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Employability Standards: Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion in Family and Consumer Sciences Secondary Curriculum

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent that the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) employability standards were included in the family and consumer sciences (FCS) curriculum. This study included 262 secondary teachers. Teachers were asked to indicate if in their teaching the employability standards were not an objective, an incidental objective, an important objective, or a major objective. Results showed that 24% of the participants identified the employability standards as major objectives in their teaching whereas, 76% identified them as important objectives. There were no significant differences found on any teacher group based on years of teaching experience and the seven areas within the employability standards. However, teachers with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience had the highest overall mean on the seven areas of the employability standards.

Background

A number of trends have been evident during the last four decades that have had an impact on the profession of family and consumer sciences (Simerly, Ralston, Harriman, & Taylor, 2000; Wild, 2000). Among those trends are shifts in society, economics, reforms in education (Wild, 2000), and the changing workplace. In response to the demands of the rapidly changing workplace, the expanded education and training opportunities was among the societal trends that served as an impetus to family and consumer sciences redefining its mission and direction. Thus, secondary family and consumer sciences programs have made considerable changes in response to the redefined mission and societal trends (Erwin, Moran, & McInnis, 1996).

A notable change in secondary family and consumer sciences programs is in the types of programs offered. Traditionally, family and consumer sciences prepared students for personal, family, and community roles which was known as a family-oriented program. However, as a result of the redefined mission and direction, secondary family and consumer sciences education programs are now moving towards a career-oriented curriculum that allows for career exploration outside of the home (Georgia Department of Education, 2005a). Furthermore, family and consumer

sciences has become part of the school-to-work/work-based learning initiative. As family and consumer sciences education continue to implement work-based learning programs, the content of employability is becoming increasingly important and relevant. Addressing the issues of employability skills can be accomplished through the implementation of employability standards.

In Georgia, the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), mandated by the Quality Basic Education Act of 1986 was established (Georgia Learning Connections, 2005a). The QCC is a statewide basic curriculum that created standards detailing what students should know and be able to do upon completion of courses within every content area. Standards were developed by a committee of public school educators, both secondary and postsecondary and have undergone revisions every four years (Georgia Learning Connections, 2005b). Employability standards were developed for all Technology and Career Education courses and intended to be integrated through the instructional course sequence of Technology and Career Education programs. At the time of the latest revisions of the QCC standards in 2004, employability standards were categorized into seven areas. Those areas are basic skills, thinking skills, personal qualities, interpersonal skills, technology, business aspects, and career development. These standards are intended to help prepare students for the transition from high school to employment. The QCC in Technology and Career Education contains two parts, the employability standards (also referred to as core skills) and the content area standards. The term employability standards, was used on the learning connections official website (Georgia Learning Connections, 2005c) and therefore, used for this study.

The implementation of employability standards in family and consumer sciences is entrusted to the teachers serving the profession. Schlossberg (as cited in Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004) synthesized the work of adult theorists and advanced several propositions. One proposition which has relevance to this study concluded that adults continually experience transitions requiring adaptations and reassessment of the self. The implementation of work-based learning programs merits a change in the curriculum for family and consumer sciences teachers and therefore, attention should be given to how teachers adapt to these changes at different periods in their career. Hall and Smith (1999) proposed that how teachers respond to educational reform initiatives could depend on factors such as years of teaching experience.

Besides, Georgia teachers of family and consumer sciences have a broad range of years of teaching experience (Smith, Jones, & Hall, 2003; Smith, Hall, & Jones, 2001) therefore, it is conceivable that teachers have adapted the employability standards in their teaching at varying degrees based on years of teaching experience. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine the extent that secondary family and consumer sciences teachers are including the employability standards in their teaching, and if teachers differ based on years of teaching experience and the inclusion of employability standards in their teaching?

