

## **PRACTICING TEACHERS' ADVICE FOR MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT OF EDUCATORS AND REVISITING THE IDENTITY ISSUE**

**Cheryl A. Mimbs, Southwest Missouri State University**

*The purposes of this study were to obtain a first-hand account from practicing family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers about their perceptions on the teacher shortage and their suggestions for recruitment and retention of FCS teachers. Practicing teachers who attended regional professional development workshops shared their advice to help new FCS teachers prepare for the challenges and rewards of the classroom. The information learned was encouraging and affirmed the FCS teachers' personal role in recruitment and retention of FCS educators. Their identity as FCS teachers is strong, and their advice helpful.*

Research has documented that secondary family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers' influence on new FCS teacher education graduates is second only to the new teachers' interest in FCS subject matter as key determinants of their career choice (Mimbs, Stewart, & Heath-Camp, 1998). What advice can FCS teachers give to the profession, to new teachers, to teacher educators? What teachers can best give this advice? Those who are successful in their career choice, those who experience high job satisfaction must be doing something right. Perhaps it is time to seek advice from those with teaching experience, those who have lived through the changes in the profession, and those who are actively involved in their own professional development as FCS teachers. Can they give us insights for the on-going challenge of meeting the demand for FCS educators? What is the teacher's role in marketing the profession?

The purposes of this study were to obtain a first-hand, descriptive account from practicing FCS teachers who are active in professional development about their perceptions of the teacher shortage and their suggestions for recruitment and retention of FCS teachers. Seeking the advice of experienced teachers and determining areas for further research were important to this study. A brief examination of these teachers' influential career choice factors, job satisfaction, and demographic characteristics is included, as well as a discussion of professional identity and marketing and its connection to recruitment and retention.

### **Related Literature**

Improving the image of the profession that is unfortunately stereotyped and reinforced by some practicing teachers was recommended as a result of a recent study on why teachers are not teaching. Mimbs (2000) examined the perceptions of teachers who are no longer in the classroom, many of which did not have a positive opinion of teaching FCS. The need to improve the image of FCS and the need for more support from administrators and other stakeholders of the education community for FCS was suggested by respondents to improve recruitment. When teachers themselves do not have a positive opinion of their own profession, they cannot present a positive image to their many audiences.

Concern for marketing the profession and the struggle for a clear identity for the FCS profession has continued. When considering personal identity as key to career development, conceptualization of a professional identity becomes important. Personal identity is directly

related to professional identity. One's goals, values, and beliefs are all part of one's personal identity (Gentzler, 1993). Vincenti (1993) describes the need for a clearer philosophy for the profession from which to build a new identity. Wild and Smith (1993) describe the identity issue as one that concerns all in the profession and one that should be acted upon. In the recent study by Mimbs (2000), improving the image of the profession and the purposes of FCS programs was the theme most often expressed by respondents. Other themes included confusion over the identity of the profession, the name change which implied a change in the way FCS is taught, and the reality of what is actually occurring in some classrooms. The public's perception continues to be stereotypical even in current television advertisements depicting home economics. Does the recent research and the continued use of stereotypes affect the supply of FCS educators? The profession of FCS has reported an ongoing shortage of teachers and extension educators in the field (Jackman & Rehm, 1994; Miller & Meszaros, 1996).

Concern for providing an adequate supply of FCS educators has directed our energies to updating FCS education programs. Some examples include reaching out to nontraditional students, hiring second career persons to fill teaching vacancies, and using accelerated and irregular certification programs (Lee, 1998; Travers, 1999). The study conducted by Mimbs et al. (1998) indicated an increase in the numbers of non-traditional, second career students in FCS teacher preparation programs. There has been considerable attention given to reform in teacher education in all disciplines at colleges and universities. These include professional development school models and partnerships with schools, teacher academies, masters' degree programs for certification, accelerated teacher education programs, and alternative certification strategies (American Association of State Colleges and Universities [AASCU], 1995).

