

## Original Research Reports

# Social Representations of Teachership Based on Cover Images of Finnish Teacher Magazine: A Visual Rhetoric Approach

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## Abstract

Media plays an important role in the formation of social representations. This study examines the cover images of Finnish Teacher Magazine published by the Trade Union of Education as means of communicating social representations of teachership among its readership consisting of teachers and student teachers. In order to critically discuss the structure of the cover images and their implications in terms of teachers' professional identity, the study applies a visual rhetoric approach to the study of visually mediated social representations. The data consist of 138 cover images of Teacher Magazine between the years 2013 and 2017. The analysis of visual rhetoric was conducted using content analysis and semiotic analysis that provided means of examining both the visual form of the cover images and meanings communicated through them. Even though this study detects a variety of social representations of teachership, it also identifies a highly homogeneous type of teacher throughout the imagery, which is understood to present the members of the Trade Union with an ideal type of their profession. Consequently, cover images of Teacher Magazine appear to be vehicles of inclusion and exclusion, strengthening certain social representations of teachership and marginalizing others.

*Keywords:* social representations, teachership, professional identity, trade union, objectification, naturalization, visual rhetoric

Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 2019, Vol. 7(2), 890–912, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v7i2.1045>

Received: 2018-08-21. Accepted: 2019-06-09. Published (VoR): 2019-11-18.

Handling Editor: Giovanna Leone, Sapienza University of Roma, Rome, Italy

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Cover images of magazines are often regarded as display windows to their contents, playing a crucial role not only in attracting readers' attention but also in distributing ideas within a culture (Popp & Mendelson, 2010; Pyka, Fosdick, & Tillinghast, 2011; Xu, 2018). The powerful impact of cover images is often related to their ability to evoke emotional responses, which also makes them more memorable than textual elements (Popp & Mendelson, 2010; Xu, 2018). Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) characterize images as framing devices that organize people's perceptions, experiences, and conceptions (see also Popp & Mendelson, 2010; Xu, 2018). In this sense, cover images can be conceptualized as forms of visual rhetoric, meaning visual arguments or statements, communicating persuasive messages (Xu, 2018). This research examines how the cover images of Finnish Teacher Magazine communicate teachership.

There is an extensive body of international research on media representations of teachers in movies (Ambrosetti, 2016; Beyerbach, 2005; Dalton, 2010), printed media (Cohen, 2010; Goldstein, 2011), and the Internet (Bergman, 2017; Guimarães & Guimarães, 2014), which argue that teacher representations in media are often stereotypical. Similar outcomes can be found in research on teacher representations in popular media, as conducted in Finland. In their studies on teacher representations in Finnish films, Keski­väli (2012) and Nygren (2007), for instance, recognized a traditional gender-based divide between female and male teachers in terms of both teachership characteristics and physical appearance. While female teachers were represented as motherly or strict educators with an extremely tidy appearance, male teachers were represented as rigid or helpful instructors wearing disheveled or formal attire (Nygren, 2007). Kujala's (2008) dissertation on representations of male teachers in Finnish films showed that recent films also portray male teachers as supportive educators. Miettunen and Dervin (2014) also recognized stereotypical and one-dimensional representations of teachers in Finnish TV series. However, they found that, compared to other teachers, art teachers were depicted in more versatile ways, challenging normative expectations (Miettunen & Dervin, 2014). Based on this research, representations of teachers in popular media can be characterized as stereotypical.

Magazine covers tend to follow certain conventions of depiction. Since their purpose is to appeal to readers and promote sales, they generally depict attractive and happy-looking persons, resulting in stereotypical representations (Bazzini, Pepper, Swofford, & Cochra, 2015; Spiker, 2015; Yan & Bissel, 2014). Stereotypical teacher representations in media may also be due to the fact that they are made by media professionals who themselves do not belong to the group of teachers. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) shows that stereotypical thinking is often stronger when members of an ingroup (in this case media professionals) observe and represent members of an outgroup (in this case teachers). In contrast, the observations and representations of ingroup members about themselves tend to be more diverse (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Because Teacher Magazine is published by the Finnish Trade Union of Education, it can be regarded as representing the voice of the ingroup (teachers). Additionally, as Teacher Magazine is not a commercial magazine, the imagery does not have the aim of promoting sales. For these reasons, one could hypothesize that the representations of teachers in its cover images may be less stereotypical.

Differing from prior research on media representations of teachers in Finland, this research approaches the topic from a social representations point of view, which provides means for discussing teachership in relation to the processes and implications of social sense-making. Media imagery and media at large play a significant role in the construction of social representations influencing both self-conception and social identity, as well as social interaction (Moscovici, 2001; Salesses & Romain, 2014). Since media images also influence professional teacher identities (Kirby, 2016), this research regards it as important to discuss critically the impact of media images on the formation of social representations of teachership.

What further differentiates the research at hand from previous research on media representations of teachers in Finland is the fact that Teacher Magazine cannot be characterized as popular media, since it is a magazine published by the Finnish Trade Union of Education. For this reason, the visual representations of teachers on the covers of this magazine can be understood as representing not only the conception of the magazine but also that of the Trade Union itself. The Trade Union of Education in Finland is a labor market organization that promotes the status and interests of education professionals and, in addition, actively influences educational policies, educational legislation and teacher training in Finland. It is an independent trade union and not linked to any political party. Approximately 90% of teachers in Finland are members of the Trade Union, and teachers from preschools

to universities as well as student teachers and retired teachers are eligible for its membership ([Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2018](#), pp. 1-5.) Due to its national, regional and local cooperation networks, the Trade Union of Education plays an influential role among Finnish teachers.

Teacher Magazine is posted to all—more than 120 000—members of the Trade Union, including teachers at all levels of education (<http://www.oaj.fi>, retrieved 23.3.2018), as well as to more than 7 000 members of the Teacher Student Union of Finland (<https://www.sool.fi>, retrieved 23.3.2018). In addition, Teacher Magazine is posted to all Members of Parliament in Finland ([Trade Union of Education in Finland, 2018](#), p. 5). With a circulation of almost 130 000, Teacher Magazine is the “principal Finnish-language magazine for the teaching profession in Finland,” as stated on the homepage of the Finnish Trade Union of Education (<http://www.oaj.fi>, retrieved 23.3.2018). Having this status, it has a hegemonic role in distributing, discussing, and constructing views on teachership among Finnish teachers and student teachers.

