with the acceptance and exploration of the concept of social and cultural difference for both educators and students. The research is significant because we know that role models are important to children and youth and we believe that students need a broader range of models about what is appropriate. The results make a contribution to knowledge about pre-service teacher dress, sketch a bigger picture about the operations of power in schools and classrooms, and help to show how images form an important part of our knowledge base. Additionally, our results are relevant for the broader education community such as school boards and teacher organizations, where they may contribute to the revision of existing policies, as well as to the development of new ones.

How does a university student change their appearance, moving from casual dress to that of a professional elementary or secondary teacher? In a limited study at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, this question was explored through use of both individual interviews and visual observations. Here we use the terms dress, clothing, costume, appearance and adornment, to mean body modification including clothing, hairstyles, jewelry, glasses, make-up, body decoration, tattoos, accessories and other possibilities (Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

While the dress of students entering schools as interns is largely the choice of the individual, there are guidelines for pre-service teachers to follow. In the Eastern School District of Newfoundland there exists an unwritten dress code, which recommends that clothing should reflect a 'business casual' standard. In order to promote a professional work environment it is suggested that denim jeans should not be worn. Yet despite these guidelines there is nevertheless an overall impression that dress standards are declining (Dr. B. Sheppard, former CEO of Eastern School District, personal communication,

November 12, 2009). Are pre-service teachers aware of this trend? How would they respond to this statement? While there are no formal attire guidelines developed by Memorial's teacher education office, prior to internship students are advised that appropriate dress may garner respect from others. Further, university supervisors reinforce this recommendation in later discussions (Mr. H. Blake, Coordinator (Field Services), personal communication, November 13, 2009). Anecdotal reports from interns note that senior teachers and cooperating teachers set the tone for dress and in some cases speak with interns about their choices (Dr. G. Galway, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs, personal communication, March 22, 2012). How do pre-service teachers respond to such advice? Do they find that they gain more respect from students when they adhere to certain clothing standards? Have they tried a variety of dress options and noticed differences? What kinds of messages are conveyed through dress, both to colleagues and to students? Personal presentation of those in transition from university student to an intern teacher is not well documented. Therefore we chose to explore this topic.

Memorial University offers a primary/elementary program that prepares students for teaching positions from kindergarten to grade six. It is offered as both a first and a second degree, which includes field experiences in schools as well as an internship. An intermediate secondary program prepares students for teaching positions from grades 7 to 12. It is open to graduates with first degrees that include two teaching subjects. The program is undertaken over three semesters, the middle of which is spent as a full-time intern in schools.

### **Dress Amongst Pre-service Teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador**

This study queried whether a student's presentation of dress evolved over the course of the internship. Are some experiences common to pre-service teachers based on gender, age, school culture or other variables? These questions were considered in the context of the professional socialization of selected Memorial University of Newfoundland pre-service teachers during the fall and winter of 2010. At that time the group was transitioning from university students to teachers during the internship.

We tailored our methodology to best describe and understand the visual aspects of experience. In this way quality and depth were added to the findings as compared to those of earlier investigations (Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

### **Literature Review**

Employing an interdisciplinary approach, which implied the notion of teacher as a cumulative cultural text Weber and Mitchell (1995) found that pre-service teachers' dress is important to their sense of identity. If clothing is a language, it is, similar to verbal communication, a socially determined activity. When asked to draw an ideal teacher, the pre-service teachers that Weber and Mitchell interviewed depicted uniformity with the attire being plain and conservative. Male teachers were portrayed as somewhat unkempt. These images reflected the prevailing norm of middle-class respectability. Expressing sexuality was understood as problematic. However, the authors note that teachers and pre-service teachers are aware of social expectations and may, in fact, by 'disguising' themselves according to socially sanctioned images.

There is no doubt that clothing demarcates gender (Atkinson, 2008; McCarthy, 2003; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Clothing in the drawings studied by Weber and Mitchell was also employed by the pre-service teachers to examine stereotypes; they associated dressing in a certain manner with teaching a certain way. The depictions by some changed over the course of an internship in response to particular school situations. Additionally, as well as helping identify the teacher, dress was understood by the pre-service teachers as a pedagogical strategy to establish respect, order and a serious working atmosphere and to exert control.

Blaikie (2007, 2009) adopted arts-informed methods to explore how female academics used dress as a strategy to negotiate scholarly identity and authority. Gathering data through interviews and photographs, she employed poetry and paintings as well as analytical prose to report her findings.

