

FINDING A PLACE FOR TRADITION IN THE CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY FOR SEWING IN THE OHIO FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES CLASSROOM

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Historically, curriculum in Career-Technical Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) included basic sewing or clothing construction. But over time, this particular aspect of the old "Home EC" has been called into question regarding its usefulness in today's society. Current FCS teachers participated in a research study aimed at assessing the prevalence of clothing and textiles within the Ohio secondary classroom. FCS teacher-educators who have the charge of educating future FCS secondary teachers need this information to help determine curriculum. Findings indicate that many secondary schools offer sewing within the curriculum and feel confident in doing so having considered the perspective of all stakeholders. The researchers conclude that sewing, as well as other aspects of clothing and textiles, should be included in the preparation of Ohio FCS teachers in order to prepare them for the real-world classroom.

Mary is a fictitious Family and Consumers Sciences (FCS) Education major. She has just completed her course work in an accredited program at a state university, so she is ready to begin a job search for her first teaching position. Mary eagerly drives to a local high school for her interview with the high school principal. The principal outlines Mary's potential responsibilities which include teaching a sewing module. Mary is unprepared to teach sewing. Her university curriculum did not include clothing construction, her high school FCS program touched on clothing and textiles but did not include sewing, and Mary's mother does not know how to sew.

Mary is not alone. Informal conversations between the authors and other FCS faculty across the United States reveal similar dilemmas. There is a gap between mandated curriculum in FCS education and the reality of program content in FCS secondary schools. The purpose of this research study was to explore the extent to which clothing and textiles, and particularly sewing, is included in Ohio secondary classrooms. Clothing and textiles (C&T) is a complex discipline that encompasses studies such as textiles, fashion merchandising, apparel design, historic costume, the social and cultural implications of dress, the psychological impact of dress and clothing construction. In some programs, clothing and textiles also includes aspects of interior design including space planning, historic furnishings and materials. Respondents who included C&T in their curriculum were subsequently asked for additional details including particular content, motivation and/or constraints for including C&T, and methods for correlating C&T with state standards.

Historically, C&T professionals have battled an enduring prejudice against their discipline from both within and outside the FCS academy. One can only speculate as to why needlework has acquired such a negative stigma. Perhaps the stigma arose because girls were taught to use a needle and thread as evidence of their marriage-ability. In 1837, E. W. R. Farrar

wrote, “A woman who does not know how to sew is as deficient in her education as a man who cannot write” (as cited in Osaki, 1988, p. 226). This association between needlework and women’s cultural roles within the home could have lead self-proclaimed progressive thinkers to dismiss needlework in an attempt to distance themselves from traditional roles in favor of more equality for women.

The industrial revolution heralded a new role for sewing. Jean Parsons (2000) chronicled the rise of sewing instruction as a means of preparing young women for work in garment factories. Dressmaking was not a new trade for women, therefore, sewing carried the dual association with the genteel arts of the upper class woman and a means of livelihood for those of a lower socio-economic standing. Neither pursuit, however, garnered respect for its high intellect or scientific nature. Parsons wrote that, “the fact that sewing represented both a part of the traditional feminine role in the home and one of the few acceptable ways to earn a living led to ambiguity on the part of both educators and students almost from the beginning” (2000, n.p.).

This ambiguity arose in part because of sewing’s association with women’s traditional roles in the home, but also because of the association between sewing and lower intelligence. Jane Bernard Powers (1992) researched the vocational movement in education during the early twentieth century. Sewing often constituted a portion of the vocational curriculum. Powers wrote that supporters of trade schools agreed that “industrial and trade training were primarily directed toward working class children, especially those described as ‘motor minded’ or not bookish” (p. 28). Powers also documented two technical high schools that taught plain sewing, dressmaking and millinery “for the benefit of young women who had to become ‘self-supporting at an early age’, yet school administrators indicated that imparting technical skills for homemaking was the primary emphasis” (p. 28).

Sewing’s association with women’s traditional roles in the home, with industrial or vocational training and with students of lower intelligence have generated long-held traditional stigma. Yet, this prejudice belies the popularity and economic impact of the multiple industries that supply the home sewing industry. The American Sewing Guild (ASG), a “national non-profit organization dedicated to people who believe sewing is a rewarding and creative activity,” (ASG, 2004) reported that it has over 20,000 members in over 125 chapters across the nation. In addition, the 2003 *Quilting in America* survey reported there are “21.3 million active quilters in the country who spend a total of \$2.27 billion each year on their passion” (Quilts, 2004). Karey Bresenhan, president of Quilts, Inc. said, “With so many sectors of the economy faltering in recent years, I am extremely happy that quilting has bucked the trend, showing greater, not less, involvement and economic impact” (Quilts, 2004). Gary Jones, president of Singer Sewing Co., reported that in 2002 sales of sewing machines rose dramatically. The company sold around 500,000 machines for a revenue of \$74 million, which is only part of the “...\$26 billion home hobby and craft industry” (Morris, 2003).

