

#teacherlife – construction of identity in social media

Identity can be defined as a number of inherent qualities of an individual or a group that distinguish them from other individuals or groups. It has a personal, an interactive and a social dimension. It is who we are or more accurately who we want to be seen as. It is constructed and context-dependent, it can be shifted between various social or cultural situations. It can be managed. Taking into account the digital turn in communication an important part of one's identity is its online rendition – even though limited by a number of factors, still exerting a powerful effect on other users.

Since the Internet has become the ultimate arena for the display of oneself we decided to follow other scholars and examine what the social media reveal about the identity of a selected professional group, namely teachers. It was our objective to find out if the images and comments posted on Instagram, a popular online photo-sharing application and social network platform, comply with the notion of a teacher emerging from research in educational studies (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Søreide, 2006; Walkington, 2005; Beijaard et al., 2000).

In order to achieve this goal we applied a quantitative and then a qualitative analysis of the bimodal texts relevant to the subject matter. A social semiotic approach was employed with particular focus on the textual and interpersonal metafunctions of the of images and verbal messages: especially modality and composition (including information value, salience and framing) as we agree with Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) that each choice an author makes, either verbal or visual, is charged with meaning.

Hopefully, the results of the study will provoke a discussion about the teachers' image and the changes it has undergone since the development of the social media: a shift in the private/public domain and a remodelling of the master/student relationship in which the teacher seems no longer an absolute or statutory authority but a facilitator, a free spirit, a passionate professional or a person a student can or even should like.

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