

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES TEACHERS: LEVEL OF PREPARATION TO TEACH PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS

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The purposes of this study were to determine family and consumer sciences (FCS) teachers' level of preparation for teaching parenting and employability skills, and the effect of years of teaching experience on their perceptions of their level of preparation to teach parenting and employability skills. A total of 309 (45%) participants responded to the questionnaire developed from a review of literature and the parenting curriculum entitled Preparation to Teach Pregnant and Parenting Teens. Overall, teachers felt well prepared to teach subject matter included in parenting education. In addition, they felt well to very well-prepared to teach employability skills. Teachers with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience differed from other teachers on their preparation in nutrition, management, and practicing good work habits (employability skills). Teachers with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience also achieved the highest overall mean and thereby, felt better prepared to teach pregnant and parenting teens, and employability skills than other teachers in this study.

Teachers are increasingly challenged by educational reform initiatives and new legislation to improve quality of teaching and address needs of diverse student populations. An educational reform initiative in family and consumer sciences (FCS) was the implementation of programs or content that focus on parenting skills. The 1976 Vocational Education Amendment that identified parenting, nutrition, and consumer education as required subjects for funded programs in FCS and became the impetus for the development of programs in parenting/parenthood education. A decade after the amendment was passed Jensen (1986) determined that many FCS programs throughout the nation had initiated teen pregnancy and parenting programs. Today, there are hundreds of programs in public schools for pregnant and parenting adolescents in several states (National Institute on Early Childhood Development, 1999). Some states have taken the lead in developing parenting courses. For example, in Ohio, the in-school program for pregnant and parenting teens known as GRADS (Graduation, Reality, and Dual-Role Skills) is offered in more than 300 school districts. The GRADS program in Lawrence County Vocational School in Chesapeake, Ohio has received much attention and is considered an exemplary program (Smith, 1998). Additionally, Colorado is noted for the Teen Parenting program at Fairview High School in Boulder (Smith). These are two examples of leading and noteworthy programs among many other FCS programs for parenting and pregnant teens.

Parenting education is a course designed for teens to study the skills of planning for and being a parent. According to Thomas (2000), there are two major assumptions that undergrid most parenting education programs. The first assumption is that parents influence their children's development in significant ways. Effective parents are believed to minimize the overall potential for human suffering by providing environments that enable their children to become emotionally mature adults. The second assumption is that good parenting skills are learnable and teachable. Positive parenting education enhances the quality of parenting. In addition, exposure of parents and future parents to parenting education reduces the occurrence of child abuse.

Therefore, the focus in parenting classes is on the teenager, his/her perspective on values, relationships, what it means to be a parent and decision making relative to his/her own life. The unique problems which teen parents face are emphasized in order to help teens cope realistically and plan for the future. In addition to developing personal and parenting skills, courses in parenting education also place emphasis on employment skills. Attention to employment skills are geared toward keeping teens in high

school and enhancing their abilities in the workforce. Zellman, Feifer, and Hirsch (1992) investigated 71 teen parent programs, and found the design of parenting courses was consistent among programs. That is, the emphasis of the programs was on educational goals, parenting outcomes, and employment outcomes.

The ultimate goal of parenting programs in Georgia is to retain the teen parents in school and enable them to acquire knowledge that will not only help them earn a living but also become good parents. Cooke (1990) declared that teaching parenting is a responsibility which FCS educators need to be prepared to do well. Family and consumer sciences educators cannot meet the challenge of assisting pregnant and parenting teens if they do not feel prepared to teach the subject matter related to parenting and employability. This study explored the level of preparation FCS teachers had for teaching parenting and employability skills and the effect years of teaching had on their perceptions of preparedness.

Review of Related Literature

Few studies were found on how prepared teachers felt to teach either generally or specifically to teach career and technical education content. Only one study dealing with the preparation of teachers was found that included FCS teachers. Virtually no studies were found on how prepared teachers felt to teach pregnant and parenting teens. This review reports the level of preparation felt by teachers from a national study of all teachers, from two studies of CTE teachers, and one study of FCS teachers.

In an effort to improve the quality of teaching in the 21st century classroom, the U.S. Department of Education (1999) examined the quality of teacher preparation in public schools. Results indicated that teachers felt either moderately or somewhat well prepared for most classroom activities, and less than half of the America teachers reported feeling very well prepared for most classroom activities. For example, only 36% felt very well prepared to implement state or district curriculum and performance standards, 41% indicated they were very well prepared to implement new teaching methods, and 28% perceived they were very well prepared to use student performance assessment techniques.

