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Family and Consumer Sciences Teacher Educator's Perception of Integration of Reading Skill Instruction

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**FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES TEACHER EDUCATORS’
PERCEPTION OF INTEGRATION OF READING SKILL INSTRUCTION**

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to determine family and consumer sciences (FACS) teacher educators' perceptions on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses. **Background:** As a result of low national reading scores and legislation, family and consumer sciences (FACS) teachers are being challenged to explicitly teach reading into course curricula but feel untrained to do so. Therefore, this demonstrates that FACS teachers know the value of literacy integration, but lack pedagogical skills too successfully and explicitly integrate literacy in the FACS curriculum. This draws attention to the preparation of FACS teachers, moreover FACS teacher educators' thoughts on the need and responsibility of reading skill integration in FACS courses. **Method:** A descriptive study was designed to answer the research purpose. Specifically, a survey instrument was used to elicit information on (a) the research participants' characteristics and (b) their views regarding the integration of reading skills into FACS courses. A population of 107 FACS teacher educators who were responsible for the preparation of FACS teacher candidates in instructional strategies for teaching FACS courses was surveyed. Fifty-two surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 48.6%. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics. **Results:** Results revealed most FACS teacher educators reported positive perceptions towards the integration of reading skills but did not feel responsible for providing explicit reading instructional methods to pre-service FACS teachers. However, respondents did not support holding FACS teachers accountable for reading scores on standardized academic assessments. Additionally, majority of respondents indicated that Reading teacher educators and other teacher educators (e.g., Curriculum and Instruction) should be primarily responsible for preparing FACS teacher candidates to integrate reading skills in the courses they teach. **Conclusion:** Overall, FACS teacher educators acknowledged the need but lacked support for assuming responsibility of integration of reading instructional strategies for FACS teachers and teacher candidates. **Implications:** Building a cadre of teachers who understand the benefits of integrating literacy skills and contextual curriculum is a pre-requisite for increased student academic achievement and workforce readiness. FACS teachers need to be given the tools to explicitly assist students with literacy action which starts in their FACS teacher education coursework. FACS teacher educators should make the effort to provide reading skill development in their instructional strategy courses because without the support and 'buy in' future FACS teachers will continue to feel untrained to explicitly teaching reading skill development.

Introduction

Literacy is the gateway skill for success in academia and in the workplace. Specifically, high school graduates need proficient literacy and reading skills in order to succeed in school, develop lifelong careers, participate in our democracy, and navigate the information age (Kamil, 2003). However, a host of federal education reports have indicated a continuous slide over the past decade in reading scores among the nation's secondary students (National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP], 2011; National Reading Panel, 2000; United States Department of Education, 2005). This decline has severe academia and economic implications for the workforce future moreover it raises the question of who is responsible for teaching and improving the reading level among students.

Today's workplace requires the ability to read and absorb technical manuals, understand and program computers, write and respond to memos on technical and professional matters, and interpret tables of instructions. Yet, according to the NAEP (2011), 35% of the nation's 12th graders were reading below the basic level and approximately 70% high school students need some form of reading remediation because they cannot comprehend the words they read. As a direct result, employers' have reported difficulty in recruiting qualified applicants that can read, follow directions, and independently solve problems, all of which are components of literacy. Implications for students who are deficient in reading include increased likelihood of not earning a high school diploma, lower self-esteem, decrease in earning potential, lower job performance evaluations, and job persistence (Kutner, 2007, National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). Heller and Greenleaf (2007) cited two reasons for poor literacy performance scores in high school are that reading and writing rarely taught as separate subjects beyond 8th grade and content teachers do not feel qualified or responsible to include explicit reading strategy instruction in their course curricula.

Career and technical education (CTE) is posited in assisting secondary students succeed with literacy education. Family and consumer sciences (FACS), a service area of CTE empower individuals to manage the challenges of living and working in a diverse global society. Within the workforce education emphasis, FACS teachers are responsible for preparing students for increasingly rigorous technical and workplace standards. However, FACS teachers are being challenged with what should be a common workplace standard, *literacy*, as a result of the national reading scores and federal legislation.

