

Submission to Royal Commission on Education by Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This brief presents an historical overview of the contribution which home economics has made to the education of students in British Columbia. Home economics with its focus on education for daily living is shown to be essential for all students in secondary schools. It is argued that knowledge for the private domain of home and family has been neglected in favour of education for the public productive sphere of the larger society, thereby creating an imbalance in the education of young people. THESA supports the position that knowledge for daily living contributes to the well being of everyone and therefore should be considered essential for all students.

THESA recommends that education for the private sphere of home and family should be incorporated into the proposed compulsory curriculum, tentatively named *Health and Guidance*. It is argued that this focus is essential in light of current societal concerns related to the lives of individuals in families. It is also argued that this family focus should a) be drawn from the knowledge base of home economics, and b) taught by home economics teachers who are already qualified and experienced in this field. The home economics teacher, therefore, would be part of a team of teachers who integrate and co-ordinate their expertise in education for daily living.

THESA also recognizes that students may require more depth in specific subjects within home economics. It is therefore essential that elective courses such as Foods and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles continue to be offered at the secondary level. Consideration should also be given to the development of elective home economics courses at the district level in order to meet the needs of students in specific areas of the province.

Home economics, like any subject, requires ongoing support for curriculum development and implementation. It is argued that human and nonhuman resources must be committed by the Ministry of Education to support ongoing work in this field.

This brief proposes major changes in the education of young people in British Columbia. The 19 recommendations herein provide direction for action; they are respectfully submitted for careful consideration by the Royal Commission on Education.

President
Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Association (THESA)

INTRODUCTION

The Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Association (THESA) views with importance the task of the Royal Commission on education in British Columbia in clarifying future directions for education in this province and welcomes the opportunity to engage in such discussion.

This brief seeks to accomplish three aims:

1. to describe the unique contribution that home economics makes to secondary schools in British Columbia;
2. to identify the issues that home economics educators believe must be resolved so that these contributions may be more clearly recognized; and
3. to suggest recommendations for resolving the aforementioned issues and for enhancing the contribution of home economics in British Columbia schools.

Before addressing these aims, it is necessary to provide an historical overview of the development of THESA, and of home economics, in order to help clarify the explication of issues and concerns presented in this brief.

HISTORY OF SUBMITTING ORGANIZATION (THESA)

Since the early 1900s home economics educators in British Columbia have worked as an organized group toward the development of home economics education. Prior to 1919, home economics teachers were organized as a sub group of the Teacher's Institute. In 1919, this group was recognized as an affiliated subject association of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. The Home Economics Specialist Association (THESA) was formally recognized by BCTF in 1960.

Throughout, the home economics professional organization has played an active role in policy development. Submissions have been made to previous government investigations such as: The Putman and Weir Survey (1924); the Chant Commission (1958); The Professional Committee on the Public School Program (1964) and Lets Talk About Schools (1985). In addition, contributions have been made to the development of home economics curriculum guides and implementation has been assisted through professional development, inservice programs, professional publications, and annual conferences.

The professional organization has always aimed to keep its members, and those in policy development, abreast of developments in the field. This paper therefore is part of an ongoing means of communication toward the goal of improvement in education in British Columbia.

HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Background Information

Education in home economics has always aimed to prepare young people to become well balanced persons and family members, and ultimately to enhance daily life for individuals and families. Historically, home economics has been concerned with: home and family; individual and family wellbeing; helping families develop their own strengths; identifying, clarifying, examining and solving significant problems that individuals and families face in their everyday lives. The practical problems addressed in home economics are related to food, clothing, shelter, child care, and family relations.

Home economics has been a changing field as it has responded to the needs of families over time. For example, in the early 19th century the purpose of home economics was to provide education for women-a group for whom educational opportunities were extremely limited, and to specifically educate women for homemaking. Emphasis at that time was placed upon the application of science to home problems: this approach was based on

the primary needs of food, shelter, clothing, and economics resources and the specific activities required to meet these needs.

