

Chapter Three

Why is Home Economics Important? Developing a Rationale

“...we need to rationalize our programs morally and intellectually so that we are able to act in terms of some vision or ideal rather than merely react to societal trends and pressures.” (Peterat & McLean, 1982, p. 186)

rationale n

the reasoning or principle that underlies or explains a particular course of action, or a statement setting out these reasons or principles

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Peterat and McLean (1982) write about the need for, and benefits of, a rationale for curriculum. They describe a rationale as one step back from, or prior to such technical concerns as goals, objectives, generalizations, activities, asking such questions as: What is education? What is home economics? What is learning? They define a curriculum rationale as “encompass[ing] the goals for the program and also stat[ing] the underlying philosophy or reason and purpose for the content and the treatment of that content in a particular program” (185). Peterat and McLean point out that home economics practitioners often justify change as a response to social problems, fixing a problem rather than seeing how it fits into the vision of the discipline and working with it from that perspective.

A philosophy outlines the underlying values and beliefs and the main purposes or mission of a field or subject area. A rationale provides the reasons for holding those values and beliefs and purposes. It is the justification for the particular value position. So in reality a philosophy and rationale go hand in hand. The philosophy provides the vision or ideal behind the response to societal trends and pressures. If home economics is guided by a vision of developing in students the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will assist them in addressing the challenges and problems of everyday living and family life then why home economics at any time is important will be determined by the challenges and problems faced by individuals and families at that time.

In the mid-19th century, Catharine Beecher published *The Treatise on Domestic Economy* her rationale for domestic studies was to reduce the workload of women in the household and improve their health, those two items being the main challenges and problems of everyday living and family life at that time.

The reasons for starting home economics can be condensed to the following three points:

1. To improve health and hygiene.
Scientific advances in disease control and prevention increased the perceptions of the general public that they could control their own health. The death of Adelaide Hoodless' young son from drinking tainted milk impelled her to work for improved sanitation for all Canadians. Other catastrophic events such as the Boer War had shown that the British working classes were seriously undernourished and physically unfit.
2. To recognize women's rights for education and participation in Canadian society.
Along with the crumbling of Victorian attitudes towards women as the weaker sex, the first wave of feminism helped most Canadian women to attain the vote in 1918 and be

recognized as persons in 1929. (Voter discrimination did not end, however, until Aboriginal women gained the vote in 1960, along with Aboriginal men). Home economics offered the opportunity for family life to be seen as important as work for pay.

3. To promote worthy home membership.

Early home economics had a strong moral component, beginning with its American founder, Ellen Swallow Richards, who proclaimed it as the art of right living, the means of teaching appropriate cultural values.

As time changed, modifications and additions to the rationale occurred and the language has changed but the first and third intents have remained fairly constant. The commercialization of food and clothing production, the explosion of advertising, the war effort – all contributed to the view that home economics was a means to create positive family life (rather than worthy home membership) in the 1940s and 50's. In the 1960's and 70's the sexual revolution brought gender issues and including boys and young men in home economics programs. Social unrest such as the civil rights and anti-war movements and brought more attention to social justice and global issues. Women's right to education gave way to democratic participation and the contribution that home economics makes to general citizenship education.

In the 1990s the Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) developed a position paper on Home Economics. They outlined the following Indicators of Need for Home Economics/Family Studies Education.

Indicators of Need for Home Economics/Family Studies Education

Our rapidly changing society places many strains on Canadian families. The **social, economic and technological changes occurring in society** and their impact on work, and personal and social relationships provide specific indication of the increasing need to provide the educational opportunity for young people to understand and direct their daily lives.

A **complex marketplace** means making informed choices about basic personal and family needs in clothing and textiles, nutrition, and shelter from a myriad of goods and services, available from all over the world. Decisions have both personal and social impact and require increased knowledge and decision making skills. There is evidence suggesting that students need to gain competence in this area.

Home life has been changed by new technologies from communication devices such as the internet, the VCR and video technologies, to devices such as microwave ovens, bread machines, and so on. Advances in genetics, reproduction, and life support systems, raise legal and moral questions with implications for personal and family well-being. Technologies impact the resources available in families and the ways we relate to each other in families and society. Individuals and families are having to make decisions among the possibilities opened by the new technologies.

