

COMPETENCIES IN CLOTHING AND TEXTILES NEEDED BY BEGINNING FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES TEACHERS

Cheryl L. Lee, Appalachian State University

A committee of 14 family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals in North Carolina was formed to review and revise the existing FCS education beginning teacher competencies. Competencies related to clothing and textiles were of particular concern as several appeared to be irrelevant for contemporary FCS programs. The author of this article gathered information for the sub-committee that worked to revise the clothing and textiles competencies. The purpose of this article is to describe the methods and results of that particular endeavor.

The National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education encouraged a group of North Carolina family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals to critically examine current competencies required for beginning FCS teachers in North Carolina. The existing FCS teaching competencies were developed in the 1980s and, therefore, were in need of review and revision. Competencies related to clothing and textiles were of particular concern as several appeared to be irrelevant for contemporary FCS programs. For example, clothing construction skills seemed to be overemphasized at a time when few individuals actually construct their own clothing.

The competencies required for beginning FCS teachers in North Carolina greatly influence the undergraduate FCS education curriculum at the university level. The university curriculum related to clothing and textiles, for example, must enable FCS education majors to gain the skills they need to effectively teach clothing and textiles classes at the secondary level. Since the existing competencies were dated, it was necessary to review them to identify what competencies students presently needed. Input from secondary FCS educators was deemed essential.

A committee of 14 FCS professionals in North Carolina was formed to review and revise the existing FCS education beginning teacher competencies. This committee included FCS state consultants from the Department of Public Instruction, teacher educators from North Carolina universities with FCS programs, and secondary FCS teachers. Sub-committees focused on individual curriculum areas, such as housing and interior design, child development, and foods and nutrition. Various resources were utilized in the review and revision process, including the National FCS Education Standards, national skills standards, North Carolina secondary program of study guides, and university courses of study. The committee met over the course of a year to review and revise the competencies. At the completion of the process, recommendations were made to the State Board of Education for approval of the revised competencies.

The author of this article gathered information for the sub-committee that worked to revise the clothing and textiles competencies. The purpose of this article is to describe the methods and results of that particular endeavor.

Procedures

As noted above, the objectives and competencies included in the North Carolina FCS programs of study (what high school students are to learn in their FCS classes) influence what

FCS teachers must be able to teach and likewise influence the beginning teacher competencies. As a result, the university FCS education curriculum is similarly impacted. A review of related literature indicated that there is not agreement on what content should be included in secondary clothing and textiles classes; specifically the debate concerns the emphasis that should be given to clothing construction skills. Some contend that sewing instruction should be a primary focus of high school clothing and textiles classes, noting the creative benefits and positive outlets it provides (Loker, 1987). Brandes and Garner (1997) also favor emphasis on clothing construction skills, maintaining that the apparel and textile industry represents one of the largest manufacturing employers in the United States with numerous challenging careers which require knowledge of clothing construction. They further note that while expertise in clothing construction may be required for successful employment, many colleges and universities claim there is insufficient time to include a basic clothing construction class in their programs in addition to the advanced technical skills that are required of college graduates. It is, therefore, critical that these basic sewing skills be taught in the high school FCS clothing and textiles classes.

It is contended that changes in society have altered the role of the traditional sewing component in the study of textiles and apparel; therefore, clothing construction skills are less critical (Murphey & Stewart, 1990; Pauley, 1996; Reynolds & Watson, 2000). Murphey and Stewart (1990) interviewed five Virginia high school FCS teachers regarding their use of sewing as part of their clothing and textiles curriculum. They found that four of the five teachers included some type of sewing project as part of their curriculum, although all had decreased the time they allotted for sewing instruction, in part because they recognized that most families in today's society purchase rather than construct their clothes. Pauley (1996) surveyed middle school students, parents, teachers, professionals, and selected other community representatives to determine what they desired in the local FCS middle school curriculum. Parents, professionals, teachers, and community members ranked sewing instruction the least important among 12 curriculum areas, instead indicating that communication, parenting/family, and consumerism skills were the most important concepts to teach.