The scientific emphasis of the field continued for six decades (Saidak, 1980). The scientific principles of homemaking were used to help families through two world wars: times of extreme hardships in terms of scarcity of resources, poor health, and disruption in family life. The relevance of home economics during and after the war years was evident in the expansion of home economics programs in schools and universities. University home economics programs emphasized the relationship between the physical and social sciences; students were required to study chemistry, biology, biochemistry, and physiology in addition to courses in foods and nutrition, clothing and textiles, housing, and home management. Home economics courses in secondary schools demonstrated how scientific knowledge could be applied to problems of the home and family and ultimately enhance family life.

In the 1970s the scientific emphasis shifted from the natural sciences to the social sciences in response to societal concerns, such as: adolescent pregnancy, unemployment, divorce rates, single parent families, family violence and an aging population. At the same time, home economics theorists provided new direction for the field (Brown and Paolucci, 1979; Bubolz, Eicher and Sontag, 1979; Hook and Paolucci, 1970). The new emphasis required educational processes other than purely technical ones; an ecological perspective, and an holistic family focus. This emphasis is reflected in the most recent curriculum guide for home economics in British Columbia (Family Management 11/12, 1986).

The emphasis on social problems has not meant, however, that the scientific aspect of home economics is no longer relevant. Home economics programs at the university level continue to mandate courses in the physical sciences in order that professionals keep abreast of new technologies which impact upon families. A strong background in the physical as well as the social sciences ensures that home economics educators are better able to help students evaluate positive and negative influences of technology on the family and society and are thus able to prepare students for the 21st Century (Hittman, 1987).

The femaleness of the field continued into the early 1970s; although never defined as such, home economics tended to be considered by those outside of the field as a subject for female students; male students were directed into industrial education. Moves to correct this imbalance are now evident in British Columbia, as in other provinces, where attention to sexist practices in schools has resulted in compulsory co-educational home economics programs. Such programs are now in place in many schools.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conceptualizing issues we have focussed on questions which we consider most pertinent to the achievement of the objectives of the Royal Commission. Issues and recommendations which pertain specifically to home economics education are presented.

1. What categories of knowledge and skills must be taught and why?

The knowledge base of home economics is recognized today, perhaps more than ever before, as vitally important for students in Canada. Government bodies, both federally and provincially, provide documents which support the need for education in daily living skills for all students (B.C. Ministry of Health, 1987; Government of Canada, 1985). Family life education, nutrition education, health education, life skills, and

consumer education have all been recognized as essential education for young people (Baker, 1985; B.C. Medical Association, 1984; King et al. 1985; Nolte, 1984).

The view that education for daily living should be an essential component of education for all students is also supported by scholars in the natural and social sciences and the humanities who, from Greek to modern times, have found the problems of daily life intellectually and morally worthy of study. One of the most recent proponents of this view is Martin (1981; 1984; 1986) who sees "reproductive," "domestic," "private" processes as central to the lives of each of us and to the life of society as a whole" (p. 106); Martin disclaims the notion that these processes are learned outside of the education system and sees the inclusion of the "private," "reproductive" "domestic" sphere as part of her ideal of the educated person.

Home economics is unique in its contribution to the ideal of the educated person because home economics is the only subject areas which focusses in depth on the individual within the home and family context. Home economics addresses perennial, practical problems of families. Perennial problems are those which face all generations such as: maintenance of good health; provision of food, clothing, and shelter; pregnancy and child care; sexuality; stress and family crises; money management; relationships; and what to do about family members with special needs. Home economics explores these problems through decision-making and action: a process which involves intellectual reasoning and judgment, critical thinking, problem solving, and hands-on experiences, and through processes of reading, writing, oral and aural communication and activities. In addressing problems of daily home and family living, home economics is an integrative discipline which provides an opportunity for students to apply knowledge gained from science, mathematics, fine arts, social studies and language arts to the problems and issues of study.

Recommendation 1

1.1 Education in daily living skills must be valued as a vital part of the concept of the educated person.

1.2 Home economics, with its focus on individuals in the family context must be recognized as a subject which makes an important contribution to this ideal.

2. For whom is education in daily living necessary and why?

Historically, education in daily living has been deemed relevant for only certain segments of the school population: girls have been directed into home economics whereas education for the industrial world has been considered as more appropriate for boys; "academic" students have been directed away from such courses; and this knowledge has been deemed more important for junior high than senior school students.

