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Student Self-Assessments and Personal Reflections after Taking a Family Life Education Methodology Course

Raeann R. Hamon, Messiah University 

Rachel R. Jones, Messiah University

ABSTRACT. The senior-level capstone course, HDFS 442 Strategies of Family Life Education, in the Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) major at a small, private university in the Mid-Atlantic region meets the National Council on Family Relations' *family life education methodology* content area for this Certified Family Life Educator-approved program. It also serves as the writing-intensive capstone course in the HDFS major. In addition to providing the details of the course description, objectives, and assignments, the authors share feedback gleaned from student process papers collected at the end of the semester. Specifically, we highlight undergraduate students' reflections on the impact of the course on revelations about themselves and their role as family life educators.

Keywords: family life education methodology course, scholarship of teaching and learning, CFLE, capstone, student reflections

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Direct correspondence to: Raeann R. Hamon, Ph.D., CFLE, Department of Human Development and Family Science, Messiah University, One University Ave., Mechanicsburg, PA 17055. e-mail: rhamon@messiah.edu



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Student Self-Assessments and Personal Reflections after Taking a Family Life Education Methodology Course

The National Council on Family Relations' Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) Program (NCFR, n.d.) has been instrumental in shaping the curricular content of programs in Human Development and Family Science (HDFS). One of the ten Family Life Education content areas that need to be part of the curriculum of CFLE-approved programs includes *family life education methodology*, "an understanding of the general philosophy and broad principles of family life education in conjunction with the ability to plan, implement and evaluate such educational programs" (Darling & Cassidy, 2014, p. 354; NCFR, 2014). Specific examples of required content include "planning and implementing, evaluation, education techniques, sensitivity to others, and sensitivity to community concerns and values" (NCFR, 2014). This paper will describe a course designed to address the *family life education methodology* content area for HDFS undergraduates at a small university in the Mid-Atlantic region. In addition to describing the course objectives and related assignments, the authors will share feedback gleaned from student process papers collected at the end of the semester, revealing students' personal reflections and growth as a result of participating in the course.

Overview of Strategies of Family Life Education

The course description for Strategies of Family Life Education, a senior-level capstone course, is as follows: The purpose of this course for the HDFS major is to investigate models and methods for strengthening interpersonal and family relationships utilizing primary prevention strategies such as family life education and family enrichment. Students will conduct a needs assessment utilizing current research and develop a family life education curriculum.

The course meets the writing-intensive general education requirement for the HDFS major. It is also a senior-level capstone course that affords a culminating experience in which students integrate and apply what they have learned in their HDFS major program.

In addition to requiring senior status to enroll, students must have completed three prerequisites: HDFS 339 Dynamics of Family Interaction, HDFS 345 Parenting, and HDFS 355 Marital and Couple Relationships. Each course includes instruction and related assignments to build skills necessary for Strategies of Family Life Education. For instance, in HDFS 339 Dynamics of Family Interaction, students learn the theoretical lenses professionals need in family science, including symbolic interaction, family development, family stress, family systems, conflict, feminist, and social exchange. In Strategies of Family Life Education, students will incorporate one or more of these theories in the needs assessment portion of the assignment for the Family Life Education (FLE) program they will design.