Families are smaller, more couples choose not to have children, there are more one-parent families, more divorces and more quasi-legal marriages. **Students are faced with decisions about their future family as well as with changing make-up of the present family.**

Young Canadians are experiencing more strain in their relationships with their parents and with each other. This is more pronounced with girls and may be related to adjustment problems they are experiencing with career aspirations, body image and dealing with the traditional values associated with marriage and family. Young men appear unaware of their increasing responsibilities with regard to child rearing and homemaking.

Young Canadians tend to be more aggressive in their relationships with others. There is a need to have young people understand how better to communicate with, and relate to, parents and peers and to better understand stress in today's rapidly changing world. These needs are particularly crucial in the context of the increasingly diverse racial and ethnic Canadian society.

While numbers of elderly are increasing, few adolescents have close, on-going relationships with senior family members. **Social and moral questions concerning the elderly are of increasing importance.**

At an early age, students face social and moral decisions about sexual relationships, contraception, reproduction and parenting. These decisions are particularly complex in the context of diverse cultures and values among Canadian families. As a result of circumstance or choice, the numbers of lone parents are increasing. Many young people growing up in small or single-child families today no longer have experience in caring for young children.

The labour force participation rates of men are declining, the rates of women have increased rapidly during past decades, and more than half of Canada's young people are in the labour market. In the majority of two parent families, both parents are employed in the labour force. In Canada, approximately fifty per cent of married women with young children are employed outside the home. This changing role of women in society requires that both men and women adjust to changing roles within the family. Children and adolescents are assuming responsible roles within their own families at an early age and they are concerned about establishing their own future roles and relationship patterns.

Global competition, global travel and communication have radically changed the way we work. Canada is a highly mobile society, in which families move frequently within their community and beyond often to secure employment. Parents may be absent from the home, living in another country or region in the country, for reasons of employment. There are fewer full year, full time jobs and more family homes are becoming places of paid work and enterprise.

More than 1.2 million of Canada's children live in families with incomes below poverty lines. A recent survey by the Angus Reid Group found that economic concerns like finances, the economy and employment prospects are the most pressing issues facing families for 72% of respondents.

Troubled families are on the rise. The numbers of reported cases of assault and battering, child or elder abuse, abuses of alcohol and drugs, and delinquencies are increasing. Twenty-five per cent of Canadian women and ten percent of Canadian men have been abused before the age of 16. Sixty to seventy percent of runaways and 98 percent of child prostitutes have a history of child abuse. Seventy-five percent of abusive husbands have grown up in violent, abusive families. Family court judges suggest that a lack of parenting skills among many adults is the underlying cause for a majority of problems of delinquent youth.

In 2010, the Teachers of Home Economics Association (THESA) with support from the British Columbia Teachers Association (BCTF) revisited the CHEA position paper and updated the rationale and included these reasons:

Why is Home Economics Education Necessary?

Home economics education is the **only subject area that focuses on everyday life and meeting basic needs**. In home economics, students learn practical skills that equip them to handle the increasing complexities of daily life. Consider the following indicators of the need for home economics education for **all** students in British Columbia:

- **Increased concerns about healthy eating habits of Canadians**

According to the World Health Organization the impact of obesity and overweight on non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and cancer threatens to overwhelm health care systems. Projections indicate that the current generation of children might be the first who have shorter life expectancies than their parents.

As a result there have been many calls for nutrition education. However, focusing on nutrition knowledge transmission alone is not the answer. A literature review on the teaching of food and cooking skills determined that mastery of these skills is necessary for a full understanding of what

constitutes a healthy life and to empower individuals to take control over their diet and food intake. Without practical first-hand experience in preparing foods and learning about nutrition, choice and control are diminished and dependence on processed and fast food emerges.