The FCS Education National Standards include Comprehensive Standard 16.0 for textiles and apparel: "Integrate knowledge, skills, and practices required for careers in textiles and apparel" (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences, 1998, p. 231). Content standards include the following:

- 16.1 Analyze career paths within textiles and apparel design industries.
- 16.2 Evaluate fiber and textiles materials.
- 16.3 Demonstrate apparel and textiles design skills.
- 16.4 Demonstrate skills needed to produce, alter, or repair textiles products and apparel.
- 16.5 Evaluate elements of textiles and apparel merchandising.
- 16.6 Evaluate the components of customer service.
- 16.7 Demonstrate general operational procedures required for business profitability and career success. (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences, 1998).

In their review of Comprehensive Standard 16.0 for textiles and apparel, Reynolds and Watson (2000) note the various changes in the family, workplace, and apparel industry which have ultimately altered the traditional sewing component of textiles and apparel instruction. They contend that it is still necessary to manage clothing, but that clothing construction skills are less important. Therefore, the National FCS Education Standards for textiles and apparel focus

on managing family clothing resources and preparing students for careers in the industry. Only one of the seven content standards relates directly to clothing construction, and Reynolds and Watson say that standard should focus on the manufacturing/industry level rather than home sewing.

In addition to the literature review, it was considered desirable to obtain input from secondary FCS educators regarding the beginning teacher competencies for FCS education. What knowledge and skills related to clothing and textiles did practicing FCS teachers find essential? To obtain this information, a survey instrument was developed and mailed to 300 randomly selected North Carolina FCS teachers. The survey listed the current North Carolina teaching competencies related to clothing and textiles which were required for beginning FCS teachers and requested that the teachers rate the importance of each competency. Teachers were also asked to list other competencies related to clothing and textiles that they felt were needed by today's beginning FCS teachers. Demographic information was also collected. Usable questionnaires were received by 140 teachers; no follow-up surveys were sent. The 140 teachers comprised the sample for this study.

Findings

Almost all (138) of these high school FCS teachers were female, and the majority were in their 40s (47.1%) and 50s (26.4%). Approximately two-thirds (62.9%) held bachelor's degrees, while about one-third (36.4%) had completed master's degrees. Teaching experience varied from 0-5 years (15.8%) to 6-15 years (30.9%) and 16-25 years (35.3%); 18% possessed over 25 years of teaching experience. Using a Likert scale, teachers were asked to assess the importance of the teaching competencies related to clothing and textiles by rating each from "1" (not important) to "5" (extremely important). The mean value of each competency is listed below and in descending order.

- Perform basic skills necessary to use and alter patterns, construct and fit simple garments, and make simple repairs and alterations (4.60)
- Choose techniques and sequences of fabric preparation, cutting and marking of pattern pieces, construction, and pressing that are compatible with fabric and garment design (4.56)
- Assess ready-made and/or constructed garments for quality of construction (4.52)
- Demonstrate ability to select and use equipment for the construction and maintenance of personal and family clothing/apparel (4.51)
- Use management techniques in clothing construction (4.36)
- Define criteria to use in the acquisition and care of sewing equipment (4.16)
- Evaluate the properties and characteristics of textiles in relation to anticipated use and care (4.08)
- Apply art elements and principles of design in the acquisition and use of apparel and textile products (3.99)
- Evaluate the trade-offs among time, money, and aesthetic values in decisions to make, repair, alter, and recycle garments and other textile products (3.98)
- Identify alternative means of acquiring, using, and caring for clothing/apparel and textile products in relation to values, defined goals, life styles, and available resources (3.93)