Conceptual Framework

Employability skills are included in secondary teaching programs with the expectation that students will be better prepared to obtain and maintain employment after high school. To ensure implementation of employability standards, attention must be given to including them in the curriculum. The notion of including essential content in the curriculum is grounded in curriculum design. Thereby, the concept of curriculum design guided this study.

Overtime, several curriculum designs have been proposed. Separate subject, multidiscipline, interdisciplinary, and integrated curriculum designs as identified by Beane (1993) were explored for use in this study. After careful deliberation, the integrated curriculum design was chosen as a framework. The integrated curriculum has been used and defined by several researchers. According to Beane, the integrated curriculum design promotes personal and social integration through the organization of curriculum around significant problems and issues that have been identified without regard for subject area lines. Shoemaker (1989) defines an integrated curriculum as one that cuts across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of the curriculum into meaningful association to focus on broad areas of study. Additionally, an integrative curriculum can start with an organizing theme followed by questions, projects, and activities that involve integration and application

of knowledge in the context of the theme. Dohner (1994) maintains that as themes are studied in and outside of the school, students will become generally educated about real-life problems, and teachers will be able to use their specializations in this general education context.

Employability standards are broad and cover several different kinds of essential skills that are applicable to all career and technical education program areas. Based on the description of the integrated curriculum, it was chosen as the lens for this study to view the implementation of these general skills desired of employers.

Review of Related Literature

More than two decades ago, researchers were interested in the qualities that employers desire in employees as evidenced by the syntheses of research associated with employability skills (Ascher, 1988; Cotton, 1993; Lankard, 1994; Overtoom, 2000). Generally, the research has shown that employers are not satisfied with the employability skills of entry-level employees (Cotton, 1993; Davies, 2000), are looking for employees with basic skills (Ascher, 1988; Cotton, 1993; Lankard, 1994), as well as affective skills and traits (Ascher, 1988; Cotton, 1993), and there is greater employer satisfaction with employees who had a vocational-technical background (Lankard, 1994).

Some studies of employability skills, asked the question: what do employers want? To answer that question, 65% of employers in a North Carolina study reported a skills gap between what they wanted and what graduates of educational institutions had (Vasu & Frazier, 1994). Additionally, 46% of the employers believed that high school graduates had inadequate reading skills, 52% found writing skills to be lacking, 48% were disappointed in math skills, and 51% were unhappy with the communication skills. The next year, McLaughlin (1995) found that employers wanted employees who could communicate, think, and continue to learn throughout their lives. Concerning affective traits in McLaughlin's study, employers wanted employees to demonstrate positive attitudes, behaviors, be responsible, adaptable, and work well with others. A year later, Heinemann (1996) discovered that employers wanted individuals who were trained in the skills of the job. Specifically, employers wanted individuals with good people skills, and good grades and attitudes.

The following year, an interview with six business and industry professionals on what they were looking for in employees was conducted (Techniques, 1997). Of the six professionals interviewed, all of them identified communication skills as the primary skill sought in an employee. Participants in this interview were also interested and desired employees to process basic skills, ability and willingness to learn, teamwork, and generally portable skills; that is, skills that were transferable from job to job (Techniques, 1997). Yet another year later, Kretovics and McCambridge (1998) discovered through a focus group that employers want employees with technical skills, communication skills, social effectiveness skills, and presentation skills.

Richens and McClain (2000) surveyed 400 employers on their perceptions of skills and competencies required for employees. Employers reported that they preferred employees to possess employability skills over technology skills. Basic skills, thinking skills, personal quality skills, and interpersonal competencies were all rated as the most important to employers by 93% while technology and system competencies were rated the lowest by 55% and 53%, respectively. Most recently, Taylor (2005) reported that employers are looking for attitudinal attributes rather than skill proficiency in young employees.

