

Family and Consumer Sciences Education Students' Assessment of their Understanding of the North Carolina Secondary Family and Consumer Sciences Programs of Study and FCCLA

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After completing the "Introduction to Family and Consumer Sciences Education" course at Appalachian State University, students completed a self-assessment regarding their knowledge, awareness, and abilities related to the North Carolina family and consumer sciences (FCS) education programs of study and Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). Students rated themselves as being most knowledgeable about the middle school, foundational, and beginning specialized FCS courses, while feeling less prepared to teach the upper level career-based courses. Regarding FCCLA, students reported being more knowledgeable about FCCLA resources and promotion of FCCLA to the community; in addition, they felt capable of developing an effective program of work for their chapters. While students felt they had a sound understanding of FCCLA STAR events, they did not feel the same about their understanding of the FCCLA National Programs.

Recent studies have found high satisfaction among FCS teachers, (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Godbey, & Johnson, 2011; Lee, 2013; Mimbs, 2000; Mimbs, 2002; Tripp, 2006; Tripp & Hollarn, 2016; White & Tripp, 2009), findings that are extremely encouraging to FCS teacher candidates. However, such studies also reveal that FCS teachers face unique challenges (Arnett, 2012; Davis, 2010; Lee, 2013). Acquiring and maintaining a sound understanding of the various high school FCS courses of study as well as developing the ability to effectively facilitate the FCCLA student organization are two such challenges for FCS education pre-professionals.

Given the number of content areas included in the secondary FCS program, it can be daunting for FCS teacher candidates to develop a comprehensive understanding of all the high school FCS courses of study. Using the Delphi method, Davis (2010) sought to determine FCS content and experiences that were priorities for FCS teacher candidates. Among those priorities were an understanding of content in the areas of consumer economics, resource management, family and human development, foods and nutrition, apparel and textiles, housing and interior design, child development and parenting, as well as knowledge of curriculum development and instructional strategies. Likewise, Arnett (2012), noted the challenges beginning teachers face when they are expected to teach in all FCS areas, sometimes with insufficient content knowledge or experience.

Developing the ability to effectively advise a high school FCCLA student organization is another priority for FCS education pre-professionals (Davis, 2010). However, several FCS teachers do not facilitate FCCLA chapters because they find the organization is complicated and confusing, and they do not know how to implement a chapter (Alexander, Davis, & Pierce,

2015). Yet, given the incredible leadership opportunities it provides for FCS students, FCCLA should be an integral part of every high school FCS education program

Developing beginning competence in both tasks is an expectation for students in an upper level FCS course at Appalachian State University, *Introduction to FCS Education*. The purpose of this course is to provide students with an introduction to the North Carolina programs of study in secondary FCS, as well as the student organization, FCCLA. This three-hour course includes the following: (1) a study of the history and organizational structure of career technical education; (2) a survey of the North Carolina FCS secondary programs of study; (3) guided observations at the secondary level to develop awareness of the various roles played by the FCS teacher, as well as to distinguish among the various courses; and (4) the study of effective procedures for organizing and advising an effective FCCLA chapter. In this class that meets three hours per week, students review the various secondary FCS programs of study and FCCLA resources; complete weekly observations at a public high school; develop a curriculum file for the various program areas; and attend the FCCLA state meeting. The purpose of this study was to obtain data on students' self-assessment of their competence related to their knowledge, awareness, and abilities related to the secondary FCS programs of study and FCCLA.

Methodology

At the beginning of the Spring 2016 semester, students received a course syllabus which included the course description, course objectives, class assignments, and a schedule listing the various topics to be addressed each week. Throughout the semester, students carried out the class activities and assignments that were required.

After gaining an overview of the history and organization of career technical education, students began their study of the North Carolina FCS education program of studies. Students joined the state's online FCS professional learning center to access the various FCS curriculum guides. They completed guided reviews of the middle school, foundational, and entry level specialized courses: *Exploring FCS Education*, *Teen Living*, *Foods 1*, *Parenting & Child Development*, *Apparel & Textile Production 1*, and *Interior Design 1*. In addition, as the entry level specialized courses were addressed, further information regarding upper level courses in that area was also provided. For example, as *Foods 1* was reviewed, information regarding *Foods 2 Technology*, *Foods 2 Enterprise*, *Culinary Arts*, and *ProStart* was also brought into the discussion to increase students' awareness of additional courses in that career pathway.

As students reviewed the various FCS secondary courses, they also made weekly observations in high school FCS classrooms, completing reflective reviews after each observation. Reflective reports required the following: brief description of what happened during the class; one thing that stood out to them; and a specific response to the concept being observed that day. For example, when considering the concept of the multiple roles of the FCS teacher, the prompt was the following.

Discuss the various roles in which the teacher was engaged (instructor, FCCLA adviser, career adviser, provider of work-based learning, curriculum developer, promoter of FCS program, evaluator, classroom manager, etc). How effectively did the teacher carry out these various roles? How does the teacher balance all these roles?

Since students observed different FCS courses and teachers, their follow-up class discussions

enabled them to distinguish more clearly among the various FCS course offerings. In addition, students gained valuable insights into the various roles carried out by FCS teachers.

Along with the guided reviews, observations, and reflective reports, students developed a resource file for each of the basic courses they reviewed. The purpose of this assignment was to help the students to clarify the content for each of the introductory and specialized FCS courses by selecting appropriate teaching resources for those courses. The resource file could then be utilized during the student teaching experience.

