

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY: TEACHING LESSONS ABOUT DRESS FOR THE WORKPLACE

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The purposes of this study were to analyze the relationship between students' perceived similarities to teachers and student learning, and to analyze the relationship between students' perceived differences from teachers and student learning in a seminar about workplace dress. Students assessed how similar or different they thought they were to teachers in attitude, background, morality, and appearance variables. They also assessed teacher credibility and how much they learned in the seminar. Mean scores of responses recorded on a seven point Likert scale indicated that the 38 students felt they were similar to seminar teachers. Correlation calculations revealed that similarity in appearance, particularly size correlated with student learning. Similarity in an attitude variable and teacher credibility also correlated with student learning.

In recent years there has been confusion about what is appropriate to wear at work. A whole generation has been raised in jeans, t-shirts, and sweats (Agin, 1999; Dickerson, 2003). Popular media has described a shift back to a preference for formal dress in the workplace as many companies are attempting to change expectations of workplace attire. The CEO of Managers Recruiters International said that managers, when surveyed, were upset with the open-toed shoes, tank tops, and sweat pants worn to work. Companies have been calling in fashion experts to teach their employees about appropriate workplace dress (Oleck, 2001).

Family and consumer sciences scholars have noted that today teachers are facing an increasingly diverse environment and are teaching students who have different attitudes, values, and beliefs from their own (Adams, Sewell, & Hall, 2004; Rehm, Allison, Darling, & Greenwood, 2002; Winchip, 1997). Suggestions about how to deal with this situation include researching several cultures, participating in multi-cultural activities, and developing course materials to better relate with students from varied cultures (Adams et al., 2004). Teaching lessons related to appearance, such as how to dress appropriately at work, allows for visual opportunities to enhance teaching diverse populations. For example, a teacher may relate to more students by featuring appropriate workplace dress on models varying in age and ethnicity.

The first purpose of this study was to analyze the relationship between students' learning and students' perceived similarities to teachers of a seminar about workplace dress. The second purpose was to analyze the relationship between students' learning and students' perceived differences to teachers of a seminar about workplace dress. Lessons about appearances are directly applicable to apparel programs, but are also applicable to other family and consumer sciences programs where professional training includes lessons about appropriate dress for a job interview, the work environment, and for a class presentation. Understanding how similarities and differences between teachers and students relate to student learning is important considering the growth in diversity in the general population and among students and teachers in family and consumer sciences classes.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Rogers' (1995) notion of the change agent in his theory about the diffusion of innovations. The change agent is “an individual who influences clients’ innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agency” (p. 335). The change agent serves as a link between technical experts and the general public. In this study, the teacher is the change agent who influences students by introducing information that is new to them (the innovation) in a classroom setting, which is part of a larger institution (the change agency). The teacher serves as a link between industry experts and the students. In this study, change and adoption mean student learning and intention to use the information presented by the teacher.

The change agent is effective if there is a balance between change agent heterophily and homophily to his or her client (Rogers, 1995). From this point forward, differences will represent heterophily and similarity will represent homophily. To be effective the change agent must create empathy. A method to create empathy is to show similarity to clients in social dimensions, such as social class, thought, and behavior. The change agent must also establish trust. To establish trust, the change agent shows differences to the client in expertise so that the client will view the change agent as credible. As an effective change agent, a teacher shows similarity to students in social dimensions and differences from students in specialization or credibility with regards to the subject matter that is being taught.

Review of Literature

The following review of literature is divided into three sections, each a summary of related research from a different field. These sections include: 1) general social sciences research, 2) teaching literature, and 3) research related to appearance and dress.

Social Sciences Research

Social scientists have supported the notion that when the source of a message and the receiver of a message are similar then the likelihood the receiver will adopt the message increases (Rogers & Bhowmick, 2001). Researchers have also found moderate dissimilarities between the source and receiver of a message was needed to enhance the successful transmission of a message (Alpert & Anderson, 1973; King & Sereno, 1973). King and Sereno found that perceptions of increased authority did not influence attitude change in every instance tested and therefore, the "relationship between credibility and persuasion should be viewed with caution" (p. 231).