Zinser (2003) described a teacher education program that is training pre-service teachers to teach for transferable career skills. Zinser (2003) believed career and technical education teachers may be in the best position to include employability skills in their classrooms because it is more natural for CTE classes to have discussions on careers and the work environment. Zinser also believed one of the best ways to improve the teaching of employability skills it to improve the teacher preparation programs of pre-service Career and Technical Education students. The University of Michigan has therefore developed a new course on teaching career and employability skills. The course is based on the ideas presented in the SCANS (1993) publication called *Teaching the SCANS Competencies*.

From the review of the literature, the desires of employers today are consistent with those over a decade ago. That is, employers are seeking employees with basic, thinking, communication, and teamwork skills as well as good personal

and/or attitudinal traits. Additionally, employers favor the acquisition of employability skills as opposed to technical skills. However, the literature shows that generally employers are not pleased with the skills of entry-level employees. The review also indicated that career and technical education programs are conducive for these skills to be taught and developed. In order to continue to supply the workforce with capable employees, there is a need to include employability standards in the curriculum of career and technical education generally and family and consumer sciences specifically.

Method

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent that secondary family and consumer sciences teachers were including the employability standards in their teaching and if teachers differ based on years of teaching experience and inclusion of employability standards. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study. To what extent are secondary family and consumer sciences teachers including the employability standards in their teaching? Are there differences in teacher groups based on years of teaching experience and the inclusion of employability standards in their teaching?

Procedure

Secondary family and consumer sciences teachers in Georgia were surveyed. Names and addresses of 444 high school teachers were obtained from the Department of Education. A questionnaire packet including a cover letter and a pre-addressed, stamped return envelope was mailed to teachers. Using Dillman's (2000) survey implementation strategies, a thank you postcard was sent a week after the initial mailing as a reminder; a second questionnaire was mailed 3 weeks later to teachers who had not responded to the first questionnaire or the postcard. Of the 444 high school teachers identified, 262 (59%) responded to the questionnaire. The teachers ranged in age from 22 to 62 years (M = 43.9, SD = 8.77) whereas, years of teaching experience ranged from 1 to 36 years (M = 16.9, SD = 8.75). Eighty-nine percent (232) of these teachers taught in a comprehensive (family-oriented) program

whereas, the remaining 11% of teachers taught in an occupational (career-oriented) program.

Instrumentation. The scale for the questionnaire consisted of twenty-five employability standards found in the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum. Face and content validity of the instrument were evaluated by an expert panel of family and consumer sciences educators. Changes suggested by the validation panel such as formatting of items and instructions for completing the instrument were made. According to Litwin (1995), levels of .70 or higher on Cronbach's alpha suggest acceptable or good reliability. For this study, the scale showed a Cronbach's alpha score of .96 which is well above the .70 recommended.

Part one of the questionnaire was developed by using the employability standard statements on a Likert-type scale. The 4-point Likert-type scale used in the instrument was adapted from the *Curriculum Orientation Survey (COS)* developed by Hall (1981). The instrument was developed to measure the extent to which selected objectives are included by teachers in their family and consumer sciences programs (Hall, 1981); it measures what you teach in your program (Anderson, Ley, & Mears, 1982). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate if the standard was *not an objective*, *an incidental objective*, *an important objective*, or *a major objective* in their teaching. The value for each anchor was: not an objective = 1, an incidental objective = 2, an important objective = 3, or a major objective = 4. A quantitative measure such as daily, weekly, or monthly was not established. Therefore, it is the teacher's perception that these standards are included in their teaching. Part two of the questionnaire requested demographic and program related information. Participants' age, number of years of teaching experience, and program type were sought.

Descriptive statistics, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA), and Tukey's post hoc tests were used to analyze data. The a priori alpha level for analytical test of differences was established at the .05 level. The effect sizes for the analyses of variance were interpreted using Eta Squared.

