

How Educational Philosophies Shape Family and Consumer Sciences and Home Economics Education: A Commentary

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I began my teaching career in the mid-1970s totally unaware of the construct of educational philosophies. I attended teachers' college (1970–1972) to obtain a home economics teacher's license and certificate rather than a Bachelor of Education degree within an Education department. I do not remember ever being taught about this aspect of teaching. That is not to say it was not taught, just that I do not recall internalizing educational philosophy as an important part of being a home economics educator. It was not until 25 years later (early 2000s), when I began teaching home economics teacher education methods courses at a university (as part of an Education faculty, not a Home Economics department), that I discovered the notion of educational philosophies as espoused in educational foundations courses and textbooks. From then on, philosophical awareness was the mainstay of my approach to teaching preservice home economics teacher education methods in these courses.

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This professional experience helped me appreciate that family and consumer sciences (FCS) and home economics education (preparing preservice teachers) does not happen in a vacuum (ideas herein are also pertinent to human sciences, human ecology, consumer sciences, home ecology, home sciences, household sciences, and more). It is affected by politics and political ideologies, state and school board curricular agendas and policies, private interests, community and parental influence, self-interest, students' interests and needs, community and parental influence, media, think tanks and consulting firms, prevailing research thrusts and popular theories, and sociocultural and economic factors (Bloom, 2006). And it is assuredly, deeply influenced by several different philosophies (i.e., principles and beliefs that guide behavior).

Like most educators, university-level FCS and home economics educators teaching preservice teachers (who become in-service teachers with their own philosophy) can be affected by several types of philosophies, a point supported by sparse home economics literature; they are affected by (a) their own philosophy of life (Fleck, 1980); (b) disciplinary and professional philosophies and

home economics philosophies (McGregor, 2012, 2020a); (c) research philosophies if engaged in scholarly activities (empirical, interpretive, critical; qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods) (Brown & Paolucci, 1978; McGregor, 2018); and (d) educational philosophies (Hitch & Youatt, 1995).

Regarding the latter, everyone has “a philosophy of education; it’s there just under the surface, unseen but affecting every decision you will make as a teacher” (Petronicolos, 2011, p. 1). The premise of this commentary is that FCS and home economics educators should be fully aware of their philosophy of education, and part of that process includes respecting the role of educational philosophies.

This commentary concerns the latter—home economics education and educational philosophies. For clarification, authors of commentaries often have in-depth knowledge of and are interested in sharing their viewpoint and personal opinions on a particular topic (Berterö, 2016). This commentary reflects my concern about FCS and home economics education and how it can and should be informed by educational philosophies. As a caveat, it is not about the topic of FCS and home economics philosophies in general (see, for example, McGregor, 2012, 2020a; Nickols et al., 2009; Vincenti et al., 2004).

Philosophy Defined

Generally speaking, a philosophy is a belief system (including attitudes, values, principles, and

predispositions) that people create (knowingly or not) and use as they live and make sense of their life (Harper, 2020). Philosophy comprises six main branches or axioms (self-evident truths): reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), thinking (logic), perception (aesthetics), values (axiology), and behavior (ethics and morality) (Archie & Archie, 2004; Wiles & Bondi, 2002) (see Table 1).

In short, philosophy deals with questions of existence, knowledge, reason, mind, values, behavioral integrity, and language. Philosophy brings these important questions of life to the table and invites people to strive for answers (Gibney, 2012). Philosophy is Latin *philosophia*, “systematic investigation” pursuant to studying the most fundamental matters of life (Harper, 2020). Philosophy is indeed “the systematic and critical study of fundamental questions that arise both in everyday life and through the practice of other disciplines” (Brown University, 2020, para. 1). These disciplines include education in general, and FCS and home economics education in particular.

Philosophies of Education

The intent of education is “to educate (related to the Greek notion of *educere*), to bring out or develop potential’ ” (Smith, 2020, para. 2). To that end, education involves providing people with intellectual, moral, social, and technical instruction,

Table 1. Six Branches of Philosophy Informing Educational Philosophies (adapted from Archie & Archie, 2004; Wiles & Bondi, 2002)

<p>Reality (<i>ontology</i>): The nature of reality and its essence (<i>be, becoming, being, existing</i>); concerns identity, the mind, free will, and the nature of the world – what counts as reality</p> <p>Knowledge (<i>epistemology</i>): What counts as knowledge and knowing; what is accepted as <i>true (truth)</i>, and how people come to know things: an authority figure, the word of God or the creator, lived experience, rational thought, and intuition, or some combination</p> <p>Thinking (<i>logic</i>): Concerns how to <i>think</i>, which is a process involving argumentation, reasoning, making judgments, problem solving, and decision making. Deductive thinking involves proving something, inductive thinking involves discovery, and abductive thinking is best guess using available information</p> <p>Perceptions (<i>aesthetics</i>): Learn through the <i>senses</i>, critical analysis, and reflection to help find meaning in all aspects of life (i.e., make <i>sense</i> of life through art and appreciation of beauty)</p> <p>Values (<i>axiology</i>): Concerns what is valuable, worth knowing, and important; what <i>values</i> should students hold; concerned with <i>quality of life</i> (rather than quality of knowledge)</p> <p>Behavior (<i>ethics</i>): Ethical and moral dilemmas and predicaments: are people’s actions good or bad (<i>ethical</i>) and right or wrong (<i>moral</i>) when they must act without all of the facts and when no single action is clear – ethical and moral dilemmas and predicaments</p>
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along with training and orientation (Anderson, 2014). Beliefs about what counts as education (called philosophies of education) are subtly and overtly informed by the six branches of philosophy (see Table 1).