Research conducted found CTE teachers, which includes FACS, believed it was important to integrate literacy in the content curriculum to improve student reading skills (Alexander, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2006), but felt untrained in instructional methods to provide reading skill instruction (Garton, 2012; Jacobs, 2008). This demonstrates that FACS teachers know the value of literacy integration, but lack pedagogical skills too successfully and explicitly integrate literacy in the FACS curriculum. This draws attention to the preparation of FACS teachers, moreover FACS teacher educators' thoughts on the need and responsibility of reading skill integration in FACS courses. Therefore the purpose of this study was to determine FACS teacher educators' perceptions on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses.

Review of Related Literature

The idea of adolescent reading was first discussed by Bond and Bond in 1941. By the 1970's researchers recognized that adolescent reading was best enhanced through interaction among lessons and content areas (Herber, 1970). By 1985 Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson reported consensus among reading educators that made it clear that teachers must provide explicit time dedicated to reading if skills were to improve.

With clarity in relationship to explicit time requirements, researchers began to conduct experimentation to determine the reading strategies that had a significant impact on student skill achievement. However, the *National Reading Panel* (2000) sounded an alarm that there was a severe scarcity of research that validated the impact of reading skill strategies on student reading achievement. In 2005, the United States Department of Education indicated that student reading skills were tragic.

Career and technical education (CTE) leaders were summoned to improve student reading skills and the *Carl D. Perkins Act* (1984) and its subsequent reauthorization (1998, 2006, 2012) called for the integration of academic content, like reading, into the CTE curriculum.

Johnson, Charner, and White (2003) reported that the term integration lacked clarity and that it was based on an ambiguous model. In addition, Kamil (2003) reported there were few studies that documented effective reading skill development strategies; however, 62% of the available research concluded that reading skill achievement was significantly improved through reading skill enhanced CTE instruction. Yet, the 2004 *National Assessment of Vocational Education* indicated that CTE programs were unlikely to lead to improvements in student reading skill. Regardless of the report, CTE were once again charged with improving reading skills with the reauthorization of federal legislation (*Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act*, 2006).

Stone, Alfeld, Pearson, Lewis, and Jensen (2006) reported that the integration of academic skills within CTE curriculum resulted in the improvement of student achievement test scores. Park and Osborne (2007) confirmed those findings in their report of a strong positive correlation of .66 in relationship to the improvement of reading skills to technical achievement. These findings supported the integration of reading and technical skills. Further, Park (2011) found that combining instructional literacy strategies with activities in a CTE context resulted in significant improvements in students' reading ability and their grades across content areas.

While research had emerged to support the integration of reading skills and technical content; Jorgenson (2000) reported that content area teachers viewed reading skill development as the responsibility of English teachers. However, Meltzer (2002) indicated that English teachers had no more training in instructional strategies for reading skill development than other content area teachers.

Of the little research that has analyzed CTE teachers' ability to effectively utilize reading skill development strategies, Darvin (2006) reported that nearly 75% of CTE teachers had utilized implicit reading skill development strategies. This finding was in direct opposition to the recommendation of Jacobs (2008) who called for teachers to explicitly teach reading skills.

Polkinghorne (2006) revealed that CTE teachers are dedicated to improving student readings skills; however they felt unprepared to provide instruction. In addition, it remained unclear as to who should be preparing CTE teachers, such as those in FACS, to improve student reading skills. However, Draper (2008) indicated it was the responsibility of content area teacher educators, like FACS, to prepare teacher education candidates with instructional strategies to integrate reading and technical skill development. Nonetheless, research had not posited a model for the training of FACS teacher educators, to provide instruction to teacher education candidates therefore research was needed to identify the thoughts of FACS teacher educators regarding reading skill integration.