Findings

In Table 1, frequencies and percents are recorded for employability standards taught in family and consumer sciences programs. Of the 25 employability standards, all of them were perceived as *major objectives* or *important objectives* for the most teachers who responded to the questionnaire. Six of the 25 employability standards were identified as a *major objective* in teaching family and consumer sciences by majority of teachers. Of the six employability standards that were *major objectives*, it is interesting to note that three of them were under the area of Interpersonal Skills. Those three Interpersonal Skills standards were: demonstrates the ability to participate as a team member (*major* for 64% of the teachers); demonstrates the ability to resolve conflicts; and the ability to perform in a work environment with individuals of different ages, gender, cultures, attitudes and abilities, 45% and 43%, respectively. Two of the six employability standards rated as *major objectives* were under the area of Personal Qualities. The two Personal Qualities standards rated as *major objectives* by 47% and 54% of the respectively were: demonstrates the ability to accomplish tasks in a forthright and timely manner; and demonstrates the ability to be trusted. The final employability standard rated as *major objective* was in the category of Business Aspects. Demonstrates the ability to maintain safety, health and environmental standards at a worksite was a *major objective* for 36% of teachers in this study.

The remaining 19 employability standards were considered *important objectives* in the teaching for family and consumer sciences teachers. Five of the *important objectives* were categorized as Basic Skills. The Basic Skills standards and the percent of teachers rating them as *important objectives* included: demonstrates the ability to locate, understand, and interpret written information (45%); demonstrates the ability to communicate thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing by creating documents (39%); demonstrates the ability to perform basic computations by using numerical concepts and calculations (43%); demonstrates the ability to receive, interpret, and respond to verbal and nonverbal messages appropriate to a given situation (46%); and demonstrates the ability to orally (or with sign language) present ideas, thoughts, and messages to listeners in a clear, concise, and courteous manner (47%).

Three of the *important objectives* were under the area of Thinking Skills. The three Thinking Skills standards and their respective ratings included: demonstrates the ability to create new ideas, combine ideas or information, make connections, and reshape goals that reveal new possibilities (46%); demonstrates the ability to specify goals, generate alternatives, consider risks, and evaluate and choose workable alternatives (46%); and demonstrates the ability to recognize a problem exists, to identify reasons for the problem, to develop a plan for a solution, to evaluate the plans, and to plan revisions when warranted (45%).

Two of the *important objectives* were under the area of Personal Qualities. The two Personal Qualities were: demonstrates an awareness of one's impact on others, knowledge of one's own emotional needs, and how to address those needs; and demonstrates the ability to assert self appropriately in social situations, and take interest in what others say and do. These standards were important objectives to 48% and 49% of the teacher, respectively.

Three of the *important objectives* were under the area of Interpersonal Skills. The three Interpersonal Skills and their respective ratings were: demonstrates the ability to teach others new skills (44%); demonstrates the ability to interact appropriately with a customer/client in a business situation (33%); and demonstrates the ability to provide leadership in an organization (43%).

The one technology skill on the list of employability standards was rated as an *important objective* by the family and consumer sciences teachers. The Technology Skill standard was demonstrates knowledge and application of computers and/or technology which was rated *important* by 35% of the teachers.

The remaining four *important objectives* all fell under the area of Career Development. The four Career Development standards and their ratings included: demonstrates the proper skills for seeking and securing employment (39%); demonstrates the proper skills necessary for successful transition to a work environment (43%); demonstrates the ability to identify key elements that comprise professional standards and appropriate behavior (39%); and demonstrates the ability to understand that most people will change careers and employers several times in their lives and be prepared for this change (39%).

Employability Standards

None of the employability standards were considered as *incidental objectives* or *not an objective* by the teachers who responded to the questionnaire.