Beyond economics, sewing has the potential to contribute to one’s quality of life. Recently, the *New York Times* (LaFerla, 2004) included a story about professionals such as lawyers and stockbrokers who take sewing classes as a means of relieving stress. The article described sewing as an alternate form of psychotherapy which helps build a sense of community as students work and share their personal stories. Singer president, Gary Jones, predicts further growth in the home sewing industry noting, “cocooning, nesting, is a social trend that is bringing women back to sewing. We have seen that trend, not only for our business, but for others that deal with the family, the home” (Morris, 2003). This same effect is often present in FCS classrooms.

In 1998, the National Association of State Administrators for Family and Consumer Sciences completed a project to develop national standards for FCS education. Barbara Border, the project director, noted in her final report, “The family and consumer sciences education standards provide the platform for the discipline to move into a new era” (Hetherly, 1998). An indicator of this new era is the questioning of a staple in the FCS curriculum: clothing construction. The 1998 national standards virtually eliminated most aspects of C&T from the curriculum except in specific FCS workforce development programs.

Despite the fact that clothing construction is only minimally supported by the national standards, many FCS teachers continue to include various aspects of apparel studies in their classrooms. Others, in accordance with the lack of national association support, have simply closed their sewing labs. This curriculum shift begins its influence in middle and high school classrooms, and continues into post-secondary programs. The ripple effect of incoming college students with no sewing skills has been felt among post-secondary FCS teacher-education programs, which in turn simultaneously question the need for college sewing labs. Many post-secondary FCS teacher-preparation programs waived clothing construction classes from the required curriculum despite the fact that many secondary schools expect their new FCS teachers to know how to use the existing and expensive sewing labs.

Review of Literature

The majority of research in FCS pertains to the specific content areas of Food and Nutrition or Child and Family Development. Little research has been conducted on C&T in the FCS curriculum at the secondary or post-secondary level. What has been written shows the general lack of consensus on the validity of sewing in FCS programs.

Rougvie and Woods (1980) completed a national survey to identify what was then being taught in FCS programs. In this study, C&T was the third most frequently taught FCS curriculum area in the United States (U.S.) following Food and Nutrition, and Family Relations. Despite its high frequency ranking in the survey, C&T was not mentioned by the authors in their narrative comparing what was taught to what they felt was most important in the FCS curriculum.

As society changes and the need for sewing skills changes from a necessary skill for homemakers to what may be considered a craft, some question its place in the FCS curriculum (Garner, 1989; Klein, 1993; Murphey & Stewart, 1990; Pauley, 1996). The FCS national standards support this thinking. There are 16 content standards developed for secondary FCS programs. Nine of these content standards are focused on specific careers which include 11.0, *Housing, Interiors, and Furnishings* and 16.0, *Textiles and Apparel*. The remaining seven apply to comprehensive family life courses with a general career focus. Of these comprehensive standards, only one, *Consumer and Family Resources*, includes a competency that could be used to justify sewing in the curriculum, “2.1.4, *Implement decisions about purchasing, creating, and maintaining clothing*” (National Association of State Administrators for Family and Consumer Sciences, 1998). Others argue that clothing construction skills are necessary only for creativity in fiber arts or for higher-level jobs in the fashion industry (Loker, 1987; Brandes, 1997).

Lee (2002) surveyed 300 randomly selected North Carolina secondary FCS teachers with 140 responding. Teachers “...indicated that clothing construction skills were among the most important skills to be gained in the study of clothing and textiles.” Furthermore teachers “pointed out that the secondary Clothing Design 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” (p. 30). The results of the survey prompted a committee of FCS professionals, current teachers, and

students in the state of North Carolina to recommend that clothing construction continue to be required to meet beginning FCS teacher competencies in the state.

Smagorinsky (1996) explored the concept of intelligence and how it is measured in our schools. As part of his research, Smagorinsky observed a sewing lab in a high school FCS program. He used Howard Gardner's premise that human intelligence occurs in a variety of ways that are not subject to conventional testing. Smagorinsky commented that "in the eyes of the school the home ec classes are marginal, not central to the 'core' of academic knowledge, physically located on the periphery of the school building, and generally regarded as appropriate primarily for non-college bound students" (p. 12). Yet he observed the students usually engaged in skills such as decision-making, communication in problem solving, a willingness to try a variety of methods until problems were solved, and spatial intelligence. He also argued that U.S. schools value abstraction over practicality such as that found in a sewing lab (p. 14). Smagorinsky concluded that "once the assessment deck gets stacked, it is very difficult to unstack it. With historical values institutionalized in standardized assessment practices, it's hard to persuade educators and their constituencies that alternative ways of learning are equally valuable" (p. 16). Sewing does not always lend itself to traditional testing, and perhaps this characteristic has contributed to the misunderstanding and prejudice against the discipline.