Two researchers, Gbomita (1999) and Burrell (1993), queried career and technical education (CTE) teachers about implementing curriculum and standards. In Gbomita's study, 79% of Pennsylvania CTE teachers felt well prepared or very well prepared to implement the state or school district curriculum and performance standards. Additionally, 97% of the teachers reported feeling well prepared or very well-prepared to teach in the occupational field in which they were certified or licensed. Burrell (1993) examined the preparedness of CTE teachers in Ohio for teaching mainstreamed at-risk learners. Burrell focused attention on the need for training. Findings indicated that relating math and science, developing youth organizations, developing communication skills, and visiting with families were significant areas of need for Ohio CTE teachers. Pregnant and/or parenting teens are included in the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1998 as student who are academically disadvantaged and therefore, at risk for failing or dropping out of school. As students from special populations increasingly enroll in career and technical education classes, it becomes important to assess the preparedness of teachers to appropriately work with a diverse student population.

Norman-Nunnery and Way (1987) surveyed secondary FCS teachers to determine the relationships among teacher certification requirements, teachers' professional preparedness, and student outcomes. Findings also indicated that the teachers' overall perceptions of their preparedness did not differ significantly in relation to demographic variables such as age, race, education, socioeconomic status, teaching experience, or occupational teaching experience. Norman-Nunnery and Way's findings paralleled those of a study by Butcher (1998) concerning preparation for teaching in occupational areas. Teachers participating in Butcher's investigation reported feeling fairly well prepared for their occupational teaching responsibilities.

In a qualitative investigation, Pillow (2002) spent days in classrooms with female adolescents who were pregnant and attending classes in their high school. Her findings revealed several major factors that strengthen the importance of FCS teachers being well prepared to work with pregnant and parenting adolescents in regular school settings. Among her findings, she noted that students felt more relaxed and accepted in FCS classes, students expressed that they felt comfortable talking about their pregnancies in

FCS classes (although they did not feel that way in other classes) they expressed more independence and stronger messages of self-esteem in FCS classes, and teachers were observed to engage in different pedagogical strategies to encourage student participation.

As a more diverse student population needs the content and skills presented in secondary FCS courses, teachers are increasingly challenged to meet the needs of these students. As a result, FCS teachers not only need to be exposed to the pedagogy that prepares them for a wide range of student needs, they must also feel that they have been adequately prepared to deliver content related to parenting education.

Conceptual Framework

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was created in 1987. The organization strives to strengthen the teaching profession and to improve student learning and is comprised mainly of teachers. NBPTS's mission is to advance the quality of teaching and learning by maintaining high and rigorous standards, providing a national system to certify teachers, and advocating related education reforms (NBPTS, 2003). The conceptual framework for the study was the core aims/standards from NBPTS. The five core propositions of NBPST are: teachers are committed to students and their learning; teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students; teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning; teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience; and teachers are members of learning communities. The second core propositions, teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students forms the conceptual foundation for this study. Although NBPST is for exemplary teachers, all teacher education programs and teachers should strive to obtain standard number two.

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1999) report on teacher quality, as a result of reform initiatives teachers must meet classroom requirements that many have not been adequately prepared for during their pre-professional training. On the other hand, Jensen (1986) claimed that FCS professionals are uniquely qualified to work with pregnant teens because of the focus of their education. In most teacher education programs, preservice FCS teachers are required to take courses including content in human sexuality, relationships, pregnancy and childbirth, nutritional needs during pregnancy, and childbirth and parenting; thereby, preparing them to teach pregnant and parenting teens. Consequently, FCS teachers may have been prepared to satisfy the educational initiative concerning Parenting with emphasis on employability skills as well as the NSPST core proposition of knowing their subject matter.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to determine teachers' level of preparation for teaching parenting skills, and employment skills. A secondary purpose was to determine the effect of years of teaching experience on the level of preparation for teaching parenting skills and employment skills.

Method

The population consisted of 760 FCS teachers in Georgia. A total of 309 or 45% of the participants responded. The majority, 280 or 90%, of the participants were women and most were white, 242 or 78%. The participants ranged in age from 23 to 63 with a mean age of 43.

