

UNDERSTANDING HOME ECONOMICS EDUCATION

The central focus of home economics education is the wellbeing of people in their everyday living. This involves enabling students to address increasingly complex challenges related to their wellbeing, including those related to human development and relationships, and the provision of commodities such as food, clothing and shelter.

It is also concerned with effecting changes that will bring about a more just society for all people with respect to their wellbeing. Home economics embodies the dynamics of change.

As we move through the new millennium, society, and indeed individuals, need the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed in the study of home economics.

The challenges of everyday living

Individuals and families face a range of challenges such as establishing and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships, juggling paid work responsibilities (or lack of) with home and personal responsibilities and pleasures, and being able to make numerous informed consumer decisions.

It is therefore appropriate that all students, males and females, develop understanding and skills in, for example:

- enhancing personal and family growth and development, including a sense of personal identity
- making decisions about entering into new relationships and responsibilities, establishing and maintaining relationships, and dealing with the pressures that threaten relationships
- developing a society that fosters family harmony and gender equity
- developing a society that promotes ecological sustainability.

Management of human and non-human resources, and making informed consumer decisions also enhance wellbeing. Therefore students benefit from knowing how to:

- develop health promoting food habits and choose and prepare nutritious foods
- choose clothing and textiles to meet their needs
- make appropriate decisions related to their housing needs.

Equally important, students need to understand and challenge the way that the broader society impacts on their wellbeing; through advertising and media messages; through social pressures that run counter to a healthy lifestyle; and the economic interests of some groups. They should understand the importance of working together to promote structures in society that are supportive of both their own and others' wellbeing.

Home economics education is concerned with meeting such challenges of everyday living in modern society.

Meeting the challenges through home economics education

At one level, the focus of home economics education is on the means of achieving pre-determined ends - for example:

- how to develop good interpersonal skills
- how to provide nutritious meals
- how to balance a household budget.

In making their decisions, home economics students learn how to take into account social, cultural, economic and historical influences on their decisions. Students consider the moral and ethical dimensions of human problems and their solutions.

Family

Home economics should now make household work and parenting and childcare issues more relevant to boys as well as girls, providing both with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will be appropriate for changing work and family roles.

(Enhancing Girls' Post-School Options, 1993, p.16)



On another level, the challenges of everyday living are interpreted more broadly. Home economics education is concerned with societal practices, structures, processes and systems that favour some groups more than others. With a view to envisaging how things might be different, students might challenge societal factors that contribute to the way:

- democracy works in our society
- some people are abused, exploited, alienated or malnourished
- some families have appropriate housing and clothing, and others do not
- some people are led into increasing debt.

A framework for action

Whether studying family, human development and relationships, or the provision of food, clothing or shelter, home economics students, males as well as females, need to be able to answer and take action on the following framework questions:

- In what way does this topic relate to the wellbeing of me and my family (and others and their families)?
- What influences people's behaviour in relation to the topic?
- What is good personal and societal practice in relation to the topic and engage in or facilitate this practice?

So, for example, in learning about food and nutrition, students should be able to answer and act in relation to the following questions:

- In what ways does food affect wellbeing?
- Why do people eat what they do?
- How can personal behaviours and societal factors related to food promote wellbeing?

Similarly, when learning about clothing and textiles, students should be able to answer and act in relation to the following questions:

- In what way does clothing affect wellbeing?
- Why do people wear what they do?
- How can personal behaviours and societal factors related to clothing and fashion promote wellbeing?

The result

Home economics education provides the necessary balance in bringing together theoretical understandings and addressing practical everyday problems. It contributes to empowering people to become active and informed members of society with respect to both living independently and living in caring situations with other people. Students develop an understanding of the interdependence of their everyday living with that of other human beings and broader issues related to ecological sustainability.

HOME ECONOMICS AND THE

The Australian nationally developed statements and profiles (published 1994)

Three learning areas in particular reflect the focus of home economics education

Health and physical education

A study of health and physical education, as described in *A statement on health and physical education for Australian schools*, focuses on the significance of personal decisions and behaviour, and community structures and practice in promoting health. It develops understandings to enable students to take part in informed public debate and to take personal and collective action necessary to promote the physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of individuals and groups, including families. As such, home economics knowledge is involved in a large portion of this learning area.

In a home economics classroom, students learn about the growth and development of family members, including the development of self-concept, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and health-promoting food-related behaviours. They address issues that challenge the safety of family members, including child safety and family violence. Moreover, home economics education can reveal how home and family living cannot be taken for granted as the source of all that is good about human relationships. It can raise consciousness of how homes and families can be places of violence and conflict, as well as places of caring and compassion, and consider actions to redress these issues.

Hence, the strands (and their conceptual components) that have most relevance to home economics education are:

Human functioning and physical activity (Patterns of growth and development; People and food; Interaction, relationships and groups; Identity; Challenge, risk and safety)

Community structures and practices (Consumer and the community)

Communication, investigation and application.

