



## Teacher's Dressing Code in Educational Institutions

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Importance of the Dressing Code in Educational Institutions.....	4
Teacher as Exemplar or Role Model.....	4
Teachers' Rights and Responsibilities Regarding the Dressing Code .....	5
CONTEXT .....	6
Uruguay Educational System .....	6
Non-formal education.....	7
ANALYSIS.....	7
Uruguay Laws about teachers dressing code.....	7
Uruguay Legislation.....	8
Dress Code Around the World .....	9
Attire for academics .....	10
The uniform inspires authority.....	11
Teacher dress codes on pandemic era .....	11
Bibliography .....	14

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a research framed within the Final Work of 4<sup>th</sup> grade English Teaching Training Course. Education is a subject that calls for the interest of different social actors thus generating the need for discussion and research. This work is set to make teachers aware of the importance of dress as well as guide them to choose the best attire for working.

Last year, I had to live a special situation in one of the high-schools I work in which motivated me to inquire in the legal and social aspects of the way teachers should dress. An important teacher and close friend intercepted me when I was leaving and started telling me things about my “modern jeans”, which were a pair of ripped ones. She ironically flattered my jeans and my fashion style but finally ended up saying that “adscriptas” (the non-teaching staff at high-schools, links among students, teachers and families) were also talking about me and my jeans and in order to avoid a bigger problem, she had decided to intercede due to we are close friends.

At the beginning of the situation, I felt surprised but immediately the feeling changed and I got disgusted and irritated although some minutes later I reflected about the topic and I realized they were right. This was something that intrigued me a lot and I started wondering if there were regulations related to teacher’s attire, but to my surprise, I found out that there is just a little regulation on the topic.

In most of the work places these days, dress code has become more casual. Teachers in some of the high schools can dress in a way that does not even make them different from their learners. You cannot see who is a teacher and who is a learner especially if learners are not in school uniform and the teacher is too young.

In general, school principals and school districts have null or a much looser policy when it comes to dress code and teachers are left to decide what is appropriate, so that, the intention of this investigation work is to help teachers learn about the legislation related to teacher’s attire, clarify concepts and help them choose the best garments according to the situation they have to face. The clothes that are worn by teachers may not determine what or how the learners learn, but they can simply affect the level of respect that learners develop for that particular teacher.

If teachers can learn to understand and practice proper dressing attire for the classroom, they can expect to have a proper relationship with the learners. The ability to serve as a role model and an authoritative figure is largely determined by the outlook.

## Theoretical Framework

### Importance of the Dressing Code in Educational Institutions

Unlike other work collectives in which the image is irrelevant, the image of the teacher not only in the classroom but also outside can be an instrument of support for his teaching activity. Experts say that the first impression of a person comes to us by the view. Moreover, they also state that a person's impact is 80% determined by their image and 20% by what they say. The professionalism of a teacher is expressed in multiple languages, including one as simple as the clothes he wears in class

*"It is not enough to have a doctorate level of education with different specialties, to be up-dated with technological advances and persistent commitment to facilitate the learning process and develop an outstanding teaching work, but also it is crucial, the care of the teacher's image, which may lead to a good management of his relations with other people as they are judged by students, parents and school managers, colleagues as well as the whole community based on how they dress. (Viteri, 2017)*

Dressing appropriately seems to be a phrase with universal meaning, but in an age where ripped jeans as well as flip flops have invaded the world, every teacher should refresh that concept as far as personal grooming does not go unnoticed by students, as it gives indications of our character, state of mind, the education we have received, our customs, tastes and also the principles and values that govern our lives. Personal grooming is a non-verbal language, since it expresses a lot without saying a single word. (Education World®, 2020)

### Teacher as Exemplar or Role Model

Decades ago, teachers' behaviors were strictly scanned because the role of the teacher was seen as they should be exemplars by the communities, that is, examples to their students of high moral standards and impeccable character, as well as conservative dress and grooming, and polish manners. Although these standards have relaxed, in some places, teachers may still be dismissed due to these issues. (Orstein, Levine, Gutek, Vocke, 2013, p.272)

In the book Foundations of Education, the authors state that teachers must follow the policies set by the board of education in their school district and outlined in their contract. This includes following the curriculum guidelines as well as other codes of behavior. Moreover, a school district may require teachers to dress and groom themselves in a manner deemed appropriate for teachers in that community.