Peterat (1999) reviewed the history of clothing and textiles studies, then visited successful secondary C&T programs across several Canadian provinces. She documented the elements of each program that contributed to its success. Peterat also included the size and economic impact of the textile and apparel industry in Canada. After her own review of literature, Peterat wrote that there was little research into student perspectives on C&T and how that would impact curriculum. She continued, "Particularly limited are descriptive studies of the nature of programs, and investigations into teachers' beliefs and practices that sustain and gain wide support for programs" (p. 22). In her conclusion, Peterat wrote, "The elective status of textiles and clothing in the school curriculum places them in the margins of education, a space where some teachers feel they constantly have to defend their programs and explain them to parents, administrators, and students" (p. 207). One might add to Peterat's observations by saying that C&T professionals also find that they must justify their discipline to fellow FCS professionals in child, family or dietetics.

Theoretical Framework

One question regularly arises in curriculum development: Who decides what is taught? When teachers are being prepared, what they are taught at the post-secondary level has a direct impact on the curriculum they implement at the secondary level. Ralph Tyler (1949) proposed in his seminal work, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, that prior to curriculum development, one must look at education from the perspectives of the three major stakeholders to get a well-informed picture of what objectives should be addressed. Those perspectives include that of the student, a view of "contemporary life," and recommendations from experts in the field of study under consideration. Thompson, Kushner Benson, Pachnowski, & Salzman (2001) refer descriptively to these viewpoints as "lenses;" the means that brings a curriculum into focus or clarity.

Although Tyler's (1949) work is now 55 years old, the principles he advocated remain fresh and pertinent to education today. Editors Willis, Schubert, Bullough, Jr., Kridel, & Holton (1993) noted in *The American Curriculum: A Documentary History*:

The widespread influence of the Tyler Rationale [A. K. A. *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*] is evident in the similarity between Tyler's topics and those used in teachers' manuals of textbooks, lesson plan forms, methods textbooks used in teacher education, curriculum guides, curriculum policy documents, and a multitude of other places. What is clear is the magnitude of the on-going influence this basic conceptualization has had on curriculum theory, development, and practice. (p. 394)

As further testament to the currency of Tyler's (1949) book, the University of Chicago Press refused the request of editors Willis et al. (1993) to print excerpts, reporting that many thousands of copies sell annually. It remains today an available title in the publisher's catalog.

Looking through the lens of the student, which Tyler (1949) names "Studies of the Learners Themselves as a Source of Educational Objectives," those developing curriculum must consider the needs and wants of the student. Tyler identifies student needs as the difference or "gap" between what educators have determined to be "desirable standards" or "acceptable norms" and the current state of the student learner. Tyler points out those educational objectives can be determined only after studies about the learner are completed by the institution. He notes that "[t]he school's efforts should be focused particularly upon serious gaps in the present development of students" (p. 8).

The other half of the student lens hypothesis is the consideration of student wants. Student wants are more accurately a listing of students' interests as discovered through various studies of the learner. Tyler (1949) writes: "children's interests must be identified so that they can serve as the focus of educational attention" (p.10). He realized that educators are working still today to more effectively incorporate, that "[e]ducation is an active process. It involves the active efforts of the learner himself. In general, the learner learns only those things which he does." Essentially, Tyler is asking for student buy-in or ownership for learning. He understood the criticism by some against this stance, but insisted that "even these educators recognize the value of beginning with present student interest as a point of departure" (p. 11).

To ascertain student interests, Tyler (1949) suggested using any number of methods that may include the following: observations by teachers, student interview, parent interview, general and specific interest questionnaires, proficiency tests of student skill sets, reviews of community data, and even police records. Tyler also suggests that students themselves be enlisted to conduct neighborhood surveys, be polled as to which courses they would like to take, or "vote" by their enrollment in elective courses. He advised that the final process of analyzing resulting data for their implications and relation to accepted standards of the field must be carefully considered as different interpretations are possible. Some twenty-eight years later in 1977 Tyler reaffirmed the importance of including in curriculum development analyses of both student wants and the following, contemporary life outside of school, in *The Tyler Rational Reconsidered* (Willis et al., 1993).

The lens of society, that Tyler (1949) names "Studies of Contemporary Life Outside the School" is an important component for several reasons. He offered two justifications that have stood the test of time. He wrote:

[B]ecause contemporary life is so complex and because life is continually changing, it is necessary to focus educational efforts upon the critical aspects of this complex life and upon those aspects that are of importance today so that we

do not waste the time of students in learning things that were important fifty years ago but no longer have significance at the same time we are neglecting areas of life that are now important and for which the schools provide no preparation.

A second argument grows out of the findings relating to transfer of training. Studies indicated that the student was much more likely to apply his learning when he recognized the similarity between the situation encountered in life and the situations in which the training took place. (pp. 17-18)

There is generally wide acknowledgement today of what Tyler was proposing in 1949 and reiterating in 1977; that students learn most when life and classroom situations are similar and when there is practice outside the classroom for application of things learned in it.