Conceptual Framework

O'Connor (2007) called for researchers to develop a conceptual framework related to literacy instruction through the analysis of literature from across disciplines. The conceptual framework for this study drew upon research findings from career and technical education, psychology, and reading education. The learning theory reported by Vygotsky (1978); which posits students must be active in the learning process, served as the foundation for the study.

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the need and relevancy in learning to read and write, "Teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something...writing must be 'relevant to life'" (pp. 117-118). This quote lends itself to the service areas of career and technical education (CTE) because of the foundational setting of contextualized education that CTE offers. For example, in FACS it is common for students to

read and analyze written instructions and then apply the instructions to a process; such as reading a culinary recipe and then constructing the product based on written instruction.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that adults [teachers] in a society foster children's cognitive development in an intentional and systematic manner by engaging them in relatable, challenging, and meaningful activities. Serafina, Bean, and Readence (2004) supported Vygotsky belief that educators must conceive adolescents as active participants in the literacy context. Additionally, educational research studies have shown that interactive, student-driven teaching results in successful learning (Center for Teaching Excellence, n.d.). Bonwell and Eison (1991) concluded that this type of instructional practice has led to better student attitudes and improvements in students' thinking and writing. Thus, building on cognitive skills improves comprehension, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking, all components of literacy. The teacher is influential in cognitive development by creating an engaging classroom environment that fosters critical thinking and decision making skills that students can transfer to situations that develop in the workplace.

Instructional strategies that promote literacy across the curriculum play a significant role in knowledge construction. Since children learn much through interaction, curricula should be designed to emphasize interaction and make connection between learners and learning tasks. The conceptual framework for literacy instruction relied on the premise that teachers have appropriate context, content knowledge, and knowledge of instructional strategies (Kehe, 2003; Stone et al., 2006) thus supporting the research into the need and responsibility for teaching reading skills in FACS courses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine family and consumer sciences (FACS) teacher educators' perceptions on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses. The following research objectives guided this study:

1. What is the perception among FACS teacher educators on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses?
2. What is the perception among FACS teacher educators on the effect of the integration of reading skills in secondary FACS courses?
3. What is the perception among FACS teacher educators that secondary FACS teachers should be held accountable by standardized academic assessment reading scores?
4. What is the perception among FACS teacher educators of who is responsible for preparing FACS teacher candidates on reading skill integration strategies?

Methodology

Instrumentation

A descriptive study was designed to determine family and consumer sciences (FACS) teacher educators' perceptions on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses.

The survey instrument was designed to elicit information on (a) the research participants' characteristics and (b) their views regarding the integration of reading skills into FACS courses. Questionnaire items were based upon a review of literature and input from a panel of experts. The survey tool was selected as opposed to interviews because the participants in this study were geographically distributed and the researchers wanted to include participants from institutions located in all regions of the United States.

Validity was controlled through the use of a panel of experts and a pilot study. Content and face validity were established using five teacher educators (two reading specialist teacher

educators, two business education educators and one curriculum and instruction educator) who provided an in-depth review of the instrument. A pilot group consisting of 40 FACS teacher educators was asked to test the instrument. Thirty-two (80%) participated and rated instrument instructions as clear (31, 96.9%) and instrument questions clear (30, 93.8%). As a result of the pilot survey, changes were made to the order and content of two questions.

Participants

Participants for this study included FACS teacher educators who were primarily responsible for the preparation of FACS teacher candidates in instructional strategies for teaching FACS courses. The participants were located by searching the Peterson's guide to four year colleges for institutions offering "Family and Consumer Science" as a program of study. Then those institutions' websites were searched to identify the program faculty and the courses in which they taught during fall, spring, and summer semesters. The courses were identified by searching the institutions course scheduling system for the course that most closely matched a course in instructional methods for teaching Family and Consumer Science. A population of 107 FACS teacher educators in the United States was identified and surveyed.

Data Collection

A survey instrument was mailed via the USPS to study participants. Participants completed the survey and returned via the USPS. Dillman, Smyth, and Christian's (2009) procedures were used to increase the response rate. That is, following the one week deadline, two subsequent surveys were sent to respondents to participate in the research study. Data were entered into the SPSS v. 18 statistical software package for analysis.