In the society, the role of the teacher is considered not only to impart knowledge, in fact, teachers are not only contemplated as educators but also value transmitters of the generation of adults of tomorrow. In fact, teachers are a reference for their students and their actions shape certain behaviors among students.

Dictionary.com defines "Dress Code" a set of rules specifying the garb or type of clothing to be worn by a group or by people under specific circumstances. In spite of that, there are some teachers who choose to dress professionally for themselves, but others have to be forced by schools to wear certain clothes. These dress codes are mandatory both to improve the opinion of students and parents about teachers, and to shape certain behaviors among students. (Pearson, 2018)

It is true that teachers as well as student dress has become more and more casual along the years and tasted boundaries of good taste and this is a matter that many schools have to face daily.

Bruce Hunter, interim spokesman for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) said that for them, it was a local issue, because some people felt more comfortable with certain styles, and you have to see what dress does to the learning environment. (Education World)

It is said that "Appropriate dress" always has had different meanings among generations, but lately the definition seems to be more fluid than ever. Perception is in the eye of the beholder, and how teachers choose to dress can make individuals of either gender uncomfortable.

In short words, a teacher could be compared to a book and more particularly to its cover. The cover of the book is decisive for its attractiveness; the visual presence of the teacher is its own cover. The students are extremely watchful and perceptive towards us: we must take care of all the details of our clothing; in the case of the teachers, do not fall into exaggerations and ridiculousness; dress with discretion, without ostentation. In the case of teachers, be very careful in all the details of our presentation: starting and ending with our well-cleaned shoes. (González, 2001)

## Teachers' Rights and Responsibilities Regarding the Dressing Code

On the other hand, teachers dress code is not set on stone. There are some professionals who state that the most important of the teaching career are other things rather than the way of dressing and the external image. They consider that everything related to the curriculum and how he delivers his classes are what really matters.

A teacher's freedom over dress may vary depending on the unions and attitudes of the school. Some school districts may fire teachers for wearing certain outfit such as blue jeans, while other districts have unions so tight that schools cannot fire teachers for wearing those kind of clothes. (Pearson, 2018)

Years ago, there was an important case in which a teacher called Max Miller, a teacher from Illinois, who used to grow a beard and sideburns. When he refused to shave the extra facial hair, his contract was not renewed. In addition, the judges ruled in favor of the school district in stating that the teacher's dress should not unduly affect students and that choice of dress or grooming is "subordinate to the public interest". (Ornstein A, Levine D, Gutek G, Vocke D, 2013, p. 273)

Moreover, there are other cases in which female teachers have been dismissed for wearing miniskirts, while male teachers have lost their teaching positions for wearing earrings or growing ponytails. Moreover, there are other things that can also be forbidden by school districts such as religious accessories or apparel like a Christian cross on a lapel pin or necklace. The courts have played a fundamental role in these decisions as they have endorsed schools with such judicial decisions. (Ornstein A, Levine D, Gutek G, Vocke D, 2013)

Experts consider that proper attire and grooming are important considerations in the profession of teaching whether or not they are legally required. Furthermore, another author stated that any behavior that negatively influences student learning or teacher effectiveness could be reason for employment termination.

On the other hand, Carla Sutherland, assistant superintendent of Sayreville, New Jersey, public schools said "I think the ideas of what is professional or appropriate have changed, fueled by the term 'business casual'. I think that is confusing to people. It can mean different things to different people."(Education World)

## CONTEXT

### Uruguay Educational System

Public education in Uruguay is free and compulsory for children aged 6 to 14. The country has traditionally boasted high levels of compliance with required education, as well as a large number of students who enroll in secondary school. All Uruguayan children are required by law to enter school at age six.

Initial education is intended for children between the ages of 3 and 5. This education is compulsory from 4 years of age.