Because of the complexity and extent of daily life, Tyler (1949) wisely suggested breaking down the “life” concept into manageable pieces and collecting information about those pieces separately. He offered suggestions and reminded educators that, as with surveying students for their wants, there is no one method by which to complete the task. He noted the purpose for educators is to gather:

data about the habits and skills of people in particular areas, studying the habits to see what changes in them are necessary to develop better habits and using the list of skills obtained to suggest types of skills which a school might well develop in its students. (p. 21)

One method of data gathering, applicable to this article, can be a survey of the community or, for a more precise view, a survey of the program’s advisory committee. Certainly, an aspect of the advisory committee’s role in any field of study is to offer the community’s and the employer’s perspective about curriculum development. A student does not function in a vacuum but in context of the whole society. Curriculum developers, looking through the lens of contemporary life, will then be guided to the general requirements of a demographic group and to requirements that may be unique to a geographical area.

The final lens through which to bring a curriculum into focus is the lens of experts in the field of study, which Tyler (1949) calls “Suggestions about the Objectives from Subject Specialists.” This lens brings to bear the stimulus of scholarly research, practitioner advice, and the implementation of state and national standards. Content areas depend upon their experts to maintain certain standards, to introduce new findings, and to provide credibility to the students and the public their area serves.

While opinions of experts usually constitute curriculum objectives, Tyler (1949) first recommended they answer the question: “[w]hat can your subject contribute to the education of young people who are not going to be specialists in your field; what can your subject contribute to the layman” (p.26)? Tyler noted that experts are the best suited to provide the required and necessarily compelling responses as they have extensive understanding of the field and will have insight into its benefits to themselves and awareness of its effect on others. This active reflection among experts should reveal a list of suggestions about the broad functions a field of study can supply. A second group of suggestions, he argued, should be revealed as well about particular contributions the field can make to “other large functions which are not primarily functions of the subject concerned” (p. 28). Both sets of suggestions are detailed in *Basic Principles of Curriculum And Instruction*. Ultimately, curriculum objectives are to be concluded from such

information by experts. By looking through this lens, developers will keep curriculum up-to-date and scholarly based.

This third lens, perspective of the experts in the field of study, should arguably include authors of both the FCS national standards and the Praxis II Professional Assessment for FCS pre-service teachers even though, as previously noted, the standards do not support clothing construction. The Praxis II content exam is a professional assessment of subject area competency for beginning teachers used by most state education agencies in making licensing decisions. The Praxis II is a high-stakes assessment for pre-service teachers and is required in thirty-five states; nine percent of the assessment covers C&T content.

Although not specifically mentioned, in practice, Ley (1998) supports Tyler's theory and advocates the use of all lenses for curriculum development and program validation. Lee's (2002) research in North Carolina is an example of using the lenses of the student and experts in the field to determine the needs of pre-service teachers. The lens of the students was used by including high school students in curriculum decision making and by consideration of student vote as they elected to enroll in C&T classes. The lens of experts in the field was used when the committee referenced the national standards for FCS.

The three lenses should be considered individually as well as collectively; that is, how they interact with each other. Results from looking through one lens may be altered by a view through a different lens. By looking through each lens as well as recognizing their contributing interrelationship, curriculum developers are more likely to meet the needs, wants, and requirements of all stakeholders. In order to adequately prepare FCS teachers, FCS teacher-educators need to balance the focus of all the lenses of the stakeholders regarding curriculum development.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this research was to address the issue of preparing future teachers in FCS. The specific issue was "to what extent is clothing and textiles a necessary part of the FCS education curriculum?" As previously defined, clothing and textiles involves a variety of topics, but this study focused on sewing. This study proposed to describe the extent to which C&T is included in Ohio FCS secondary programs. Using Tyler's theory, a second goal of the research was to explore who determined the inclusion or exclusion of C&T in the curriculum. In other words, did the students, the experts, or the community influence curriculum? The following research questions served as guidelines:

1. What is the current status of clothing and textiles in Ohio FCS programs?
2. If C&T is included in the curriculum, is sewing part of the program?
3. If sewing is part of the curriculum, how do teachers justify it within the state curriculum standards?
4. Who determines curriculum content, specifically whether or not sewing is part of the curriculum?

Method

A survey instrument was developed within the guidelines of the university's institutional review board for the protection of human subjects. The instrument included both program and demographic questions pertaining to FCS programs. The instrument contained several types of questions including questions graphed on a Likert scale, open-ended and multiple choice

questions, and categorical questions where participants could select one or more answers or supply a written-in category.

The instrument was pre-tested for content validity with a group of 20 FCS teachers who attended a metropolitan school district meeting. The teachers provided feedback and the survey instrument was revised. The revised survey instrument was included in a registration packet at a Family and Consumer Sciences Career and Technical Teachers state conference. The conference included both workforce development teachers and non-workforce development teachers. As part of the conference's opening remarks, a member of the research team asked the non-workforce attendees to complete and return the survey. Thus, a non-probability, purposive (teachers in FCS) sample was used. Of the 231 non-workforce development teachers who attended the conference, 175 returned the survey for a return rate of 76%.

The survey data was compiled using the SPSS statistical program. Descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies, were used to create graphs of the data. These results were subsequently presented at a concurrent session of a state AAFCS meeting entitled *Clothing Construction in the Ohio Classrooms*. At the end of the presentation, attendees were asked to participate in a focus group. Nine volunteers participated in the focus group. The group was asked a set of prepared questions, and their responses were recorded and transcribed. The limitations of this focus group included the fact that, presumably, only those participants interested in the study of clothing and textiles attended the presentation and volunteered for the focus group. The group was not asked whether or not they had taken the survey. Therefore, this would not have been a representative group.