- **The impact of poor parenting practices**

Parenting is the most important job because it determines the character of our children and the quality of our society. Yet few people get any training for it. An alarming number of children are at risk of being abused, neglected or otherwise poorly cared for by inadequately prepared parents. Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth reveal that parenting practices have significant effects on a child's social and cognitive outcomes and on the likelihood that a child is vulnerable in some way. Parenting Education for school age children and teens addresses these concerns in several ways by working to interrupt the cycle of poor parenting before young people become parents. Preparing youth to become caring, competent parents may be the single most effective way to prevent child abuse and other violence, increase mental health, advance school preparedness, and achieve academic success for future generations. As Nel Noddings wrote,

... if one has children of one's own, caring deeply and effectively is a lifelong commitment. We must educate for this commitment. . . . the study of children should be an important topic in secondary education, and. . . practice in caring for and teaching younger children should begin in the upper elementary grades. Surely the care of children should be a central topic in the education of all students.

- **The impact of financial illiteracy**

Informed money management plays a vital role in raising the quality of life for individuals and families. In June 2009, the Honourable Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance, announced the establishment of Canada's Task Force on Financial Literacy to help create a cohesive national strategy to support initiatives across Canada aimed at improving financial education. Citing the effects of the current turmoil in financial markets on the financial future of all Canadians, Flaherty declared that financial literacy as displayed through a strong understanding of the principles of prudent financial management, is an essential life skill.

Consumers are better positioned to make informed financial decisions that affect their livelihood when they understand the financial products and services, and the options that are available to them. But competency in managing money appears to be a skill that doesn't come naturally to everyone. Unless a person is exposed to the practice of money management, he/she is less likely to understand how it works and its long-term benefits. It is easy to develop poor spending and financial habits resulting in significant negative consequences such as a poor credit rating, denial of credit, rejection for a checking account and personal bankruptcy, to name a few. While financial vocabulary is important, research in literacy education shows that students must have the opportunity to engage in 'real' or simulated' literacy events that over time become literacy practices. Financial literacy must be more than simple recitation of facts.

- **Increasing complexity of family life**

Most Canadians now live in dual-income and single-parent families rather than the traditional male breadwinner family. One in four Canadians reports that his or her work responsibilities interfere with the ability to fulfill responsibilities at home. Workers who experience difficulties meeting family commitments often find it difficult to give their best at work, and have a higher rate of absenteeism and stress related health issues. The strengthening of families is essential for a strong nation and national economy: loss of productivity due to family issues can lead to multi-billion dollar losses for Canadian businesses.

- **Increased concern about global citizenship and environmental health**

Global citizens are willing to think beyond boundaries of place, identity and category, and recognize all human beings as their equals while respecting humanity's inherent diversity. Within their own sphere of influence, global citizens seek to imagine and work towards a better world.

No parts of the Earth are isolated anymore. Cultural diversity and global interdependence are facts of life. Our economy is global and what happens around the world deeply affects all of us. Global issues are manifested locally, for example, the one billion people world-wide who experience food insecurity include 17% of British Columbia. Environmental sustainability has increasingly become an international agenda as the basic necessities of life such as water, food, and safe living conditions cannot be taken for granted and the implication for the most vulnerable populations cannot be ignored. In every study of environmental health, low-income, minority, and aboriginal families are singled out for being at higher risk. Consumers are often unaware of their own responsibility for making sustainable choices. While products are readily available from around the world, consumers need to be aware of the conditions under which these products are produced, who is being affected, and the environmental impact. "Developing a sense of environmental responsibility which goes against the consumerist culture and the tyranny of the short term is one of the family's most crucial tasks." "It is not only a matter of personal empowerment, it's good global citizenship."

Both papers agreed on the following points about the Canadian family:

- Canadian families are experiencing rapid social, economic and technological changes that impact work, personal and social relationships.
- The marketplace is becoming increasingly complex and families are continually required to make informed choices about basic needs in clothing and textiles, nutrition, and shelter.
- Social and moral decisions concerning the elderly are of increasing importance as are decisions about sexual relationships, contraception, reproduction and parenting.
- The division between rich and poor continues to widen, locally and globally.

In these two papers, a comprehensive case emerged for the inclusion of home economics education for all students. While other topic areas may touch on health, or parenting or family life, they do not take those topics as their focus.