## The Present Research

The aim of this research is to find out what kinds of social representations of teachership the Trade Union of Education in Finland communicates through the cover images of Teacher Magazine, and to discuss the findings critically. When examining the cover images, attention is paid not only to types of teachers depicted in them but also to types of teachers not depicted in them. Since absence or nothingness included in images can be understood as a way of silencing or denying certain aspects of social representations (see [Barreiro & Castorina, 2017](#)), it is important to focus on depictions both included in and excluded from the cover images. The cover images of Teacher Magazine may be understood as cultural mirrors of teachership provided by the Trade Union of Education influencing the members’ self-reflection on their own professional identity.

Because of the targeted readership, consisting of teachers and student teachers, this research does not discuss social representations of teachership and their implications in terms of the public at large, but focuses on the teaching professionals’ point of view. To highlight the critical potential inherent in the theory of social representations ([Howarth, 2006](#); [Voelklein & Howarth, 2005](#)), this study integrates the visual rhetoric approach to the study of social representations. In prior research, [Billig \(1988, 1993\)](#), [Byford \(2002\)](#), and [Lyut \(2003\)](#), for instance, have discussed the rhetorical aspect of verbally communicated social representations, relating anchoring and objectification to discursive communication with ideological and social functions. In contrast to a number of studies focusing on verbal communication, there seem to be notably fewer studies using the rhetorical approach to explore visually communicated social representations (e.g., [Finn, 1997](#); [Hakoköngäs, 2017](#)). Thus, the application of the visual rhetoric approach to studying social representations constitutes the theoretical contribution of the research.

## Theoretical Frame

### Theory of Social Representations

The founder of the theory of social representations, Serge Moscovici, defined social representations as common-sense knowledge constructed by members of societies in social interaction ([Moscovici, 2001](#)). Social representations embody knowledge and experience of past and contemporary people, helping members of societies act in a material and social world ([Höijer, 2011](#); [Moscovici, 2001](#)). However, social representations are neither static nor determine people’s thoughts and actions; instead, they are modified, challenged, objectified, and reconstructed in everyday situations, and more specifically in the processes of anchoring and objectification ([Höijer, 2011](#); [Moscovici, 2001](#); [Sakki, 2016](#)). Due to this fluctuation, [Moscovici \(2001\)](#) characterized social representations as polyphasic,

meaning that individual persons, as well as social groups, may have several, even contradictory, social representations of the same phenomenon (see also Jovchelovitch, 2008). However, certain social representations may obtain a hegemonic status within the culture (Höijer, 2011).

Anchoring refers to the act of situational sense-making, in which encounters with the material and social world are interpreted against the culturally and socially shared knowledge that people possess of them (Lahlou, 2015; Moscovici, 2001; Sakki, 2016). Originally, Moscovici (2007) conceptualized anchoring as a process in which new phenomena are made familiar in the frame of existing knowledge and experience, but recently the scope of anchoring has been widened to include familiar and naturalized phenomena as well (Hakoköngäs, 2017; Hakoköngäs & Sakki, 2016). Objectification, for its part, refers to the act of expressing abstract phenomena by using, for instance, verbal and visual means of symbolic communication. Through objectification, social representations receive a tangible, material form, providing means for detecting the core notions or themata around which social representations are formed (Moscovici, 2001; Philogène & Deaux, 2001). Some social representations are integrated into everyday knowledge to the extent that they become naturalized. At this stage, social representations gain a taken-for-granted quality, for instance, through frequent repetition in the media (Höijer, 2011; Moscovici, 2001). When naturalized, the constructed nature of social representations becomes obscured and finally forgotten, making them appear as “the reality” itself (Flick & Foster, 2010; Moscovici, 2001).

The theory of social representations has been criticized for being acritical, discussing the structures and contents of social representations but ignoring their functions, as well as the questions of power related to them (Howarth, 2006; Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). However, a number of scholars have recognized the critical element inherent in theorizing on social representations, and have discussed social representations as vehicles legitimizing and marginalizing social groups, issues, and phenomena (e.g., Howarth, Andreouli, & Kessi, 2014; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Lozada, 2014; Sarrica, Mazzara, & Brondi, 2016). Hence, social representations are not neutral or disinterested, but instead, “different representations compete in their claims to reality, and so defend, limit and exclude other realities” (Howarth, 2006, p. 8). For this reason, Voelklein and Howarth (2005) regard it as important to strengthen the critical stance of the theory of social representations.

### Visual Rhetoric

This research uses visual rhetoric as a critical approach to scrutinize the visual construction of cover photographs of Teacher Magazine, understood as visual objectifications of social representations of teachership. It draws on Michael Billig’s (1988, 1993) rhetorical approach to study social representations. Billig (1993, p. 47) argues that by emphasizing the role of communication, the theory of social representations implicitly recognizes the role of rhetoric, since both communication and rhetoric are characterized by “a dialect between criticism and justification.” Consequently, Billig (1988, 1993) regards anchoring and objectification as processes and mechanisms of selection between opposing views. Moscovici (2001) himself regarded Billig’s rhetorical approach as complementing the theory of social representations.

Rhetoric originated as a branch of knowledge in classical Greece and focused on studying how symbols were used for communicative, mainly persuasive, purposes (Foss, 2004; Sonesson, 2013). Traditionally, its attention focused on verbal texts and speech, but in the 1970s its scope widened to include visual images (Foss, 2004; Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). In contemporary times, visual imagery constitutes a significant part of what Foss (2004, p. 142) calls the “rhetorical environment” and provides an effective means of influencing and persuading people through its emotional appeal (Danesi, 2017; Lefsrud, Graves, & Phillips, 2015; Olson et al., 2008). Conse-

quently, in addition to the visual-communicative quality of the images themselves, the ways in which images are used to create meanings and influence people's thoughts and actions can be identified as within the scope of visual rhetoric research (Olson et al., 2008).

Visual images are not neutral records of reality, but intentional compositions of visual elements aiming to communicate particular meanings (Howarth, 2006; Lefsrud et al., 2015). While a number of scholars (e.g., Foss, 2004; Olson et al., 2008) define visual communication at large as the scope of visual rhetoric, Danesi (2017) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2004), for instance, conceptualize visual rhetoric more specifically as an approach examining visual images as rhetorical structures with specific purposes. They regard the visual qualities of the image as devices framing the subject matter in a particular way, with the aim of influencing the spectators' perception and sense-making (see also Lefsrud et al., 2015; Sonesson, 2015). Focusing on both the structure of images and their functions in terms of influencing and constructing social relations and views (Danesi, 2017; Olson et al., 2008; Sonesson, 2013), visual rhetoric provides a tool for critically discussing the structure and social function of visual images.