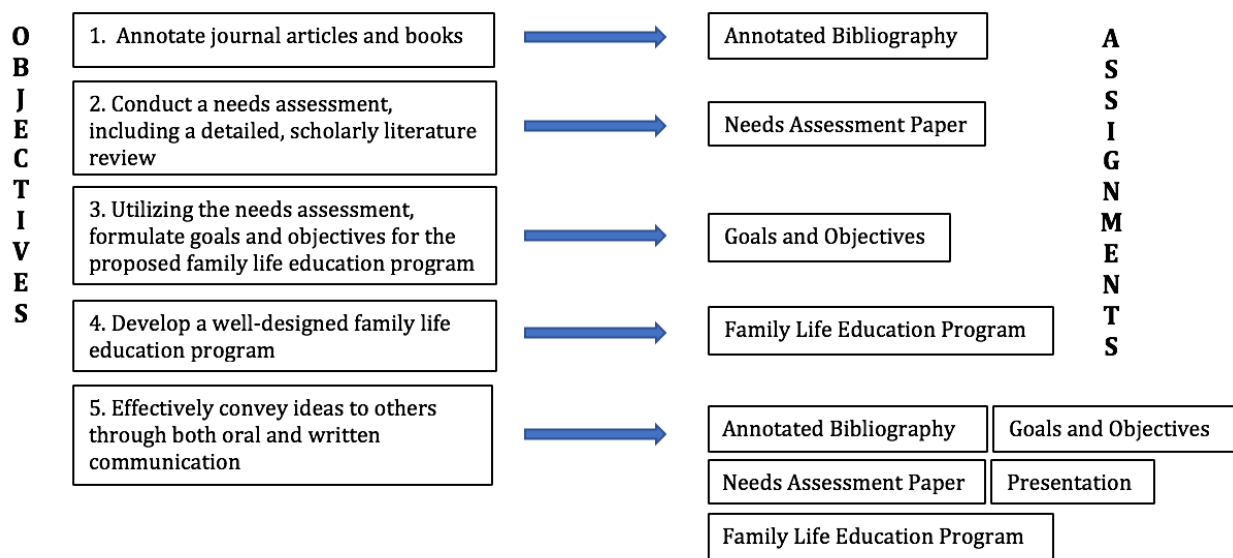
In HDFS 345 Parenting, students gain in-depth exposure to a family life education program, the Systematic Training for Effective Parenting program (Dinkmeyer, McKay, & Dinkmeyer, 1997). In addition, students create a one-hour parenting lesson based on their professional interests and literature review. More specifically, students first develop an FLE proposal in which they create a title for the lesson, delineate the target audience, write a two- to three-page literature review in which they identify risk and protective factors, outline parenting questions the lesson addresses, outline the lesson and include a reference page in APA format. After receiving feedback from the instructor, students then expand their proposal by designing a parenting lesson. This lesson includes a materials list, preparation notes, a session script, references and suggested readings, and appendices (e.g., handouts and copies of PowerPoint slides). These experiences serve as building blocks for a lengthier and more developed family life education program in Strategies of Family Life Education.

In HDFS 355 Marital and Couple Relationships, students work in groups to evaluate a relationship education program from a list of marriage/couple education programs provided by the instructor. Each group learns as much as possible about its program and then evaluates it based on a program evaluation rubric covered in class. After careful review, each group creates a PowerPoint presentation to provide an overview of its program evaluation results. In addition, each student group produces a poster board presentation on its program for the Premarital/Marital Education Fair, a class period devoted to groups sharing details of their program (authors, primary audience, major goals of the program, training required of educator, protective and risk factors addressed, evidence of effectiveness, etc.) with the remainder of the class.

In Marital and Couple Relationships, students also create a Couple Relationship Tips brochure with a community partner. This brochure is an assignment during which each student works with a community partner (e.g., non-profit, church) to synthesize scholarship on specific and focused aspects of marriage or couple relationships and offer sound, helpful research-based tips/advice. Students create a Couple Relationships Tips pamphlet that the community partner may distribute. These assignments and related course content offer essential scaffolding for students entering Strategies of Family Life Education by requiring them to dig deeper into family theory and existing family life education programs and to recognize that FLE programs need to be research-based and driven by objectives derived from risk and protective factors. The courses also help students to learn how to create family life education materials, whether a single lesson or pamphlet. These skills will be important as students enter Strategies of Family Life Education.

Course objectives for the Strategies of Family Life Education course include: 1) Annotate journal articles or books, 2) Conduct a needs assessment, including a detailed, scholarly literature review, 3) Formulate goals and objectives for the proposed family life education program utilizing the needs assessment, 4) Develop a well-designed family life education program, and 5) Effectively convey ideas to others through oral and written communication. Refer to Figure 1 for a visual depiction of how each objective relates to class assignments.

Figure 1
Course Objectives and Associated Assignments



In addition to a course text (Duncan & Goddard, 2017), other excellent resources on creating successful and effective family life education programs (Allen & Taylor, 2021; Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2009; Darling et al., 2022), and formal instruction by co-instructors, students are given a series of assignments throughout the semester that serve as building blocks for their final, individually produced FLE product. The tasks students must complete, found in Table 1, include: 1) Prior to leaving for summer break at the conclusion of their junior year, students need to select a topic for their project and have it approved by their Strategies of Family Life Education instructor. 2) Over summer break, students collect at least 15 scholarly references, annotating five of them, to create a reference list for their project, due the second day of class. This assignment arms students with a number of research-based articles which inform them about their population, risk and protective factors, and the problem they are trying to prevent. These articles offer a great start for the needs assessment paper, a draft of which is due within the first few weeks of the semester. 3) After receiving feedback from both a peer reviewer (from the class) and their instructor on an early draft, students make revisions and resubmit the final eight- to 10-page needs assessment paper for a grade.