The second part of the *Introduction to FCS Education* course focused on the FCCLA organization. Using the *Handbook to Ultimate Leadership* (2009) FCCLA resource, students studied FCCLA traditions, organization, membership, funding, adviser's role, student leadership, communication, public relations, and FCCLA national programs and STAR events. One of the weekly high school observations concerned FCCLA, with the prompt being:

What evidences do you see that this teacher has an active FCCLA chapter? Bulletin boards? Co-curricular activities? Involvement in FCCLA events? If there is an active FCCLA, find out about it: How the teacher facilitates it; how many members there are; when meetings are held; how involved in various events and projects students are; etc. If there is not an active chapter, see if you can find out why that is the case. If there is an active chapter, reflect on what they do that you might also want to do with your future chapter. If there is not an active chapter, reflect on how you might get one started—what specific actions would you take?

For an FCCLA field experience, students served as judges for North Carolina's STAR Events competition which was held during the FCCLA state meeting. Students prepared for this experience by studying the event to which they were assigned, and then serving as a judge alongside FCS teachers and professionals. This experience enabled the students to see FCCLA in action.

At the end of the semester, students presented their resource files and FCCLA experiences to the class. They also completed a self-evaluation of their awareness, knowledge, and abilities regarding secondary FCS programs of study and the FCCLA student organization. Eleven FCS education students completed the self-evaluation instrument. The survey asked students to evaluate their awareness, knowledge, and competence related to the secondary FCS program of studies and FCCLA. Students were asked to rate themselves using a 3-point Likert-type scale (3 = "I have definite readiness or awareness in this area;" 2 = "I have some readiness or awareness;" and 1 = "I am still weak and uncomfortable in this area").

Results

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the mean scores of students' responses. Regarding their awareness/knowledge of the secondary FCS programs of study, students were most confident in their understanding of the following courses: (1) middle school Exploring FCS Education (mean = 2.55); (2) Teen Living (mean = 2.55); and (3) the specialized courses (Foods 1, Parenting & Child Development, Interior Design 1, & Apparel & Textile Production 1) (mean = 2.55). Students were less confident in their understanding of the history, organization, and status of career technical education in general (mean = 2.27). They were least certain regarding their knowledge of the career type courses (*Early Childhood Education, Culinary Arts, etc.*)

(mean = 1.73).

Regarding FCCLA, students reported being most knowledgeable about the resources available to FCCLA advisers (mean = 2.82), as well as feeling most competent in promoting FCCLA to students and the community (mean = 2.82). Students also reported feeling capable of developing an effective program of work for their chapters (mean = 2.73) and promoting the development of student leadership skills (mean = 2.73). Overall, students had a clear understanding of the facts, history, and traditions of FCCLA (mean = 2.55) and STAR events (mean = 2.55). They were less confident in their understanding of the national programs (mean = 2.18) and the overall organization of FCCLA at the district, state, and national levels (mean = 2.18).

Discussion and Conclusion

After completing the *Introduction to FCS Education* course at Appalachian State University, students reported that they were most knowledgeable about the middle school, foundational, and beginning specialized FCS courses, while feeling less prepared to teach the upper level career-based courses. Regarding FCCLA, students reported being more knowledgeable about FCCLA resources and promotion of FCCLA to the community; in addition, they felt capable of developing an effective program of work for their chapters. While students felt they had a sound understanding of FCCLA STAR events, they did not feel the same about their understanding of the FCCLA National Programs.

Findings from this study indicated that students were more knowledgeable regarding the courses that beginning teachers are more likely to teach in their first positions, and this aligns with the instructional emphasis in the *Introduction to FCS Education* course. In addition, most of students' public-school observations were completed in those foundational classes. Students appeared to recognize the value of reviewing the FCS curriculum guides and completing the weekly observations in high school FCS classrooms as indicated by some of their open-ended comments:

For me the most valuable thing was the exploration of the various NC curriculum guides. It was something I had never looked at but is very important as it provides the basis of our classrooms in the future. (Student A)

The observations and reflection prompts allowed me to look deeper instead of just sitting and observing. I tend to take things at face value, but the prompts challenged me to consider more than just the surface. (Student B)

The classroom observations really helped me see firsthand what I'm going to be doing soon. It was great to see it in action. (Student C)

Regarding FCCLA, it appeared that students' direct involvement with the STAR events at the state meeting enhanced their understanding of those events. A similar experience related to the national programs was not completed, and students appeared less confident in that area. However, even in most of the lower rated areas, students had some readiness or awareness. Students' open-ended comments indicated that they valued the experience of serving as a judge at the FCCLA STAR Events:

I enjoyed going to the FCCLA STAR Events. I was able to talk with FCS teachers and learn about the basics of FCCLA. (Student D)

The most helpful learning experience in this class was serving as a judge in the FCCLA STAR Events. It made everything much clearer for me as a future adviser to an FCCLA club, and it gave me plenty of insights.” (Student E)

Additional comments from the students revealed their desire for even more class discussion regarding their FCS classroom observations to share more fully with their classmates who might have different perspectives. In addition, students requested that more time be allotted for exploration of the state’s FCS professional learning center to not only review the basic curriculum guides, but also the more advanced FCS guides, as well as the resources related to FCCLA. Finally, students desired more information on the specifics of helping their future students prepare for an FCCLA STAR event.

Limitation

This study’s main limitation was its small number of participants; however, additional data will continue to be collected. In addition, these findings and students’ comments will be considered as future course revisions are made.

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