This research conceptualizes the cover images of Teacher Magazine as visual objectifications of social representations of teachership. The visual elements of the cover images (both the subject matter and the elements of visual expression, such as composition, color, texture, and viewing angle), in turn, are regarded as the constituents of visual rhetoric, constructing the objectifications visually. When attention is paid to visual elements that are both included in and excluded from the images, the visual rhetoric approach may contribute to a critical understanding of cover images of Teacher Magazine as vehicles strengthening certain social representations of teachership and marginalizing, even silencing, others.

## Method

### Data

The cover images of Finnish Teacher Magazine during the past five years (2013–2017) form the data of this research. The period of the past five years was chosen because this research is interested in the current imagery of teachership. In addition, the layout of the cover page of Teacher Magazine changed during 2012. While the former cover page consisted of a large photograph on versatile subject matter, with a couple of small photographs of teachers (only faces, mostly), the updated cover page features a large photograph depicting a teacher or a group of teachers. In terms of the comparability of teacher images, a similar layout was considered to be important. Of 147 cover images, 138 images were photographs of people and 9 cover images were photographs of objects (2 images), graphs (3 images) or graphic art pieces depicting people metaphorically (4 images). Because of the different subject matter and media of expression, these nine cover images were ruled out of the data. Thus, the data includes 138 photographs depicting either a teacher or a group of teachers in an environment ranging from school to a leisure-time setting.

The cover images included in the data are all photographs. The apparent realism of photographs may conceal their constructed nature (Barthes, 1977; Hook & Glăveanu, 2013). However, regardless of the similarity that photographs appear to have with reality, they are not direct recordings of reality as such, but are constructed through a variety of choices in terms of visual expression (Rose, 2016). While the persons, objects, and environments included in the photograph construct the subject matter (i.e., what is depicted), the means of visual expres-

sion, such as framing, viewing angle, lighting, and color (i.e., how it is depicted), construct the stance to the subject matter (Hook & Glăveanu, 2013). Together, these two levels form the visual rhetoric of the image, communicating certain social representations of teachership. It is important to note that when analyzing the photographs of teachers, this research does not make any claims about the personality or professional characteristics of the teachers depicted in the photos. Instead, photographs are regarded as objectifications of social representations of teachership of the Trade Union of Education in Finland. Similarly, this research does not discuss the relation between the photographers and the publishing board, such as whether or not the assignments include direction in terms of visual expression. The analysis concentrates on what is visually perceivable.

The cover pages of Teacher Magazine include verbal elements, as well. In addition to the name of the magazine at the top of the page, there is a short caption related to the cover image. Since captions direct and influence the perception of images, highlighting certain visual traits and marginalizing other traits (Barthes, 1977), the images were analyzed without reading the captions. This choice was designed to accentuate the role of the visually communicated meanings (see Lefsrud et al., 2015).

## Analysis

This research applies the visual rhetoric approach to study social representations of teachership. In other words, it analyzes the visual rhetoric of the cover images of Teacher Magazine as means of communicating certain social representations of teachership. The analysis of the visual rhetoric presupposes that attention is paid to elements presented in the image and elements suggested by the image (Foss, 2004). While presented elements refer to the persons, objects, and environments depicted in the image, as well as to means of visual expression (composition, shape, color, space, etc.), the suggested elements refer to the meanings constructed based on visually presented elements (Foss, 2004). In this research, the analysis of visual rhetoric is operationalized using content analysis and semiotic analysis. This combination allows the analysis to discuss both the subject matter and the structure of the images, as well as their meanings and functions (see Danesi, 2017).

Danesi (2017) regards visual rhetoric as closely related to visual semiotics, with the aim of exploring the meaning of visual elements in a cultural context (see also Foss, 2004; Lefsrud et al., 2015). The ways in which meanings are produced, conveyed, and interpreted are at the center of semiotics (Sonesson, 2013). Two levels of meaning—the denotative and the connotative—play an important role in both visual rhetoric and visual semiotics, with the denotative level communicating the literal meaning and the connotative level communicating the culturally specific, associative, and affective meanings (Danesi, 2017; Veltri, 2015).

To elucidate and discuss both these levels of meaning in visual images, this research draws on Sonesson's (1989) concepts of "iconic language" and "plastic language" of images. The image contains both languages simultaneously: the iconic language identifies the denotation of the image (what is depicted), whereas the plastic language refers to the way in which the denotation is expressed visually (how it is depicted) (Sonesson, 1989). Visual rhetoric is constructed at both levels. In addition to Sonesson's (1989) concepts of "iconic language" and "plastic language" to study denotative and connotative meanings, the semiotic approach of this study draws on social semiotics of visual communication, which provides a tool for analyzing the cultural and social meanings of visual elements (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Even though the visual elements direct the perception and sense-making of images, the meaning is not in the visual elements themselves, but is constructed by viewers based on a cultural matrix of meanings, both explicitly and implicitly (Hook & Glăveanu, 2013; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Despite the culturally preferred ways of interpreting the visual (Danesi, 2017; Kress & van

Leeuwen, 2006), different people may and do perceive and interpret the same image in different ways due to their different motivations, goals, knowledge, and prior experiences (McArthur & Baron, 1983).

Visual content analysis commonly focuses on classifying people, objects, and settings depicted in images (Bell, 2012; Rose, 2016). When classifying people, it often uses facial expressions, gestures, and clothing, for instance, as the basis of classification (Bell, 2012). In order to extend the scope of visual content analysis from the observation of the mere iconic language of images to include the elements of visual expression at the level of plastic language, this research complements content analysis with features of compositional analysis (e.g., Rose, 2016) and formal analysis (e.g., Schroeder, 2006). This kind of extended content analysis provides a tool for scrutinizing and classifying the components of visual rhetoric at large, consisting of persons, objects, and environments and their visual characteristics, as well as elements of visual expression such as color, light, composition, and viewing angle (Bell, 2012; Hook & Glăveanu, 2013). In turn, (social) semiotic analysis is used for making sense of the findings provided by content analysis and interpreting them within the matrix of socially constructed meanings (Jewitt & Oyama, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This study design provides a methodological frame for examining the components and meanings of the visual rhetoric of cover images communicating certain kinds of social representations of teachership. Figure 1 elucidates the methodological design of this research.