Using the same methods Blakie's (2011) investigation of the male professoriate found that dress is a self-reflexive social, personal and political statement, which challenges or confirms gender and social roles. Social acceptance judged by gender and sexual orientation was central. The latter were revealed in a policed socio-cultural, personal and visual aesthetic of the body and clothing that was understood to be scholarly.

Barney (2009) utilized a/r/tography as the methodology in his study in which he invited a public secondary school art teacher and her students to explore concepts of dress while inquiring through artistic processes. Barney asked what understandings are provoked by concepts of dress investigated in relation to artist, researcher, and teacher identities? Dress was found to be both oppressive and potentially liberating. New understandings and "redescriptions" of artist, researcher, and teacher identities developed. For example, a teacher is not one who transmits fixed bodies of knowledge to generate new understandings, but rather one who occasions learning. Teaching and learning co-existed and were not separate within the identities of teacher and student. Nor were they balanced and equal. Instead they were relational, shared and shifting processes.

The research of Weber and Mitchell (1995, 2004, 2006), Mitchell and Weber (1999), Blaikie (2007, 2009, 2011) and Barney (2009) all describe research with Canadian populations. However, we pondered what a study of dress and teacher interns in Newfoundland would reveal. The culture of Newfoundland is considered to be unique within Canada. It is possible therefore, that this aspect of school culture in the province may be distinctive.

Recently studies regarding social acceptance of gay, lesbian and/or transgender identity have become more common in North America. Might this be an aspect of identity that some student interns struggle to communicate or conceal in the classroom (Atkinson, 2008)? As well, body modification in the form of tattooing (Blair, 2009) and plastic surgery has gained popularity amongst young people. Do such changes form a part of some pre-service teachers' self-presentation through dress (Colbert, 2008)?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two concepts frame this research; Goffman's ideas about performance linked to impression management (1959) and Butler's notion of performativity (1993). Goffman discusses "impression management" as a means by which a person adjusts their posture, facial expressions or clothing to match any given situation. The impetus is to

give the right 'impression' to those we meet. Additionally, he suggests that people attempt to present an idealized version of the character they are performing. In our study, this character is the teacher, who reflects the values of society. Thus, wearing an appropriate costume enables the teacher to be recognized more readily which, in turn, contributes to the social inscription of the teacher.

Goffman's Shakespearean metaphor (1959) for everyday life – "all the world's a stage" – suggests that people perform their identities to an audience in a conscious, bodily way (on the surface). This notion seems straightforward and obvious -- however, what might lie beneath or behind such displays of self? In this common sense view we are thoughtful actors with agency, making choices, and are equipped with some kind of coherent inner self. But what is the relationship between our outer performance and our inner consciousness? Judith Butler's notion of performativity is helpful here (1993).

In introducing performativity, Butler suggests that there is no natural body that exists before the body is culturally inscribed. *We do gender* through repeated "acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 25). In other words, gender is a performance; it is what you *do* at particular times, rather than a universal *who you are*. Configurations of gender have come to seem natural in our culture, but it does not have to be this way. Rather than being a fixed characteristic in a person, Butler promotes the mobilization of a proliferation of genders -- and therefore identities.

We argue that Butler's concept of performativity (1993) can be helpfully read as extending into other realms of life. We are not born to teach, but rather, through a set of repeated acts, laboring within the tight parameters of a regulatory framework, we *do* teaching. We perform the teacher, framed by the regulated "script" of teaching. And a part of the teacher's script includes the presentation of oneself through costume.

Thus, while teachers in schools are still expected to conform in various ways, and appropriate dress works to convince other people that one is a teacher (Goffman, 1959), teachers also have to convince themselves through repeated and appropriate acts of 'dressing like a teacher' (Butler, 1993). Further, our awareness that we are performing to a script does not make the script disappear. Nevertheless, such knowledge offers us an opportunity to engage in reflection, and the possibility to choose other options. Therefore we examined the norms that govern pre-service teacher self-presentation.