Does changing the way we provide teacher certification and offering alternative options really make the difference in recruitment and retention? Is there a discrepancy between the vision of those who worked so hard to position the profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (American Home Economics Association [AHEA], 1994) and what is happening in the classroom? Has the name change, development of National Standards for FCS (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Science [NASAFACS], 1998), and related efforts made a difference? Have we marketed a new identity that is in conflict with what practicing teachers are doing? These questions will require more research to find the answer. However, some have studied the identity issue. Often the teacher and her/his classroom are the only picture students and parents have of FCS. Erwin (1995), who examined guidance counselor's perceptions of secondary FCS programs, recommended that teachers do a better job of marketing the value of what FCS teachers teach. A link was found between the teacher and the perceptions of the program and also to the larger community. Lee (1998) examined secondary school students' perceptions of the field, which indicated their confusion about what FCS is. Lee described a concern for the perpetuation of the stereotypical curriculum as a deterrent to young people choosing it as a career.

It is important to ask why teachers choose to teach. In a survey of 93 education majors, over 95% of the students strongly agreed with the following statements, "Teaching will allow me to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth," "Teaching will give me an opportunity to use my creative abilities," "I like working with children," and "I like children and youth" (Hayes, 1990). Believing one will like what they plan to do is important. Sarason (1993) described one necessary criteria of choosing a teaching career as whether or not "becoming a teacher very much appeals to you" (p. 16). In addition, Sarason stated that persons who choose teaching want to take a role in influencing children's development.

Teachers often indicate the need to “nurture” as a motivation for their choosing teaching as a career as found in a study of recent graduates of FCS teacher education programs (Mimbs et al., 1998). Serow (1994) examined the notion that teachers actually believe they have a “calling to teach.” Bogue (1991) also defines teaching as a “calling” and describes teaching as “a journey of the heart” (p. 92). Over 30% of respondents in the study by Mimbs (1997) indicated they felt teaching was a calling in their life. Understanding one's own motivations is helpful in making a career choice (Sarason, 1993). Through the process of career development, one finds a fit between their personality, needs, values, and interests with the set of characteristics needed for success in whatever career they are seeking. They need to take into account the influence of social, environmental, and economic factors in making their career decision. This is described as salience theory, the value one places on life roles, and how they change over time (Scharf, 1997).

Marketing one’s own career to others is a key responsibility of FCS teachers, especially in a time of critical teacher shortage. There are many careers available to secondary students today. Making FCS education a viable option requires efforts by practicing teachers. Students need to see teachers that they themselves can use as role models. They need to be able to picture themselves as that teacher, if they are going to choose teaching FCS as a career. Research has not sought the opinion and advice of practicing teachers. Yet as suggested by Wild and Smith (1993), this is particularly important especially with regard to marketing the profession.

## **Methodology**

### Subjects

All 94 FCS teachers who attended regional curriculum workshops in a large Midwestern state in spring 2000 were the subjects targeted for this study. The regional workshops covered six different geographical locations across the state. The workshop session was planned and prepared at a central location as a team by FCS state staff, teacher educators, and curriculum writers, then delivered separately by members of the team at the six locations. Both a state FCS newsletter and an email list-serve announcement were used to advertise the workshops. Workshops were delivered in universities, schools, and area conference centers.

### Instrumentation

The researcher developed the survey, and workshop team members provided feedback before the surveys were distributed. The survey included personal, education, and employment demographics; career choice-factors; and four open-ended questions on retirement, recruitment, and retention. The career-choice factors portion of the survey was adapted from that used by Mimbs et al. (1998) and Serow (1994).

Surveys were given to all who attended the workshops (n = 94). The completed surveys were then mailed in batches from the different locations by team members to the researcher. This provided anonymity. The researcher numbered the surveys as they were returned for data analysis purposes. A total of 83 persons completed the survey for an 88% return rate.

### Data Analysis

Personal, education, and employment demographic data was analyzed using frequency distribution and descriptive statistics. Career-choice factor data is reported here in descriptive form and was informally compared to findings of an earlier study using the same survey questions (Mimbs et al., 1998). The answers to open-ended questions were analyzed using NVivo qualitative software (Richards, 1999). This software allows for sections of text, individual words, and phrases to be examined for similar meanings and repetitive use.