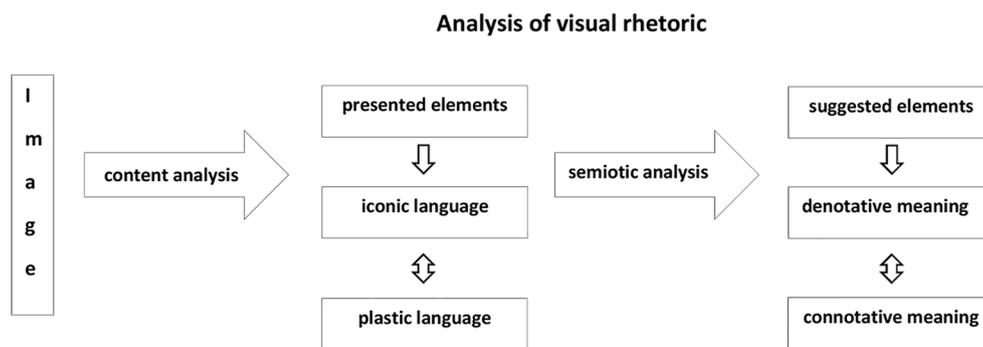


Figure 1. The methodological design of the research.

## Procedure

The cover images of Teacher Magazine during the years 2013–2017 are archived in electric format on the homepage of Teacher Magazine and were easily accessible. The cover images were downloaded and ordered according to the year of publication. In the next phase, the cover images were scaled smaller, arranged in a Word document, and printed. This was considered beneficial in terms of classifying and comparing the cover images.

At first, data were analyzed using content analysis. The cover images were sorted into groups intuitively, based on their visual characteristics, such as the teacher's gender, age, facial expression, gestures, and attire, as well as the number of teachers in the image, the action, and the environment. This initial classification was refined through a more careful and detailed examination of the images, based on which classes of teachers started to emerge. These findings of the iconic language of the images were set into dialogue with the characteristics of the plastic language of the images, scrutinizing the composition, viewing angle, color, lighting, and location in the picture space as means of modifying the choices made at the level of iconic language.

Subsequently, the visual elements identified at the level of iconic language and plastic language were analyzed using semiotic analysis, in which they were furnished with their denotative and connotative meanings and interpreted in relation to each other. At this point, classes of teachers were named by anchoring them to a cultural matrix of meanings, combining social representations of teachership and cultural meanings of visual communication. An example elucidating the stages of analysis is provided in [Appendix 1](#). After having observed what is included and depicted in the cover images, attention was directed to what is excluded and not depicted in them. Finally, the findings of the analysis were related to recent discussions related to teachership and education.

The analysis is based on the perception and interpretation of visual images. The meaning is not in the image itself, but is constructed in the process of perceiving and interpreting it ([Hook & Glăveanu, 2013](#)). Since the analysis is researcher-driven, it is appropriate to sketch the researcher's background briefly. He is a Finnish, middle-aged teacher of visual culture studies and a post-graduate student of social psychology, whose current research interests focus on the visual dimensions of teachership, as well as the functions of the visual in everyday social interaction. Student-centeredness and collaboration characterize his pedagogic approach. He is interested in issues related to multiculturalism, diversity, and equality, as well as ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. Despite this profiling, the results of the research reflect social understanding of teachership, since the interpretation anchors cover images to the matrix of social representations of teachership in Finland, as well as to socially constructed meanings of visual communication in western cultures.

## Findings

The data consisted of 138 cover images that were photographs depicting only one teacher (85 images), a pair or a group of teachers (42 images), or a teacher with pupils (11 images). A large majority of the images (80 photographs) depicted only female teachers, 32 photographs depicted only male teachers, and 26 photographs depicted both female and male teachers. Of the photographs, 75 depicted teachers indoors (mostly school interiors) and 63 depicted teachers outdoors (either in a school yard or in nature). A vast majority of the photographs (106) depicted teachers smiling, whereas in the remaining 32 photographs the teachers looked serious. Even though it is difficult to estimate age based on the image alone, most teachers seemed to be between 30 and 50 years, with the exception of approximately 10 teachers who looked younger than 30, and 2 teachers who looked older than 60. Teachers looked tidy, appropriate, and moderate. [Table 1](#) summarizes the quantification of the visually perceivable features in the cover images.

The cover images of Teacher Magazine depicted a variety of teachers. However, four classes of teachers emerged from the data. These classes were, in order of frequency, experts ( $n = 59$ ), pranksters ( $n = 31$ ), recreationists ( $n = 27$ ), and educators ( $n = 11$ ). Ten cover images couldn't be included in the classes mentioned above and didn't form any specific class. Examples of images in each class are presented in [Appendix 2](#). This research does not suggest that the classes were mutually exclusive in reality, so that only some teachers were experts whereas other teachers were always pranksters, for instance. Rather, these classes must be understood as aspects of teachership common to teachers at large. The aspect that dominates depends on the situation. In the following, each class will be presented with an analysis at the level of iconic and plastic language, paying attention to both denotative and connotative meanings.

Table 1

*Quantification of Visually Perceivable Features in the Cover Images*

Category of Depiction	Number of Cover Images
Total number of cover images	138
<b>Number of teachers depicted</b>	
one teacher	85
two or more teachers	42
one teacher with pupils	11
<b>teachers' gender and sexual orientation</b>	
female teachers only	80
male teachers only	32
female and male teachers	26
female teacher with pupils	10
male teacher with pupils	1
visually identifiable features of teachers representing gender minorities	0
visually identifiable features of teachers representing sexual minorities	0
<b>teachers' age</b>	
teachers younger than 30 years old	10
teachers between 30-50/60 years old	126
teachers older than 60 years old	2
<b>teachers' ethnic origin</b>	
teachers with visual features of typical Finnish ethnic origin	137
teachers with visual features referring to other ethnic origin	1
<b>teachers' facial expression</b>	
smiling teachers	106
serious looking teachers	32
<b>teachers' body shape</b>	
slim (not overweight)	119
plump	6
fat (very overweight)	0
cannot be estimated	13
<b>teachers' attire</b>	
tidy, neutral, appropriate attire	138
eye-catching / extravagant attire	0
<b>teachers' environment</b>	
teachers indoors	75
teachers outdoors	63

## Experts

One clearly distinguishable type of teacher can be identified as the expert (Appendix 2, Images 1, 2, 3). Expert teachers, equally female and male, are depicted as knowledgeable professionals either with or without reference to their subject. When these references exist, they create a traditional divide between female expertise (such as nursing and textile work) and male expertise (such as machinery and technical work). Surprisingly, music is also depicted as gendered, belonging to the field of male expertise. Most expert teachers look middle-aged, with only a few recognizably younger teachers, suggesting that expertise grows with experience and age. However,

teachers older than middle-age are not included among experts. Experts are depicted neither in the act of teaching nor with pupils or students. Instead, they are depicted alone indoors, in an environment that can be associated with a school interior. Even though the data includes photographs in which teamwork between teachers is visualized, far more often, teachers seem to be private entrepreneurs meeting the challenges of their profession alone.