The questionnaire entitled *Preparation to Teach Pregnant and Parenting Teens* was developed by the researchers from a review of literature, contained 18 items on a Likert type scale and addressed the teachers' level of preparation for teaching parenting education and employment skills. The items related to preparation for teaching the major areas in the parenting curriculum which includes: (a) child growth and development, (b) parenting skills, (c) nutrition, (d) management skills for the development of home and work, (e) balancing work and family commitments, (f) job search skills, and (g) work maturity skills. The questionnaire consisted of six response categories. Respondents used the 6-point scale ranging from

1-not at all prepared to 6-very well prepared to express their level of agreement. The scale was anchored at each point. The anchors and values are not at all prepared = 1, poorly prepared = 2, fairly well prepared = 3, prepared = 4, well prepared = 5, very well prepared = 6. Based on Litwin (1995) and Nunnally (1978) estimations, a score of .70 or higher on the Cronbach's alpha suggests good reliability. For this study, the overall instrument showed a Cronbach's alpha score of .84.

Procedures

Data were collected using a mailed questionnaire. A mailing list of all FCS teachers was obtained from the Georgia Department of Education. A cover letter and questionnaire were mailed to all 760 FCS teachers. The first mailing resulted in 240 responses. In accordance with Dillman (1978), a follow-up postcard was sent two weeks later to 520 teachers to request that they complete the survey. Two weeks later a second questionnaire was mailed to teachers who had still not responded. The response to the second mailing resulted in 69 returns, giving a total of 309 or 45% respondents.

Means, standard deviations, t-tests, and the planned comparison approach were used to report findings. Mean ratings of 1.0 to 1.50 represent not at all prepared, 1.51 to 2.50 poorly prepared, 2.51 to 3.50 fairly well prepared, 3.51 to 4.50 prepared, 4.51 to 5.50 well prepared, and 5.51 to 6.0 very well prepared.

Findings

Table 1 shows teachers' level of preparation in the subject matter on parenting education. On the subject matter in the Georgia's parenting education curriculum, teachers felt *well prepared to very well prepared* to teach. Mean scores ranged from 5.5 to 5.1 with nutrition having the highest and balancing work and family having the lowest score, respectively. The overall mean for the scale in Table 1 (child growth and development, parents skills, nutrition, management skills for the homemaker/wage-earner, and balancing work and family commitments) was $M = 5.3$. Hence, teachers felt *well prepared* to teach parenting education.

Table 2 shows teachers' level of preparation in teaching employment skills. Mean scores ranged from 4.6 to 5.5. The overall mean for the scale on employment skills was 5.21; overall means for job search and work maturity skills were 5.23 and 5.19, respectively. Therefore, teachers felt *well prepared* to teach employment skills.

Teachers varied in their years of teaching experience. Eight teachers reported 1 year of experience while two reported 36 years of teaching experience. In order to better understand the effect of teachers in various stages of their careers, teachers were sub-grouped according to number of years of teaching experience. This grouping yielded the following categories of years of teaching for the participants: 1-10, 11-20, 21-30, and 31 - 40. On the Certified Personnel Data section of the Georgia Public Education Report Card, teachers are grouped in ten-year increments for years of experience (Georgia Department of Education, 2003). Teachers in this study were categorized accordingly.

Frequencies for years of teaching experience were disproportionately distributed among the four groups (see Table 3). The category representing 11-20 years of teaching experience was the largest group, ($n = 115$). The second largest group (102) represented participants who had taught 1-10 years, while the lowest count ($n = 13$) was reported for the 31 to 40 years of teaching.

Table 1

Level of Teacher's Preparation for Teaching Parenting Education to Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I feel prepared to teach pregnant and parenting students about:		
Child growth and development	5.28	1.02
Parents skills	5.21	1.03
Nutrition	5.48	0.80
Management skills for the home & work	5.29	0.86

Balancing work and family commitments	5.19	0.99
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Note. Overall mean for the 5 areas is 5.3.

Table 2
Level of Teacher's Preparation for Teaching Employment Skills to Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I feel prepared to teach pregnant and parenting teens concepts relate to job search skills:		
Preparing a resume	4.79	1.23
Searching for available jobs	5.56	0.80
Complete a job application	5.43	0.83
Interview for a job	5.50	0.81
Handle job offers	5.51	0.82
Prepare for the world of work (i.e. what motivates workers, decision making)	4.61	1.33
I feel prepared to teach pregnant and parenting teens the following work maturity skills:		
Present a positive image (grooming, dress, self- confidence, etc.)	5.06	1.33
Exhibit positive work attitudes (social skills, creativity, taking pride in one's work)	5.03	1.13
Practice good work habits (attendance, thoroughness, safety practice)	4.87	1.18
Practice ethical behavior (integrity, respect for property, follow company rules)	4.91	1.14
Communicate effectively (oral, written on verbal, listening)	5.50	0.80
Accept responsibility (use initiative, problem solving, manage personal responsibility)	5.50	0.82
Cooperate with others (work in teams, work under supervision)	5.54	0.80

