Family and Human Development: Current Trends, Teaching Strategies, and Resources for the 21st Century Classroom

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Teaching about human development, parenting, family life, and interpersonal relationships is one of the ways that family and consumer sciences educators work to strengthen individual and family life. This article examines current social trends impacting individual and family life and addresses what family and consumer sciences teachers should know and be able to do when teaching family and human development. Other topics included in this article are discussions about determining appropriate subject matter, developing suitable curriculum, creating a positive learning environment, and assessing teacher candidates’ progress. A list of government agencies, professional organizations, and non-profit organizations that provide services or content related to family and human development also is included.

The profession of family and consumer sciences has historically viewed the family as the central institution of society and has been primarily concerned with strengthening family life (Green, 2001). Over one hundred years ago the early founders of the profession believed that “the family is the most important of human institutions” (as cited in Green, p.1). This is still true today. Both the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences and the Family and Consumer Sciences Division of the Association for Career and Technical Education state their purpose is working to improve and strengthen individual and family life (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences [AAFCS], 2006; Association for Career and Technical Education [ACTE], 2008). One way to achieve the goal of improving individual and family life is through education.

Family and consumer sciences (FCS) is taught at the elementary, middle, secondary, postsecondary, and community levels. The emphasis on the importance of the family as a human institution and the goal of strengthening individual and family life provides the foundation and rationale for teaching about family and human development. In 2004 the National Association of Teacher Educators of Family and Consumer Sciences (NATEFACS) developed 10 standards for middle and secondary level FCS teachers. These standards identify the necessary skills and knowledge that beginning family and consumers sciences educators should possess. Standard 3 addresses Family and Human Development. The purpose of this article is to discuss appropriate subject matter, elements of effective teaching, and assessment as they relate to FCS teacher candidates meeting Standard 3, Family and Human Development.

Current Individual and Family Trends

Standard 3, Family and Human Development, states, “Apply principles of human development, interpersonal relationships, and family to strengthen individuals and families across the lifespan in contexts such as parenting, care giving, and the workplace” (NATEFACS, 2004). One way to equip family and consumer sciences educators about family and human
development is for them to recognize current social trends of individuals and families. Identifying trends in individual and family life helps determine appropriate subject matter and provides teachers with insights on factors that may influence how students develop and learn. Data from the United States Census Bureau reveal that families are diverse. Family types can vary from single person households to grandparents raising grandchildren. Here are some United States Government statistics that give a snapshot of contemporary family life.

- One out of every four households is a one-person household (Simmons & O’Neil, 2001) with 31% of men and 25% of women who never marry.
- According to the 2003 Current Population Survey 4.6 million heterosexual couples and approximately 600,000 same-sex couples were cohabiting meaning that they were “sharing living quarters and also had a close personal relationship with each other” (Simmons & O’Connell, 2003, p.1).
- United States Census data showed that there were 12 million single parent households in 2003 (Fields, 2004).
- 2.4 million grandparents had primary responsibility for their grandchildren under the age of 18 (Simmons & Dye, 2003) and almost 6 million children lived with a grandparent (Simmons & Dye) according to the 2000 United States Census.
- Almost 4 million families living in the United States are multi-generational meaning that more than two generations live together in the same household (Simmons & O’Neil, 2001).

The types of families in which children and youth are raised impact individual and family development. Environmental conditions such as parental incarceration, substance abuse, poverty, immigration, and child abuse or neglect impact family life and functioning and in turn affect how a child grows, develops, and learns. Listed below are some United States Government statistics that state how many children and families are impacted by these issues.

- In 1999 an estimated 1.5 million children had a parent in a state or federal prison (Mumola, 2000).
- According to the 2001 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse 6 million children lived with at least one parent who abused or was dependent on alcohol or an illicit drug during the past year (Office of Applied Studies, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2003).
- According to the 2000 United States Census, 11.7% of the United States population was foreign born (Larsen, 2004) and 47 million people age five or older reported speaking a language other than English at home (Shin & Bruno, 2003).
- According to the Survey of Income and Program Participation in 2002, 63% of children under the age of five were in regular child care and the average length of time spent in child care was 32 hours a week (Johnson, 2005).
- According to the 2002 Current Population Survey 15.8 million children under the age of five had some kind of developmental delay (Steinmetz, 2006).
- In 2003 over 900,000 children were determined to be a victim of child abuse or neglect. Sadly, about 1,500 children a year died because of child abuse or neglect (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, 2004). As a result of child abuse or neglect 523,000 children were in foster care in 2003 (U. S.
Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

