

Chapter 5

The Loss of Mystical Mother Powers as a Childless Educator

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ABSTRACT

As a teacher, administrators, co-workers, and parents would ask how I understood children if I did not have any. I have heard the adage “She’s a mother of children,” implying a deeper connection to students. This excuse has been utilized to prove that a co-worker is better at time management, people skills, and connection due to some mystical power of having a child. Even working at multiple levels of education and in numerous roles, the nuance that I violated all expectations remains. A childless administrator related well to me until she became a mother. A switch occurred, and I remember vividly being told “You do not like children and do not understand them!” I had indeed become the societal deviant in the school system. Regardless of my Ph.D. and in-depth education knowledge, I could not know what a child needed. By not having children of my own, I had an unspoken disdain for children. These stereotypes were far from the truth. I devoted my life goals to loving others, so I did not wish to detract from this ability. The mother stereotype meant I could never understand.

American culture holds an expectation that teaching ability is characterized by the ability to rear children and that educators, especially those who identify as women, are better equipped by their mothering experiences.

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Childless describes people who do not have children for various reasons, while the term childfree defines individuals who have made a deliberate decision to not have children despite being physically able and possibly chose surgical sterilization (Bays, 2017). Thus, these ideals of the perfect educator as a parent are indoctrinated into society that those of us who are termed as childless educators are doubted, rejected, and challenged by the childbearing educators, parents, and even students. Questions posed: How can you possibly relate to and understand children without having any children yourself? This question has been the bane of my existence as an educator. I have confronted the question in insinuations and direct confrontations, which I never expected. This stereotype explained by Shannon McMahon (2019) as “the childfree academic is that of the lonely, isolated professor who can’t stand kids yet feels left out of departmental social gatherings and resentful when academic parents meet for play dates or picnics.” My advanced credentials, including, but not limited to, years in education, a Master’s in Workforce Education and Adult Education, and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, dimmed by a social experience of motherhood.

Educators are more prepared from a public perspective to teach children when they are parents themselves. According to Home et al. (2006), “In general, we find that women educated for jobs in teaching and health care are in a class of their own, with much lower permanent childlessness at each educational level than in any other major grouping.” When I was a teacher, administrators, co-workers, and parents would ask, “How can you understand children if you do not have children?” I explained my experiences as a babysitter, substitute teacher, and how I relate to children. Additionally, I have heard the adage “She’s a mother of children,” so she will understand how to connect with children. This rule housed some additional power over my own skills, deeming my abilities as less because I did not have to juggle my own career in addition to mothering children. A co-worker associated the experiences with children as being better with time management, organization, people skills, and connection due to some mystical power of having a child. I have worked at multiple levels of education and in numerous roles, yet the nuance that I have violated all expectations remains. These stereotypes are far from the truth. I devoted all my energy to my career and loved others so much that I did not want to detract from this ability. However, this concept of being a mother or not meant I was in the category of not understanding.

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