Table 3
Effects of Years of Teaching Experience on Level of Preparation to Teach Pregnant and Parenting Teens

Variables	Years	<i>n</i>	Nutrition		Management		Work Habits	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	1 - 10	102	5.35	.87	5.12	.86	5.59	.70
	11 - 20	115	5.47	.79	5.26	.87	5.39	.87
	21 - 30	70	5.74	.60	5.60	.74	5.74	.69
	31 - 40	13	5.46	.87	5.42	.85	5.55	.78
Missing		1						
Total		301						

The planned comparisons approach was used to determine if teacher groups were different on years of teaching experience and the areas included in parenting education. Rather than testing whether several populations have identical means, the planned comparisons approach determines whether one population mean differs from a second population mean or whether the mean of one set of populations differ from the mean of a different set of populations (Olejnik & Hess, 1997). Analysis indicated no

significant difference in child growth and development, parenting skills, and balancing work and family commitments and any teacher group. However, a significant difference (see Table 3) was noted on nutrition ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 0.80$), $t(296) = -1.167$, $p = .028$) and management skills for the home and work ($M = 5.29$, $SD = .86$), $t(297) = -1.242$, $p = .010$). The significant difference occurred on nutrition, and management skills for the home and work between teachers who had taught 1-10 years and teachers who had taught 21 to 30 years. Teachers who had taught 21 to 30 years felt more prepared to teach nutrition and management skills for the home and work than teachers with 1 to 10 years of teaching experience.

Employment skills revealed a significant difference on practice good work habits ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.18$), $t(296) = 1.910$, $p = .004$). The significant difference occurred between teachers who had taught 11-20 years and teachers who had taught 21 to 30 years. Teachers who had taught 21 to 30 years felt more prepared to teach work habits than teachers with 11 to 20 years of teaching experience.

Conclusions and Discussion

Five major findings emerged from this study. First, teachers felt *well prepared to very well prepared* to teach parenting education to pregnant and parenting teens. These findings are similar to those of the US Department of Education (1999) and Gbomita (1999) studies. Teachers who participated in those studies also felt fairly well to very well prepared to implement state curriculum standards. It is important for teachers to be knowledgeable about concepts and competencies that blanket the profession. Knowledgeable teachers can positively affect student learning. Students in parenting programs, who may face greater challenges, due to their circumstances can benefit greatly from these teachers. This is encouraging since findings from these studies relate positively to NBPTS' second Core Proposition, teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.

Second, teachers felt *well prepared to very well prepared* to teach employment skills to pregnant and parenting teens. Zellman, Feifer, and Hirsch (1992) survey of 71 teen parent programs reported that schooling and parenting goals were considered critical in all programs whereas, employment goals were considered far less important in most. According to the teachers in this study, almost equal emphasis is placed on employment skills as parenting skills. Therefore, this finding is noteworthy. Emphasis on employment skills is important since a goal of the program is to increase immediate and/or future employability. Placing a significant emphasis on employability can have an accumulative effect; that is, increased employability skills will increase economic possibilities which lead to self-sufficiency. The parenting status of female teenagers can have a powerful impact on their career choices. Brown and Barbosa (2001) found that career goals of teen girls who come from low-income families were confined to the experiences of their relatives or friends. It is projected that exposure to the content in FCS classes related to employability would broaden students' perceptive and changes of wider career choices.

Third, teachers were different with respect to years of teaching experience on nutrition and management skills for home and work. Teachers with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience felt more prepared to teach nutrition and management skills for home and work to pregnant and parenting teens than teachers with 1 to 10 years of teaching experience. Fourth, teachers were different with respect to years of teaching experience on employment skills (practice good work habits). Teachers with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience felt more prepared to teach good work habits to pregnant teens than teachers with 11 to 20 years of teaching experience. Fifth, of all teachers, those with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience achieved the highest mean rating and thereby, felt more prepared to teach pregnant and parenting teens than other teachers in this study.

Although there were fewer teachers in the 21 to 30 than in the 1 to 10 and 11 to 20 years of teaching experience groups, in the last three conclusions they consistently scored themselves higher in their feelings of preparedness. As teachers mature in the profession, they are more confident in their ability to deliver the subject matter. The researchers feel that this could be the result of these teachers taking advantage of professional development through their schools, counties, or universities. We also feel that it is parallel with teachers keeping abreast in the field by attending conferences, reading professional journals and taking enrichment classes. As Pillow's study indicated, FCS teachers do indeed

have a profound impact on the in-school experiences of students who are pregnant. It is imperative, therefore, for secondary teachers to have the knowledge and skills that will help to feel confident when working with this specific population of students.

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