Social scientists have also identified dimensions in which two people can be similar or different. Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) categorized these dimensions as either “status” or “value” dimensions. Status dimensions included the degree of similarity in gender, age, education, and social class. Value dimensions included the degree of similarity in values, attitudes, and beliefs. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) summarized sociological research related to the similarity among individuals and effective communication. They discussed the following dimensions of similarity: ethnicity, gender, age, religion, education, occupation and social class, behavior, and attitudes and beliefs. They also noted that circumstances, such as work or family induced similarity between individuals.

Rogers and Bhowmik (2001) divided analysis of differences and similarities in relationships into two categories, objective and subjective. Objective analysis included the study of observed similarities or differences, such as gender and age. Subjective analysis was defined

as the measurement of an individual's perceived similarity or difference to another. Subjective analysis is not as common as objective analysis, but it is important to consider because individuals behave according to their perceptions of each other (Rogers & Bhowmik).

Teaching Literature

Literature about the effect of similarities and differences between students and teachers was found in suggestions and speculations about how a teacher can succeed in the classroom. The literature supports the general contention that the teacher must empathize with students (Lowman, 1990; McKeachie, 2001). McKeachie described the teacher as an expert who has specialized knowledge and imparts it to students. He also said the teacher needs to create empathy with students, by being warm and open.

Hurt, Scott, and McCroskey (1977) specifically discussed students' perceived similarities to and differences from teachers in the classroom. They stated that students' perceived similarity to the teacher is very important, because students will be more attracted to a teacher they see as similar to themselves and thus they will learn more from that teacher. The authors identified dimensions of perceived similarity that they speculated influences teacher and student interactions. The first dimension, attitude similarity, refers to students' perceptions that their attitudes and beliefs are similar to the teacher's attitudes and beliefs. Similarity in attitudes fluctuates over time as students learn about the teacher. It is a more varied dimension than others because there are a variety of subjects in which the teacher can have attitudes about, such as attitudes about homework or religion.

Similarity in background is the second dimension that Hurt et al. (1977) identified as influencing teacher and student interactions. For example, students from New York City will perceive a teacher from New York City as more similar to themselves than a teacher from France. The final dimension the authors identified was "value" similarity. The authors speculated that if student and teacher backgrounds and values are similar, more communication between the student and teacher occurs, which increases student learning.

Hurt et al. (1977) also said that students must perceive the teacher as credible in order for them to accept the teacher's opinion. Perception is important in this instance. A teacher may assume that the information he or she is presenting is informative and important. The student, with a perception that questions the teacher's credibility, may decide that the information is opinion rather than fact. However, Boyer and Bolton (1971) suggested that the teacher who is perceived as having "psychological bigness" or a very high status inhibits communication in the classroom. They noted that behaviors, such as acting in a formal manner and using too much knowledge in class materials will more likely be perceived by students as domination, not leadership.

Research has focused on observable similarity and difference dimensions. Race and culture have been analyzed in particular as a critical difference between teachers and students that influences student learning. With a focus more on the effects of teacher perception on student performance, Jenkins and Bainer (1994) asserted that minorities are motivated differently, their ability to speak English proficiently varies, approaches to writing are different, and their general worldviews vary. Scollon (1981) indicated that teachers who were effective in teaching cross-cultural groups not only understood the culture, but also made students aware that they were also people with unique customs, preferences, interests, and views of the world.

Family and consumer sciences scholars have written about how to work with different cultural groups and the steps teachers can make to improve interaction with different cultural

groups. The research focuses on teachers' perspectives. Adams et al. (2004) studied FCS teacher perceptions of teaching multicultural groups. They indicated that FCS teachers felt it was important to consider multicultural groups in the classroom. However, they need some training in the area in order to understand diverse cultural needs. Rehm et al. (2002) interviewed teachers about their life experiences with diversity. She suggested activities to understand different cultures both in the classroom and general professional development, which included: 1) reflection on personal histories to understand how their friends and family talked about and treated others who were different, 2) work in multicultural environments, and 3) research of a wide variety of cultures. Winchip (1997) encouraged utilizing multicultural perspectives in family and consumer sciences coursework. Her definition of culture incorporated differences and similarities in gender, race, family structures, and socioeconomic status. Her holistic approach included helping other students appreciate multicultural perspectives and realizing that the classroom is an opportunity to link learners from different backgrounds together.

