NATIONAL JUMP$TART COALITION FOR FINANCIAL LITERACY BENCHMARKS: CURRICULUM INCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE IN WISCONSIN

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Current middle school and high school family and consumer sciences teachers responded to a survey that asked the amount of time devoted to various financial topics as identified by the National Jump$tart Coalition. Results suggested that courses included in high school programs provide instruction time on most topics identified by the Jump$tart Coalition. Classes at the junior high level provided less instruction on financial topics.

The Goals 2000 Educate America Act of 1994 motivated many organizations to write national content standards to guide America's schools. A practical reason to write standards was to increase the likelihood that schools would voluntarily review and adopt these standards. National standards for elementary and secondary schools have been identified in 10 disciplines within the K-12 curriculum (Buckles & Watts, 1998).

The National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education published in 1998 included extensive consumer economic standards in sections 2.0 and 3.0. These standards identified specific competencies, academic proficiencies, and process questions that focused on both services and practices.

The National Jump$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy also identified consumer education/financial management topics for youth. This coalition consists of various organizations including the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, the National Council of Economic Education, and the Foundation for Teaching Economics. These standards outline a general rationale and identify benchmarks and achievement levels for grades 4, 8, and 12.

Detailed economic standards were published in 1997 by a coalition of representatives from the National Council on Economic Education, the National Association of Economics Educators, the Foundation for Teaching Economics, and the American Economic Association's Committee on Economic Education. These standards also contain a general rationale and identify benchmarks and achievement levels for grades 4, 8 and 12.

Ideally, part of the national reform movement was to coordinate content material across disciplines (Siegfried & Meszaros, 1998); not unlike the 1968 amendment to the 1963 Vocational Act that mandated all vocational approved consumer and homemaking programs integrate consumer education into all coursework. However, coordination on the development of the standards is not evident (Buckles & Watts, 1998). Voluntary standards may not be adopted unless they can be integrated into a current school curriculum, which is already quite crowded. Past history suggest that groups do not consider the competing demands for time.

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE, 1993) stated:

> Coherence across subject-matter standards (not just within) is necessary to ensure that a collective the standards are "doable" during a school day and a year. Most

> of the National Science Foundation's 1950s and 1960 science curriculums did not take into consideration the competing demands and interest which fight for time and resource within a school. Additional time for science meant that time for other subjects had to be reduced, and science did not win out in the end. (p. 4)

Currently, Family and Consumer Sciences educators who teach consumer education/financial management topics have several overlapping standards to consider when developing curriculum. In addition, these educators and students live in an economic environment that is more diverse and complex than previous generations.

Although several national standards have been developed and published, recent surveys (Jump$tart 1997, 2001; Madell, 1998) suggest that students are leaving our secondary schools without adequate basic skills in personal finance. Without the proper financial education and skills children and young adults can be very vulnerable to poor financial planning and a wide range of deceptive practices. Martin and Oliva (2001) suggest that young adults' inability to understand financial issues leads to long-range difficulties in financial security and responsibility.

Educators and parents need to provide opportunities for students to develop knowledge and skills about personal finance. A recent review of family and consumer sciences curriculum (Pauley, 1996) suggests that contemporary family and consumer sciences classes may not be addressing current needs. However, some family and consumer sciences programs do include financial topics, and these programs could benefit by publicizing to parents and administration the fact that these programs are helping students develop basic financial education and skills.

This study was conducted to assess the current status of consumer economics classes and topics taught in Wisconsin's family and consumer sciences secondary programs. The results of the study will be used in a required consumer economics college course for family and consumer sciences majors. In addition, family and consumer sciences instructors and professionals could use the results to critique their curriculum or market their consumer programs to administration and parents.

Survey Development and Pilot Test

A survey was developed that listed consumer education/financial management topics and teaching processes for high school programs and middle school programs. The consumer education/financial management topics were generated after a review of Jump$tart Coalition benchmarks for the 8th grade and 12th grade level.

The teaching processes list was taken from the *Wisconsin's Model for Academic Standards for Family and Consumer Education* (1997). Identical teaching processes lists were used in the high school and middle school sections of the survey. Participants were asked to indicate the time of instruction on each topic or process used based on the following choices: a good deal, some, slightly, or not at all.

The survey also included open-ended questions. These questions asked for any additional information; if the courses were required; suggestions for in-services or conference topics; and the school name, address, and other relevant information**.** A pilot test utilizing nine family and consumer sciences teachers was conducted. Based on feedback from the pilot test participants, three items (questions 27, 28, 29) were added to the high school section. The source of the teaching processes was also identified.

Sample

A purposive sampling of Wisconsin's approximately 880 family and consumer sciences teachers was used for the study. Mailing labels ordered from the State Department of Public Instruction were counted, and every third label was included to reach a total of 175 high schools/community schools (51% high schools/community schools) and 125 middle schools/junior highs (51% of middle schools/junior highs).