Definitions are assigned and themes created to give meaning to open-ended text responses, such as those the teachers gave to the open ended questions.

## Findings

All the respondents were female and most were Caucasian except for one person who was Asian and one who was Hispanic. Over half of the participants in the study were between the ages of 41-50, and 23% were between the ages of 51-55. A total of 82% of respondents were married with 64% indicating they had children living in the home. Almost 34% indicated they interrupted their teaching for parenting/homemaking responsibilities, and 41% indicated they taught after being a full-time homemaker and/or parent.

Job satisfaction was high for these teachers participating in the regional workshops. A total of 59% were very satisfied while 31% were somewhat satisfied with their current teaching job. Teaching was the first career choice of 81% of respondents, and FCS was the first choice of discipline for 89%. A total of 48% made their career choice while in high school and 34% while in college. Comparing this to the study of newly certified FCS teachers (Mimbs et al., 1998), these practicing teachers are considerably older, have higher levels of education, and indicated teaching FCS as a first career choice more often than newly certified teachers. More of them also made their career choice while in secondary school than newly certified teachers.

A total of 40% of participants had been teaching FCS for over 20 years. Expected time of retirement was within the next 3-5 years for 35% and within 10 years for another 25%. The majority of respondents were teaching in comprehensive FCS programs at the high school level. The education level of respondents varied with 39% having credits beyond a bachelor's degree, 24% with a master's degree, 33% with credits beyond a master's degree, and less than 5% with a bachelor's degree only. A total of 42% of respondents received their teaching licensure between the years of 1970-1975, and most have a lifetime certificate.

Respondents were asked to choose from a list of 12 factors which ones they felt were influential to their decision to seek teacher preparation as their career choice. The three factors most often chosen by these practicing teachers were "I like working with young people" (60%), "I like helping people" (52%), and "The example of my own teachers inspired me" (43%). This compares to the same most influential factors indicated by recent graduates of FCS teacher education programs as (57%), (55%), and (40%) respectively (Mimbs et al., 1998).

The teachers were asked to answer the following open-ended questions: (a) Do you feel there will be available applicants for your position when you retire? Please explain., (b) Are you planning to teach longer than you anticipated because of the lack of applicants to take your place? Please comment., (c) What suggestions do you have for recruitment and retention of FCS teachers?, and (d) What advice would you give to new FCS teachers?

Over 40% of respondents indicated they did not expect there to be available applicants for their position when they retire. Ten of those persons explained it was because few choose FCS as a career. Others indicated low pay and lack of available programs at universities as reasons they felt there would not be available applicants. Eleven persons were unsure of their replacement, and seven other persons were hopeful they would be replaced but did not explain further.

Only 19% (n = 16) were confident there would be applicants. Several of these persons indicated they felt this was because of their geographical location near or in a more densely populated area. Three of those persons described confidence in their replacement because they themselves were promoting it as a viable career to their own secondary students.

A total of 52 persons (63%) of respondents indicated they would not teach longer than they had expected. Ten other teachers indicated they would consider staying, but were uncertain. One wrote, "I don't know. I will hate to see my program abandoned if there is not replacement for me." Another person wrote, "Maybe. I hate to let my department down after we spent so long building and validating my programs." One other person indicated their commitment to their program, with a condition. "Yes, I'll probably teach until a replacement is found; however, I will not go past 60 years of age."

Five themes were discovered as a result of analysis of the teachers' responses to the question asking for suggestions for recruitment and retention. They include: (a) more innovative marketing of the profession as a career, (b) earlier recruitment and more recruitment efforts by teachers through their own classrooms and by university programs, (c) increased community and administrative support for programs, (d) more scholarships and teacher education programs available to students, and (e) concern for better salaries. Some teachers expressed a concern regarding low pay, support from schools, and awareness of importance of what FCS teachers contribute as one person wrote "More pay, more recognition. It's almost like we don't teach 'real stuff.' We are a dumping ground for non-college bound students and those who don't really care about school." However, the suggestions shared by many respondents were more positive and enthusiastic which showed their commitment. Some examples follow.

