

# Teaching concerns of secondary home economics teachers in British Columbia

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*The article was based on a report edited, designed, and researched by Susan Parrish, analyzed and written by Leslie Paris, and assisted by Bonnie Murphy.*

## Introduction

There is a definite potential in British Columbia for a program of in-service and continuing education in home economics for secondary school educators. This was the major result of a preliminary survey done by secondary school home economics teachers at the 1980 (March) British Columbia Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Association (THESA) Conference held in Vancouver. The results have helped to narrow down directions for possible continuing-education courses and workshops in the province for home economics teachers.

## Purpose

The purpose of the survey was to gain a preliminary overview of home economics secondary school teachers' opinions of the major professional areas that needed attention and could be supported by continuing and in-service education services in the province of British Columbia. Underlying the purpose is the belief that the University of British Columbia and the Faculty of Education, as a community support, can assist the field of education beyond the training of teachers. Hence, the Faculty of Education is trying to identify in what ways and in what areas to provide continuing and in-service professional education to teachers. Specifically, the focus is on home economics secondary education. Further, there is heightened attention because of the new secondary school curriculum introduced in Autumn 1979. At present, there is little province-wide coordination of continuing and in-service professional education offered in home economics. Except for a few school districts in British Columbia, any specific support or development in continuing and in-service education for home economics must be generated at the grass-roots level and with co-ordination of the school district and THESA chapter. The effort of further professional education is encumbered even more when there is not a THESA chapter in the school district.

## The survey and sample

The one-page questionnaire of open and closed type was considered to be stage one of a two-part study to identify the areas of attention and identify the nature of focussed attention areas. Hence, in stage one, the questionnaire indicated priority of continuing and in-service professional education needs in home economics education and general conditions under which the services ought to take place. The three main questions asked were:

What are the suitable times by date, hours, and season for participating in continuing and in-service education programs?

What is the amount of interest in pursuing a master's degree program?

What is the personal rank order preference of professional teaching concerns that need attention in the home economics secondary school?. Describe the area of concern.

The questionnaire was distributed at the annual general meeting of the THESA conference on March 2, 1980 and took 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

The respondents in the sample represented the British Columbian home economics secondary school teachers as follows (figure 1)

Sample Representation of the British Columbia Home Economics Secondary School Teachers	
Area of Representation	PER CENT
Delegates of THESA Conference 1980	38.0
Secondary School Home Economics Teachers	

In British Columbia	8.5
School Districts in British Columbia	42.0

Further, the respondents were divided by geographic regions in British Columbia. The per cent of respondents relative to the total home economics teacher population for that geographic region was as follows (figure 2).

Figure 2

Geographic Representation of the Sample as a Per Cent of the British Columbia Home Economics Teacher Population in the Region

Geographic Region	Per Cent
Lower Mainland	9.6
Vancouver Island	8.6
Fraser Valley	12.2
Central Interior	5.6
North	9.2
Kootenays	0.0

Overall, each geographic region, except for the Kootenays, was represented by 10 per cent of their regional group. Hence, 10 per cent (rounded off of the total British Columbian home economics teachers was represented, not only on a provincial level but also on a regional level.

## Results

Results of the survey were organized about the three main questions.

**The first main question** was about the preferences for suitable times for participating in continuing and in-service education programs. Summertime was the most preferred season for a university long-term course for 64 per cent of the sample. Spring was second choice, with 40 per cent, followed by winter, with 39 per cent, and last and least desired, autumn, with 38 per cent. Ready access on a long-term basis to a university was a deciding factor to season preference. Should a university course be given in the pertinent geographic region, seasonal preference for a course offering might change.

If continuing education programs were held in a school district during the week, 61 per cent of the sample placed Thursday in first preferred position. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday ranged from 54 to 59 per cent and close to the Thursday choice. A combination of Friday evening and Saturday was preferred by 44 per cent, and the weekend preferred the least, with 27 per cent.

The week nights, Monday to Thursday, are the preferred days for a course offering in a school district. A possible reason for Thursday being the most favored day is that only one day is left for which to prepare work, then there is a chance to relax.