Martin (1981; 1984; 1986), Tetreault (1986) and Thompson (1986) provide an explanation of why this situation has transpired by examining the relationship between knowledge and the unequal distribution of power in the social system. The knowledge system of home economics has been shown to have less power than other subjects because "it has been closely tied to the social world experienced by women, i.e., the domestic or private sphere" (Thompson, 1984, p. 318). Martin (1981, 1984) contrasts this world with the education system: a system which she describes as being designed for the productive, political, public, visible world of men rather than the reproductive, domestic, private, invisible world of women. Martin's "productive" world includes knowledge in the male-defined theoretical disciplines which include political, social, cultural, and economic activities.

Martin's "reproductive" world includes "not just creation and birth, but the rearing of children to maturity and related activities of keeping house and serving the needs of family members" (1984, p. 345).

Activities of disciplines such as home economics which focus on daily life in families are tied to virtues such as care, concern, connectedness, and nurturance. Although these virtues are as essential for the productive sphere as they are for the reproductive, they have not been considered as worthwhile activities by the theoretical disciplines (Martin, 1984; Tetreault, 1986). Consequently, home economics has not been recognized as essential for all students and has been considered to be a subject for women because it deals with work traditionally associated with women.

Yet, the reality today is that many adults in families have responsibility for work both inside and outside of the home; in recent years increasing numbers of women have entered the paid work force, there are more single parent families headed by both women and men and more single person families (Ministry of Labour, 1981). In addition, paternal unemployment has caused many men to be "thrust into child care and homemaker roles for which they felt ill-prepared" (Johnson and Abramovitch, 1986, p. 12).

Home economics courses provide unique opportunities for young women and young men to learn co-operation and sharing in nurturing and human centered experiences. Sharing in the work of the home and family will have physical, emotional, and economic benefits for both young women and young men. For too long men have been denied nurturing experiences; for too long women have led exhaustive double roles, assuming responsibility for work inside as well as outside of the home; for too long the education system has supported such role segregation (Russel, 1979; Tetreault, 1986).

Role -segregation is emotionally limiting to both sexes. In addition, women suffer economically when they are denied equal opportunities because of their supposed --and often real-- responsibilities at home. This is in turn reflected in the impoverished situation of many women, particularly those who are single, divorced, lone parents, or widowed. Similarly, men who through their learned helplessness in the domestic sphere are often left isolated and empty when their work in the public sphere is over. There are many men who are unable to care for daily needs when single, divorced, lone parent, or widowed.

A statement made at the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education in 1979 addressed similar concerns: "Education systems must prepare all pupils for the sharing of domestic and parental responsibilities, and equip girls as well as boys to earn an independent living" (p. 17).

Some might argue that gender is no longer an issue in home economics since equal rights laws protect against sex discrimination and many classes at the junior high level are now coeducational. However, even with the existence of these laws some schools get around, ignore or undermine the law and as a result when home economics is an elective subject, female students continue to predominate in home economics classes (Ministry of Education, 1986).

Also, "co-education " does not necessarily promote egalitarian relations: the language, assumptions, and actions of teachers, administrators, and guidance counsellors, the sexist images of learning materials and resources, as well as timetabling options may all, albeit unconsciously, perpetuate sex role stereotyping (Baker, 1985; Stanworth, 1983; Wynn, 1983), and ultimately discourage male and female students from taking home economics.

Some might also argue that affirmative action programs are in place, or in process, as a result of various reports on gender inequality in recent years. However, many of these reports have focussed on access of females into traditional male activities in the public sphere: "An acknowledgement of the need to prepare both female and male students for work in both the productive and reproductive spheres is central to research and curriculum development in the field (Tetreault, 1986, p. 230).

Recommendation 2

- 2.1 Education for daily living skills should be considered essential for all students.
 - 2.2 All students should be required to take home economics at both junior and senior secondary levels.
 - 2.3 Teachers, administrators and guidance personnel should be required to participate in professional development designed to enhance their awareness of covert practices which perpetuate gender inequity.
3. **What program structure should be established for teaching daily living skills to all students?**

Many courses in the school curriculum are becoming more holistic in their approach in an effort to make education more relevant to the lives of students. For example, home economics, health, biology, social studies, English, sociology, and law are just a few of the courses where education for life long physical, social, and emotional well-being may be incorporated.