Only one survey was sent to a school. The recipient of the survey was asked to consult with other members of the department, if applicable, prior to completing the survey.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected in the spring of 2001. The surveys were mailed to the instructor. The mailing included an introductory letter, the survey, and a prepaid postage envelope in which to return the survey.

Ninety-nine surveys were mailed back representing a return rate of 33%. Twenty-five surveys were from only middle schools, 28 surveys from only high schools, and 46 surveys were a combination of middle/high schools. The data analysis represented 74 high schools/community schools and 71 middle schools/junior highs. Twenty-six high schools had a two or more person department; only nine middle schools reported having two or more instructors.

To generate mean scores for each of the consumer education/financial management topics and teaching processes numbers were assigned to each choice as follows "A good deal" = 4, "Some" = 3, "Slightly"= 2, and "Not at all"= 1. The software program SPSS was used to record the scores for each topic (Table 1). All open-ended responses were compiled and reviewed for any continuing themes.

Findings

The mean score of 2.8 for all high school consumer education/financial management topics suggested that the high school classes address topics more in-depth than middle school classes for which the mean score was 2.3. The top three high school survey topics included "factors influencing decision-making process" (M = 3.50); "signs of credit problems" (M = 3.36); and "individual decision about money management" (M = 3.36). The top three selections from the middle school survey included "needs vs. wants" (M = 2.99); "using product information to make choices" (M = 2.91); and "ways to earn money" (M = 2.81). However, the topics- investment options, interest rates, inflation rates, and government influence on interest and inflation rates–received lower rating on both surveys suggesting that less time was spent on these topics at both levels.

Table 1
Mean score for high school and middle school consumer education/financial management topics

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM	
Consumer Education/ Financial Management Topics	M
1. Individual decision about money management	3.36
2. Family decision about money management	2.96
3. Factors influencing decision-making process	3.50
4. Types of resources (human, financial, etc.)	3.16
5. Career options and earning potentials	3.31

6. Developing and using a budget	3.2
7. Fixed and variable expenses	3.15
8. Disposable income	3.01
9. Taxes	2.50
10. Different types of insurance (car, home, etc.)	2.91
11. Transportation costs	2.89
12. Housing options and costs	3.14
13. Interest rates	2.62
14. Inflation rates	2.16
15. Governmental influence interest & inflation rates	1.84
16. Pros and cons of high/low interest & inflation rates	1.96
17. What is a credit report	2.69
18. Factors influencing a credit rating	2.91
19. Signs of credit problems	3.39
20. Types of financial services	2.81
21. Basic financial operations (balance checkbook, figure interest costs, etc.)	3.00
22. Use product information to make choices	3.27
23. Consumer protection laws	2.85
24. Sources of consumer information	2.99
25. Cost of using credit-annual percentage rate	2.70
26. Using technology resources and information	3.09
27. Investment options	2.36
28. Employment considerations (deductions, etc.)	3.31
29. Entrepreneurship	2.45
High School Grand Mean	2.80
MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM	
Consumer Education/ Financial Management Topics	
40. Needs versus wants	2.99
41. Entrepreneurship	2.36
42. Career options and income potential	2.71
43. Types of financial services	1.93
44. Use of goals in financial planning	2.39
45. Budgeting for expenses or wants	2.49
46. Pros and cons of saving versus spending	2.34
47. Factors that influence personal credit worthiness	1.93
48. Simple interest	1.76
49. Ways to earn money	2.81
50. Using product information to make choices	2.91
51. Consumer rights and responsibilities	2.50
52. Consumer Protection Laws	2.13
53. Investment options	1.57
54. Inflation	1.59
55. Using technology resources and information	2.64
Middle School Grand Mean	2.30

A variety of teaching processes are being used in the high schools ($M = 3.25$) and middle schools ($M = 2.97$). At each level service learning and management processes were both ranked toward the bottom.

A paired *t*-test (Table 2) was used to compare the means of the teaching processes at the high school level and the middle school level. The paired *t*-test found that a statistically significant difference between middle school and high school instructors in the time that was spent on service learning activities with high school instructors spend more time on service learning activities. However, the middle school teachers do spend significant more time than the at the high school teachers when it came to using leadership processes in their instruction.

Many middle school programs include a basic food and nutrition/food preparation unit, a sewing unit, and personal skills unit. The personal skills unit typically includes discussion of the role of leadership and skills needed. After instruction in these areas, instructors may have little time left for additional topics such as service learning**.**

Table 2
Teaching Processes Paired t-test

	High School M	Middle School M	t-test	p
30. Problem solving	3.50	3.26	3.536	.001
31. Informed decision making	3.50	3.03	4.102	.000
32. Practical reasoning	3.35	2.93	3.463	.001
33. Critical thinking	3.41	3.06	3.715	.001
34. Creative thinking	3.35	3.01	3.739	.001
35. Management processes	3.15	2.49	5.205	.000
36. Communication processes	3.36	3.11	3.842	.000
37. Leadership processes	2.92	3.29	2.402	.021
38. Service learning activities	2.73	2.55	1.729	.091
Average Mean	3.25	2.97	2.985	.017

Table 3
Additional consumer education/financial management topics taught or process used (high school level).