Data Analysis

Fifty-two surveys were returned, resulting in a response rate of 48.6%. A Mann-Whitney U statistical test was utilized to determine if a significant difference existed between early and late responders. No statistically significant differences were identified. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics to describe the data and answer the research objectives.

Results

Research Objective 1: What is the perception among FACS teacher educators on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses?

The majority of FACS teacher educators either strongly agreed or agreed that high school FACS teachers should integrate reading instruction in FACS courses (47 or 90.4%), reading skills should be frequently integrated (48 or 92.3%), and reading skills should be explicitly integrated in high school FACS courses (34 or 65.4%). The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Perception on Integration of Reading Instruction in Secondary FACS Courses

Statement	SA		A		SD		D	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Secondary FACS educators <i>should</i> integrate reading instruction in FACS courses	23	44.23	24	46.15	3	5.77	2	3.85
Secondary FACS educators should <i>frequently</i> integrate reading skills in FACS courses	27	51.92	21	40.38	0	0.00	4	7.69
Secondary FACS educators PRIMARILY integrate reading skills <i>explicitly</i> with FACS content	10	19.23	24	46.15	14	6.92	4	7.69

Research Objective 2: *What is the perception among FACS teacher educators on the effect of integration of reading skills in secondary FACS courses?*

Table 2 indicates that many of the participants believed that integrating reading skills will help to improve the reading skills (51 or 98.1%) and the FACS knowledge and skills of their future students (49 or 94.2%).

Table 2

Participants' Perception on the Effect of Integration of Reading Instruction in Secondary FACS Education Courses

Statement	SA		A		SD		D	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Preparing FACS teacher candidates to integrate reading skills in secondary courses will help them to improve the literacy skills of their students	25	48.08	26	50.00	1	1.92	0	0.00
Preparing FACS education teacher candidates to integrate reading skills in secondary courses will help them to improve the FACS knowledge and skills of their future students	23	44.23	26	50.00	3	5.77	0	0.00

Research Objective 3: *What is the perception among FACS teacher educators that secondary FACS teachers should be held accountable by standardized academic assessment reading scores?*

The majority of participants indicated that FACS teachers should not be held accountable by standardized assessments for teaching reading in FACS courses (33 or 63.5%). Six (11.54%) participants strongly agreed and 13 (25%) agreed to the accountability measures.

Research Objective 4: *What is the perception among FACS teacher educators of who is responsible for preparing FACS teacher candidates on reading skill integration strategies?*

Table 3 reveals the majority of participants (30 or 57.69%) indicated that Reading teacher educators and other teacher educators (e.g., Curriculum and Instruction) should be primarily responsible for preparing FACS teacher candidates to integrate reading skills in the courses they teach.

Table 3

Participants’ Perception of Their Role in Preparing FACS Educators to Integrate Reading Instruction in Secondary FACS Courses

Responsibility and Context	N	%
Reading teacher educators	27	51.92
FACS teacher educators	21	40.38
Other teacher educators	3	5.77
No response	1	1.92
Total	52	100.00

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine family and consumer sciences (FACS) teacher educators’ perceptions on the integration of reading skill instruction in secondary FACS courses. Overall, FACS teacher educators acknowledged the need but lacked support for assuming responsibility of integration of reading instructional strategies for FACS teachers and teacher candidates.

In this study, FACS teacher educators believed that it is important to integrate reading skills into FACS courses. This finding supports research by Alexander (2006) and Polkinghorne (2006) that CTE teachers, which FACS is a service area of, do believe integration of reading within the FACS content is essential. Additionally, FACS teacher educator respondents indicated that preparing FACS teacher candidates to integrate reading skills into their secondary FACS courses could improve the reading skills and FACS knowledge and skills of among students. Confirming Park’s (2011) finding, the combination of instructional reading strategies with activities in a CTE context resulted in significant improvements in students’ reading ability. Given the positive support for reading skill integration, FACS teacher educators understand the instrumental learning opportunity position the discipline posits with providing students with contextual reading skills. That is, students can apply their academics, such as literacy in a relevant and meaningful way as suggested by Vygotsky (1978). For example, students can research recipes to create a gluten free diet menu for a diabetic client.