## **Methodology**

We used interviews and visual methods (Pink, 2001) to take a critical approach. By comprehending the reflexivity and experience through which visual materials such as photographs were produced and interpreted, we met the challenges of understanding local visual cultures as well as the ethical issues raised. Drawing on the insights of photography theorist Victor Burgin (2010), who argues that visual culture involves both self-consciousness and unconscious processes, we focused on the production of meanings through images. Our work draws on interviews with, and photographs of, selected pre-service teachers' self-presentation through dress. We directed particular focus on digital portrait photos, a good source because the material is easily accessible. Portrait photos are an important but, until recently, relatively overlooked source of insight into teacher dress. The photos, taken by individual teachers and their photographers, often include multiple subtle details, thus offering unusual insights not only into teachers'

work and personal histories, but also into the nature of the teaching experience and cultural understandings of teacher self-presentation during an era of transition. Within such an environment, photos take on immense importance. These photos, when read through the lens of teacher interviews, Weber and Mitchell's (1995, 2006) contemporary understandings of teacher dress, and the theoretical lenses of Goffman's concept of impression management (1959) and Butler's notion of performativity (1993), allow for a deep engagement with the articulation of contemporary teacher experience.

### ***(i) Digital Photographs***

The pre-service teachers used their personal digital cameras for the project. A minimum of one photograph a week was desirable with these being collected electronically by the researchers. The photographs were then used to aid analysis. Additionally, they were used, with permission, for publication as illustrations of the narratives that emerged from the interviews.

### ***(ii) Sampling***

Eight pre-service teachers comprised of six females and two male students, beginning their teaching internships, were invited to participate in this study. Researchers were particularly interested in the experiences of males as their views have seldom been explored, however a perfect balance was deemed not necessary. It was noted that few males enroll in the primary-elementary integrated program.

### ***(iii) Data Collection***

At the end of the internship participants were interviewed. Transcripts from the digital recording sessions were supplemented with notations made either during the sessions or shortly thereafter. In addition, photographs submitted were used as visual referents adding further credibility. Stories emanated from these pictures and would be used as illustrations, points of reference and aides to memory.

### ***(iv) Instrumentation***

Our interview questions served as guides to establish a research based relationship with the participants. Students were invited to recall stories of how they developed their professional style of dress. The majority were open questions that took the form of a semi-structured interview. This allowed the interviewer to prompt participants in order to gain further insights. Since the success of the study depended to a large extent on eliciting high quality information, the methodology of asking and listening was important. *The Ethnographic Interview* by Spradley (1979) was used as well as the organizing concepts from art educator Feldman (1987) as guides. All interviews were transcribed.

Narrative analysis and analysis of narrative (Polkinghorn, as cited in Kramp, 2004) were employed. This involved looking at the whole story before addressing excerpts. Rereading helped us discern particular themes for each narrative. These expressed the essence in abstraction. Participants' experiences were embodied and temporal and their language was preserved. Kramp finds that metaphors are often used as organizing images in narratives. Perhaps this is because, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, metaphors structure our conceptual systems, and any abstraction requires layers of metaphor. Indeed, they claim, non-metaphorical language is useful only to describe

physical reality, and because metaphors arise from our experiences they are culturally specific. Thus, since we accepted that language is a source of evidence to aid in the discovery of conceptual systems, it followed that in our research we aimed for a holistic understanding of each story. Polkinghorne's 'narrative analysis' (as cited in Kramp, 2004), based on narrative reasoning produces a story created by the researcher based on those elicited from the participants. Constructed in this manner, our story fits the data while at the same time ordering and bringing a meaning to it that is not apparent in the data themselves. This is a "method that returns a story to the teller that is both hers and not hers; that contains herself in good company" (p. 120). The research product was reviewed with the participants.

Next, we moved inductively to identify themes found in individual narratives that suggested a common theme between a variety of narratives. This is what Polkinghorne (as cited in Kramp, 2004) calls 'analysis of narratives' which draws on paradigmatic reasoning. This approach was useful for understanding abstractions. The data was then organized in an appropriate structure to make it accessible.

## **Preliminary Results**

### ***(i) Bracketing Interviews***

The researchers conducted bracketing interviews to examine our own experiences relating to standards of dress. Through this process we became aware of the presuppositions provided by our experiences, thus as the study continued we interacted with an awareness of these biases.

We found a common abstract theme of 'appropriateness'. While we have taught in a wide-variety of settings, several of which supplied varying interpretations of what constitutes appropriate dress, there were nevertheless, some unifying threads. The teacher, it seems, should wear something that communicates formality, class aspiration and clear gender assignment within a particular local context (McLeod, Bride, & Stevens, 2010). Reflecting on our experiences we argued that strict norms of appropriateness in relation to a teacher's dress standards offer youth role models only within a narrow range and generally work to discourage the acceptance of social and cultural difference. Additionally, prescriptive dress norms are unfair to teachers in that some good teachers may run afoul of these often-unwritten codes and face either formal or informal 'discipline' from their administrators, other teachers, parents or students.