Table 1
Frequencies and Percents for Teachers' Views of Employability Standards Taught in Family and Consumer Sciences Programs

EMPLOYABILITY	Not an Objective		Incidental Objective		Important Objective		Major Objective	
STANDARDS	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Basic Skills								
Demonstrates the ability to locate, understand, and interpret written information (manuals, graphs, schedules, publications, etc.)[a]	12	5	52	21	112	45	73	29
Demonstrates the ability to communicate thoughts, ideas, information, and messages in writing by creating documents (letters, memos, directions, manuals, reports, graphs, flowcharts, etc.)	14	6	57	23	98	39	80	32
Demonstrates the ability to perform basic computations by using numerical concepts and calculations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, whole numbers, decimals and percentages).	10	4	53	21	108	43	78	31
Demonstrates the ability to receive, interpret, and respond to verbal and nonverbal messages appropriate to a given situation.	5	2	23	9	116	46	105	42

STANDARDS	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Demonstrates the ability to orally (or with sign language) present ideas, thoughts, and messages to listeners in a clear, concise, and courteous manner.	7	3	23	9	118	47	101	40
Thinking Skills								
Demonstrates the ability to create new ideas, combine ideas or information, make connections, and reshape goals that reveal new possibilities.	8	3	38	15	116	46	87	35
Demonstrates the ability to specify goals, generate alternatives, consider risks, and evaluate and choose workable alternatives.	10	4	25	10	116	46	96	38
Demonstrates the ability to recognize a problem exists, to identify reasons for the problem, to develop plans for a solution, to evaluate the plans, and to plan revisions when warranted.	8	3	18	7	114	45	109	43
Personal Qualities								
Demonstrates the ability to accomplish tasks in a forthright and timely manner.	7	3	17	7	106	42	119	47
Demonstrates an awareness of one's impact on others, knowledge of one's own emotional needs, and how to address those needs.	8	3	21	8	120	48	99	39
Demonstrates the ability to assert self appropriately in social situations, and take interest in what others say and do.	7	3	18	7	123	49	101	40

EMPLOYABILITY STANDARDS	Not an Objective n	%	Incidental Objective n	%	Important Objective n	%	Major Objective n	%
Demonstrates the ability to be trusted.	8	3	14	6	90	36	136	54
Interpersonal Skills								
Demonstrates the ability to participate as a team member.	6	2	6	2	75	30	161	64
Demonstrates the ability to teach others new skills.	5	2	26	10	110	44	107	43
Demonstrates the ability to interact appropriately with a customer/client in a business situation.	32	13	59	23	82	33	72	29
Demonstrates the ability to provide leadership in an organization.	18	7	39	15	108	43	82	33
Demonstrates the ability to resolve conflicts.	5	2	24	10	104	41	113	45
Demonstrates the ability to perform in a work environment with individuals of different ages, gender, cultures, attitudes, and abilities.	18	7	35	14	87	35	107	43
Technology Skills Demonstrates knowledge and application of computers and/or technology.	32	13	74	29	87	35	53	21
Business Aspects								

STANDARDS	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Demonstrates the ability to maintain safety, health, and environmental standards when using and disposing of hazardous materials.	58	23	59	23	64	26	65	26
Demonstrates the ability to maintain safety, health, and environmental standards at a worksite.	29	12	50	20	76	30	91	36
Career Development								
Demonstrates the proper skills for seeking and securing employment.	17	7	36	14	99	39	95	38
Demonstrates the proper skills necessary for successful transition to a work environment.	21	8	41	16	107	43	78	31
Demonstrates the ability to identify key elements that comprise professional standards and appropriate behavior.	18	7	41	16	99	39	89	36
Demonstrates the ability to understand that most people will change careers and employers several times in their lives and be prepared for this change.	19	8	50	20	97	39	81	32

Employability Standards

With the exception of one area, there were at least two standard statements in each area of the employability standards. Participants responded to each statement; however, responses within each area were summed to provide a holistic understanding of a given area. Table 2 shows teachers' overall mean and standard deviation for each area of the employability standards. For the summated areas of the employability standards, mean scores ranged from 2.65 to 3.32. Personal Qualities and Thinking Skills received the highest overall mean, 3.32 and 3.21, respectively. On the other hand, Business Aspects and Technology Skills received the lowest overall mean, 2.75 and 2.65, respectively. Therefore, teachers included the Personal Qualities and Thinking Skills standards in their teaching more than they did the Business Aspects and Technology Skills standards.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Areas in the Employability Standards