Related Research: Appearances and Dress

The influence of similarities and differences between teachers and students on student learning has not been addressed in apparel related lessons. However, the influence of similarities and differences between a salesperson and a consumer has been analyzed in marketing literature. Churchill, Collins, and Strang (1975) found that customers tended to buy apparel from sales people who were similar in combined dimensions, including age, nationality, gender, education, and religious preferences. They noted that “visible similarity” was a predictor of the size of the purchase. The results overall were not statistically significant and the researchers explained that it may be due to the temporal nature of the retail transaction.

Other related research has documented how appearance influences the perception of individuals in education environments. Workman (1984) found that teachers who dressed professionally were seen as credible, smart, and prepared. Kenner, Underwood, McClune, and Stephen (2001) surveyed high school principals' perceptions of female teachers in different dress. They measured perceptions of ten occupational attributes including responsibility, competency, knowledge, professionalism, honesty, reliability, intelligence, trustworthiness, willingness to work hard, and efficiency. Principals perceived teachers who were dressed professionally as “overwhelmingly” professional, responsible, and confident. As a result, the authors encouraged teachers and students to learn about dress, and professionals in fashion merchandising programs to assist with such endeavors.

Summary

Research about the influence of the degree of similarity and differences between the source and receiver of a message emphasizes the communication process. These relationships have been discussed generally in literature about developing empathy and trust. The degree of similarity between student and teacher has been speculated as influencing student learning in the classroom. Analysis of similarities and differences between source and receiver of messages in general social sciences and in teaching literature have addressed dimensions that are objective or observable more than those that are perceived. Related research about dress was found in marketing research. Also, teachers' appearances were analyzed and related to assessments of teacher competency level.

Research Purposes and Questions

The first purpose of this research was to study the relationships between students' learning and their perceived similarity to teachers in attitudes, values, backgrounds, and appearances. The second purpose was to assess the relationship between students' learning and their perceptions of teachers' credibility. If the teachers are viewed as change agents who must create empathy, it is assumed that student learning will relate to students' perceived similarity to teachers' attitudes, values, backgrounds, and appearances. Also, if teachers are viewed as change agents who must create trust, student learning will relate to students' perceptions that the teachers are credible or knowledgeable about workplace dress. The research questions are:

1. Is student learning related to the perception that students see teachers' attitudes as similar to their own?
2. Is student learning related to the perception that students see teachers' values as similar to their own?
3. Is student learning related to the perception that students see teachers' backgrounds as similar to their own?
4. Is student learning related to the perception that students see teachers' appearances as similar to their own?
5. Is student learning related to the perception that students see teachers' credibility about workplace dress as different from their own?

Methodology

Data Collection

Data were collected during a seminar where lessons were taught about appropriate dress in the workplace. The presentation was conducted in collaboration with Work One, an organization that provides services for unemployed, dislocated, and low-income groups. The "students" were seminar participants in the Work One pre-employment program. The "teachers" in this study taught the seminar. The seminar was part of a series of sessions designed to help participants acquire employment. The teachers in this study taught this seminar only and thus did not have previous experience with the students.

The data collection procedure included, first, distributing a pre-presentation survey. The survey was collected and, second, a lecture was presented outlining guidelines for appropriate dress in the workplace. Third, a post-presentation survey was distributed by seminar teachers and completed by seminar students. This process was completed two times among different groups of students, each seminar lasting approximately one-hour.