Expert teachers are not involved in an activity, but stand or sit still, turning towards the spectator. Typically they hold a laptop, books, or folders that can be interpreted as signs of expertise and knowledge. Occasionally, they are depicted folding their arms across their chest, communicating persistence but also detachment. In addition, expert teachers wear formal and neat clothes, such as a suit or a blazer with a skirt or trousers, mostly in shades of black, blue, or gray. A number of experts wear spectacles. The majority of experts look at the spectator with a hint of a smile. However, the aforementioned elements signaling formality and detachment modify the smile from an expression of mere friendliness to an expression of self-esteem and dignity. On one hand, the fact that the teachers look at the spectator creates the impression of communication. On the other hand, posing and looking straight at the camera creates the impression of rationality, control, and prudence. The experts do not seem willing to throw themselves spontaneously into situations, but rather prefer to have control over them.

In addition to facial expression, posture, gestures, attire, and environment, the impression of expertise is constructed through elements of visual expression. The colors in the images are mostly cold, shifting toward blue or gray, creating the impression of distance and formality. Combined with brightness, these colors also seem to refer to “the light of reason,” conceptualizing teachers as rational and knowledgeable professionals guided by reason. The brightness of images may also communicate trustworthiness, since nothing is hidden in the shade. The impression of distance and formality is further signaled through half-length or full-length photographs, which frame the person further away from the spectator than a close-up would do. In terms of composition, experts are mostly located in the middle of the image, emphasizing their status. The shots are taken either at eye-level or from a low angle, with the latter making the teacher appear imposing and hegemonic.

When the elements of iconic language and plastic language of images are observed together, they create the impression of expert teachers as knowledgeable professionals characterized by reason, trustworthiness, restraint and formality. They seem to have a positive attitude towards teaching, facing the challenges of their profession with heads high, mostly alone, but sometimes also with their colleagues. Some images depict teachers' expertise in terms of the traditional division between female and male subjects. The teachers in the photographs communicate with the spectator through eye contact. However, communication with students, or instances related to education, is not visualized in the photographs.

## Pranksters

A number of cover images depict teachers playing the fool and having fun (Appendix 2, Images 4, 5, 6). These “pranksters” include young and middle-aged teachers who break the rule of formality with their more relaxed attitude. Pranksters are depicted either alone or with their colleagues, but no students are included in the photographs. Teachers peeking through a magnifying glass, playing with a globe, or wrapping themselves up in a curtain communicate playfulness and joy. Typically, pranksters wear casual clothes that add to the air of informality. Even though these images include more colors, teachers' clothes are predominantly dark or gray. These teachers smile or laugh with their mouth wide open and gesticulate in versatile ways. However, the fact that almost all of them look at the spectator diminishes the impression of immediacy and casualness, adding the flavor of calculated posing for the images.

The humoristic atmosphere is created through elements of visual expression, as well. Some photos contrast dark shadow and bright light next to each other, which dynamizes the images and increases the feeling of mystery, adventure, and excitement. Even though both female and male teachers are depicted as pranksters, the contrasting play of light and shadow is visible only in photos of male teachers, which makes adventurousness and excitement gendered and typical for men only. This division is increased by the objects included in the photos: whereas male teachers peek through magnifying glasses, reminiscent of detectives, female teachers hold cone cows, referring to a more traditional kind of play with children. Images of pranksters include close-ups as well as half-length and full-length shots. However, close-ups are used more than for other classes of teachers, creating a feeling of sociability. The colors shift toward cold shades. On one hand, they communicate freshness, but on the other hand, distance, contradicting the warmth and immediacy created by smiles, casual clothes, close-ups, and eye-level angles.

Taken together, pranksters are playful teachers characterized by immediacy and spontaneity. In these images, teachers act and gesticulate in a more relaxed, vivid, and enthusiastic way, which makes them appear easy to approach. However, the impression of spontaneity and immediacy is restrained by the teachers posing for the spectator, which adds a flavor of artificiality to the images. Despite this fact, the images represent joyful and good-tempered teachers, who are not afraid of throwing themselves into play. However, the images suggest that adventure and excitement are more apt to male than female teachers.

## Recreationists

A number of cover images portray teachers outdoors ([Appendix 2](#), Images 7, 8, 9). Apart from a few urban scenes, the outdoor environment is depicted as “uninhabited” greeneries, forests, paths, and lake shores, which characterize nature as the place of peace and relaxation. Except for a few winter scenes, the photos show summer-time nature, in which teachers are enjoying their summer holidays. The impression of relaxation is fostered through teachers’ casual clothes and smiling faces. The majority of recreationists are female teachers. The few male teachers are depicted mostly in action—playing football, for instance—whereas female teachers are depicted as tranquil flaneurs seeking recovery.

Apart from a few cover pages on which two teachers or a small group of teachers are depicted in nature, teachers are typically alone outdoors. This manner of depiction characterizes nature as teachers’ private sphere, giving them a possibility to delve into their own thoughts and experiences as a counterbalance to their socially active and challenging profession. The impression of privacy is stronger in the photos in which the teachers are not turning toward or looking at the spectator. However, these photographs are in the minority. In most cover images, the teachers turn toward the spectator, make eye contact, and smile. This manner of depiction communicates contradictory messages: on one hand, the teachers are depicted seeking privacy, but on the other hand, they are also presenting teachership when relaxing in nature.