Exhibit a positive, enthusiastic attitude about what we do! Be a role model and "put a bug" in your student's ear. Build up your program and advertise and enjoy your job! Focus on the variety involved in the job and the support systems in place. Visit FCS programs, get great ideas, believe in yourself, what you teach is important.

Some of the recruitment suggestions included the need to market the profession as not only needed and practical, but also changing and innovative. Teachers expressed the need to continually promote their role as professional and thus improving their image. One teacher wrote, "We need to choose students who we think would enjoy the profession and assert their interest and offer more scholarships." A recurring theme is well stated in these two comments, "FCS teachers in middle and high school are our best resource for recruiting. Teachers have to sell their programs, be a role model." Another person also suggested more recruitment of student organization members from the Family, Career, and Community, Leaders of America (FCCLA).

The teachers gave a lot of advice for new FCS teachers. As the comments were analyzed, 10 themes appeared as follows: (a) be involved in professional development activities, workshops, conferences, and further education; (b) seek help from other teachers and ask questions, (c) get organized and budget time, (d) be flexible and adaptable, (e) be ready for hard work and challenges, (f) enjoy your career and remember the value of your profession with its' rewards, (g) create balance in your life, (h) hang in there, things get better, (i) show kids you care and teach what they need, and (j) promote your program. Some teachers' comments included several of the themes as evidenced here.

Become involved in organizations, network with others, visit with other teachers for encouragement and advice. Don't be an island. Rewarding, but be prepared to be daily exhausted. It is a very fulfilling career. Don't let the scope of FCS overwhelm you. The first 2 years are the roughest because there is so much you learn that cannot be taught in a classroom. Create a balance in your life.

## Discussion and Conclusions

It is interesting to note how similar the respondents in this study are to one another. They can be described as female, the majority of which are married, and parents, one-third of which have interrupted teaching to do parenting and/or homemaking responsibilities, yet the majority of respondents have many years of teaching experience and high job satisfaction. Being able to balance their work and family responsibilities and enjoy what they do is a very positive description of their teaching careers. This should be used by teachers when recruiting students for teaching. Despite this description of their own teaching career, many indicated their concern for enough available applicants for their own replacement.

Person's certified as FCS teachers, whether newly certified or practicing, is very similar to one another. Their career choice was made based on similar altruistic values. Altruism, helping others without concern for one's self, has been identified as a motivating force for those seeking a teaching career (Daniel & Ferrel, 1991). A full 33% of recent graduates newly certified for teaching FCS were characterized as altruistic (Mimbs et al., 1998). Both the experienced teachers in the current study and those in the study of those newly certified made their career choice because family was important to them, and they sought professional satisfaction and creativity in their work. They were similarly influenced by their interest in working with and helping young people and their own teachers' inspiration.

Open-ended question number three about suggestions for recruitment and retention was also used by Mimbs (2000) in the study of non-teaching certified persons. Themes that were similar to both studies include image of the profession, concern for better salaries, and improving administrative and community support for programs. This current study targeted practicing teachers' suggestions, and there seems to be a more positive proactive response than that from those not teaching. The study by Mimbs indicated more responsibility for recruitment and retention should be on the teacher education programs and school administrators. Whereas practicing teachers in this study indicate they feel a responsibility themselves to increase their own recruitment efforts and use their classroom, programs, and students to market the profession as a career.

As suggested by Feltehausen and Couch (1991), it is often through an introduction by teachers in secondary schools that persons first become interested in careers in FCS. The teachers in this study seem to understand this responsibility to market their programs. Some examples of this proactive stance that is evidenced in the comments of several respondents are as follows: "Work with school administrators about relevance of FCS program. Get them to support you." "FCS teachers in middle and high school are our best resource for recruiting." "Exhibit a positive, enthusiastic attitude about what we do. We tend to moan and groan about how busy we are." "Build up your department, advertise, and enjoy your job!" O'Brien and Rehm (1993) encourage FCS educators to remember that "students are our reasons for being," and they reinforce the power of enthusiasm as key to marketing what we do (p. 112). This follows for all levels of students. For instance, a study by Lee (1998) indicated that enthusiasm demonstrated by university faculty was a key contribution to the success of those seeking FCS teacher certification.