Findings

Of the teachers who returned surveys ($n = 175$), 83% indicated that they include some aspects of C&T within their curriculum, and 10% indicated they do not include the topic (see Figure 1). Teachers who indicated that C&T is included within their curriculum were asked what instructional activities are used. Ninety-one percent included machine sewing; 87% included hand sewing; 85% included clothing care and maintenance; 79% included clothing construction.

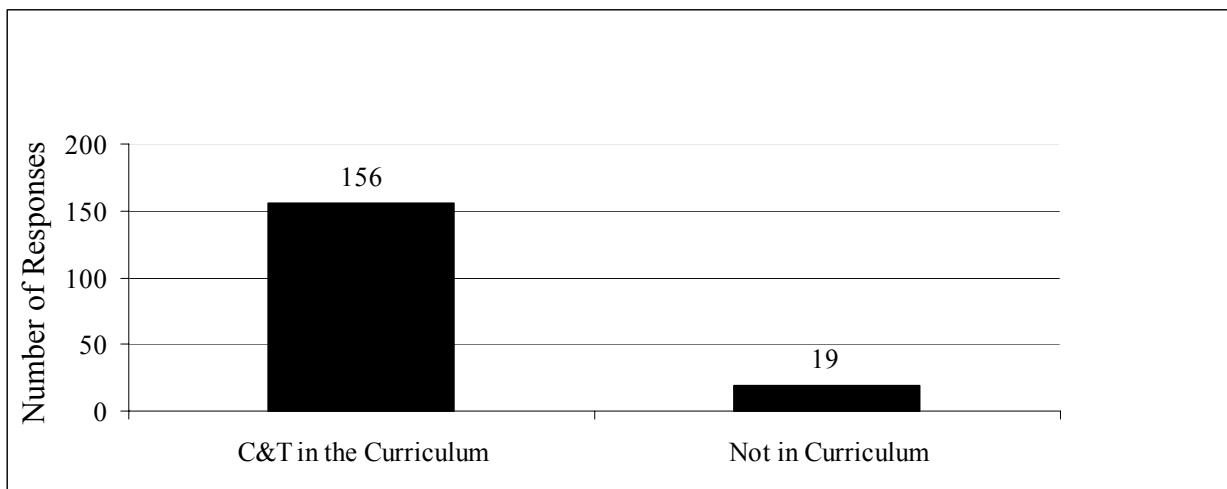


Figure 1. FCS teachers' inclusion of clothing and textiles in their curriculum

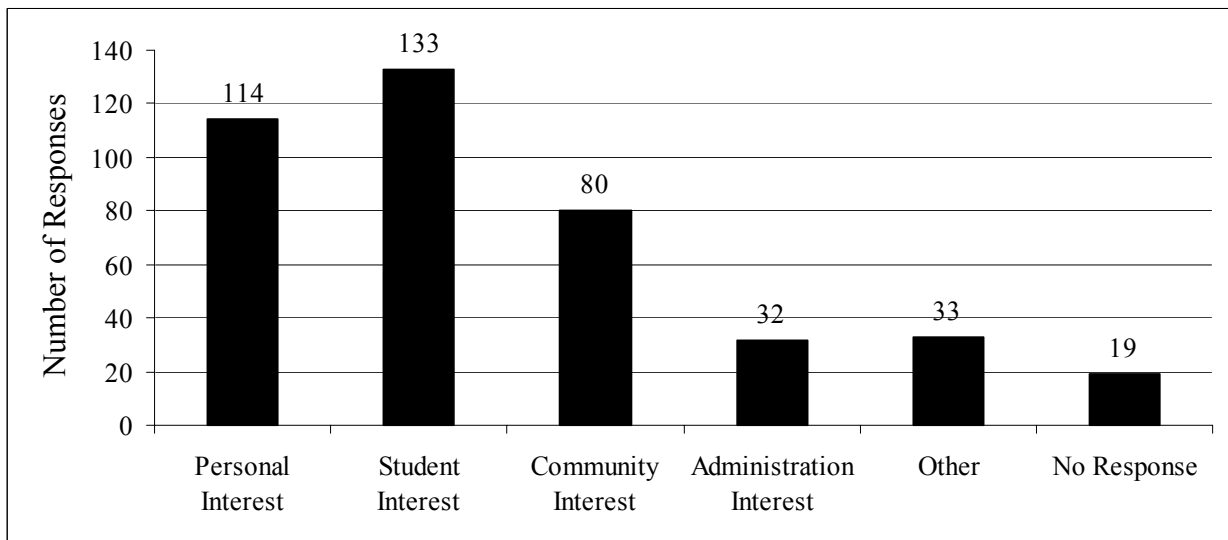


Figure 2. Barriers to including clothing and textiles in the curriculum

As shown in Figure 2, those teachers who do not include C&T in their curriculum ranked “lack of state mandate” and “other” as the major reasons followed by “lack of adequate time for instruction.” The focus group mentioned “maintenance of equipment” as a deterrent even though they include C&T in their classrooms. Therefore, poor maintenance of the equipment may also be the “other” to which the survey group referred.