To leave such education to chance, however, dependent upon course selections of students would be negligent. THESA commends the Ministry of Education for its recent attention to this problem in proposing the implementation of a mandated program in health and guidance, and family life education, for junior and senior students throughout British Columbia.

However, we do have the following concerns regarding the structure and implementation of these new programs:

- a) A comprehensive framework for education in daily living skills exists in home economics yet this subject area has not been incorporated into the proposed programs in family life and health education. We consider this to be a serious omission since many home economics teachers have already implemented innovative and outstanding programs in home economics which encompass the goals of education for personal and family living. As previously emphasized, the focus of home economics is the family; the physical, social and emotional well-being of individual members within the family context is a priority in home economics, as previously emphasized.
- b) There is a real danger that the proposed *Health and Guidance* curriculum is developed from a narrow perspective in response to the latest "crisis" that hits the headlines, whether it be AIDS, family violence or adolescent pregnancy. The conceptual framework for a comprehensive family studies/health education program already exists within home economics, where concerns related to individual and family well-being are addressed from an holistic, family-focussed perspective. A submission to the Royal Commission on Education by the Alcohol and Drug Education Services (November, 1987) has attested to the narrow definition and inappropriate conceptualization of health proposed for the Health and Guidance program; this organization has recommended

an "expansion of the health education curriculum currently proposed ... to include other areas of health so as to be well balanced and better address the needs of students in society" (p. 1).

c) The professional expertise of home economics teachers must not be overlooked when decisions are made regarding who will teach Family Life Education and Health and Guidance. Home Economics educators are already qualified in this field; they are also ready to meet the acknowledged need for education in daily living skills for all students.

Recommendation 3

3.1 Home economics must be recognized as a major contributor to education for daily living and as such must be included in the conceptualization of the proposed program in family life and health education.

3.2 Home economics teachers must be recognized as qualified educators in the area of family life and health education and as such must be included in the team of teachers who integrate and co-ordinate their expertise in this field.

3.3 If the above recommendations are adopted the title of the proposed health education curriculum should reflect the unique contribution made by home economics (for example, *Family, Health, and Guidance* or *Home Economics, Health and Guidance*).

3.4 The number of hours specified for this proposed program must be increased to allow for the inclusion of home economics at each grade level.

4. What curriculum structure should be established as a framework for teaching home economics?

Home economics has been shown to be a changing field and one which has developed over time in response to the perceived needs of learners. For some time leaders in the field have suggested that home economics develop a more holistic family focus in keeping with the stated mission of home economics which is to enhance family life. In addition it has been suggested that more emphasis be placed on cognitive processes such as critical thinking, decision making and Problem solving rather than adherence to a technical model of rationality evident in earlier curriculum documents (Brown, 1980, 1984; Peterat, 1984).

An holistic family focussed home economics curriculum incorporates knowledge from many home economics subject areas. For example, units of study previously considered as separate subjects, such as Foods and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles, Housing, Home Management, and Relationships are combined within a unifying framework. This framework is formed by problems which individuals and families face in their everyday lives.

The family-focus approach emphasizes intellectual reasoning about family problems which require decision making and action (Fauske, 1984). For example, the family problem of unemployment might incorporate knowledge from all subject areas of home economics. Also, rather than the teacher stating what the family should do about this problem, this approach asks, "What should be done?" In this way, students understand values and beliefs which underlie decision making and action. Consequently, students develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of family problems and the interrelationship between various facets of family life as well as between the family and the larger society.

Home economics in British Columbia has already begun to reflect these changes. For example, *Family Management 11/12* encompasses an holistic perspective rather than individual units of study. We hope that ongoing curriculum development will result in two additional holistic, family focussed curriculum guides for Grade 7/8 and 9/10 respectively; each program would reflect the needs and interests of students at different age levels. If previous recommendations in this brief are adopted, the three levels of home economics suggested here would then become compulsory areas of study reflecting the family focus of the proposed *Family, Health and Guidance* curriculum.