The current data inform family and consumer sciences professionals that families are diverse in their structure and functioning. This snapshot of individual and family life in the United States provides FCS educators with some facts about students’ family structure and living environment. An awareness of a student’s home environment informs FCS educators about what they should be teaching in regards to human development, parenting, family, and interpersonal relationships and provides a context for understanding the social and educational needs of students.

**Family and Human Development Content**

It is important that family and consumer sciences teacher candidates have knowledge of family and human development. To specifically meet the requirements of Standard 3, teacher educators must ask, What is essential family and human development subject matter? One way to answer this question is by examining the National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences [NASAFACS], 2008) These Standards for middle and high school students include 16 Areas of Study. Of these, four are specific to the subject matter of Standard 3, Family and Human Development: (a) Human Development, (b) Interpersonal Relationships, (c) Family, and (d) Parenting. The Standards in these four Areas of Study help determine what family and consumer sciences educators must know and be able to do when teaching family and human development in middle and high school settings.

When teaching the Human Development Area of Study (NASAFACS, 2008), it is important that family and consumer sciences educators recognize the principles of human development and conditions that impact how children and individuals grow and develop. First, it is critical that FCS educators can identify the various stages of human development: prenatal; infancy; early childhood; middle and late childhood; adolescence; and early, middle, and late adulthood. It is also essential that FCS educators recognize basic human development theories such as Erikson’s Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development (see Childhood and Society by Erik Erikson [1963]), Piaget’s Cognitive Stages (see The Growth of Logical Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence by Bärbel Inhelder and Jean Piaget [1958]), Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (see Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura [1986]), or Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (see The Ecology of Human Development by Urie Bronfenbrenner [1979]). Knowledge of the stages of human development and theories serve as a foundation for educating about families, parenting, and interpersonal relationships. Understanding how children grow and develop impacts parent-child relationships, parenting practices, and how families function and interact with each other. For example, the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities of a toddler influence parental expectations, family communication patterns, and roles of family members.

Humans do not grow and develop in isolation. All individuals are in some form of relationships whether it is as a family member, peer, friend, or community member. For these reasons it important to educate children and youth about the Interpersonal Relationships Area of Study (NASAFACS, 2008). Knowing how to communicate, resolve conflicts peacefully, and express emotions are basic social and emotional skills children, youth, and adults need in interpersonal relationships. When preparing family and consumer sciences educators it is important that they gain knowledge and skills in building and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships. FCS teacher candidates should not only know the elements of good
communication they should also practice good communication with students, parents or caregivers, fellow co-workers, and community members (Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Other areas for knowledge and skill development include: (a) cooperation, (b) decision making, (c) listening, (d) self concept, and (e) characteristics of healthy or unhealthy relationships.

One of the most important interpersonal relationships for children and youth is their family. Families greatly influence how one grows, develops, and meets basic human needs. In the Family Area of Study (NASAFACS, 2008), topics include: (a) types of families, (b) family structure, (c) family functioning, (d) transitions in families, (e) families in crisis, (f) family law and policy, and (g) families in society. Family and consumer sciences educators need to know family theories and research trends. It is also vital that FCS teacher candidates have skills in teaching contentious issues. This is particularly important in the Family Area of Study. Same-sex marriages, child custody laws, parental rights regarding discipline, or governmental assistance to financially distressed families are examples of a few of controversial topics that might be discussed. FCS teacher candidates not only need a knowledge base in the Family Area of Study, they also need to have skills in teaching sensitive subject matter.