The needs assessment reviews the literature, identifies risk and protective factors, includes information about the target population, incorporates a helpful theoretical framework for examining the issue, and offers a coherent rationale for the proposed FLE program. 4) Based on the needs assessment and after receiving instruction on how to develop goals and objectives, students submit a draft of four to six goals and at least two objectives per goal for the proposed FLE program. 5) Once they receive feedback from their instructor and peer reviewer, students move forward with the structure and content of their sessions based on the goals and objectives. 6) Then, students craft and submit the first two hours of their FLE program. 7) Once they receive instructor and peer reviewer feedback, they make modifications and move on to developing the second two hours of programming. Again, these hours are reviewed by the professor and peer reviewer, who suggest necessary improvements. 8) After the revised and complete FLE program is submitted toward the end of the semester (approximately 100 pages in length), students present an abbreviated 20-minute version of a program session, which should include all elements of the session in an abridged format (i.e., introduction to the content, teaching content, abbreviated interactive activity, and session overview). The final few minutes allow time for questions and answers. 9) Finally, students submit a two- to three-page Process Paper assignment during the final exam period in which they respond to a series of prompts or reflection questions designed to assess the extent to which they attained course objectives, as well as what they learned about themselves in the process of taking this course.

Effective Teaching Practice

We assert that Strategies of Family Life Education, a culminating senior capstone experience, meets Kuh's (2008) definition of a *high-impact educational practice* since students merge the knowledge they gained over their undergraduate experience to create this four-hour family life education program. The FLE program development process involves characteristics of unusually effective learning practice (Kuh, 2008). First, creating an FLE program *requires considerable time and effort* from students. Students benefit from a project that demands investment and commitment to the activity. Second, students *profit from substantive interaction with faculty and peers* over an extended period. In Strategies of Family Life Education, faculty co-instructors serve as important mentors and coaches to their assigned students, and student peer reviewers offer substantive support to one another as they tackle the creation of FLE programs. The course exemplifies collaborative learning. Third, high-impact practices increase the likelihood that *students interact with people different from themselves*, challenging students

Table 1*Tasks to be Completed by HDFS 442 Students*

Timeframe	Task
1. End of junior year	Students select topic for their project and have it approved by instructor
2. Summer before senior year *	Students collect at least 15 scholarly references, annotating five and create reference list, due the 2nd day of class
3. Week 3 of semester	Needs assessment draft due
4. After receiving feedback from peer reviewer & instructor on needs assessment draft	Students make revisions and resubmit the final 8-10 page needs assessment paper for a grade
5. Based on needs assessment and after receiving instruction on developing goals and objectives	Students submit a draft of 4 to 6 goals and at least 2 objectives per goal for the proposed FLE program
6. After receiving feedback from peer reviewer & instructor on goals and objectives	Students move forward with the structure and content of their sessions, based on the goals and objectives
7. After developing session structure and content	Students craft and submit first 2 hours of FLE program
8. After receiving feedback from peer reviewer & instructor on first 2 hours	Students make modifications and develop the second two hours of their program
9. After final FLE program is submitted at end of semester	Students present an abbreviated 20-minute version of a program session: respond to Q&A
10. After presentations	Students submit 2-3 page process paper, responding to a series of reflection questions

Note: * Faculty unable to task students with such an assignment over the summer can have students collect articles during the first week of class and submit their reference list at the end of the second week of class.

to think in new ways. All seniors in the HDFS program take the Strategies of FLE course at the same time, increasing their interaction with a range of students while building a sense of camaraderie. Working with peers, students are also exposed to a range of abilities and perspectives. Fourth, high-impact practices afford students frequent feedback about their performance. In addition to *receiving process feedback* from their instructor on four occasions, students in Strategies of FLE give and receive peer review with their peer review partner throughout the semester. Such input is valuable for improving the quality of FLE programs. Fifth, high-impact activities afford opportunities for students to *see how what they are learning is applied* in different settings. Students in Strategies of FLE are encouraged to envision what it would be like to meet a community need and offer their FLE program in real-world contexts. Some students plan to employ their programs during an internship experience the following semester. Finally, high-impact practices *can be life-changing*. As an intensive and demanding experience, the Strategies of FLE course has the capacity to help students to understand themselves and others better, as well as to develop the intellectual and professional tools necessary to make a difference in the field of family science.