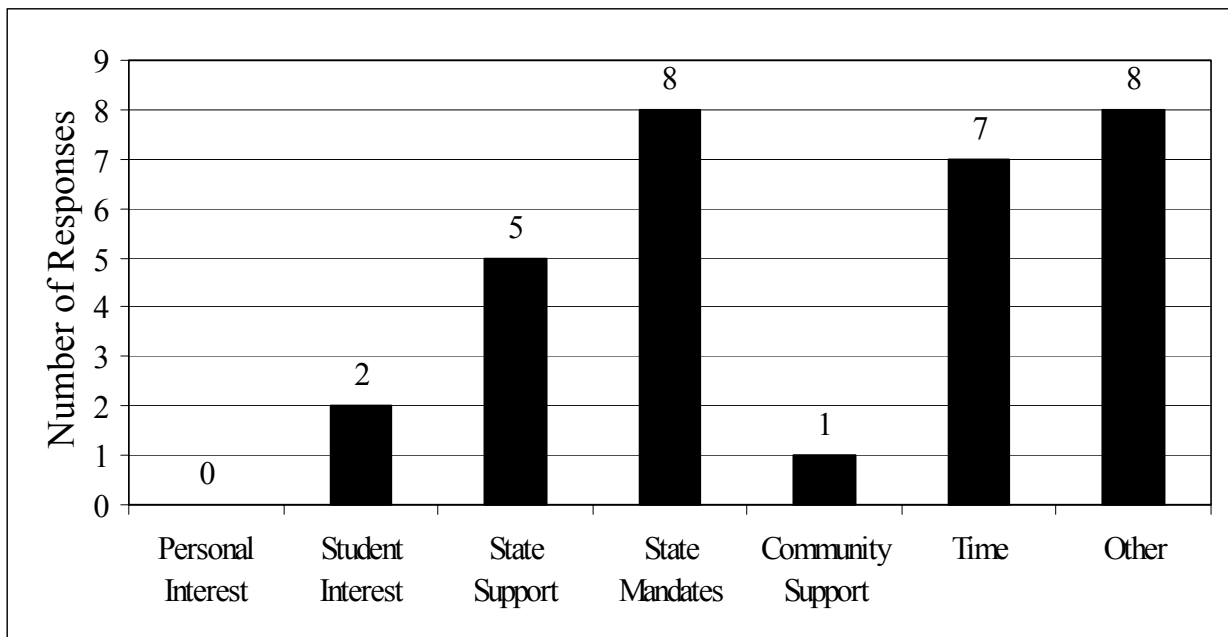


Figure 3. Motivations for including clothing and textiles in the curriculum.

Respondents indicated the primary motivation for including C&T in the curriculum is *student interest* followed by the teachers’ *personal interest* (see Figure 3). The focus group reported that students request sewing in the FCS programs. The focus group teachers also noted that students benefit from the inclusion of C&T in a broad number of ways including, satisfaction in completing a project, applying math, learning money management, reading for understanding, and demonstrating higher order thinking skills.

The respondents' third motivator for including C&T was *community interest*. Those in the focus group had not actually inquired of the community or parents, but indicated that parents and advisory boards requested sewing to be part of the curriculum.

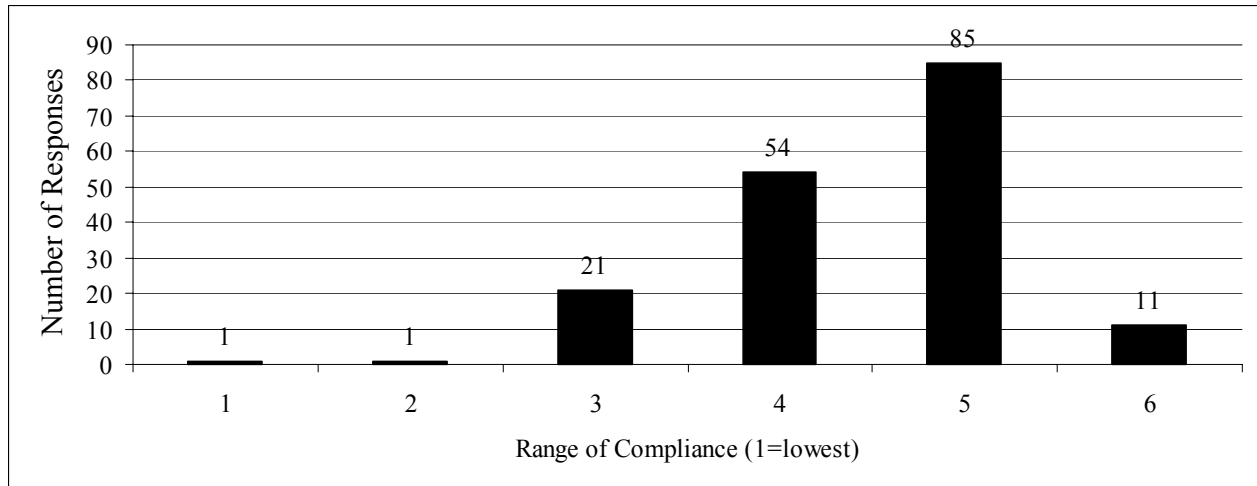


Figure 4. Teachers' perception of their compliance with state standards.