Employability Standard Area	*M*	*SD*
Basic Skills	3.10	0.66
Thinking Skills	3.21	0.69
Personal Qualities	3.32	0.67
Interpersonal Skills	3.20	0.65
Technology Skills	2.65	0.96
Business Aspects	2.75	0.95
Career Development	3.02	0.81

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, 2005b). 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 = 99). The second largest

group (70) represented participants who had taught 21-30 years, while the lowest count (n = 15) was reported for the 31 to 40 years of teaching.

Table 3 shows that teachers who had taught 21 to 30 years had the highest overall mean on the areas within the employability standards which means these teachers included employability standards in their teaching more than other teacher groups. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to determine if teacher groups were different on years of teaching experience and the areas included in the employability standards. Analysis indicated no significant difference on the seven areas of the employability standards and any teacher group. Eta-square is routinely used to calculate effect size for ANOVA. Effect size is an estimate of the degree of association for the sample. Effect size quantifies the size of the difference between two groups, and provides a way to interpret statistically significant results in practical terms. In this study, the effect sizes ranged from .001 to .013 with Business Aspects and Technology Skills receiving the lowest and highest correlations, respectively (see Table 3). According to Cohen (1988), an effect size less than 0.1% is trivial or negligible. For these data, less than one percent of the variance is attributed to years of teaching experience thereby years of teaching experience did not influence whether teachers included the employability standards in their teaching.

Table 3

Effects of Years of Teaching Experience on Areas in the Employability Standards

Years (n)	1-10 (62)		11-20 (99)		21-30 (70)		31-40 (15)				
Area	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*P*	*ES*
Basic Skills	3.04	0.70	3.09	0.62	3.18	0.65	3.11	0.88	.49	.68	.006
Thinking Skills	3.14	0.72	3.18	0.66	3.29	0.66	3.31	0.80	.74	.53	.009
Personal Qualities	3.26	0.62	3.35	0.63	3.35	0.64	3.35	0.90	.27	.85	.003
Interpersonal Skills	3.25	0.63	3.19	0.68	3.22	0.66	3.06	0.63	.38	77	.004
Technology Skills	2.73	0.89	2.55	0.97	2.78	0.97	2.46	0.99	1.06	.37	004
Business Aspects	2.79	0.97	2.75	0.98	2.72	0.99	2.73	0.95	.06	.98	.007
Career Development	2.97	0.81	3.03	0.81	3.05	0.81	3.13	0.92	.19	.91	.002
Overall	3.03	0.76	3.02	0.76	3.08	0.77	3.02	0.87			

Conclusion and Discussion

One major finding emerged from this study. Twenty four percent (24%) of the employability standards were rated as *major objectives* while the remaining 76%

were rated as *important objectives* by family and consumer sciences teachers. From this finding, family and consumer sciences teachers are teaching the employability standards in their classes. Traditionally, family and consumer sciences programs were geared toward preparation for the work of the home rather than preparation for a career whereby employability standards were not as pertinent to the program and its content. However, by including the employability skills in their teaching, it appears family and consumer sciences educators have adapted and embraced the school-to-work/work-based learning educational reform initiative and are also contributing to the preparation of students for the workplace. Family and consumer sciences educators are therefore positioning themselves in the mainstream educational reform movement. This finding also corroborates findings from previous studies (Cotton, 1993; Lankard, 1994; Davies, 2000) which showed that employers want employees with basic skills, personal skills, are creative problem solvers, and work well with those around them.