Creating an FLE program from scratch also requires higher-order thinking that exceeds the basic recall of factual information (Bloom et al., 1956). It requires cognitive processes that are more complex in nature, such as evaluation and synthesis. *Evaluation* was used by students when they offered regular feedback on their peers' assignment drafts. Students were given the opportunity to critically evaluate their peers' work based on FLE programming criteria (Duncan & Goddard, 2017) as well as standards for good writing (APA, 2020). *Synthesis* is probably the most notable process used during the FLE project completion, as it requires students to "put together elements to form a coherent or functional whole" (Eber & Parker, 2007, p.46). In other words, the introductory steps of the FLE program (i.e., the needs assessment, goals, objectives, etc.) eventually result in a four-hour program. Because students were required to spend considerable time in the literature and produce measurable goals and objectives for their program sessions, the synthesis process is quite evident; the more time undergraduates put into these preparatory steps of their FLE programs, the stronger their programs tended to be. These skills, obtained through higher-order processes, are perhaps more helpful given that students can apply their newfound knowledge to situations beyond those in which the skill was immediately learned (Airasian & Miranda, 2002; Eber & Parker, 2007; Marra & Palmer, 2004; Wise et al., 2004).

In addition, Fink (2013) describes a "taxonomy of significant learning" or ways learners change. Within this taxonomy (see Fink, 2013, p. 35 for a figure representing this taxonomy), there are six major categories: learning how to learn, foundational knowledge, application, integration, human dimension, and caring. Students in Strategies of Family Life Education encounter *application* learning by engaging in new activities which involve practical thinking and unique skills, including using a logic model and developing an FLE program. Strategies of FLE students also experience the category of the *human dimension* of significant learning. Within this category of learning, students learn important things about themselves and others. According to Fink (2013),

What they learn or the way in which they learn sometimes gives students a new understanding of themselves (self-image), a new vision of what they want to become (self-ideal), or greater confidence that they can do something important to them. (p. 36)

For this paper, we analyzed student Process Papers for the types of things that students learn about themselves and their discipline as a result of the process of creating a family life education program. These reflections help us continue to refine this course's organization and delivery.

Methods

The co-instructors of Strategies of FLE collect evaluative data from students each fall when the course is offered and use that information to modify subsequent course delivery. However, during the fall of 2016, the first author decided to take a different approach and analyze student Process Papers. The second author, an HDFS major, served as a Smith Scholar Intern and assisted the first author on the project. We received IRB approval (protocol #2016-014) for this assessment. All 31 students in the class, HDFS seniors, consented to participate in the study, allowing us to utilize their Process Paper reflections for research purposes.

Process Papers, submitted during the final exam period, offered the data source. Students were asked to consider a series of prompts or questions as they wrote their reflection papers. Questions related to how well this course helped them achieve each of the desired course objectives and what they learned about themselves from engaging in the project. A complete list of questions is in Appendix A.

Our analysis aimed to describe the course's impact on students, so we engaged in open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Thus, student narratives were first organized around responses to particular questions. Then, three independent reviewers identified recurring themes. Using concept maps (Babbie, 2005), we independently analyzed the process papers and organized data as categories within the themes. After we identified themes and categories, we conferred on the visualizations of our organizational categories and came to an agreement, reconciling any differences by talking through our rationales for original placement and agreeing on the best categorization. For this paper, we report on two primary domains that emerged from the student narratives: revelations about *self* and the *role of family life educator* as a result of creating a family life education program.

Results

Students learned a great deal about themselves and the role of family life educators as a result of this course. Respondents identified personal talents and strengths ($n=20$) as they reflected upon their time management ($n=20$), stress management ($n=12$), ability to respond to constructive criticism ($n=15$), self-care ($n=5$), communication ($n=4$), research skills ($n=12$), writing skills ($n=14$), reading skills ($n=7$), resources/support ($n=3$), and confidence ($n=14$). Student responses also revealed a greater understanding of the role of family life educators ($n=72$): what the work entails ($n=27$), experience required ($n=22$), and consideration of FLE as a future career ($n=23$).

Revelations about Self

Strengths

Students spent a great deal of time identifying their talents and strengths. Student-identified strengths included resiliency, creativity, passion, empathy, and a strong work ethic. One student said,

“Resiliency was used in this course to help me manage stress and remind me that this project was not the most important part of my life this semester. This helped me stay calm and positive while creating this program. My creativity skills were handy when coming up with session activities and lessons.”