From ages 6 to 12, children attend primary school. At age 12, they enter the first stage of secondary school, also called basic secondary education or Basic Cycle, which lasts for 2 years. At age 15, students may opt for several advanced tracks, depending on their choice of vocation. For the next three to four years, students complete the upper secondary education also called bachillerato, which is similar to a high school diploma in other countries like the United States. Following completion of bachillerato, graduates may proceed either to one of the country's three universities or attend special institutes related to their specific interests.

## Non-formal education

Pre-primary education, or early childhood, includes children between 0 and 3 years old. It is generally provided through private centers. The governing bodies are the Uruguayan Child and Adolescent Institute (INAU), ANEP and the MEC. In this area, the CAIF Plan provides pre-primary education in centers for families with economic deprivation, privately managed and supervised by public financing. Non-formal education is also aimed at youth and adults. In the formal sphere, education is also provided for this age group, with specific programs for students to complete primary and secondary cycles.

# ANALYSIS

## Uruguay Laws about teachers dressing code

In circular No. 1302/974 / JCF of February 21, 1974, the Council of Basic and Higher Secondary Education considers that it is an indispensable condition that every civil servant of the Public Administration and especially one who fulfills his functions within an educational body, must be presented in a neat, correct and dignified way, according to the importance of their work, which includes the physical aspect and clothing.

The teaching officials in the exercise of their functions, must wear normal clothing, which, in the case of the professors, will be a street suit with their respective shirt and tie.

On the other hand, the teacher may choose to wear a tunic or overalls of a single color, which must also be accompanied, in the case of men with shirts and ties.

The administrative and service officials who carry out their positions in Central Offices, Institutes and high-schools, and other dependencies of the Council of Basic and Higher Secondary Education, must wear a special attire during the usual hours that correspond to their tasks.

This circular specifically states that Administrative women, must wear tunic or light blue smock while Administrative men, black satchel, in acrocel, (a very thin synthetic fabric used in the manufacture of clothing) or similar. Service officers, men and women, must wear blue tunic or smock. The officials involved in the cleaning service are exempt from this rule. (Consejo de Educación Secundaria, 2020)

Jacqueline Viteri, expert in Corporate Etiquette considers that a teacher must be distinguished by an elegant, modern and sober wardrobe, so teachers must wear clothing with neutral colors in order that do not distract the attention of the student body, as well as they must never be tight, transparent or provocative. It must also be in good condition and properly washed and ironed.

At the initial, primary and secondary levels the dress code is casual and academic institutions usually have their dress codes. On the other hand, at the university level the dress is more formal. For men, the use of a jacket is essential. Dark colors such as black, blue or gray, complemented by light colored shirts. For special occasions you should wear a tie. For ladies, we recommend a classic tailored set in black, blue, gray or red wine. It can be pants or skirt, whose length must be mid-knee or below it. The shoe preferably with a thin heel, in basic colors such as black or brown.

It is recommended that accessories be discreet. In the case of ladies, avoid excess bracelets and shiny garments or that generate noise or distraction. Regarding fragrances like perfumes, colognes, creams and others, it is suggested to be equally discreet.

To look good, grooming and personal hygiene are also essential in addition to clothing: shaving, grooming nails and keeping hair clean, well cut, combed and away from the face. The neglect of these details can be classified as a lack of consideration and respect towards the students. (Viteri, 2017)

## Uruguay Legislation

The Law No. 18,437 in Uruguay education law, in article 13, talking about the purposes of education, states that “The national educational policy will take into account the purpose of promoting the search for alternative solutions in conflict resolution and a culture of peace and tolerance, understood as respect for others and nondiscrimination among others.

The exterior image of a person is highly conditioned by his hygiene. It is crucial for the teacher to take great care of his personal hygiene, showing an always pleasant and clean appearance. This might ensure that not only he but also his students feel comfortable in class and do not have to be enduring bad smells said Jaime Nubiola and María Rosa Espot in their article about the teacher’s grooming.

Professional dress as well as a correct hygiene helps the teacher establish himself as an authority for students. By dressing professionally, they show that they take their job seriously.