At this stage of the analysis of the intern teacher narratives, three common themes emerged: the existence of teacher dress codes, changes in dress, and dress as communication about self. Below we offer excerpts from the narratives of our participants.

### ***(ii) Dress Codes***

All participants observed various codes in relation to teacher dress. Participants used the terms professional and appropriate to explain what they saw. Some agreed with what they found and argued that it offered potential for student management and enhancement of teaching as a profession. However some were troubled that they needed to conform to the way that others dressed.

Jennifer thought that the parents of her high school students and also the principal would consider an ideal teacher look to be, *“Professional, conservative, clean-cut... Nothing low cut or high cut, not ridiculously high shoes, not a lot of cleavage – very conservative.”* She thought teachers should not wear anything *“...that’s loud and flashy or inappropriate.”* Attire that Jennifer considered to be inappropriate for a teacher included, *“Low cut, tank tops with spaghetti straps...really short skirts, platform heels.”*

Reflecting on the internship Jennifer could see that her mode of dress functioned to demarcate her as an adult who deserved respect:

*I think it has a lot to do with...my classroom management, in how the students interact with me as well. I know I have far fewer issues in my classroom because they had already perceived me as an adult.*

Lindsay used the terms professional and appropriate to describe her approach to dressing for the internship:

*I guess, most importantly it was about...being professional...I was there to do a job. I always made sure that...my clothes were respectable for students, and not...inappropriate clothing, and just looked professional.*

When queried further about what inappropriate dressing entailed she explained that it might include, *“revealing, low-cut shirts. I don’t know. Short skirts, stuff like that is not really appropriate for school.”*

Jody, another participant, recalled being told by the staff in the Memorial University teacher education program that professional dress was expected: *“It was kind of like be as professional as you can. You know, you should wear this shirt and tie and da, da, da, da, da...”* The students were guided that: *“it doesn’t really matter where you go; you should...dress the part and play the role.”*

Nevertheless, Jody referred to on-going discussion amongst interns about dress standards. As educators interact with the public, his view was that they should dress in a professional manner. He argued that this standard would assist in improving their image:

*From my perspective...what society sees...the teaching profession...is that it’s not really a profession...so I think it’s important to at least dress the part and act the part and... build that kind of authority.*

Jody had a strong interest in fashion and received compliments from university staff, and his co-operating teacher and principal about the way he dressed during his internship. He stated that the dress code for teachers can be described as, *“Conservative...professional...stylin’.”* This comment reflects what Jody perceives around him, what he is told by authorities (and has come to believe), and what he desires in teacher dress. Jody exerted his agency in relation to dress; he has strong notions of what constitutes professional dressing and understands how it can work to his advantage and to the advantage of the profession.

On the other hand some participants troubled the notion of “professional” dress. They argued that they could be good teachers regardless of whether they conformed to the

way that others dressed, and looked forward to a future where when they had gained job security they would feel freer to dress as they wished.

In regards to her internship experiences Kayla described her dress in the following way, “*dress pants, maybe a buttoned-down shirt, or...a nice sweater.*” She observed that standards of dress for a teacher seemed to be mostly influenced by her colleagues’ opinions, “*I feel like the way you dress is more for your colleagues and the people you are working with so they perceive you as a professional.*”

She was conscious of her junior status during her internship:

*I needed to wear dress pants. I needed to look nice...I did feel that pressure to dress that way because I felt like I had a reputation to build...and if I dressed more laid back,...I might not be taken as seriously...I did feel that I had to do that even though I would rather...you feel like you had to build that reputation with the other teachers, and you don't want to be viewed as slack because you dress a certain way...I feel that just starting out, it is a lot of pressure to conform...in the way I dress...you have to conform to what is expected. Like if not, you're going to get the shaft type thing, right? ...I don't think it's intentional. I think it's...what's been put on us through society....I feel like if I were to go into a classroom...dressed like this (on the day of her interview Kayla was casually dressed in denim jeans and a hooded sweatshirt) they probably wouldn't think I was a teacher....It's like a lack of...respect. They won't see you as...someone in a professional position.*

She recounted a story to support her conclusion:

*One day...I wasn't feeling sick enough to stay home, but I wasn't feeling the best, and I was like - you know what, I want to be comfortable today....Friday is Jeans Day...So this Thursday I wore my jeans...on a Thursday, yes - lord forbid....I came in and I went to my cooperating teacher. I was like, “I'm wearing my jeans today. I just wanted to be comfortable...She said...“Yes, go on, I don't care”...but...I noticed when I walked into the staff room you kind of got the second look right to – “She's wearing jeans.” They never said anything to me. The principal and the vice-principal were there, and they never said a word, but you could tell that they took the second look.*

Kayla hoped that in the future her choice of comfortable dress for teaching would not be significant to others. From this she generalized that teachers should be allowed to establish their individual choices:

*I feel like once you develop the relationship that maybe isn't as important ...For my internship, I was being graded the entire time, whereas if I had my own teaching position and I established rapport with my colleagues, I think I would tend to dress less and less dressy...once you get more comfortable in your role...it's how you feel. If this makes me feel more comfortable – like wearing what I'm wearing today, a hoodie...I feel I will be more comfortable teaching...If dressing up in dress pants and a button-down shirt is what makes someone more comfortable in their role*

*... then that is what they should do...not necessarily one or the other. It's what you want and what makes you comfortable. I'm me. Does that shock you?*

Another participant, Jodi, had a strong sense of style. She saw dress as art and had made and altered clothing. She described her sense of style and dress as follows: *"My style is very funky. Normally, like outside of school, I know it's very original. A lot of people make fun of it but love it at the same time. It's weird. I shop at thrift shops."*

In speaking about the transition from being a student to teaching, Jodi reflected on the process:

*I'm trying to learn right now, and I don't think it would be the same when I am actually teaching, but at this point...I know I'm not normal. I'm trying to do everything as normal as I should to get as much as I can and get as much positive...acceptance because I know some people can be thrown off from piercings and things like that...and I don't know what normal is...I have some sort of wrong thing in my brain about how to be socially normal.*

Jodi started an internship in Ontario. Half way through that internship she had an accident and injured her ankle quite badly. As a result of this, she moved back to St. John's and began a new internship the following semester. Jodi's experiences in her first internship seem to have greatly impacted how she dressed when she began her second internship in Newfoundland. When asked directly about her self-presentation and the way that her first supervising teacher treated her, Jodi said, *"It could have made a difference. Well, you can't know for sure; but if your look is something that he was not...if you didn't fit the proper gym teacher look...."*

About her second internship Jodi recalled needing to fit in to be accepted and liked by colleagues. She said:

*For me it is absolutely about fitting in, so I try to mirror my cooperating teacher. Absolutely, but it's also because I'm in gym, right? Sweats and comfies, but...I wouldn't normally wear joggers. I had to go buy brand-name clothes, and I know I shouldn't have. I didn't have to, but I did...because I wanted everybody to like me. That's what my teacher wears, and that's what all the kids wear.*

However, Jodi felt that once she was safe in a teacher position, she could let her own style and self shine through:

*Once I'm gainfully employed in the system and in the union...then I will wear whatever I want to wear, and...I'm sure mostly it's in my own head, but that's how I feel more comfortable. You know, I feel comfortable doing the best possible thing to get the job, and then the most socially accepted...and then once I'm there, then I think that people would know me anyway, and I don't think it's really that big of a deal how you dress...I think it would maybe spark...something in some other people. Like, "Hey, look at Miss, she's weird." "That's cool." You know...I can be different too if I want to be want to be different.*

### **(iii) Changes in Dress**

While several participants spoke of knowing in advance how they ‘should’ dress as a teacher and therefore conformed, others recalled that they ran into surprises, which influenced them to change their way of dressing during their internships. The advantages of conforming included blanketing differences or blending in; not getting in trouble; communicating with others; and changing one’s mindset towards becoming a teacher.

Natalie, was surprised how her dress changed over the course of her internship:

*I’m a jeans person and...you can only wear jeans on Friday, so...that’s definitely different, but I’m really surprised now. I had two internships, so there was...four or five months...and now...this shirt – I wouldn’t have worn that before.*

When describing some of her changes in style, Natalie commented that it was as simple as seeing a teacher wear a style of clothing, liking it, and adopting it. Referring to the shirt she wore for the interview she said, “*This was a type of style that I saw other teachers wearing, and I liked it...and it’s comfortable too.*”

Alluding to a teacher dress code, she reflected on her new sense of style and wanting to fit in:

*I definitely wear different clothes now than I did even at the beginning of the semester...Blending in with the group and not standing out too much and not getting in trouble. And it makes it easier to...maybe communicate with the other people...I found beforehand when you’re studying the teaching, you were always a student, always a student, so learning to be a teacher, dressing like one, it definitely helps your mindset change in order to become a teacher.*