**The second main question** of the survey dealt with the amount of interest in doing a master's degree program. From 84 per cent of the sample respondents, there was an equal three-way split for interest: Yes, interested-29.9 per cent; No, not interested-28.6 per cent; Undecided-26.0 per cent; and No response-15.5 per cent. Some in the "No, not interested" category already had their master's degree.

**The third main question** of the survey was, "What are the most important and least important areas of concern to you in teaching home economics in the secondary school?" The major difficulty in rank ordering a large group of items (16) is that it does take time, and 18 items is generally a maximum for anyone to handle. Hence, only part of the sample answered the complete list of 16 areas of teaching concerns; 84 per cent of the respondents did not rank all of the concerns; 62 per cent ranked the six most important areas; and 6 per cent did not rank any of the areas but did make comments.

The six most important areas (weighted and unweighted scores) were as follows in figure 3.

Figure 3

## Rank Order of the Six Most Important Teaching Concerns in Home Economics Secondary Education

Teaching concern	Rank
Implementing the new British Columbia home economics curriculum	1
Developing curriculum resource units	2
Resources	3
School and District administration and coordination	4
Sharing with colleagues	5
Upgrading qualifications	6

Rank order: 1 -most important.

The first three areas of concern (implementing the new British Columbian home economics curriculum, developing curriculum resource units, resources) deals with definition of home economics, Decision-making, planning and implementing the curriculum. The fourth-, fifth, and sixth-ranked concerns (administration, sharing and upgrading) deal with professional enhancement and support. Consequently, there is a definite interest and need for support in curriculum development and implementation.

However, at the least important end of the list of teaching concerns in home economics, there was a cluster around future trends, counselling, community/student needs, classroom management, co-ed teaching, and home economics content. These areas of concern deal with either assumed competencies or fundamental underlying concepts for curriculum development.

Figure 4 is a listing of the areas of concern

In teaching, with rankings according to weighted and unweighted scores. When the ranking of concerns was identified by weighted and unweighted scores, there was very little difference in the three most important concerns (implementing the curriculum, developing resource units, resources). The three most important concerns were distinct from the remaining 13 concerns. One reason for the ranking of teaching concerns could be that a revised home economics secondary school curriculum for the province was introduced in September 1979 with a phasing-in period from 1979 to 1982. A second reason for the ranking outcome could be that the needs are characteristic of the individual or school district rather than common to the whole province.

Figure 4

Rank Order of Areas of Teaching Concerns in Secondary Home Economics Education.

Area of Teaching Concern	Rank*	Rank**
Implementing the new curriculum	1	2
Developing curriculum resource units	2	1
Resources	3	3
School / District co-ordination and administration	4	6
Sharing with colleagues	5	4
Upgrading home economics qualifications	6	7
Teaching techniques	7	5
Teaching for special needs	8	9
Vocational teaching	9	13
Co-ed teaching	10	14
Future trends	11	10
Counselling	12	12
Community and student needs	13	8
Classroom management	14	15
Home economics content	15	11
Other	16	16

\*Unweighted

\*\*Weighted

Rank order: 1 – needs attention first;

16 – needs attention least.

## Recommendations

Fundamental to the support of continuing and in-service professional education programs in home economics at the secondary school level are the co-ordination and communication methods. Further, for the quality of home economics education to be advanced, the following recommendations about continuing and in-service professional education programs are made:

- A master's degree program should be offered at the university in home economics education in both summer and winter.
- University field courses offered during the week should have scheduled sessions of several hours, with a break for an evening meal. The number of sessions are minimized and support those participants who travel long distances.
- Any courses or workshops in the near future should focus on implementation and development of the British Columbian secondary home economics curriculum and on development of resource units.
- There should be co-ordinated efforts with THESA chapters and the Ministry of Education to assist individuals who teach home economics as a second course without complete qualifications in the area.
- A provincial in-service education committee should be established to co-ordinate continuing education programs in home economics. Participating groups should include THESA, University of British Columbia (School of Home Economics, Faculty of Education), Ministry of Education, and Provincial Educational Media Centre.
- Independent and parochial schools should be included in the continuing education program.
- A more detailed examination should be done of alternative ways of providing continuing professional education for home economics teachers in British Columbia.
- A more detailed survey should be done to investigate the identified important areas of concern to home economics teachers.