In addition some senior students may desire, or career interests may require, greater depth in areas of home economics specialization, e.g., Foods and Nutrition, Clothing and Textiles. We suggest that these courses continue to be offered on an elective basis at the secondary level.

Also, in some areas, home economics teachers have contributed to the development and implementation of *Science and Technology* // (Ministry of Education, 1986-b). Historically, home economics, as described earlier in this submission, has emphasized the application of science to the lives of individuals in the home and family. It is therefore appropriate that home economics educators continue to be recognized for their expertise in the field of science. This is especially important in light of recent provincial, national, and international research in science education which has identified a need to develop courses in biology, chemistry, and physics that are more relevant to the lives of *all* students (Bleier, 1986; Jorg & Wubbels, 1987; Verne, 1987; Wallsgrove, 1980; Whyte, 1986),

Recommendation 4

- 4.1 A comprehensive, holistic, family focussed home economics program should be implemented at three levels, Grade 7/8; 9/10; 11/12.
- 4.2 Curriculum development should be ongoing and should reflect developments in the field: development and implementation of the courses mentioned in 4.1 for Grades 7/8 and 9/10 should be a priority.
- 4.3 Home economics 7/8; 9/10; 11/12 should become compulsory components of the proposed curriculum tentatively named *Health and Guidance* (see 3.1-3.3).
- 4.4 Specialized courses in Foods and Nutrition, and Clothing and Textiles should continue to be offered as elective courses in secondary schools.
- 4.5 Support should be given to locally developed innovations which meet specific needs at the school and district level, e.g., courses for students with special needs; vocational and career oriented programs.
- 4.6 The Ministry of Education should give consideration to allowing students to use specific home economics courses as science credits. For example, courses such as Food Science, Nutrition, Textile Science, and Technology in the Home would provide an approach to science which is relevant to the lives of students.

5. What process should be used for development and implementation of curriculum?

The development and implementation of curriculum has been recognized as an extremely complex process: a synthesis of the implementation literature by Fullan (1982) shows how educational change is a "dynamic process of interacting variables over time" (p. 57) influenced by the social,

cultural, economics and political environment. The implementation literature also suggests that because of the complexity of this process, implementation cannot be left to chance; it must be planned. The following principles are suggested as guidelines for such a plan.

- i) Home economics curriculum should evolve and develop from the best knowledge available at a given point in time. Curriculum development committees must reflect divergent thinking and an openness to different perspectives on education (Fowler, 1980; Fullan, 1982; Werner, 1980).
- ii) Teachers must be viewed as professionals who through interpretation of curriculum in the classroom have much to contribute to curriculum development; new curriculum should therefore be presented as a proposal for change, subject to ongoing development during the implementation process (Aoki, 1987; Fowler, 1980; Fullan, 1982).
- iii) Change often requires new knowledge and practices; there must therefore be a commitment to ongoing professional development throughout the implementation process (Fowler, 1980; Fullan, 1982; Guskey, 1986).
- iv) Teachers must be viewed as subjects rather than objects of professional development; they must therefore be provided with the resources needed to develop and implement their own professional development experiences (Dawson, 1978; Fullan, 1982; Goodlad, 1983; Joyce, Showers, 1980).
- v) All participants in the implementation process must have opportunity to engage in interaction throughout the implementation process (Fullan, 1982; Werner, 1980).
- vi) Both internal and external consultants have an important role to play in directing and coordinating curriculum development and implementation and in ensuring that human and non-human resources are provided on an ongoing basis (Fullan, 1982).

Recommendation 5

5.1 Home economics curriculum development committees should make provision for adequate consultation with home economics teachers, theorists, and administrators.

5.2 Curriculum conceptualized and developed at the provincial level should be subject to continuing development and adaptation at the district level. Locally developed innovations should be encouraged through provisions of adequate resources from the Ministry to support their development.

5.3 Home economics teachers must be encouraged to update professionally through participation in professional development activities and continuing professional education. There should be adequate release time and resources required for this purpose.

5.4 An implementation plan must provide opportunity during the school day for ongoing discourse among participants, i. e., developers, consultants, administrators, teachers, parents, and teachers' groups.

5.5 Home economics consultants should be appointed at the provincial and district administrative levels. Consultants must have academic qualifications and teaching experience in home economics education.

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