The seminar about workplace dress was similar to a lecture in a classroom setting. The seminar teachers presented each main point verbally and visually with Power Point slides and live models. One of the seminar teachers presented lessons about what is appropriate workplace attire, which included a Power Point slideshow. Then, a second teacher introduced the "wardrobing" concept, which included live models wearing appropriate workplace dress.

The teachers and models varied in objective similarity/difference dimensions as discussed in the review of literature, included a variety of ages and both genders. Specifically, the ages of the presenters and models ranged from 20 to 45. A male presented the guidelines of professional dress and a female introduced the "wardrobing" concept. Models included two males and four females. Ethnic backgrounds of teachers and models were five Anglo Americans and one Asian American. Teachers and models varied in size.

The teachers and models wore traditional professional dress during the presentation as defined by Bixler and Nix-Rice (1997), except one who wore unprofessional clothing as an example of what not to wear in a workplace setting. Traditional professional dress worn by teachers and models during the presentation included a mixture of the following clothing; a dark suit jacket, matching dress pants or skirt, dress shirt, trouser socks or hosiery, close-toed shoes with a low heel, and minimal accessories. The unprofessional appearance presented during the seminar was the opposite of the traditional professional appearance and included a pink t-shirt with a skull logo, a long frilly skirt, sandals, and large accessories.

Instrument Development

The presentation survey had demographic questions, such as age, income, gender, and career interests. The survey also included statements that assessed how much students in the workshop felt they learned. Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey (1987) discussed the validity of students' assessments of their learning. These researchers recognized that although it is subjective, it is appropriate because adult learners have extensive experience in school. Therefore adults can estimate with accuracy the amount that they learn.

The survey developed by Richmond et al. (1987) included two questions to stabilize subjectivity. One item assessed on a scale from zero to nine how much students learned in a class (learning score) and the second assessed how much they thought they could have learned in the class if they had an ideal instructor (learning-loss score). The scores were virtually identical for one of their studies where they correlated student responses to questions about perceptions of teachers' behaviors. The overall correlation between responses to learning and teachers' behaviors resulted in a .74 correlation and the result of the correlation between responses to learning-loss and teachers' behaviors was .73 (Richmond et al., 1987). Therefore, a survey for a later study included assessments about learning and items addressing learning-loss were eliminated (Sanders & Wiseman, 1994). The survey for this study also only includes questions about perceived learning.

Due to the applicability of the lessons taught for this study, the survey by Richmond et al. (1987) was modified to include items that assessed whether the students would ultimately use the information. Their nine-point scale was reduced to seven points to be similar to the remaining items included in the survey for this study. The survey for this study included the following three items: "I will use this information when I dress for my next job interview," "I feel I have learned from this presentation," and "I am more aware of appropriate dress for a job interview than before the presentation." The responses were recorded on a Likert scale that ranged from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree).

The survey also included items assessing the degree of students' perceived similarity and dissimilarity to presenters on a seven-point Likert scale with one as similar to me and seven as different from me. The instrument to measure perceptions of similarities and differences was developed by McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975) who reported that they used rigorous testing protocol to ensure validity. They found four general concepts were statistically uncorrelated (attitude, morality, appearance, and background). Therefore these concepts became the main categories under which other dimensions were listed.

There were originally four dimensions under each category. However, after reliability tests McCroskey et al. (1975) eliminated two items related to morality. Morality was originally labeled "values", but one of the items eliminated was "shares / does not share my values." Teacher credibility has been identified as significant in establishing trust between teacher as a

change agent and student as a client (Rogers, 1995). Therefore, the statement “the presenters of the information were” credible or not credible was added to the survey, with seven as the most credible and one as the least credible.

Prior to the seminars, a pilot study was conducted with selected college students who were not familiar with the presentation. The survey was modified and the administration process was refined based on the results from the pilot study surveys and feedback from pilot study participants. Specifically, the "appearance" and "resemblance" dimensions were eliminated for this study, because after the pilot test, these dimensions were determined to be repetitive of the "looks" dimension. The statement "attitude is unlike / like me" was eliminated, because it is similar to the statement "attitude is similar to / different from me," see Table 1.

