Assignment #1 Essay: Teacher Identity

As professionals, teachers have the responsibility to dress and act in an appropriate way. Teachers are a major influence in the development of many young children, so to gain the respect of students, their families and the communities we live in we must act and be dressed in a respectful way. “…the teacher is an autonomous individual, constantly moving between the need to connect with other colleagues and the need to maintain a sense of individuality” (Smith, 1996, p. 6, as cited by Zembylas, 2005, p. 107). As a preservice teacher, I am aware of possible sacrifices that need to be made in the way of clothes, hair, make-up, and the way I act and am perceived in public, but this is necessary and incredibly worth it so as to make myself a trustworthy and reputable teacher.

Unfortunately in today’s society people tend to be judged largely on their appearance rather than their personality, abilities, morals, and other virtues of a person that really count towards who they are. I do think that people should be judged on the latter aspects, but because of the fact that we cannot simply sit down and have a conversation with everybody we meet before we judge them, we are forced to automatically critic them on the first things we see. I am admittedly guilty of this like I’m sure many of us are – I believe it is somewhat human nature to automatically judge people on what we see. This is why we cannot expect others to not judge us on appearance and, therefore why teachers must dress appropriately if they want to be respected by their students, the student’s families, the school community, and even the wider community.

Teachers have “…ethical, moral, and professional obligations to students that go beyond just the delivery of the curriculum” (Lasky, 2005, p. 906). A teacher must be a role model, and this includes with work ethic, basic morals, being a good listener, leader, and appropriate dress. “Children to look up to their teachers and tend to take them very seriously” (Mayesky, 2012, p.17.). Therefore, if you are not dressed suitably in class and out in public, you really should not expect your students to dress suitably either.

In an investigation discussed in Weber & Mitchell (1996), children “were asked to ‘please draw a teacher (any teacher)”’ (p. 111). Many of the pictures drawn were
white females standing in front of a classroom writing on a black board (Weber & Mitchell, 1996). I undeniably would have done the same thing, as I have had white female teachers through most of my schooling, and I think because of that, a white female is the image I get in my head when asked to picture a teacher. “Stereotypes that are prevalent in the culture and experience of childhood play a prevalent role in the evolution of a teacher’s identity” (Weber & Mitchell, 1996, p. 115). This is applicable with me, as the stereotype of teachers I have is because of the fact that I had primarily white, female teachers throughout schooling.

I hope that if I asked my students in the future to draw me, they would draw me sitting down on the mat at the same level at them using new and exciting methods of teaching, such as all learning and playing the ukulele together and performing it to the school. I would love to incorporate creativity into as many lessons as I can when I am a teacher. This would be a way to help the children bond with each other and with me in different ways, to get away from them always sitting at a desk, and to make learning fun! This is a major factor in constructing my teacher identity. I think I got the inspiration from my mother who is a music teacher, and I loved watching her teach children music, and watching their faces light up when they could play a simple tune, or were allowed to listen to their favourite songs and analyse them. Although it is difficult to create a unique teacher identity these days with how many prevailing ideas there are on how a teacher should act and look like, this is the sort of teacher I would like to be.

I think that with so many of my own preconceived ideas of what a teacher should act and dress like, it will be hard to form my own teacher identity without basing it heavily on one of my previous teachers. But is this really a bad thing? If I can think of a teacher that really influenced me, and I think that I would like to be a teacher with a similar identity to theirs (for example, my mother as mentioned before), then I think it would be a positive move for me to form my teacher identity with that person in mind.

In retrospect, I want to be a fun, approachable and unique teacher, but in an appropriate way. It is important to dress and act appropriately when you are the role model of young children who are so easily influenced by others, especially ones they
look up to. There are so many preconceived ideas about what a teacher should look like and how they should teach their class, so teachers have to work harder to create a learning environment which is fun and comfortable to be in for children. This is the classroom I set out to be a part of when I become a qualified teacher.

References