At the level of plastic language, most photographs are characterized by bright and warm colors, as well as sunshine. These color choices fill the photographs with a joyful, light, and cozy atmosphere, forming an impression of unstressed and care-free leisure time or holidays. However, the photographs in which teachers are depicted as more serious and thoughtful make use of more dull and grayish colors contributing to the air of contemplation. In these images, teachers wear clothes in more tempered and earthy colors, as well. In terms of composition, the teachers are not placed at the center of the image but in the golden section, which adds to the connotation of teachers

being at leisure. The framing favors half-length and full-length images, which detaches the teachers from an intimate relation with the spectator, giving them privacy in nature.

In summary, the cover images with teachers photographed outdoors construct the impression of teachers as recreationists enjoying their holidays or seeking recovery in nature. The unstressed holiday-makers are depicted with smiles, relaxed postures, and casual clothes in brightly lit photos. In contrast, the photos with contemplative teachers make use of more down-to-earth and grayish colors, also due to the typically cloudy weather of these images. Most often, the teachers are alone in nature. The air of privacy is further constructed through framing the teachers further away from the front of the picture space. Recreationists are typically depicted in the golden section, which shifts them away from the center of the image, connoting meanings of leisure. However, in a number of photos, the teachers turn toward the spectator and smile, which creates the impression of deliberate posing, diminishing the impression of privacy. In terms of gender, the majority of recreationists are female. In addition, male teachers at leisure are depicted as more active and extrovert than female teachers.

## Educators

The last group of teachers, the educators, is based on images depicting a teacher with pupils ([Appendix 2](#), Images 10, 11, 12). In the data of 138 cover pages, 11 cover photographs depict pupils, as well. The small number of such photographs may be due to matters related to consent and permission for photography. For this reason, the small number of images should not be overemphasized. Apart from one male teacher, all teachers depicted with pupils are female, and the pupils seem to be either pre-schoolers or comprehensive school pupils. Two photographs show action, in which teachers are playing with pupils. In all the other photos, students are composed around the teacher in a manner reminiscent of a mother surrounded by her children. Smiling faces and casual clothes contribute to a cozy and friendly atmosphere.

In most photographs, the teacher is depicted in the middle of a group of pupils. On one hand, this composition can be interpreted as portraying a student-centered teacher among her pupils. Together with the smiling faces, the teacher's location lower than the pupils and the high angle of the shot foster the impression of a consultative, servant-type of teacher. On the other hand, the central composition may also be interpreted as referring to a teacher-centered pedagogy, as well as discipline, especially when pupils are composed more or less symmetrically around the teacher. The colors and light in the photos tend to be cold rather than warm tones, increasing the impression of appropriateness and slight formality.

Visual elements of the iconic and plastic language of images construct a somewhat controversial image of educators. On one hand, the photographs depict smiling female teachers surrounded by smiling students, which at first creates the impression of coziness and friendly, unproblematic interaction between the teacher and students. In addition, teachers are located lower than students, which makes them appear to be a consultative, servant-type of teacher at the grassroots level, equal to the pupils. However, the symmetrical composition of students around the teacher in the center can be associated with a teacher-centered approach to teaching, as well. Together with coldish colors, this type of arrangement communicates an air of discipline and formality. The fact that teachers and students all pose for the photographer and for the spectator, further diminishes the impression of natural and easy-going interaction. It rather seems that teachers and students are acting out a friendly and cozy scene in a play on education.

## Summary of Results

Four classes of teachers—experts, pranksters, recreationists, and educators—were identified in the data, reflecting various visually mediated impressions of teachers in the cover images of *Teacher Magazine* between 2013–2017. While experts and educators were more closely connected with the teacher's occupation in terms of being knowledgeable pedagogues, pranksters and recreationists expressed more relaxed types of teachers having fun or spending leisure time. The analysis at the level of the iconic language of images served as a basis for the classification of teacher representations. The findings at the level of plastic language either fostered or challenged the classification, merging denotative and connotative meanings.

The clear majority of cover images depicted female teachers, which characterized teaching as a predominantly “female profession.” In terms of gender, traditional female and male teacher roles seemed to emerge, with female teachers being those who nurse, bake, knit, and dance, and male teachers being those who are technically oriented, inventive, and adventurous. In addition, apart from one photograph in which a male teacher played ice-hockey with pupils, interaction with pupils was related to female teachers. Even though a number of cover images depicted a pair or a group of teachers, the clear majority of them depicted a teacher alone indoors or outdoors. These depictions created the impression of teachers as autonomic individuals who face both the joys and challenges of their profession alone, or seek recreation in privacy.

Through all four classes of teachers, there seemed to be a preferred type of teacher who is good-tempered, neutral looking, between 30–50 years old, slim, and fit. When the focus is extended from what is being included in the cover images to what is being excluded from them, the lack of diversity in terms of ethnic background, gender, and sexual orientation, for instance, becomes apparent. It can be concluded that the imagery of teachership communicated by cover images of *Teacher Magazine* is highly homogenous.

## Discussion

In this research, cover images of Finnish *Teacher Magazine* were understood as visual objectifications of social representations of teachership, representing the ideas, values, and visions of the Trade Union of Education in Finland. According to [Moscovici \(2001, 2007\)](#), common-sense social representations sediment around core notions related to the phenomenon. However, core notions never reveal themselves directly; that is why they must be studied via their material expressions, created through objectification ([Moscovici, 2001](#)).

### Cover Images as Vehicles of Inclusion and Exclusion

This study detected four classes of teachers from the cover images of Finnish *Teacher Magazine* between 2013–2017, suggesting four different core notions of social representations of teachership, namely expertise, pedagogy, playfulness, and recreation. These four core notions seem to be interconnected, since on one hand, pedagogy is part of educational expertise, and on the other hand, pedagogy operationalizes educational expertise. Playfulness, for its part, can be used as a pedagogical approach. In addition, playfulness and recreation can be understood as teachers' means of charging their batteries in order to cope with the challenges of pedagogical expertise. [Moscovici \(2001\)](#) characterized social representations as polyphasic, meaning that an individual person, as well as a group of people, may have a number of social representations of one phenomenon. Thus, the four classes above constitute various facets of social representations of teachership. Similar social representations of

teachership have also been found in other national and cultural contexts. For instance, several studies conducted among Brazilian teachers have identified expertise based on knowledge as the key constituent of social representations of teachership (Carneiro & Monteiro, 2018; Camargo, 2017; da Silva, Dias, & Pimenta, 2014). Da Silva (2012) and Fischman (2000), in turn, found that teaching in basic education is often regarded as a female profession. In their study on social representations of teachers' role identity conducted among Italian teachers, Rochira, Guidi, Mannarini, and Salvatore (2015), for their part, identified pedagogic competence, authority and deterioration of the image of teachers as the cores of social representations of teachership.