- many of these topics are taught in business and math classes
- stock market game on internet
- food budgeting, clothing budgeting/comparisons, child care cost comparisons
- I use simulations
- spread sheets, clothing purchases and care, food purchases and care
- basically integrate consumer discussion in all foods, sewing, child development, and interior design classes
- Most of the above topics and processes are taught in other departments
- College financial aid, child care options, cost and selection, food cost comparisons, home furnishing and equipment comparison
- furniture buying, history of consumer movement, advertising, food: menu, list, shopping

Table 4
Additional consumer education/financial management topics or process used (middle school level).

- When we teach financial management topics it is integrated with career exploration and entrepreneurship. It does not stand alone
- Consumer economics is offered at the high school level
- Consumer education - financial management is not taught as a separate course in our department (taught by social studies in high school)
- Living on you open simulation (not the disk one)
- We have been without a middle school teacher for 1 year. One has been hired for fall - unable to complete section at this time.
- I only have 7th graders for 6 weeks
- Through entrepreneurship this information is taught
- Technological changes and influence on society/family, change in laws, family structure
- Budgeting Project - Find a place to live--either mortgage or rent they can afford based on income given, grocery shopping & planning, a week's worth of meals, buying a car with payments, insurance and gas
- Cooperation

One middle school teacher commented (Table 4) that instructional time was usually limited, thus there may not be time allotted for service learning activities. This is not unlike the concern expressed by Conrad (1998) that standards should be taught as a collective across the entire school curriculum so they are "doable" within a year. Instructors may need to look at reprioritizing or restructuring curriculum within the school system.

Only 46 schools, the majority of which were high schools, offered a specific consumer education class. Many respondents stated that several of the consumer topics were incorporated into content-specific materials (i.e., food budgeting/shopping, clothing purchases, child care cost, home furnishings and equipment). Career exploration and entrepreneurship activities are taught by other departments (business, math, and social studies). Although this survey did not specifically address the issue of vocational and general programs, the comments suggest that instructors have integrated consumer topics into many courses as mandated by the 1968 amendment to the 1963 Vocational Act.

Implications

Survey results revealed that high school programs are likely to provide more in-depth discussion on a variety of consumer education/financial management topics than middle school programs. Undoubtedly, middle school teachers are constrained by the limited instructional time. In the "additional comments" section of the survey, several respondents specifically requested middle school curriculum and activities suggesting a willingness to incorporate consumer education/financial management topics in the middle school curriculum in Wisconsin. A revision of middle school curriculum may be desirable to ensure the curriculum is addressing the needs of students for financial/consumer education.

Some respondents also suggested a state requirement to increase consumer education at the secondary level. A state requirement could have the effect of boosting enrollment in family and consumer sciences programs, assuming state and local administrators are fully aware that family and consumer sciences teachers are prepared to teach consumer education/financial management topics.

Several respondents identified a lack of family and consumer sciences instructors to fill positions. Unfortunately, a predicted shortage of family and consumer teachers (Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Stout, Couch,& Fowler, 1998) exists throughout most of the United States. Any state requirement will be difficult to meet when teachers are not available to fill teaching positions. Recruiting individuals to enroll in the family and consumer sciences education must be a high priority for the profession.

Other respondents suggested that current school budget issues are limiting their programs. Obviously, school budget issues are complex problems involving politics, people, and priorities. Family and consumer sciences teachers must be willing to market their programs and educate local administrators and school boards that they are prepared to teach a variety of topics including consumer education.

Teacher preparation programs must continue to provide a broad base of consumer information including investments options, interest rates, and inflation rates in addition to teaching processes. The results of the survey suggested the following recommendations for undergraduate courses:

- Continue providing content on a wide range of consumer topics including interest rates, inflation rates, and the influence of government on economic indicators.
- Highlight investment opportunities--include advantages and disadvantages.
- List appropriate consumer economic/financial management topics for middle school and high school curriculum.
- Identify teaching resource available to middle school and high school instructor--including internet resources and web sites.
- Discuss teaching processes that could be used to teach the curriculum--including management processes/theories, entrepreneurship, and service learning activities.
- Encourage students to market their ability to teach consumer economic/financial management classes.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study used the National Jump$tart Coalition for Financial Literacy benchmarks to assess topics taught in family and consumer sciences classes. A future study could use the National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education to assess topics. Additionally, a comparison of the various national standards that identifies overlapping standards could help educators develop a set of standards that are “doable” during a school year.

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