The results of this study are also encouraging to FCS professionals, teacher educators, state staff, and others who are involved in preparing and delivering professional development activities, workshops, in-service and pre-service training for FCS educators. We must continue our efforts to provide opportunities for FCS educators. Professional development should be

ongoing and relevant. As suggested by Jones, Vail, and Williams (2000), professional development should meet the needs of the teachers to best facilitate change.

The advice given to new FCS teachers is also mostly positive in nature. The 10 themes reflect taking action; taking responsibility; awareness of challenges; seeking help when needed; continuing professional development; working hard; and being creative, flexible, and active in the profession. This positive approach is refreshing. Since these are workshop attendees who are likely to be more active themselves in improving their teaching and taking advantage of networking and professional development activities, perhaps they are more inclined to see the positive side of the issues. Brown (2000) suggests that successful professional development should include opportunities for teachers to network with each other.

This study was small in numbers; however, it was representative of six regions across the state and can be somewhat generalized for FCS teachers who are active in professional development activities. Further study of these respondents' specific strategies for recruitment of their FCS secondary students to pursue FCS education as a career would be helpful. Although respondents were unsure that there would be someone to replace them, they provided positive advice for FCS teachers and indicated an understanding of the importance of their own recruitment efforts. They appreciate the responsibility they have in marketing the profession and in being a role model, demonstrating that they value what they do. It is also encouraging as evidenced through their comments that they enjoy their work and find rewards as FCS teachers.

The results of this study indicate that many of these teachers do not need to be persuaded that what they do is important, and they are well aware of the seriousness of the supply issue. They know they must take action to recruit replacements for themselves. Others need to join with them to actively market their careers as a viable career choice for students. As these teachers have expressed their own personal experiences, FCS educators need to listen and take their advice. This proactive approach to recruitment was echoed in the comments of many respondents. Perhaps more FCS teachers should coin the phrase one respondent shared, "If you want to change the world, choose FACS as a career!"

It is important to also remember the larger value and outcomes of the work of FCS educators: (a) improving families, (b) creating life-long learners, and (c) making a better world. To make a real impact on the teacher supply, FCS teachers need to have an awareness of the concerns of professional identity and make concerted efforts to cooperatively market the value and necessity of the continuation of secondary programs for individuals and families. Teachers of FCS are prepared to teach in all specialty areas of the field. They touch the lives of many youth and families by empowering them with skills to balance the multiple roles they play as part of a family, community, and work environment.

Perhaps the next questions to ask FCS teachers are, "Did you find creativity and professional satisfaction in your chosen career? Were you able to balance the values of family and helping people with your own family's priorities and responsibilities? Further research should include an examination of FCS teachers' expectations versus the realities of their job duties. More information regarding their environmental conditions in schools, administrative support for FCS programs; types of students in FCS classrooms; financial rewards; and other factors that affect job satisfaction, career maintenance, and professional development would be helpful. Mimbs (2000) found these issues to be key reasons why certified FCS teachers are not currently teaching. Further research on a larger scale of other practicing FCS educators on issues of job satisfaction, enthusiasm for and perceptions of the value of their work, and strategies for balancing family, parenting, homemaking, and other responsibilities with their teaching career is

recommended. More qualitative studies should be conducted as they can provide more authentic understanding and insight as evidenced by this study.