When the results of the analyses of both iconic and plastic language of images are taken into consideration, further core notions of social representations of teachership can be identified in this study. The vast majority of teachers were depicted smiling and laughing, communicating joy, happiness, and an absence of problems. Combined with a deliberately arranged composition, the smiles created the feeling of "keeping up appearances," intended to communicate a positive image of teachership. Even though the genre of magazine covers may limit the way in which people are depicted, one is left wondering whether it is regarded as unprofessional for a teacher to show sorrow, failure, or fatigue, for instance. Similarly, the fact that most teachers are depicted alone attracts attention. One might expect that, in contemporary times, when counseling, peer support, networking, and multiprofessionalism characterize professions in the field of education (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Webb, Vuilliamy, Sarja, Hämäläinen, & Poikonen, 2009), this networking type of teachership would occupy a more prominent role in the cover images of Teacher Magazine. Research shows that teachers are still commonly regarded as autonomous actors in Finland, taking responsibility for their students and teaching alone (Huusko, Pietarinen, Pyhältö, & Soini, 2007; Webb et al., 2009). On the other hand, research also shows that a large number of Finnish teachers suffer from work-related stress, fatigue, and burnout (Collie, Perry, & Martin, 2017; Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011). Based on the cover images of Teacher Magazine, happiness and autonomy / individualism can be regarded as core notions of the social representations of teachership of the Trade Union of Education. Bearing the aforementioned research in mind, one is tempted to ask whether the imagery of happy and autonomous/individualistic teachers might increase teachers' pressure to "bear the burden" alone and hide the hardships behind a smiling façade, contributing to work-related stress and fatigue.

The notably high number of cover images depicting female teachers suggests that, at the core of social representations of teachership, there is a conception of teaching as a predominantly female profession. In the light of statistics, there are more female than male teachers in pre-school, comprehensive, vocational, and upper-secondary education in Finland (Kumpulainen, 2017). In addition, this research identified gender-based teacher roles as a core notion of social representations of teachership. While female teachers were profiled as teachers of domestic science, textile work, and nursing, male teachers were profiled as teachers of forestry, engineering, and technology. Furthermore, female teachers were depicted with pupils in a manner evoking feelings of motherly care. Wall (2008) found similar results when studying images of teachers in British trade union publications between the years 1940–2000. In Finland, Keskiväli (2012) and Nygren (2007), for instance, have found gendered teacher representations in Finnish films. Lahelma (2011), for her part, has recognized that students in Finnish teacher education tend to select subjects based on a traditional division between female and male subjects. Lahelma (2011, p. 226) regrets that the theoretical and empirical results of gender research in education have scarcely been included in teacher education curricula in Finland and calls for gender awareness, since "unquestioned cultural gender assumptions are reproduced in teacher education."

When attention is paid to types of teachers excluded from the cover images, social representations of teachership communicated by Teacher Magazine gain additional features. In 2014, Miettunen and Dervin wrote about Finnish teachership that “it is a well-known fact that the diversity of the teaching body in the Nordic country is far from diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, and language” (Miettunen & Dervin, 2014, p. 22). Now, three years later, the situation may have changed in terms of teacher diversity, but the cover images of Teacher Magazine in the past five years do not show such a development. Transgender teachers, teachers belonging to sexual or religious minorities, teachers with a visible handicap or injury, teachers with eye-catching looks (such as tattoos, piercings, extraordinary clothing style), fat teachers, and elderly teachers are absent in the imagery of Teacher Magazine. Even though belonging to a sexual or religious minority, for instance, cannot necessarily be judged based on visual features, it would be possible to construct images so that these aspects were visually perceivable.

The Trade Union of Education explicitly mentions on its homepage that “there is no such thing as the right type of teacher” ([www.oaj.fi/en/](http://www.oaj.fi/en/), retrieved 13.6.2019). In addition, Integration compass 2019 published by the Trade Union (2019, p. 9) points out that “more teachers with an immigrant background must be trained for all levels of education.” However, the cover images of Teacher Magazine between the years 2013 and 2017 seem to communicate a different message. When images included in and excluded from the cover images of Teacher Magazine are reflected against each other, it seems the ideal type of teacher at the core of social representations of teachership of the Trade Union of Education can be characterized as a white (Finnish) woman or man, heterosexual, 30-50 years old, healthy, slim and fit, and neutral looking. This result resonates with prior research on teachers’ gender and sexuality (e.g., Lahelma, 2011; Valkonen, 2002), ethnic background (Lefever et al., 2014), age (Kumpulainen, 2017), and attire and appearance (Hankaniemi, 2014; Kamila, 2012). In the light of these findings, one can conclude that the initial hypothesis of teacher images being more diverse in Teacher Magazine than in popular media was not tenable. Representations of teachers in Teacher Magazine seem to be equally stereotypical as in popular media.

The research at hand does not claim that visually perceptible diversity is the only mode of diversity. Neither does it argue that all diversity is visually perceptible. However, it shows that the visual imagery of teachers in the cover images of Teacher Magazine between 2013–2017 is highly homogenous in terms of ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical appearance. In addition, the imagery communicates a gender-based divide between traditional roles of female and male teachers. From the social representations point of view, this is problematic. Media participates powerfully in circulating and constructing social representations of teachership (see Höjjer, 2011). Through extensive repetition, the constructional nature of images becomes obscured and the naturalized imagery “becomes a replica of reality, a simulacrum in the true sense of the word” (Moscovici, 2001, p. 51). These naturalized social representations circulate in societies through the cycles of anchoring and objectification, affecting people’s thoughts and actions (Hakoköngäs & Sakki, 2016; Rätty et al., 2012).

Images can be conceptualized as “cultural mirrors” or “counter images” (Martikainen, 2011) that viewers use as means of reflecting on themselves as members of societies and constructing their social identities. It is reasonable to think that the readership of Teacher Magazine, namely teachers and student teachers, use the cover images of Teacher Magazine in mirroring their own teachership and professional identity as teachers (see Kirby, 2016). This research shows that several types of teachers, who are excluded from the cover images of Teacher Magazine, may not find a point of identification in the imagery included in the magazine covers. Barreiro and Castorina (2017, p. 83) regard repressing, silencing, and denying as operations of social representations, stating that “nothingness is constructed because some specific characteristic of the symbolical status of the object is disturbing for social

groups.” Visually communicated exclusion from social representations of teachership positions the excluded as “others”, which may have destructive consequences not only in terms of their professional identity and work-related matters, but also in terms of their life in general. In addition, one may ask whether deviation from the prevailing imagery might be a cause of discrimination.