The value added action of reading integration, can be a great asset to other academic teachers by reinforcing the skills and concepts that students learn in those subjects that students make minimal connection with as well as a transferable skill in the workplace. Draper (2008) contended that for student reading skills to improve there must be an interdisciplinary approach by teaching reading within in the realm of the content or the use of contextualized learning. Seconding Draper’s thought, Vygotsky’s (1978) learning theory insists that instructional

strategies that promote literacy across the curriculum play a significant role in knowledge construction resulting in improved reading skills.

Given the acknowledgement of support of reading skill integration, the responsibility of preparing FACS teacher candidates on reading skill instructional strategies proved differently in the findings. FACS teacher educators in this study did not perceive that the FACS teacher should be held accountable to improve reading skills scores earned on standardized academic assessments. This perception opposed other research (Park & Osborne, 2007; Park, 2011; Stone et al., 2006) that academic integration such as reading potentially could improve student scores on state tests. A thought worth noting regarding this study's finding about non-accountability measures is standardized testing measures student achievement on academics only, such as math, science, English; there is not section on family and consumer sciences thus not providing the respect or value of a much needed discipline. Much of the emphasis with mandating testing has been on the core academics giving minimal attention to CTE courses. Additionally, FACS is an applicable discipline to prepare students for the real world to be critical thinkers, life-long learners, and self-sufficient adults thus a single answer to a problem as the state tests are written is not a relevant assessment used in the FACS discipline.

In a disagreement with Draper (2008) and Jacobs (2008), the FACS teacher educators reported they should not be held responsible in explicitly teaching reading strategies in the FACS curriculum but that of other teacher educators, namely Reading teacher educators. A direct outcome of this finding, it is not surprising that high school FACS teachers feel untrained in instructional methods to provide reading skill instruction (Polkinghorne, 2006). In spite of a host of curriculum topics with limited time that needs to be addressed in a teacher candidate's program of study by not including explicit reading integration methods FACS teacher educators may be widening the gap among academics, FACS subject matter, and workplace entities.

Implications for Family and Consumer Sciences Education

FACS teacher educators perceived it important to integrate the teaching of reading in FACS courses; however, they do not view teaching reading skills as their responsibility and report they should not be primarily responsible for instructing FACS teacher candidates on how to do so. Based on the perceived value added, FACS teacher educators should make the effort to provide reading skill development in their instructional strategy courses because without the support and 'buy in' future FACS teachers will continue to feel untrained to explicitly teaching reading skill development. In the longer term, it will be valuable to build interdisciplinary relationships that will allow FACS teacher educators to work with their colleagues in reading education to ensure that FACS teacher candidates are well prepared.

FACS teacher educators reported they did not feel FACS teachers should be held accountable for the improvement of students' reading skills. However, Federal legislation suggests that they are indirectly responsible; and should be held accountable through assessments tied to the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation. Therefore, FACS teacher education curricula should be modified to include instruction in reading skill development because FACS teachers will be held responsible via federal legislation, even though they do not perceive teaching reading literacy to be their responsibility. Additionally, those FACS teachers who visibly integrate the importance of reading in an applied context may prove noteworthy among administrators in assisting with improving reading scores on state tests.

Building a cadre of teachers who understand the benefits of integrating literacy skills and contextual curriculum is a pre-requisite for increased student academic achievement and workforce readiness. But FACS teachers need to be given the tools to explicitly assist students

with literacy action which starts in their FACS teacher education coursework. Integration of literacy and content skills is the key to maintaining the viability of FACS programs and building a literate workforce in the United States; if not, students who struggle with reading will enter the work world singularly unprepared to earn a living (Garton, 2012).

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