## References

- American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (1995). *Changing the course: Teacher education reform and state colleges and universities*. Washington, DC: AASCU and Teacher Education Council of State Colleges and Universities.
- American Home Economics Association (AHEA). (1994). Positioning the profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *AHEA Action*, 20(2), special pull out section.
- Bogue, E. G. (1991). *A journey of the heart: The call to teaching*. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa.
- Brown, B. L. (2000). Vocational teacher professional development. Practice Application Brief No. 11. Educational Resources Information Center. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 442994)
- Daniel, L. G., & Ferrel, C. M. (1991, November). *Clarifying reasons why people aspire to teach: An application of Q-methodology*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Lexington, KY.
- Erwin, G. T. (1995). *High school guidance counselors' perceptions of secondary home economics programs: Directions for the future*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Felstehausen, G., & Couch, S. (1991). Home economics education: Reflecting on the past, projecting for the future. *Journal of Vocational Home Economics Education*, 9(1), 1-11.
- Gentzler, Y. S. (1993). Certification, accreditation, and identity. In E. P. Anderson & V. I. Clark (Eds.), *Marketing home economics: Issues and practices*, pp. 77-87. Yearbook 13 of the American Home Economics Association. Peoria, IL: Macmillan McGraw-Hill.
- Hayes, S. (1990). *Students' reasons for entering the educational profession*. Alva: Northwestern Oklahoma State University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 366 234)
- Jackman, D. H., & Rehm, M. (1994, December). *National supply and demand study of secondary home economics teachers*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Vocational Association, Dallas, TX.
- Jones, E. G., Vail, A., & Williams, S. K. (2000). The impact of professional development experience, advocacy support and other opportunities for South Carolina family and consumer sciences secondary school teachers. *NATEFACS Research Abstracts: 2000 Annual Meeting*. San Diego: Association for Career and Technical Education.
- Lee, C. L. (1998). Irregular certification: A potential solution to the critical shortage of family and consumer sciences education teachers. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 16(2), 33-44.
- Lee, C. L. (1998). Middle school students' perceptions of family and consumer sciences teaching as a career. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 16(2), 95-106.

- Miller, S. H., & Meszaros, P. S. (1996). Study of national incoming supply and demand for family and consumer sciences teachers and extension educators. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 88(1), 51-54.
- Mimbs, C. A. (2000). Retention of certified family and consumer sciences teachers: Implications for teacher supply and demand. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education* [On-line serial], 18(1). Retrieved from <http://www.natefacs.org/journal/vol18no1/retention.htm>.
- Mimbs, C. A. (1997). *Career choice decisions of family and consumer sciences education recent graduates: Implications for recruitment to address the teacher shortage*. UMI Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor, MI: Bell & Howell.
- Mimbs, C. A., Stewart, D.L., & Heath-Camp, B. (1998). Career choice decisions of family and consumer sciences education recent graduates: Recruitment implications. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 16(2), 45-59.
- National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS). (1998). *National standards for family and consumer sciences education*. Decatur, GA: Vocational-Technical Education Consortium of States.
- O'Brien, S. J., & Rehm, M. L. (1993). To be or not to be: Marketers, that is. In E. P. Anderson & V. L. Clark (Eds.), *Marketing home economics: Issues and practices*, pp. 101-112. Yearbook 13 of the American Home Economics Association. Peoria, IL: Macmillan McGraw-Hill.
- Richards, L. (1999). *Using NVIVO in qualitative research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Melbourne, Australia: Qualitative Solutions and Research, Pty, LTD.
- Sarason, S. B. (1993). *You are thinking of teaching? Opportunities, problems, realities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Scharf, R. S. (1997). *Applying career development theory to counseling* (2nd ed). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Serow, R. C. (1994). Called to teach: A study of highly motivated preservice teachers. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 27(2), 65-72.
- Travers, R. D. (1999). Teacher recruitment: Turning the tide. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education* [On-line serial], 17(2). Retrieved from <http://www.natefacs.org/journal/vol17no2/teachrecruit.htm>.
- Vincenti, V. B. (1993). Professional identity: Interferences within. In E. P. Anderson & V. L. Clark (Eds.), *Marketing home economics: Issues and practices*, pp. 41-62. Yearbook 13 of the American Home Economics Association. Peoria, IL: Macmillan McGraw-Hill.
- Wild, P., & Smith, S.S. (1993). Internal and external marketing telling the story. In E. P. Anderson & V. L. Clark (Eds.), *Marketing home economics: Issues and practices*, pp. 190-200. Yearbook 13 of the American Home Economics Association. Peoria, IL: Macmillan McGraw-Hill.

### **About the Author**

Cheryl A. Mimbs, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor and Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher Educator in the Department of Consumer and Family Studies in the College of Health and Human Services, at Southwest Missouri State University.