Another student identified an additional personal asset: “I was able to utilize my empathetic personality and incorporate it into my program.” Enthusiasm was important to one student: “Some strengths that I had for this project was my passion and experience with this population.” Students also observed new talents and skills that developed during the process of the semester. For instance, one student noted, “A new skill that I developed was better writing, more confidence academically, time

management, work ethic, and determinacy.” Another student shared: “Two new strengths I believe I developed as a result of this course is the ability to write from the perspective of another person and to identify a population in need and create programming specifically for them.”

Time Management

It is not surprising that students reflected on their time management skills (or lack thereof). One student stated,

“I realized that I am not too bad at managing my stress, but my time management skills still need a lot of work . . . this more laid-back approach to the project may have been why my time management suffered. Because I was not overly stressed out by the project, it became very easy to shift my focus away from it and on to other, more immediate assignments causing me more stress.”

Another said, “Managing my time has always been difficult for me. I tend to be a procrastinator, so having to learn not to leave things until the last minute was a very hard lesson.” Procrastination was perceived as a challenge in this class, as noted by yet another student: “I often procrastinated and then was feeling a little stressed and overwhelmed for when I had to get things done.” One more student described, “I learned how to better manage my time in terms of not leaving all my work until the last minute when due dates approached.” Those who managed time well were pleased with this ability: “My organization also proved to be helpful considering the amount of work that goes into planning several hours of programming. Through organization, I was able to keep all of my deadlines and submit my work with pride.” Another noted, “I really like organization. I like to make checklists which keep me on track.” Since the Strategies of Family Life Education assignments required so much time and attention throughout the semester, it is no wonder that such revelations about their personal ability to manage time were salient.

Stress Management

In light of the demanding nature of the course, many students also gained a heightened awareness of their ability to manage stress. Many students discussed strategies they employed. Several students noted the importance of positivity: “The first way I tried to reduce my stress for creating this program was by keeping a positive attitude.” Another student wrote, “I learned early on that I have a tendency to react to stress in a negative way. I was able to learn how to view stress most positively and use it to my advantage.” Another said,

“I also learned how to manage my stress and . . . my time. Other than this class, I had five other classes to manage and work on. However, each day I took some time to just think of some ideas of what I could do with my program, whether it was working on an activity or thinking about other resources to help the participants.”

The importance of planning came through loud and clear, as one student asserted: “I carefully plan ahead what I will do each day and each week so that it does not end up being left until the last day and result in me feeling extra stressed.”

Ability to Respond to Constructive Criticism

Receiving critical feedback, even when intended to help improve programs, was one of the most difficult challenges. In some cases, criticism was taken personally: “One aspect about myself that I found throughout this process is that I can sometimes have trouble taking constructive and critical feedback from my peers and my professor. I often have a hard time understanding that the comments

provided are for my benefit so that I can improve my program to its fullest potential.” A different student reinforced this point: “Sometimes I feel like if a person gives me criticism, they do not like me, or my work is not good enough. Then I tend to focus on only the bad things that were criticized.” Constructive feedback impacts how students feel about themselves: “As for criticism, I take a dip in confidence when I receive it, but I also appreciate it greatly, but I already know that about myself. It is something I need to continue to work on.” For this student, the quality of the relationship with the one offering critique was important: “I have a much harder time receiving criticism from individuals when I don’t think they know me very well.” Criticism was conditional in some cases, as one student explained.

“I think I am fine with constructive criticism if I am doing well in a class. When I didn’t do so hot on the first two hours or the needs assessment, I felt so frustrated, and it felt like my whole life was falling apart. I wish I could handle criticism better, not just when I think I need it.”

On the other hand, several students responded well to critique, as noted by the following comment: “I also believe I handle constructive and critical feedback well. I am always looking for opportunities to grow, and I believe feedback is an essential thing in order to grow.” Another student remarked,

“As for handling constructive feedback, it is pretty easy for me. I am used to asking for people’s advice on things I have written, so listening to my peer editors was easy, and I took a lot of their suggestions and implemented them into my project. I believe other people can see things you cannot see yourself in the project, so I made sure to take every comment into consideration.”

Students who defined critique as intended to help them were able to manage better. One student commented, “I decided to stick with the mindset of taking criticism and learning from it. I used it to motivate me to do better and change the things in my program to make it better,” while another student observed, “I handled constructive and critical feedback much better than I thought I would. I was warned ahead of time that it can be difficult to have the strategies project critiqued by others, so I was nervous. However, because of the significance of this project, I welcomed all feedback and truly wanted suggestions to make the project better.”