Figure 4 illustrates that those surveyed feel they are in compliance with the state FCS academic standards known as ITACS. ITACS are the competencies, based on the National Standards for FCS, used in Ohio FCS classrooms that receive state and federal funding for career-technical education programs. The ITACS were developed for six FCS programs: *Personal Development, Resource Management, Life Planning, Nutrition and Wellness, Family Relations, and Parenting*. There are also general or “Core” ITACS that apply to all career-technical programs and are not specific to any one program. ITACS supply key indicators for each competency.

Only one key indicator in ITACS specifically addresses C&T. Indicator 2.7.10 in the *Resource Management* program reads: “Perform clothing maintenance, minor repair tasks, and basic clothing construction tasks.” Teachers in both the survey and focus groups indicated that *Resource Management* is their primary justification for including C&T in their program (see Figure 5).

Twenty-five percent of survey respondents indicated the “Other” category as where they place C&T within their curriculum. This category may refer to those who teach a C&T course that is not funded by career-technical dollars. School districts have the option to offer elective coursework within the FCS department, such as quilting, that is not eligible for such funding.

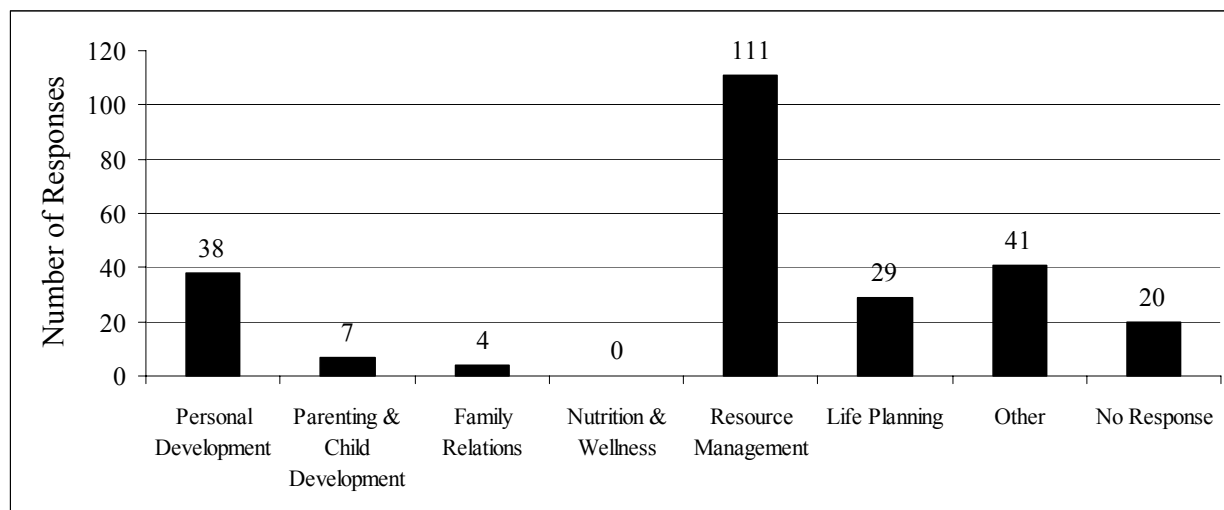


Figure 5. Placement of clothing and textiles within the state approved courses

The focus group offered an additional reason why the survey group selected “Other.” Many members of the focus group use the Core ITAC, which is intended to be included in all career-technical programs, to justify including C&T in their curriculum. The specific competency of “Solving Problems and Thinking Skillfully” in the Core ITAC was frequently mentioned. One teacher stated, “It also teaches decision making. What kind of pattern should I choose based on what my skill level is? What color of fabric am I going to use? Does this particular shape garment fit my body? There’s a lot of decision making that goes into that.”

Of those surveyed, the third most frequently mentioned program where C&T could be taught was in *Personal Development*. One teacher in the focus group agreed. When asked why she would include it in *Personal Development*, she replied, “Your good health, your good looks, and all that other personal care. That whole thing goes in with that too.” There was unanimous consensus from the focus group that a university teacher-preparation program should include a course on clothing construction.