Parenting is another Area of Study (NASAFACS, 2008) addressed in Standard 3, Family and Human Development. Teaching about parenting involves having knowledge about human development, interpersonal relationships, and family. The following examples illustrate how human development, interpersonal relationships, and family influence parenting. Prospective family and consumer sciences educators must recognize how the stages of development (e.g., infancy, adolescence, or adulthood) influence parental expectations and discipline. Parenting styles such as authoritarian, permissive, or authoritative often are influenced by interpersonal relationships with the child’s mother or father, grandparents, extended family, and community members. Family structure, such as one or two parent households or blended families, impacts decisions regarding living arrangements, parenting goals, and parental roles. These subjects are just a few of the possible topics that FCS teacher candidates need to understand in order to teach parenting. Other parenting topics include: (a) responsibilities of parenting, (b) laws related to public policy, (c) selecting child care, and (d) types of child abuse and neglect.

The Areas of Study of Human Development, Interpersonal Relationships, Family, and Parenting (NASAFACS, 2008) each have unique content; however, family and human development concepts, theories, and research interact with one another and teacher candidates must recognize this interdisciplinary nature of the family and consumer sciences profession. For example, if one is teaching about adolescent development, one will need to examine issues of interpersonal relationships such as friendships and dating, an adolescent’s role in their family, and parent-child interactions. Not only are the four above-mentioned Areas of Study interrelated, they also are related to the other 12 Areas of Study in the National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education (NASAFACS) and with the other content-focused standards in the National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences (NATEFACS, 2004): (a) Standard 1, Career, Community, and Family Connections; (b) Standard 2, Consumer Economics and Family Resources; and (c) Standard 4, Nutrition, Food, and Wellness. When teaching about family and human development, it is essential to discuss housing, family resource management, and nutrition because these areas impact how children, youth, and adults grow and develop.

Identifying the integrated nature of the various content areas demonstrates the holistic approach of the discipline of family and consumer sciences. Family and consumer sciences educators should be acquainted with the theoretical framework of the Body of Knowledge of Family and Consumer Sciences (Baugher et al., 2000), which is built on an ecological
perspective that focuses on human interaction with their environment (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). The Body of Knowledge of Family and Consumer Sciences includes four major components: (a) common body of knowledge, (b) specialization threads, (c) cross-cutting threads, and (d) basic human needs (Baugher et al.). The common body of knowledge component includes systems theory, lifespan development, individual, family, and community. The specialization threads consist of health, food for basic nutrition, food science, clothing and textiles, housing, economics and management, relationships, social leadership, and wellness. The third component, cross-cutting threads, is based on societal trends. These cross-cutting threads are integrated across FCS subject matter and are comprised of basic human needs; communication skills; public policy; critical thinking; diversity; global perspective; professionalism; independence; dependence; creative thinking; community development; technology; and moral, ethical, and spiritual development (Baugher et al.). The framework functions by specialization and cross-cutting threads interacting with the common body of knowledge to address the fourth component, basic human needs. For example, interpersonal relationships are impacted by communication skills, technology, an individual’s development, and environment. These interactions influence how basic human needs of belonging or attachment are met. Thus, the Body of Knowledge of Family and Consumer Sciences enables FCS educators to gain insights about family and human development.

The professional organization, National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) also has developed a framework that is relevant to teaching about family and human development. The Framework for Life Span Family Life Education created by NCFR identifies ten substance areas for providing quality education about family life: (a) families and individuals in societal contexts, (b) internal dynamics of families, (c) human growth and development across the lifespan, (d) human sexuality, (e) interpersonal relationships, (f) family resource management, (g) parent education and guidance, (h) family law and public policy, (i) ethics, (j) family life education, and (j) methodology (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2003). This framework is comprehensive in regards to teaching about family and human development; however, it lacks the integrative nature of the Body of Knowledge of Family and Consumer Sciences (Baugher et al., 2000). Missing from its framework are the following areas of study: housing, health/wellness, and clothing and textiles. When preparing FCS educators it is important that they understand both the Body of Knowledge of Family and Consumer Sciences (Baugher et al.) and the Framework for Life Span Family Life Education (Bredehoft & Walcheski). Together, these frameworks give FCS teacher candidates the solid knowledge base needed to teach family and human development.