Presenting yourself in front of a class in one way or another is not a question of money, but rather of respect and commitment. The external forms such as the way of dressing, of speaking, of treating others not only show how the person is but also show the respect and consideration that one has towards others, in short, how important they really are to him. (Pearson, 2018)

Generally, it is said that it may not be fair to judge a book by its cover. In other words, this saying is said to show that you cannot know what something or someone is like by looking only at that person or thing's appearance, but it happens everywhere you go and in all spheres of life and in most professions, especially with teachers.

## Dress Code Around the World

Many UK educational institutions, however, enforce very strict rules on this matter: For example, according to the Daily Telegraph, at Lampton School in Hounslow "extremes of fashion" are not acceptable, including visible hairstyles, makeup and visible perforations on the body, except for the ears and nose. Their criteria also advise against "visible underwear, skirts above mid-thigh and excessive skin exposure" and emphasize that "staff should not chew gum or use their mobile phones when they are in the presence of students". North Leamington School in Warwickshire also disapproves of wearing jeans, shorts or leggings, low-cut tops, short skirts or sheer garments. (Cruz, 2020)

Thus, there have been times when teachers have also been excluded from their schools due to their "inappropriate dress". Steve Smith, a 52-year-old substitute teacher at St Ambrose College in Cheshire, was ordered to wear a tie. The school hierarchy was unhappy that Smith wore an open-necked shirt exposing a furry tanned chest and a thick gold chain. He refused to do so, so he had to leave. Adrian Swain, a math and science teacher at St. Paul's Way Community School in Tower Hamlets, London, was fired because of his partiality for athletic shoes and jogging pants. His reply, quoted in BBC News, was that teachers and students have always been treated differently, otherwise, everybody would all wear a school uniform.

Another case in the one of Charlotte Tumilty who was forced to leave on her first day as an assistant teacher at St. John Vianney Catholic Elementary School in Hartlepool, because Daily Mail reporter Jennifer Newton commented she had tattoos along her arms and legs, drawings smaller on his fingers, hands, back and chest and an eye emblem on his neck. Tumilty stated that she would look ridiculous if she tried to hide everything with casts and bandages, as the school had suggested. Newton emphasized that under current legislation, people with tattoos are not covered by the Equality Act of 2010 and referred her readers to the warning issued by the Tattoo and Piercing Industry Union that members of the public should think carefully about tattoo placement as it can influence their job prospects.

## Attire for academics

“With brains and with style” is an article written by Pilar Richardson, a Bolivian-American blogger, speaker, and trainer with a passion for good manners, etiquette and international protocol that focuses on the issue of how professors or university professors should dress. Although, many of them worry and wear an elegant suit every day, others with a lot of class but very comfortable and some even others with a bow tie.

She wonders about to what extent universities and other study houses have developed dress codes for teachers today and considers there should be few establishments, however, if they think that a teacher should emit respect, it is crucial that they reinforce their visual message and have their own dress code and she gives some tips to get it.

For instance, well-structured clothing, without wrinkles, with well-adjusted buttons, that the suits are not wide or excessive, since they give an appearance of neglect. Women should wear good heels, as it is essential to cover a large visual space in front of the class. It is also important to consider the lengths of skirts, dresses, sleeves and pants, which do not distract or divert attention from the context of your lectures.

Colors is an issue to also take into consideration, so she advises to wear colors in subdued tones with a tendency to dark, as they show authority. Full color looks better than prints and overly patterned suits for women. Each person knows an unflattering color, so try to choose your best color, it will even enliven the skin tone and bring to the fore the joy and enthusiasm that you should bring to the class.

Another important issue is accessories. It is advised not to wear too much jewelry, nothing to dominate teacher’s facial features as earrings that are not long and heavy, just only one necklace; neither long or noisy bracelets. In general, try to use jewelry that is not flashy or that reflects with light. Many studies have confirmed that if ladies add glasses to their outfit, they will make them look smarter.

So far no research has credited makeup on a woman making her more capable, trustworthy, and lovable. However, if you think that not wearing makeup will decrease your confidence, put on and show it off, it can be very effective stated the author.” I always say that it is the option of every woman, since it can be a strategic and effective tool depending on the agenda. *The only thing I recommend is that it is not very flashy, that it looks balanced*”, said Richardson

Hair is an issue that shouldn’t be left aside. She always has suggested a medium size or hair up that is out of the face; otherwise it will appear that one is hiding behind it. Needless to say, hair should always look neat and well-groomed.