Rationales in Mandated Curriculum Documents

Most mandated curriculum documents created by ministries of education include an introduction that outlines the philosophy and rationale for the subject area. They often reflect the current overarching philosophy and rationale for general education in the jurisdiction. The most current curriculum guide in British Columbia, known as as Integrated Resource Package (IRP) includes what is called a rationale for each of the three pillars of home economics:

<p>Rationale for Family Studies 10 to 12</p> <p>The aim of the Family Studies 10 to 12 curriculum is to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will assist them in making informed decisions related to parenting, adolescence, adulthood, family and interpersonal relationships, and housing and living environments.</p> <p>The Family Studies 10 to 12 curriculum provides opportunities for students to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •practise decision-making and 	<p>Rationale for Foods and Nutrition 8 to 12</p> <p>The aim of the Foods and Nutrition 8 to 12 curriculum is to provide opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that have immediate and future applications in their personal and family lives, as well as in local and global environments, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding the principles of healthy eating to plan and create nutritious foods for individuals, groups, and family members 	<p>Rationale for Textiles 8 to 12</p> <p>The aim of the Textiles 8 to 12 curriculum is to provide opportunities for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that have immediate and future applications in their personal and family lives, as well as in several key sectors of the local and global environments, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding the versatility of textiles by designing, producing, and evaluating textile items • increasing knowledge of the social and economic factors that affect
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<p>problem-solving skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •identify and explore personal and educational requirements related to family studies career opportunities •participate in activities that reflect skills required in the workplace •examine and practise skills that help develop healthy relationships •consider, propose, and implement ways to meet the needs of individuals and families •practise managing resources to develop as globally responsible producers and consumers •appreciate the diversity of cultures in relation to the care of others •consider and apply practices to nurture the growth and development of individuals at various stages of their lives <p>The interrelation of intellectual, human, social, and career development in the curriculum provides students with strategies for managing their lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing knowledge of the nutritional, social, and economic factors that affect food selection and preparation • practising and thinking critically about principles and techniques related to acquisition, production, and consumption of foods 	<p>textile selection and preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practising and thinking critically about the principles and techniques related to textile acquisition, production, and consumption
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Observe that the “rationale” in the BC Home Economics IRP begins with the aims of the subject. The information that is included under the aims is an enlarged description of the aims.. Therefore the IRP is not a true rationale because it does not provide a link to the reasons why each aim is important. A rationale needs to answer the question, “Why?”, not how. You may find it interesting to examine curriculum guides from other provinces and countries to compare philosophy and rationale statements (see list in the references) to see what justifications are offered for home economics (family studies in Ontario and the Maritimes; family and consumer science in the US) before you go on to developing rationales for the home economics courses you teach.

Developing a Course Rationale

Most of us have had the experience of trying to implement a unit plan written by someone else; often it just doesn’t feel right, and the students don’t respond to it as predicted. According to Posner and Rudnitsky (2001), the development of a course rationale is essential to serve as a check on the consistency of the various course components:

The values and educational goals expressed in a rationale reflect the rules and expectations that will underlie the way the course will be taught; they express the emphasis and tone that the teacher will give to the course (Posner & Rudnitsky, 2001, p. 68).

Home economics educators who are able to answer the question, “Why is home economics important in the school system?” will be able to ensure that the curricula they plan (course outlines, unit plans, and lesson plans) are defensible. By making the values and educational goals underlying the course explicit, the learnings that students are to acquire in the course are justified, as are the methods and procedures used to teach the course.

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Curriculum Documents

- Alberta: <http://education.alberta.ca/media/772058/philosophy.pdf> [pp. 1-3]
- British Columbia: [choose any of the following, page 4]
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/applied_skills/2007he_famstudies1012.pdf
http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pdfs/applied_skills/2007he_foodnutri812.pdf
http://bctf.ca/thesa/pdf/he_textiles812.pdf
- Manitoba:
http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/teched/fs_framework/overview.pdf (pp. 1-6)
- Ontario:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/sstudies910curr.pdf> (pp. 3-6)
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/sstudies1112curr.pdf>