Table 1
Dimensions of similarities and differences on survey

Category	Dimension
Attitude	Does/does not think like I do
Attitude	Behaves/does not behave like I do
Attitude	Attitude similar/different than mine
Background	Similar/different social class to mine
Background	Similar/different economic situation from mine
Background	Status like/different from mine
Background	Background different/similar
Morality	Morals unlike / like mine
Morality	Sexual attitudes unlike / like mine
Appearance	Looks similar / different from mine
Appearance	Different / same size than I
None	The presenters of the information are credible / not credible

Data Analysis

Mean scores of responses to items about perceived learning were calculated. Mean scores were also calculated for items about perceived similarity and dissimilarity to presenters. Relationships between perceived learning and similarity and dissimilarity were assessed using Pearson Correlation.

Results

The sample size was limited to 38 participants. The presentation was completed twice with approximately 18 to 20 participants at each presentation. The sample consisted of 23 women (71.9%), 9 men (28.1%), and 6 other participants who did not respond to the gender item. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to over 50. Twelve of the participants were in the 18 to 27 years old (31.6%) category, 12 of the participants were in the 25 to 35 years old (31.6%) category, 7 participants were in the 35 to 50 years old (18.4%) category and 1 participant was in the over 50 years old (2.6%) category. The income level of 26 participants included, 21 who had an income of less than \$10,000 annually (55.5%), 2 who reported an annual income of \$10,000-\$20,000 (5.3%), 3 who indicated an annual income of \$20,000-\$30,000 (7.9%) and 1 who reported an income of over \$30,000 (2.6%). Twelve participants did not respond to the income item on the survey. Participant employment interests varied and included retail sales, production, professional management, service industry, and healthcare.

Descriptive statistics showed participants felt similar to teachers in attitude variables, thought, behavior, and attitudes; values variables, morals and sexual attitude; and background variable, social class. The students perceived the teachers as different from themselves in background variables, economic situation, status, and background; and appearance variables, looks and size. The mean scores of the perceived differences and similarities of these dimensions did not vary by more than one point and were middle values, ranging between three to five on the seven point Likert scale. The participants saw the teachers as credible. The response to the item on the survey assessing teacher credibility resulted in a mean score of 6.03 where one is not credible and seven is very credible, see Table 2.

Table 2

Mean scores of students' perceived level of similarity and difference to seminar teachers

Statement	Category	Perception	N	Mean	SD
Think	Attitude	Similar	35	3.51	2.07
Behave	Attitude	Similar	35	3.91	2.08
Attitude	Attitude	Similar	34	3.76	1.96
Social class	Background	Similar	35	3.69	2.03
Economic situation	Background	Different	35	4.34	1.92
Status	Background	Different	34	4.50	1.94
Background	Background	Different	35	4.77	2.13
Morals	Value	Similar	34	3.12	2.09
Sexual attitudes	Value	Similar	31	3.74	2.03
Looks	Appearance	Different	33	4.09	2.20
Size	Appearance	Different	34	4.12	2.13
Credibility	None	Different	31	6.03	1.33

Participants also indicated that they learned from the presentation. The mean scores of each assessment are as follows (one strongly disagree, and seven strongly agree): "I will use this information when I dress for my next job interview" (M = 6.61); "I feel I have learned from this presentation" (M = 6.50); and "I am more aware of appropriate dress for a job interview than before the presentation" (M = 6.50).

All similarity/difference dimensions had a relationship to learning. The more similar students thought they were in attitude variables, thought, behavior, and attitude, to teachers the more they thought they learned. The correlation between students' perceived similarity to teachers' behaviors and the survey item "I will use this information when I dress for my next job interview" was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

The more similar in value variables, morals and sexual attitudes, students thought they were to teachers the more they thought they learned. The more similar students thought they were in background variables, social class, economic situation, status, and background, to teachers the more they thought they learned. None of these relationships were statistically significant.