### **(iv) Dress as Communication About Self**

Despite acknowledging the dress codes they perceived during their internships, all of the participants spoke of wanting to express themselves even if it was only in a minor way such as an individual colour preference for a shirt. Whitney concluded:

*I want to look nice, professional, but I want to still have my own style involved. I don’t want to look like everybody else. I want my personality to show through; and especially now I am working with young children, I want to look...just kind of fun, professional...comfortable, but it’s still me.*

## **Discussion**

Participants in our study reported feeling very aware during their teaching internships of negotiating a balance between dressing for others or fitting in and dress as a means to communicate about self. They acknowledged and observed implicit dress codes related to the culture of various schools. This is set against a background where not long ago in Newfoundland schools and school boards would have been quite prescriptive over dress.

No doubt as a result of their cumulative school related experiences, pre-service teachers had strongly held and frequently unexamined assumptions about what constitutes 'appropriate' or 'professional' dress. Some of their personal beliefs and attitudes around professionalism and related boundaries were defined by dress. However despite having just completed intensive studies with the aim of qualifying as a teaching professional, while several acknowledged this aspect of their future work, few explicitly critiqued it.

Several participants expressed that they felt the need to fit in during their internships, while some participants discussed how their dress changed over the course of their internships. This relates to our argument that dressing like a teacher may be key to becoming one. We speculated that teachers are expected to conform, and through a process of impression management (Goffman, 1959), 'appropriate' dress works to convince others that one is a teacher. Additionally, it may be the case that in extending Butler's (1993) theorizing about performing gender to 'doing' teaching, individuals also have to convince themselves that they are teachers, which they achieve through repeated acts of 'dressing like a teacher'. The awareness that teachers are performing to a script presents the opportunity to reflect and perhaps choose other options. If pre-service teachers become aware that they are unconsciously following a 'script' they may think of the many other valid ways of becoming a teacher. This larger concept has significance as part of a democratic education, which can better prepare children and youth to contribute to a complex and constantly changing world. There are many 'right answers' and ways of being.

For all of the participants one function of dress was to communicate about self, and Jodi's observation that she tended to resist the notion of what is 'normal' and her assertion of her belief that she should be allowed to be different if she wants to, speaks to an emerging sense that good teaching can be associated with the acceptance and exploration of the concept of social and cultural difference for both educators and students. For example, Kayla's views on dress were also reflected in how she supported children in their exploration of gendered dress:

*There was this little boy in my class...he loved to wear the aprons and have bandanas on his head and go around and clean everything...In playtime he would go straight for that. Has a purse over his arm and we're like, "Sure, go ahead!" ... in the class we would support...whatever you want....If he wanted to go and dress out and be a little maid, which is a stereotypical girl role, he could do it. All of it was encouraged.*

### **Significance of the Research**

Students need role models that represent a more diverse cross section of our society. We know that dress can function to relay important messages about social difference related to gender, class, race, ethnicity, religious orientation and sexuality, particularly for non-conforming teenagers eager to announce evolving identities (Pascoe, 2007). Our emphasis on visual subjectivity adds new insights to scholarship on the contemporary visual culture of education. Our balance between the published research literature and portrait photos paired with narratives, is a new methodology that offers new ways of assessing the relationship between the scientific understanding of pre-service teacher self-presentation, on the one hand, and subjective experiences and understanding, on the other.

This research is also significant because we know that role models are important to children and youth. Additionally, teachers perceive strong messages from their administrators, school boards, the community and parents as to 'appropriate' ways to dress. We believe that students need a broader range of models about what is appropriate. Also, since many teachers leave the profession in the first five years, we wonder if the imposition of narrow standards of dress might be one of the reasons that they do so. The results from our research make a contribution to knowledge about pre-service teacher dress, sketch a bigger picture about the operations of power in schools and classrooms, and help to show how images form an important part of our knowledge base. Additionally, our results are relevant for the broader education community such as school boards and teacher organizations, where they may contribute to the revision of existing policies, as well as to the development of new ones.

### **New Research**

This research led to Dr. McLeod's current project *Teacher Dress in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Funded by a SSHRC/VP grant, she is applying the same methods but with the added benefit of video interviews. Dr. McLeod questions what social, cultural and personal factors shape how teachers present themselves. What do teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador understand as normative 'appropriate/professional' dress? How much beyond normal is not 'normal'?

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