She also advises about some accessories and elements that should be avoided like the use of too short skirts, shorts, bermudas shorts, slippers, flip flops, mules, tight jeans, boots over the knee, among others.

Academics have the need to be respected, and although she always recommends not losing style when dressing, it will always be better to dress better groomed and formal than casual or informal. Dressing well will always be constructive in the message people are going to give. Finally, they are training professionals! (Richardson, 2014)

## The uniform inspires authority

The current concern for the quality of the school climate reveals that the pedagogical relationship between teachers and high school students presents deep tensions.

The sociologist Stanley Milgram demonstrated through a famous experiment to what extent people obey an authority figure when someone orders people to take actions that even go against their values. If that figure is accompanied by a uniform, it acquires even more authority as uniforms are present in peoples' lives more than we think, homogenizing diversity and identifying hierarchies and subgroups within a homogeneous collective.

Besides, Milgram considers that they serve to standardize, unify a group of people, make all appear the same through a common appearance. At the same time, they have the mission of differentiating one group from another.

A uniform can also provide information on the differences that exist within the same group, for example hierarchies. This is the case of the security forces, all kinds of police and hierarchical organizations. This information is very useful both for people outside the body and for the members themselves who can thus always know the category of the person in front of them. In summary, *"defenders of the uniform at work claim that it conveys professionalism"*. (Ágora de ideas, 2014)

## Teacher dress codes on pandemic era

Liam Davis has recently written an article about the dress code on Coronavirus era and says that it has reignited a long-running debate about how strict teachers' dress codes should be.

In the grand scheme of things, it may not seem like a big deal but it's just the latest chapter in an ongoing saga that often causes a great deal of frustration for staff, in more ways than one. Moreover, the approach is largely influenced by the current government advice, which encourages washing of clothes more regularly to reduce the spread of the virus.

Many teachers have expressed concern over the difficulty that comes with having to wash a suit every day, arguing that allowing flexibility for this period is sensible and safe while others have argued that staff should not be wearing casual clothing as it conveys a drop in professional standards when schools need to create regularity for pupils again.

It's not clear if there is a quick and easy answer – *“it will be interesting to see where this discussion will go next and if schools do allow any leeway”*. (Davis, 2020)

## CONCLUSION

This project started as an attempt to shed light on the topic related to teachers' attire.

In general, choosing how to dress for work depends to a great extent on the type of place one is going to work but also on the position that the person is going to have in that place. In other words, in order to choose the correct clothing, it is usually advised, in addition to using common sense, to observe the environment where the person works.

However, when it comes to the teaching profession, when talking about how the clothing of an educational professional should be, there are fundamentally three factors that should not be lacking, such as elegance, fashion or modernity and sobriety.

Elegant dress is pleasing to the eyes of the students while dressing elegantly always involves taking into account the age or stage of life in which people are. Fashion denotes that you live in this world, that you are up to date, and this is very important for students as well as dressing soberly, helps avoid distractions among students.

In conclusion, if it is taken into account that personal appearance always sends a message, consciously or unconsciously, the respectful teachers committed to the educational mission that society has entrusted them and also to the institution that have hired them, have to make sure that the message they send are successful. It is therefore a matter of not sending the wrong messages. In this way, teachers share their professionalism and instills seriousness and credibility also with their dress and personal hygiene.

As Nubiola and Espot said in the article “El arreglo personal del profesor”, the teacher's professionalism is expressed in multiple languages, including one as simple as the clothes they wear in class. Moreover, the way of dressing, as well as personal hygiene, is an instrument that teachers have with which, without saying a word, they can teach numerous values and attitudes.

This investigation really satisfied my curiosity as well as it opened my mind, furthermore, it could serve as a starting point for future possible investigations like the effect produced by teachers' attire on students' attitude and their learning as well as inspire new legislations or regulation about this controversial topic.



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