The more similar in appearance variables, looks and size, students thought they were to teachers the more they thought they learned. Correlations resulting in statistically significant relationships ($p < .05$) were students' perceived similarity in size of teachers related to all three items on the survey about learning including intent to use the seminar information, amount learned, and awareness of appropriate dress for a job interview.

Responses to teacher credibility resulted in a relationship where the more credible students thought teachers were about workplace dress, the more students felt they learned. The relationship between an increase in students' perceived credibility of seminar teachers and student learning was statistically significant ($p < .05$) to the learning items; "I feel I have learned from this presentation," and "I am more aware of appropriate dress for a job interview than before the presentation." The learning item "I will use this item when I dress for my next job interview" was very close to having a statistically significant relationship to an increase in students' perceived credibility of teacher with a p value of .052, see Table 3.

Table 3
Correlations between perceived similarity and dissimilarity to presenters and student self learning assessments

	I will use this information when I dress for my next job interview.	I feel I have learned from this presentation	I am more aware of professional dress for a job interview than before a presentation
Think	-.134	-.213	-.083
Behave	-.341*	-.259	-.051
Attitude	-.061	-.099	-.004
Social class	-.028	-.086	-.098
Economic	-.015	-.175	-.091
Status	-.079	-.110	-.142
Background	-0.38	-.051	-.041
Morals	-.199	-.267	-.057
Sexual attitudes	-.099	-.190	-.022
Look	-.311	-.326	-.175
Size	-.354*	-.425*	-.343*
Credibility	.352	.516*	.415*

* $p < .05$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze how students' perceived differences and similarities to teachers related to student learning in a seminar about appropriate dress in the workplace. Background data revealed that the participants overall felt that they learned from the presentation and that they will use the information when they dress for their next job interviews.

The mean scores of students' perceived similarity to and differences from teachers indicated that the more similar participants thought they were to teachers in all dimensions (except credibility), the more they thought they learned. Three similarity and difference dimensions (size, behavior, and credibility) correlated strongly with student learning. Students' perceived similarity in size and teacher credibility specifically related to how much students thought they learned, how aware students felt they were about appropriate dress for a job interview after completing the presentation when compared to awareness before the presentation, and the probability that they will use the information presented when they dress for their next job interviews. Behavior correlated with the item "I will use this information when I dress for my next job interview."

The mean scores of perceived similarity and differences only varied by one point and these scores were in the middle of a seven-point scale. The "teachers" of the seminar varied in objective similarity/difference dimensions, such as age and gender. Other dimensions that were in the survey could be considered objective dimensions, such as size and looks. The variety of objective or easily observed dimensions of teachers and models in the seminar presentation could explain the lack of variance of students' perceived level of similarity and differences to the teachers.

Hurt et al. (1977) emphasized the importance of teacher similarity to students in attitude, values, and backgrounds. Relationships between students' perceived similarity in attitude, value, and background variables to teachers and student learning were found. However, only the relationship between behavior (an attitude variable) and student learning was statistically significant.

The statistically significant relationship between students' perceived similarity to teachers in behavior and student learning supports Rogers' (1995) assertions about the change agent. It is interesting that neither survey items about learning that addressed understanding the material related strongly to students' perception of similarity in behavior to teachers. However similarity to teachers in behavior related to the item about applying the information or "behaving" accordingly. The direct relationship between students' similarity in behavior to the item that asks participants if they will change their behavior is particularly supportive of Rogers' theory. Teachers can increase student behavioral change by empathizing with students and showing that they, as teachers, behave similar to students.

The results support Rogers' (1995) idea that the change agent is effective when he or she is similar to the client in social dimensions. Rogers stated that ideally an effective change agent is similar in dimensions to the client except with knowledge about the innovation. Rogers' theory was not completely supported, because not all of these relationships were statistically significant. It is interesting that similarity in social class and student learning did not result in a statistically significant relationship. Rogers emphasizes the importance of a similar social class between the change agent and the client. The economic situation was not strongly related to learning, even though the seminar was presented to students who were participating in a program for individuals with limited economic means.