Self-care

Multiple students reflected on matters of self-care which were often related to time and stress management. One student said,

“Since this was such an extensive project, it was important for me to recognize when I needed to take a break and step back. This further emphasized the skill of time management because you plan ahead and allow yourself some buffer time; there can be time to allow for breaks and time to rest.”

Another student reflected, “If I had to do this all over again, being some[one] that already suffers from depression and anxiety, I would have tried to take more time for myself to relax and do nothing sometimes.” Several students mentioned specific self-care strategies. One explained,

“‘Treating myself’ was a fairly decent way to accomplish this. I would set a time limit or page limit for what I needed to accomplish, and after it was over, I would talk with my friends or take a Netflix break.”

Another student described,

“I learned what the best ways to cope with stress are for me, and I learned how to balance all of this stress. I found that taking quiet time, going for walks outside, coloring and listening to

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music, or talking to friends and families are ways I can rejuvenate and then come back to my work with a clearer, more productive mindset.”

Students realized the importance of these acts of self-care, as another student noted: “I can see how the self-care techniques I employed (taking time for myself, spending time with others, etc.) were valuable.”

Communication

Another personal revelation to emerge was related to communication. One student wrote, “Working in groups has been useful to further develop my communication skills with others in the class.” Another student emphasized the importance of ongoing communication and questioning when working on projects:

“I learned through this process that asking for clarification is not a sign of weakness; this will be an ongoing piece of work for me. This is a transferrable skill because, in my future career, there will be points when I will need assistance or clarification. It is inevitable. Being able to ask these things will help me to improve in my field and, therefore, further assist the population I will be serving.”

Students also identified the importance of being able to communicate to particular audiences, as noted in this quote, “Perhaps the biggest skill that I developed was effective communication to a specific population . . . I learned to simplify complex information and share it in an engaging manner.”

Research Skills

Many students described how their skills improved in this area. One expressed, “I had to think critically about the research I had done and base my rationale on that . . . this taught me to purposefully remove my biases and focus on the real research.” Another described, “The course Strategies of FLE helped me in an abundance of ways. Regarding the needs assessment, the course helped me be able to accurately summarize a journal article that pertained to my topic and apply it to my paper.” One more said, “Assessing literature and applying the materials to my own project . . . and research and self-learning are valuable skills I can apply from the project.”

Writing Skills

Students described how they grew in their writing abilities. One student acknowledged, “By writing a program that is over 100 pages, I gained a better understanding of APA formatting and the value of rereading my writing.” Another stated, “As a result of this project, I was able to develop new strengths and skills, which included creating a Needs Assessment and writing with a different state of mind.” One more observed, “I now feel more prepared to write literature reviews because of my practice writing my needs assessment. I learned how to organize articles by information on the population, risk factors, and protective factors.” Another noted,

“I feel as though I was able to grow in my writing skills a lot as a result of this project. I now feel much more confident in my writing abilities and know that if I was ever asked to write something in a professional setting that I would be able to do so and excel.”

Reading Skills

Students also reflected on improved skills related to reading. Students described how this project allowed them to grow in reading comprehension, especially when reading peer-reviewed journals. One student said, “The literature review . . . helped me solidify my skills in reading and summarizing scholarly materials.” Another stated, “I also improved my proofreading and critical reading skills.” One

more student observed, “I can more effectively read and summarize articles because of the amount of practice I had for completing this project.”

Support Services

Several students recognized their ability to seek out and utilize resources and support services. One student noted,

“I met this challenge (overcoming lack of confidence) through meeting with the Writing Center, which made me take time to critically evaluate my own work through my audience’s eyes. I also overcame challenges in meeting with professors in order to further my quality of work.”

Another stated, “I have to give credit to my counselor at the Engle Center for helping me through my hard times also.” These responses affirm the importance of access to resources and the personal courage and initiative to utilize them.

Confidence

Process papers were replete with images of confidence as a result of completing the course and its associated assignments. One student put it this way:

“While the project certainly exhausted me at times, and I even struggled with doubts in my abilities to establish something worthy of helping others, I completed this program with confidence and newfound growth that I believe has empowered me as a future professional.”

