

PRINCIPAL'S PERCEPTION OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AS DEFINED BY TEACHER DRESS

**Rachel A. Underwood, Janie O. Kenner, and Sandra McCune
Stephen F. Austin State University**

Clothing is an important cue in the initial judgment of others (Kwon, 1994). Image and reputation are affected by dress or essentially one's appearance. Selection of professional attire enhances occupational attributes of teachers. Even in today's casual school environment, dress is important and can give a degree of authority. Family and consumer sciences teachers should be in the forefront in setting the standards for dress in public schools. The purpose of this research was to investigate high school principals' perceptions in regard to dress of teachers. Ten occupational attributes, responsibility, competency, knowledgeability, professionalism, honesty, reliability, intelligence, trustworthiness, willingness to work hard, and efficiency, identified by Kwon (1994) were used. The questionnaire included demographic variables of years as principal, gender, age, level of education, size of school and location. Three dress modes: traditional, business casual, and leisure, were shown in line illustrations. Principals ranked the occupational attributes of teachers per dress mode on a five-point Likert scale. A total of 720 surveys were mailed to principals in Texas, North Carolina, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Utah. Two hundred twenty-four surveys were returned. Respondents were male (79.78%) and Caucasian (94.50%). School boards and principals establish dress policy with principals (82.35%) being responsible for enforcement. Principals were somewhat (46.88%) satisfied with faculty dress on campus which was primarily business casual. In contrast, traditional attire was worn by principals (78.03%). Choices of income, comfort, school setting, and lack of knowledge of appropriate dress were listed as factors influencing teacher dress. Comfort was the number one factor in apparel selection. The means for the top three attributes for traditional dress – female were as follows: professionalism = 4.70, responsibility = 4.38, and competence = 4.28; for business casual: responsibility = 3.97, professionalism = 3.94, and competence = 3.87; for leisure dress: honesty = 2.52, intelligence = 2.51, and knowledgeability = 2.50. The means for the top three attributes for traditional dress – males were as follows: professionalism = 4.67, responsibility = 4.45, competence = 4.31; business casual: responsibility = 4.03, professionalism = 3.99, and competence = 3.99; leisure dress: honesty = 2.53, knowledgeability = 2.51, and intelligence = 2.51. If traditional business attire is worn, the teacher is seen as being overwhelmingly professional, responsible, and competent. When dressed in leisure attire a significant drop in means occurred when compared to professional dress. There were no common attributes in the top three means for both males and females across all three modes of dress. Traditional business attire indicates a more professional image for both males and females. Teacher training curriculum should include information on how to dress professionally for the classroom as well as for other school occasions. In this era of teacher accountability, the teacher's image projected to the principal, students, parents, school board members, and general public affects how professional the teacher is viewed.

About the Authors

Rachel Underwood, Ed.D., and Janie Kenner, Ph.D., are Professors in the Department of Human Sciences at Stephen F. Austin State University. Sandra McCune, Ph.D, is Professor in Elementary Education at Stephen F. Austin State University.