The relationships between students' perceived similarity to teachers in size and responses to three statements of student learning were statistically significant. The size dimension is observable so it may have had a greater influence than other similarity/difference dimensions listed on the survey (Churchill et al., 1975). The relationships between the dimension addressing similarity/differences in looks was not statistically significant when related to degree of learning, but two of the learning assessments did show a relatively strong relationship with a p value of .078 for the statement "I will use this information when I dress for my next job interview" and .064 p value for the correlation of looks to the statement "I feel I have learned from this presentation" (see Table 3). These findings support the notion that appearance dimensions are important, particularly when the message relates to apparel (Churchill et al.).

The relationship between teacher credibility and student learning was significant. Relating with the audience in size could have been important in helping students see how they could dress professionally. Similarity in size could also be interpreted as a credibility variable when it is discussed in the context of a presentation about clothing. Featuring teachers and models appropriately dressed who are different sizes shows learners that the presenters understand how to dress people of different sizes. These results support Rogers (1995) theory

that change agents need to be perceived as credible or knowledgeable about the product. It also supports previous research about teaching and credibility. Students who thought the workshop teachers were credible may not have thought the information was mere opinion, so they indicated that they learned from the seminar (Hurt et al., 1977).

Implications

These results have implications for the apparel field and family and consumer sciences teachers. The results are particularly helpful for new instructors in family and consumer sciences education, guiding these instructors about how to effectively communicate with students. The findings demonstrate that visual cues are important when relating with students. Models who are more compatible in size to their audience are more successful in teaching others about such lessons. In other words, students effectively relate to and learn from people who are the same size. Teachers should show a variety of body types in presentation visuals to relate to students.

If the results are interpreted as demonstrating teachers' knowledge about dress for people who vary in size, then size is a factor that needs to be considered when planning to teach similar lessons. Teachers demonstrating principles about size must be able to show that they understand such concepts as appropriate clothing that would enhance an individual's appearance. Family and consumer sciences teachers may include such topics especially in career and occupational courses. When doing so, they should consider the lessons, such as food and nutrition, taught in their classrooms where size may be an issue. A teacher who lectures about healthy eating can demonstrate such habits by appearing to be a healthy size.

Furthermore, the results show that students' feelings of similarity to teachers' behaviors were related to actually acting out or applying the lessons taught in the seminar. Therefore, it is important that teachers not only talk about subjects, but also act accordingly if they desire to convince students to apply information that is being taught. To bridge a gap between student and teacher behaviors and reach out to a broader audience, teachers could incorporate guest speakers or film clips of people who behave similarly to students in their courses.

This finding indicates that the content of a lesson that is being taught needs to be considered in relation to how the teacher may be perceived by the students. A class about family relations may show a different finding where student perception of the presenters' sexual attitudes may influence learning. Therefore, family and consumer sciences teachers should be aware of dimensions in which he or she can be similar to or different from students that relate to a particular lesson.

With increased diversity in classrooms it is encouraging to realize that similarity in background variables (social class, economic situation, status, and background) were not strongly related to student learning. However, these dimensions may have more impact if teachers spent more than one hour with participants (Hurt et al.). The participants indicated that perceived similarity to teachers in all dimensions was related to student learning. The relationships were not always statistically significant, but it does show that it is important to consider and understand students who vary in such dimensions as background, social class, and economic status. The suggestions by family and consumer sciences scholars to bridge the cultural gap will help create such feelings of similarity (Adams et al., 2004; Winchup, 1997).

Further research could explore how changing visual cues, such as size, would facilitate the relationship to student learning. The relationship between students' perceived similarity to and differences from their teachers to student learning could be examined over an extended time period, and in different geographic locations and income levels. Also, the influence of objective

measures of similarity and difference could be examined further. A larger sample would provide increased validity to these results. Testing the theory with more teachers in other family and consumer sciences content areas could be examined for a more complete picture about topic variation. Such studies may show that different dimensions of students' perceived similarity to and differences from teachers are related to students' learning.

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