- Analyze economic factors which influence market choices among textiles products and male/female clothing including patterns of production, distribution, and consumption (3.65)
- Analyze the cultural, social, and psychological factors that influence the acquisition and use of clothing/apparel and textile products (3.57)
- Evaluate the physical aspects of clothing/apparel and textile products that contribute to the protective environment of persons (3.46)

Discussion, Actions, and Implications

These secondary FCS teachers rated all the original teaching competencies related to clothing and textiles as relatively important; however, they rated those related to clothing construction the highest. In open-ended responses, teachers indicated the following competencies should be added: (a) skills in sewing machine repair, (b) advanced construction techniques, (c) serger operation, and (d) computer-aided design, as well as awareness of careers in the clothing and textiles industry.

The clothing and textiles sub-committee considered the review of literature and survey results, along with several other resources (including the National Standards for FCS Education), as they reviewed and recommended changes to the existing competencies related to clothing and textiles. There appeared to be some discrepancy between the national standards and the survey results as to the emphasis that clothing construction should receive in the curriculum and, therefore, in the beginning teacher competencies. While the standards seemed to advocate less emphasis on clothing construction skills, the secondary FCS teachers indicated that clothing construction skills were among the most important skills to be gained in the study of clothing and textiles. When this discrepancy was brought before the full curriculum revision committee, the majority of the committee members likewise felt that clothing construction skills were an important component of the study of clothing and textiles. It was pointed out that the Clothing Design secondary course was one of the most frequently offered FCS courses in the state, and that a major part of the course involved clothing construction skills. In order to be prepared to teach that course, a beginning teacher would have to possess adequate skills in clothing construction. As a result, clothing construction skills were retained as a part of the beginning teacher competencies for North Carolina FCS teachers. To provide for the achievement of those skills, North Carolina FCS education university programs typically require students to complete a clothing construction course.

The revised beginning teacher competencies related to clothing and textiles are listed below.

- Develop an appreciation for the cultural and aesthetic aspects of textiles, apparel, and fashion
- Assess apparel decisions in terms of value, functionality, and appearance
- Apply elements and principles of design in the use of apparel and textile products
- Select, care for, repair, and redesign textile products to meet individual and family needs
- Perform basic skills necessary to use and alter patterns, construct and fit simple garments, and make simple repairs and alterations
- Evaluate fibers, fabrics, design concepts, and principles of construction in textile products
- Identify clothing and textiles industry standards and technology

- Assess the influence of technology on apparel and textile products
- Explore career opportunities in textiles, apparel, and fashion

These revised beginning teacher competencies for clothing and textiles (along with those from the other FCS education areas, e.g. foods and nutrition, housing and interior design, family relationships, etc.) were recommended to the State Board of Education and were ultimately approved. Family and consumer science teacher educators had 1 year to revise their university FCS education programs and bring them in compliance with the new guidelines. Family and consumer science education majors from North Carolina universities are now accountable for achieving these revised competencies, and FCS teacher educators are responsible for ensuring that opportunities for that achievement are provided.

References

- Brandes, K., & Garner, M. (1997, Spring). The case for high school clothing construction classes. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 89(1), 62-65.
- Loker, S. (1987). A case for creativity: Sewing in the classroom. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 79(1), 15-18.
- Murphey, I., & Stewart, D. (1990). Changes in the clothing and textiles curriculum: Practices of five home economics teachers. *Journal of Vocational Home Economics Education*, 8(1), 19-30.
- National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences. (1998). *National standards for family and consumer sciences education*. Decatur, GA: Vocational-Technical Education Consortium of States.
- Pauley, E. (1996, Summer). Families and consumer sciences curricula: What do students, parents, faculty, and community want? *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 88(2), 11-14.
- Reynolds, S., & Watson-Maile, D. (2000). Textiles and apparel. In A. Vail, W. Fox, & P. Wild (Eds.), *Leadership for change: National standards for family and consumer sciences education* (pp. 187-196). Peoria, IL: American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences.

About the Author:

Cheryl L. Lee, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.