Teaching Family and Human Development

Family and consumer sciences educators must know how to effectively teach about family and human development as well as identify appropriate content. In preparing FCS educators to teach family and human development, it is also important that they gain information and skills on how to teach. In the document National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences (NATEFACS, 2004), three additional standards address the need for effective teaching. They are: (a) Standard 5, Curriculum Development; (b) Standard 6, Instructional Strategies and Resources; and (c) Standard 7, Learning Environment (NATEFACS). These Standards address the importance of good curriculum development, appropriate teaching methods, and a safe learning environment. The following paragraphs address how these three Standards are applied to Standard 3, Family and Human Development.
In her book, *Powerful Teacher Education*, Darling-Hammond (2006) stated that good teacher education programs have curricula which apply a developmental perspective and demonstrate sensitivity to the social contexts of learners such as the classroom environment, the students’ community, and the learners’ uniqueness. Darling-Hammond argued that good curriculum and teaching strategies are grounded in appropriate child and adolescent development. Providing age-appropriate instruction are elements of Standard 5, Curriculum Development and Standard 6, Instructional Strategies and Resources. It is essential that prospective family and consumer sciences educators have a knowledge base of child and adolescent development because it helps determine subject matter and appropriate teaching strategies. Because some subject matter in human and family development can be sensitive, it is especially important that teacher candidates recognize age-appropriate subject matter and teaching strategies. For example, when teaching about abusive or unhealthy intimate relationships, teaching strategies and curriculum should be different for seventh graders than for seniors in high school. Seventh graders need to know about basic characteristics of unhealthy intimate relationships while twelfth graders need additional information on causes of unhealthy intimate relationships such as power and control.

Another element of good curriculum development is demonstrating sensitivity to the learners’ social context (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005a). The social context of the learning environment consists of an individual’s learning style, student readiness to learn, and family and community expectations (Darling-Hammond et al.). When family and consumer sciences teachers develop human and family development curriculum they must inquire about how students learn, what are important family and community values, and what is age-appropriate subject matter. For example, developing curriculum and creating teaching strategies for the subject matter of human sexuality requires a development perspective and a social context lens. Teaching about puberty to sixth graders in a small rural community in Tennessee should be different than teaching about puberty to eleventh graders in a large metropolitan city in California.

Creating a safe learning environment is another important aspect of good curriculum development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005a). One element of recognizing the social context of a student is respecting diversity. Standard 7, Learning Environments, of the *National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences* (NATEFACS, 2004) and Standard 4 of the *National Council Accreditation of Teacher Education* (NCATE, 2008) emphasize the need for teacher candidates to be sensitive to issues of diversity. Family and consumer sciences educators need to identify how issues of diversity such as age, family type, gender, race, ability, religion, and sexual orientation impact human and family development subject matter and the teaching strategies used to teach that content.

High quality teacher education programs prepare future educators to develop curriculum to meet local school district or state standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005a). Family and consumer sciences teacher educators should prepare teacher candidates to use the *National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education* (NASAFACS, 2008) to guide their curriculum development, teaching, and student assessment. Teacher candidates should ask and be able to answer the question, What is the relationship between family and human development content and state or national standards? For example, Standard 12.1, Human Development, in the *National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education* states, “Analyze principles of human growth and development across the life span” (NASAFACS, n.p.). In addressing this Standard, FCS educators need to determine how subject matter, effective teaching strategies, and
a student’s social context (e.g., culture, age, gender, and learning style) will influence family and human development curriculum and teaching methods and strategies.

**Assessment of the Standard**

According to Carr and Harris (2001) assessment improves instruction, determines how well a student has learned, and indicates how well an instructional program is working. This point illustrates the importance of assessment in family and consumer sciences teacher education programs. It is important to ask the question, How should FCS teacher candidates be assessed to meet Standard 3, Family and Human Development? One way to answer this question is by conducting either authentic or performance assessments. In authentic assessment students are evaluated on their ability to apply their knowledge and skills to real life problems in contextual settings (Gronlund, 2006). One type of authentic assessment is the use of case studies. According to Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman (2005b) using case studies are an effective way to evaluate a student’s ability to apply theory to a specific situation. Case studies allow students to examine elements of a particular idea to a real-life situation. For example, What are appropriate teaching strategies for a class of teenage mothers when discussing parenting? Another type of authentic assessment that is found in effective teacher education programs is action research (Darling-Hammond, 2006). In action research, practitioners (in this case teacher candidates) design or conduct an investigation based on their experiences (Darling-Hammond). For example, teacher candidates might investigate how family participation impacts student performance and attendance. Performance assessments require an individual to demonstrate understanding and skills by performing a task (Gronlund). Selecting age appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies during student teaching are examples of performance assessment for FCS teacher candidates. Two of the most common and effective performance assessments in teacher education programs are field experiences and the teacher candidate portfolio (Darling-Hammond). Field experiences give teacher candidates the opportunity to perform various teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and select appropriate curriculum. Using portfolios allows students the opportunity to reflect on their teaching experiences, illustrate self-awareness, and show their knowledge and skills regarding teaching family and human development (Darling-Hammond).