Discussion

Throughout the history of FCS the profession has fought the stigma of cooking and sewing. Perhaps in an attempt to distance themselves from this stigma, the writers of the FCS National Standards limited sewing to only one key indicator. Yet, Lee’s (2002) survey of FCS secondary teachers revealed that sewing is alive and well in North Carolina FCS classrooms. The study discussed in this article showed that sewing is also popular in Ohio FCS classrooms. The disconnection between national standards and the everyday FCS classroom creates a dilemma for FCS teacher educators. Many post-secondary curricula do not include sewing, yet new FCS teachers may be called upon to teach sewing in their classrooms. This dilemma exists in Ohio; and informal discussions with FCS teacher educators across the country reveal that teacher educators in other states share similar concerns. Instead of stigmatizing sewing as being old-fashioned and in the past, the authors suggest that it is time to open a dialectic that examines a new role for sewing in the FCS classroom.

Looking through the lens of the experts, those who establish core academic curriculum have sometimes worked under the misguided impression that FCS curriculum is less valuable than those subjects required for graduation or college entrance. Have the FCS experts abandoned

sewing as a measure to salvage their programs and to appear more relevant to the general academic community? Ironically, experts from other disciplines have “discovered” experiential learning activities such as sewing and have incorporated them into more traditional courses such as math. One author attended a national teachers’ conference where a FCS secondary teacher said the geometry teacher in her building asked for sewing lessons so that he could use quilting as a learning activity for geometry. Sewing activities support the elements of scientific inquiry by incorporating decision-making and problem-solving. In this study, the focus group provided similar anecdotal information.

The lens of the student has a two-fold perspective: the secondary FCS student and the FCS teacher education student. As noted in the theoretical framework, Tyler (1949) suggested that we must consider the wants and needs of the student, particularly in addressing “gaps” in students’ education. From a needs perspective, sewing has the potential to fill in those gaps for both secondary and post-secondary students. Post-secondary students can incorporate sewing as a teaching method to reinforce secondary students’ core academic competencies. The post-secondary student may also need sewing experience to secure a teaching position. From a wants perspective, teachers in this study indicated their number one motivation for including C&T in the curriculum was student interest. The focus group supported this indicator by reporting that their students request sewing in their FCS programs. Lee (2002) reported similar results. FCS programs usually provide elective courses in the secondary school and, as such, are dependent on student interest for their survival. Therefore, sewing can make a valuable contribution to the sustainability of FCS programs.

Tyler’s (1949) final lens, that of society, is a natural fit with the career-technical requirement to have an advisory committee. Teachers can draw upon the input of their advisory committee as well as the cultural context in which they teach. Parents constitute a vital component of this cultural context. As such, more research needs to be conducted regarding the opinions of secondary school students’ parents about individual components of the curriculum, because most of the evidence offered by teachers in this study is anecdotal. The synthesis of the input from these sources would provide a very clear picture of the zeitgeist, or spirit of the age, of a particular teaching context. Cultures change, and our FCS curriculum should reflect the values of the constituency that it serves. For example, currently there is an increasing interest in do-it-yourself home design activities. One can hardly turn on the television without finding a home make-over show in which someone is using a sewing machine. Clearly there is a renewed interest in textiles and clothing, and particularly in sewing. FCS has the opportunity to address this interest by maintaining or incorporating sewing within the curriculum.

The authors would like to suggest expanding Tyler’s (1949) theory to include a fourth lens, that of the teacher. Peterat and Vaines (1992, p.243) suggest that both educational and life experiences contribute a richness to the curriculum that should not be left out of curriculum decision-making. Teachers have a unique perspective. They function as experts, as part of society, often as parents, and the person in closest contact with the student. Teachers have the potential to see the big picture almost more than anyone else. They know when recommendations are working or not working. They implement the programs, therefore, they are better able to see the strengths and weaknesses of change. With the use of this additional lens, teachers must recognize their tremendous responsibility to their students and fellow FCS professionals to maintain a relevant and rigorous curriculum. FCS teachers must make sure their programs are academically rigorous and make that rigor visible to the outside world. As those in the front line, FCS teachers are challenged to overcome the prejudices in the discipline.

Outsiders smell the cooking lab and see the products of the sewing lab, but the long standing prejudice colors their vision of what is truly going on in the classroom. FCS teachers can validate their programs through thoughtful curriculum development, documentation of their program's connection to the core academics, and through public relations.

It is time to open a conversation about including clothing and textiles, particularly sewing, in the FCS curriculum. As Williams, Strom, and Plihal (1986) concluded, “[w]hen the image one person holds of another or of the subject matter involved is based on myths, distortions, and unexamined beliefs, conversation might not take place.” Sewing does not necessarily tie us to the past, but it can be a contemporary endeavor. The university curriculum should include contemporary uses of sewing that can be adapted for use within secondary school classrooms. Our professional organizations could offer workshops or in-service programs to provide opportunities for secondary school FCS teachers to adopt a more relevant and rigorous sewing curriculum.

There is a proud and rich history in family and consumer sciences which should be embraced. In that tradition, FCS professionals need to respect and value the multiple disciplines that constitute the FCS profession. But at the same time, we also need to be aware of and responsive to the families and communities we serve. FCS has historically been a catalyst for change, but we need to be cautious of discarding one element of our profession that one might perceive as being “old fashioned.” Instead, we need to continually update and adapt our programs for the modern world.

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Acknowledgement

This study funded in part by the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences.

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