Another student noted, “Throughout this project, I learned that I am capable of much more than I give myself credit for.” In many cases, this confidence impacted how they anticipated selling themselves in the job market. For instance, a student observed, “I feel that after completing this project, I have more confidence in myself. I now feel that I have a leg up on other people who apply for similar jobs to me.” Another remarked:

“I think the greatest skill that I gained from creating this project is my ability to create something that is entirely mine from beginning to end. I think that this is a confidence booster for talking to family, friends, and potential employers about what I can do with my major.”

Another student stated, “I honestly can say this project has made me more confident in my work. Creating a program that others can use has helped me to see that I can professionally contribute to my field.” This student’s comment reiterated the confidence gained through the project: “This project gave me a tangible object that I can now hand to someone and feel confident in my abilities, my major, and myself.”

Revelations about Themselves in the Role of Family Life Educator

Given the methodical approach that the class takes in helping students grasp what is involved in creating research-based family life education programming, it is no wonder that most students obtained a greater perspective relative to the role of Family Life Educators in developing and delivering the FLE curriculum. One student wrote, “The needs assessment assisted me in revealing a clear rationale for why the topic I chose should transform into a family life education program.” Students also obtained greater awareness of the component parts of strong FLE programs, as noted in this student’s comments: “I grew professionally as I learned the necessary pieces of this project, such as the copyright, facilitator notes, and program information.” Another student explained:

“I think the most prominent skill I learned throughout this course was the ability to create a family life education program. I was very unsure at the beginning of this course, even how to

begin to create a program, but I was able to discover and learn new skills that I was able to utilize.”

One student described their experience by observing:

“I also learned and further developed the skill in vocalizing and orally presenting research and information that I have found about a certain topic. This will be helpful in the future if I create other programs or do other research that I would need to present to colleagues.”

Appreciation for the Work

Due to their surprise at how much work it takes to create FLE curriculum, students also described the value of Family Life Educators' work. One student said, “I definitely have a much greater appreciation for the work that family educators have, especially in creating and writing a program.” Another added, “I understand what it is like to be in the role of a family life educator more now than I have before.” Yet another student stated:

“I learned a lot about creating a program that can actually be used by a family life educator. I also appreciate the role of a family life educator providing their time, energy, potentially money, and their experience to discuss with people in the community about a topic that increases knowledge and develops a sense of community.”

One student noted:

“The ... Family Life Educator does not only have to present the curriculum but also do massive amounts of research and work before writing the curriculum. Something that caught me off guard was the time difference between the idea (to) get pitched, to when the program will start running. I always assumed it was a smaller turnaround rather than a year or a year and a half ahead of time.”

Finally, another student observed

“I can definitely say that I have grown to appreciate the work that goes into writing a research-based curriculum. Upper-division students had talked about their experiences with writing a family life education program, but it's definitely not the same as writing one myself. It also makes me marvel at the people who do this on a regular basis.”

FLE Career Options

The hands-on experience of *creating* family life education programming afforded the opportunity for some students to imagine career possibilities related to FLE, while other students confirmed that family life education was not a desirable career option. One stated, “I understand why they (FLE) are important but was not convinced to add this to my job list I would like to have.” Others saw the relevance and application for their chosen career path. As one student noted:

“As I potentially work in college student programming, this will help me to consider how to engage various populations of students and how to effectively meet program goals. This will most likely be a large part of my career, and I am excited to have experience in this type of programming.”

Most students see ways in which their experience in the course will foster their own career goals. One student related:

“I do know that I also want to help people and work towards serving others. These family life education programs aim to do just that, help people. I think that completing a research-based program to accomplish these goals taught me that when helping others, our work needs to be founded on the research that has proven to be effective.”

Even if they did not intend to become Family Life Educators, most students envisioned some ways in which the experiences they gleaned from this project will assist them professionally.

Discussion

Students enrolled in Strategies of Family Life engage in course experiences that seek to enhance their professional skills and meet course objectives. While grades on course assignments are an indicator of the extent to which students achieve course objectives, other measures provide additional insights into the student experience of the course. For this paper, we analyzed the Process Paper assignment in which students reflected on their course experience and its project elements, paying particular attention to what students learned about themselves and family life education. There are a couple of possible limitations to this approach. First, even though all students received 20 points for completing the paper, student names were on the papers, and they might have felt the need to embellish or respond in a certain way to receive the most points. In the future, the instructor might allow students to maintain anonymity or indicate that students will receive all points for completing the paper. Second, the content of the Process Papers might be limited by the prompts that students were asked to consider in completing the assignment. Consequently, care needs to be given to the creation of prompts that are expansive enough yet encourage students to think deeply about them. Providing students with general categories of reflection might help to address this concern.