When the overall mean score for each area of the employability standards was considered, Personal Qualities and Thinking Skills received the highest mean scores. The two areas of employability standards, Personal Qualities and Thinking Skills, are considered portable skills. Portable skills are those that can be taken from workplace to workplace (Techniques, 1997). Personal quality, thinking skills, and interpersonal skills are some of the most important skills for job applicants to possess, according to a group of employers (Richens & McClain, 2000). This finding supports those from previous research whereby employers prefer employees have attitudinal traits (Taylor, 2005) and basic skills (Techniques, 1997; Richens & McClain, 2000) rather than technical skills. Family and consumer sciences teachers are uniquely positioned to stress the characteristics of the aforementioned areas of employability standards based on their knowledge of content areas dealing with child, family, and interpersonal relationships.

Although their were no significant differences found between teacher groups based on years of teaching experience, teachers with 21 to 30 years of teaching experience received the highest overall mean score for the seven areas of the employability standards.

According to Schlossberg (as cited in Herr et al., 2004), who summarized the work of major theorists in adult career development, the concept of transitions suggests that adults are constantly experiencing change either deliberately or due to external forces. She further asserts that changes can engender growth or new concepts. The event of family and consumer sciences migration to career-oriented programs did not affect teachers with extended years of teaching experience. This finding is consistent with previous studies of Georgia teachers (Hall & Smith, 1999; Smith, Jones, & Hall, 2003; Smith, Hall, & Jones, 2001) concerning years of teaching experience and educational reform initiatives. These writers contend that although teachers have been teaching at least two decades, they can and will embrace change. In fact, from this study teachers with 20 or more years of experience embraced the inclusion of the employability standards in their teaching more than teachers with less than 20 years of teaching experience as evidence by the mean ratings. This also supports the notion of the adult development theory that adults continually undergo change; these teachers by including employability standards as major or important objectives in their teaching. Based on the high mean scores in this study, the writers postulate that the inclusion of the employability standards in the secondary family and consumer sciences curriculum brought about growth as a new educational reform initiative, work-based learning, was implemented.

The teaching of employability skills to future employees is an effort that should be undertaken by a total school. Miller (1989) maintains that family and consumer sciences teachers have a vital role in teaching essential skills. Historically, family and consumer sciences within high schools has taught basic living skills which are important to individuals, families, and society. The image of the traditional family and consumer sciences program is still held by some people. However, the results of this study confirm that family and consumer sciences teachers in Georgia have gone beyond the traditional anticipated curriculum and are including employability skills in their teaching. Subsequently, family and consumer sciences teachers are helping to prepare students for the workforce by contributing to the desires and needs of employers while simultaneously participating in an educational reform initiative, work-based learning.

Implications for Practice

It is the design of the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) that the employability standards are taught by all career and technical education teachers. Therefore, the concept of the integrated curriculum is useful and appropriate for blending specific subject matter content and general employability standards. Beane (1994) ascertain that while using the integrated approach, teachers listen to the concerns of students. However, the process used for curriculum planning is still tightly constructed and thereby representative of what should be included in the curriculum.

Adhering to the guiding principles of the integrated curriculum, family and consumer sciences teachers can be successful in implementing the employability standards into any course within the program. Based on an assumption of an integrated curriculum, one begins with a theme and then questions and activities follow. With the employability standards, family and consumer sciences teachers could use a standard from any of the seven areas and integrate into the different subject areas such as nutrition and wellness, parenting, or child development.

In as much as family and consumer sciences teachers are teaching employability standards, the notion of contextualizing the curriculum is encouraged and supported. Contextualizing the curriculum may be done inside or outside the family and consumer sciences classroom. Experiences that take place inside the classroom are known as in-school laboratory experiences where classrooms are set up to resemble work situations. In-school laboratory experiences can be handled through activities such as Bake Shops and Nursery Schools. Experiences that take place outside the classroom are termed extended laboratory experiences and usually take place in a business or agency in the community such as Preschool Centers or restaurants. Participation in real or simulated work settings such as in-school laboratory or extended laboratory experiences will afford students an opportunity to practice the employability standards.

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