**Family and Human Development Resources**

Information about family and human development can quickly change and can often be contradictory. The World Wide Web is one source of information about family and human development. Other sources include print materials such as journal articles, newsletters, or books. It is essential that family and consumer sciences educators know how to evaluate information based on factors such as: (a) accuracy, (b) authority, (c) objectivity, (d) time of publication, (e) coverage or depth of topic, and (f) author (Beck, 2006). Listed below are brief descriptions of agencies or organizations that work in the area of family and human development. The various Web sites provide research-based information, statistics, publications, resources, and links to other agencies or resources. When obtaining information from these and other sources it is important to use the above mentioned criteria to evaluate information.


The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences is a professional organization for family and consumer sciences professionals that strives to improve the
quality and standard of individual and family life through educational programs and public policy.

This professional organization works to promote family and consumer sciences education throughout the United States. It supports the work of ACTE. The FACS Division includes three affiliates: the National Association Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences (NATFACS), the National Association of Teacher Educators for Family and Consumer Sciences (NATEFACS), and the National Association of State Administrators for Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS).

This United States government agency is a system of health surveillance which monitors and prevents disease outbreaks, implements disease prevention strategies, and maintains national health statistics.

This non-profit organization works to improve the lives of people who are financially distressed by conducting research and policy analysis; advocating at the state and federal levels; and providing information and technical assistance on family policy for United States policy makers, advocates, researchers, and the media.

The United States Department of Agriculture is the parent agency of CYFERnet. It provides peer reviewed content that includes child, youth, and family resources of the public land-grant universities to educators, researchers, parents, youth agency staff, community members, human services and health care providers, students, policy makers, youth, and the media.

CSREES is a part of the United States Department of Agriculture. It acts to solve problems of consumers, farmers, and communities and works in cooperation with land-grant universities, public institutions, and private sector partners. Extension offices can be found at the state and local levels. Family, youth, and communities are specific research and program areas of CSREES.

This is a non-profit research center that provides data to inform decision-making on the changing workforce, family, and communities.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (2008). Retrieved October 21, 2008, from http://www.naeyc.org. This professional organization works to improve the well-being of all young children (ages birth to eight). NAEYC accredits child care centers, provides resources such as publications and conferences for their members, and advocates on issues on behalf of children.


This non-profit organization provides leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. The organization’s work is centered on the 40 Developmental Assets™ which are used to help communities create environments for healthy, caring, and responsible young people.

This is an agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services. It is a nationwide aging network that provides services to the elderly and helps them remain independent by providing services such as in-home meals, transportation, and at-home services.

This government agency is responsible for 60 programs that promote the economic and social well-being of children, families, and communities including: (a) welfare (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), (b) child support enforcement systems, (c) Head Start, (d) child care assistance, (e) foster care and adoption state programs, and (f) programs that prevent child abuse and intimate partner violence.

Conclusion
To meet Standard 3, Family and Human Development, of the National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences (NATEFACS, 2004), family and consumer sciences teacher educators must give teacher candidates opportunities to gain knowledge and practice skills needed to teach family and human development. Quality FCS teacher education programs should make sure that teacher candidates are obtaining relevant, research-based family and human development content and are able to develop appropriate curriculum that meets the academic needs of students; addresses local, state and national student standards; and ensures a safe learning environment. Knowledge and skills of FCS teacher candidates can be assessed by authentic and performance assessment methods such as case studies, action research, field experiences, and portfolios. High quality content, curriculum, teaching strategies, and teacher candidate assessment ensure that Standard 3, Family and Human Development is met and that FCS teacher candidates are prepared to fulfill the profession’s mission of empowering children, youth, and families to live and work in a diverse global society (NASAFACS, 2008).

References


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