Students identified personal strengths or attributes (e.g., positivity, resilience) that helped them complete the work. They also identified self-revelations about how they manage time, stress, and constructive critique, as well as the need for self-care. They delineated skills that were enhanced due to the project: communicating, researching, writing, and reading. They better understood and appreciated the role of family life educators in enhancing individual and family well-being. Even if they determined that a career in FLE was not a good fit for them, they could articulate transferrable skills gleaned from the class that they could apply in various professional contexts. For instance, knowing one’s audience, writing measurable objectives, “using sensitive language,” and understanding the essentiality of research-based practice are important revelations for future family science practitioners, no matter the particular career path.

The Strategies of Family Life Education class employed many characteristics necessary for *high-impact educational practice* (Kuh, 2008). The course and associated project demanded significant time and effort, incorporated substantive interaction with faculty and peers over the semester, required students to interact with all other seniors in the program, afforded frequent feedback on student work, permitted students to visualize how their work could be utilized in a real-world context and provided an opportunity for personal reflection and enhanced self-understanding.

As Fink (2013) noted, *significant* educational experiences, like those provided in Strategies of FLE, offer important learning about the *human dimension*. After taking Strategies of FLE, students were better able to articulate the role of a family life educator, as well as the challenges and rewards of the work. They understood the characteristics and qualities necessary for someone who develops and delivers FLE curriculum. They were able to assess whether their abilities and interests aligned with those needed to develop and provide outstanding FLE programs. In addition, they were also able to reflect on the experience of *doing* family life education for themselves and what it means for them. The

Process Paper assignment, in particular, encouraged students to engage in personal reflection about the process and outcomes of the course for them as growing family science professionals. Having completed all the components and the building blocks of FLE programming, students could reflect on their preferences, strengths, talents, abilities, and growth areas. They were able to assess themselves, have a better idea of what they would like to become and gain confidence in what they could do.

As noted earlier, the professors of this course use student feedback to modify and enhance the course for each subsequent offering. While the Process Paper assignment is not a typical course evaluation instrument, it offered insights into students' perceptions of their course experience and how it impacted them personally. After analyzing these student reflection papers, we might be interested in adding additional prompts in future Process Papers. Some examples might include: Delineate and describe the support systems you used during this process; What campus resources aided you in completing your program, and which were most helpful? What was lacking?; What specific and tangible suggestions would you offer the professor to help HDFS seniors gain confidence and be successful in Strategies of FLE?; and What advice would you give to HDFS majors about how to best prepare for and be successful in Strategies of FLE? In other words, what do you wish you had known prior to taking this course?

In the future, we might also ask students to reflect on their personal qualities as compared to those deemed essential for family life educators: general intellectual skills, self-awareness, emotional stability, maturity, empathy, effective social skills, self-confidence, flexibility, understanding and appreciation of diversity, verbal and written communication skills, and ability to relate well with all ages and groups and on a one-to-one basis (Darling & Cassidy, 2014, p. 47). We could even employ Darling and Cassidy's *Assessing Your Personal Qualities as a Family Life Educator* instrument to help students perform a deeper, more thorough self-assessment relative to their preparedness for a career in FLE.

It also became apparent that time spent preparing students for the strain of a project of this magnitude is worthwhile. Faculty of Strategies of Family Life Education need to foster a climate of reassurance and support and constantly communicate messages of encouragement. The instructors might also reinforce the value of time and stress management and constructive feedback. Providing illustrations of how faculty themselves receive critique via the manuscript submission process can help better frame the value of critique in improving a product.

In conclusion, students can experience deeper learning, and faculty can enhance their capacity to better meet the needs of their students through a shared reflexive process. Taking time to reflect on a semester-long experience can assist in identifying ways to prepare future family science professionals better.

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Appendix A
Reflection Paper Prompts

How well did this course help you achieve the desired course objectives?

What did you learn about *yourself* from engaging in the project?

How do you manage stress and time?

How do you handle constructive and critical feedback given to you?

What did you find most challenging during this class? How could these challenges be addressed?

What strengths and skills were assets for you in this project?

What new strengths and skills did you develop as a result of this project?

Reflect on the extent to which you grew personally (i.e., attitudes, knowledge, and skills) as a result of this class and associated projects.

How would you prepare differently, or how would you approach developing a family life curriculum in the future based on your experience this semester?

How can you apply what you learned from doing this to your future goals and endeavors?