Social representations not only construct the present but also anticipate the future (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Sakki, 2016). Social practices are permeated by power: we use and perform power in our everyday acts verbally, visually, and bodily (Foucault, 1980). The way things normally appear is not a natural, unbiased state of affairs, but ultimately tied to social interests and views (Barreiro & Castorina, 2017; Foucault, 1980). In this sense, social representations are vehicles of power (Barreiro & Castorina, 2017). In order to challenge and interrupt the naturalized circulation of social representations, the process of objectification plays a key role (de Rosa & Farr, 2001; Moscovici, 2001). De Rosa and Farr (2001) claim that changes in the images can lead to changes in social representations. For this reason, it is important to reveal the constructed character of naturalized images and raise critical awareness of their social implications. The research at hand is an attempt to contribute to this awareness by applying the approach of visual rhetoric to studying visual objectifications of social representations of teachership in Finland.

### Strengths, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

One strength of this research is its innovative theoretical and methodological design. On one hand, it combines social representations theory with a rhetoric approach, and on the other hand, it uses visual data to study social representations, and analyses them using content analysis and semiotic analysis. This design creates a critical approach to discuss visual images as objectifications of social representations in terms of both visual structures and communicators of meanings. Another strength is the researcher’s experience in visual methodologies. This, however, may also be a limitation, since not all members of the readership may be that experienced in visual literacy, and thus, some visually communicated meanings presented in this research might be beyond their reach. Similarly, since people from different occupational, educational, and cultural contexts may possess a number of social representations of one phenomenon (Moscovici, 2001), the results of this researcher-driven analysis cannot be generalized to other cultural contexts, for instance.

The exclusion of textual elements of cover pages, as well as photographs on other pages of the magazine, might also be considered as a limitation, since this choice narrows the scope of the material used as basis for discussion of the topic. On the other hand, the focus on the cover images alone is justified because of their important communicative value, as explicated in the method section. However, in the future, it would be interesting to systematically study and compare both verbally and visually communicated social representations of teachership in Teacher Magazine.

In addition, it would be interesting to see how the image of teachers detected in this research relates to the image of teachers in other national contexts. Perhaps this study could be replicated in other national and socio-cultural contexts in the future.

### Conclusions

This research shows that cover images of Teacher Magazine function, either consciously or unconsciously, as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, legitimizing and marginalizing certain kinds of teachership. As the main publication of the Finnish Trade Union of Education, with a large circulation among teachers and student teachers, Teacher Magazine occupies a powerful position in issues related to teachership. For this reason, the teacher imagery

it communicates may importantly contribute to the formation of social representations of teachership among its readers influencing the self-reflection on their own professional identity as teachers. Therefore, it is important to discuss critically and raise awareness of visually mediated meanings in this particular magazine, as well as in magazines published by trade unions in general. Instead of ruling out certain groups of teachers and mediating traditional social representations of teachership, Teacher Magazine, as well as other related media, could use imagery as constructive rhetorical acts to communicate anticipatory social representations of teachership (see Philogène, 1999), paving the way to more diverse and inclusive teachership in the future.

## Funding

The authors have no funding to report.

## Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

## Acknowledgments

The authors have no support to report.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

Table A.1

Example of the Analysis of Visual Rhetoric (see Image 11, Appendix 2)

CONTENT ANALYSIS		SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS	
iconic language	plastic language	iconic and plastic language combined	VISUAL RHETORIC OF THE IMAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>female teacher</li> <li>teacher and pupils smile</li> <li>teacher wears casual clothes</li> <li>calm gestures and posture</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>friendliness</li> <li>approachability</li> <li>calmness</li> </ul>	Smile and casual clothes make the teacher appear friendly and approachable evoking feelings of motherly care.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teacher is depicted with pupils</li> <li>teacher kneels / sits on the floor</li> </ul>	<p><b>composition:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teacher is surrounded by pupils</li> <li>teacher is depicted lower than pupils</li> </ul> <p><b>viewing angle:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high angle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interaction</li> <li>togetherness</li> <li>approachability</li> <li>counseling</li> <li>care</li> <li>equality</li> <li>servant-type of teacher</li> <li>no emphasis of status</li> </ul>	The way of depicting teacher so that she is surrounded by the pupils, positioned lower than the pupils and photographed from high angle make her appear as an approachable and caring student-centered teacher who treats pupils as equals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>environment can be identified as a corner of the classroom</li> </ul>	<p><b>framing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>focus on a restricted part of the classroom where the teacher and pupils are</li> <li>other classroom items are framed outside the image</li> </ul> <p><b>colors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>warm, bright colors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>intimacy</li> <li>coziness</li> <li>joy</li> </ul>	The intimate framing of the image and the use of warm and bright colors make the classroom a cozy learning environment.

## Appendix 2

## Experts:



**Image 1**  
Photograph: Ari Korkala  
Opettaja 6/2017



**Image 2**  
Photograph: Jussi Vierimaa  
Opettaja 20/2014



**Image 3**  
Photograph: Jussi Vierimaa  
Opettaja 1/2017

## Pranksters:



**Image 4**  
Photograph: Leena Koskela  
Opettaja 2/2016



**Image 5**  
Photograph: Veikko Somerpuro  
Opettaja 19/2014



**Image 6**  
Photograph: Veikko Somerpuro  
Opettaja, 40/2013

## Recreationists:



**Image 7**  
Photograph: Jussi Vierimaa  
Opettaja 24/2014



**Image 8**  
Photograph: Maiju Pohjanheimo  
Opettaja 3/2014



**Image 9**  
Photograph: Lauri Rotko  
Opettaja 12/2016

## Educators:



**Image 10**  
Photograph: Veikko Somerpuro  
Opettaja 7/2017



**Image 11**  
Photograph: Veikko Somerpuro  
Opettaja 26/2015



**Image 12**  
Photograph: Ari Korkala  
Opettaja 16/2017

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Figure A. 1. Image examples of the classes of teachers.