Health

The policy aims to improve the knowledge and skills necessary for Australians to choose a health diet. ... Such strategies may include education programs in schools...

(Food and Nutrition Policy, 1994, pp.13–15)

Social justice

Good nutrition and its role in the context of a healthy lifestyle is a fundamental part of achieving social justice.

(Food and Nutrition Policy, 1994, p.4)

THE NATIONALLY DEVELOPED CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS

developed by the Curriculum Corporation in 1994) provide a broad curriculum framework for Australian schools.

education: health and physical education; technology; and studies of society and environment.

Technology

The learning area of technology as described in *A statement on technology for Australian schools* focuses on the purposeful application of knowledge, experience and resources to create processes and products that meet human needs. In this learning area, students design, make and appraise various processes and products using a variety of materials, information and systems to address issues and problems associated with human kind.

In home economics classrooms, students have the opportunity to, for example: design and make products using a range of materials such as food, textiles and plastics to meet identified needs; develop and implement household management systems, and food production/distribution systems; and design and make information - for example, developing resources to promote nutritious food selection - and appraise these in terms of their promotion of quality of life for individuals and families.

As such, all strands of the technology learning area have relevance to home economics:

- Designing, making, appraising
- Materials
- Systems
- Information

Technology

All students need to explore the perspectives and values of women and men, and their contribution to the development and application of technology. Diverse cultures, experiences, locations and backgrounds should be taken into account. Explicit links should be made with the application of technology in the home, in paid and unpaid work, and in recreation as well as with personal needs and interests.

(A statement on technology for Australian schools, 1994, p.3)

Studies of society and environment

The learning area of studies of society and environment as described in *A statement on studies of society and environment for Australian schools* develops knowledge about Australia, its people, its cultural and environmental heritage, its political, economic and legal systems, and its place in the world.

In home economics classrooms, students learn about norms, customs, beliefs, values and practices of family groups. They also consider resource use and management, consumer issues and issues related to family, housing, and the social structures that impact on families. Hence, home economics has strong links with the following strands of this learning area:

- Culture
- Resources
- Place and space
- Natural and social systems

HOME ECONOMICS CONTENT AREA	LEARNING AREA	LEARNING AREA STRANDS OR CONCEPTUAL COMPONENTS
Family	Health and physical education	Patterns of growth and development; Identity; Interaction, relationships and groups
	Studies of society and environment	Culture
Human relationships	Health and physical education	Interaction, relationships and groups; Identity
	Studies of society and environment	Culture
Food	Health and physical education	People and food; Patterns of growth and development; Identity; Consumer and the community
	Studies of society and environment	Culture; Resources
	Technology	Designing, making, appraising; Materials; Systems; Information
Housing	Health and physical education	Patterns of growth and development
	Studies of society and environment	Resources; Natural and social systems
	Technology	Designing, making, appraising; Materials; Systems; Information
Clothing and textiles	Health and physical education	Identity
	Studies of society and environment	Culture; Resources
	Technology	Designing, making, appraising; Materials; Systems; Information

Table 1 Links of home economics content areas with the learning areas

Home economics education enhances students' ability to participate effectively in both unpaid and paid workplaces. It develops the ability to think critically and solve problems related to home and family life as well as in the paid workforce. Students communicate, manage resources, and design and create solutions to practical problems.

Home economics therefore supports the development of the key competencies:

- collecting, analysing and organising information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organising activities
- working with others and in teams
- using mathematical ideas and techniques
- solving problems
- using technology
- cultural understandings.

As such, students of home economics are well prepared for a range of paid and unpaid work options. They are particularly well prepared for family and community life, and for professions or courses in community health and welfare, industry and commerce, and education.

Training

If girls are to benefit from programs designed to enhance their post school options, it is imperative that work education programs be extended to include issues related to paid and unpaid work. In particular, they must include the need for all students (that is, boys and girls – added by HEIA) to develop those skills and attitudes which are necessary for assuming primary responsibility for family and household management.

(National Action Plan for the Education of Girls, 1993, p.29)

Equity

This (education for family and household management) needs to be done in a context which emphasises that boys as well as girls have a responsibility to participate equally in domestic duties and in the care of young children and family members.

(National Action Plan for the Education of Girls, 1993, p.29)

Community health and welfare

Home economists work in:

Community health, working with families e.g.
Aboriginal Community Services

Health promotion agencies, both government and private e.g. National Heart Foundation

Financial counselling

Social work/ Psychology

Child care

Industry and commerce

Home economists work in:

Food and nutrition advisory and demonstration services

Advertising to promote healthy lifestyles

Consumer advisory services

Marketing

Catering and hospitality

Fashion and textiles

Education

Home economists work in:

Secondary teaching: home economics, health, personal development, child care, textiles, hospitality, technology and consumer studies

Middle years of schooling

Primary school teaching

Tertiary teaching

TAFE teaching



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