In more detail, each *educational philosophy* concerns several key elements: (a) the purpose of education and any given program of study; (b) what content is important, of value, and worth learning and knowing; (c) how students learn best; (d) what material, methods, and resources to use when teaching; and (e) how, when, and by whom learning should be assessed (Ornstein, 1991). Educational philosophies also differ on how a curricula are tied to (f) society, and (g) tied to the past, present, and future (i.e., curricula have a temporal element) (Sowell, 2000).

This cluster of ideas comprising an educational philosophy about education can “evolve openly or unwittingly” for each person before and during practice (Ornstein, 1991, p. 104). Wittingly (with full awareness, attention, and intention) is preferred, because so much depends on one’s philosophical orientation to education and teaching. Educational philosophies give meaning to (i.e., help educators and people make sense of and justify) any decisions they make related to what, how, where, when, who, and why to teach, and they “determine principles for guiding actions” (Ornstein, 1991, p. 102).

“Educators who live life without a philosophy tend to act out their opinions without examining them, which is an untenable approach” (McGregor, 2014, p. 150). Also, without a clearly thought out educational philosophy, home economics educators may run the risk of becoming “vulnerable to externally imposed prescriptions, to fads and frills, to authoritarian schemes, and other ‘isms’” (Ornstein, 1991, p. 109). An uncritical approach to one’s educational philosophy is also indefensible because it is tantamount to unprincipled practice.

Put simply, what FCS and home economics education looks like in practice depends on which educational philosophy or philosophies teachers are using, either alone or in some combination. A roster of philosophies has evolved over the past 100 years, and they differ along a

full range of 10+ criteria (see Table 2) including but not limited to the focus of the educational process, intellectual emphasis, concept of learning, direction in time, values, worth of disciplinary subject matter, curricular content (what is taught), role of student, role of teacher, nature of learning group’s diversity, learning spaces, and link to society and citizenship (Ornstein, 1991; Wiles & Bondi, 2002).

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Readers are invited to study and then contemplate the information offered in Table 2, and then try to locate, or philosophically position, themselves. To illustrate, while in high school, my home economics teachers used perennialism and essentialism. I thus began my university teaching career with a teacher-centered focus on subject matter, but I shifted mid-career to a more student-centered approach. My philosophy was knowingly, pragmatically, a hybrid, because I knew that pre-service new home economics teachers had to learn the outcomes-based approach to survive in a teacher-centered, subject-matter, teach-to-the-test context. Still, I wanted them to appreciate the beauty and possibilities of progressivism and self-actualization. I have never taught from an existentialism approach, but I am most definitely familiar with and have employed both the global/transformational and social reconstructivism philosophies in my other courses.

Educational Philosophy Pendulum

The popularity of educational philosophies changes over time. As a collection, these 10 educational philosophies are often characterized as being on a continuum with teacher-centered and student-centered presented as two polar

Table 2. Common Educational Philosophies (Eisner, 1970; Houston Community College, ca. 2006; Marsh & Willis, 1999; McNeil, 1977; Olvia, 2001; Ornstein, 1991; Parkay & Hass, 2000; Sowell, 2000; Wiles & Bondi, 2002; Zuga, 1989)

FOCUS ON SUBJECT MATTER	
Perennialism	<p>Per its name (lasting for a long time), assumes the truth is the same today as it was in the past; look to the past to solve today's problems</p> <p>Instead of facts, truth comprises everlasting, unchanging <i>principles</i> and enduring <i>great ideas</i> that serve allhuman kind</p> <p>Teach <i>universal truths</i> through Liberal Arts curriculum using 'the Classics' (e.g., Dickens, Steinbach, Joyce, Hemingway, Shakespeare, Austen, Brontë) and other <i>enduring</i> disciplines (mathematics, science, engineering)</p> <p>Truth is found through reasoning, logic, rational thinking, revelation, the scientific method, and the Socratic method</p>
Essentialism (basic skills, 3 Rs, liberal education)	<p>Teach what is essential to transmit national and cultural heritage – preserve society the way it is as much as possible, appreciating that change may happen</p> <p>Focus on <i>essential</i> skills and the <i>intellectual and moral standards</i> needed for students to cope with and adjust to existing society; called a <i>common core</i> of knowledge</p> <p>Students learn the essentials, rigorously and thoroughly, from simple to complex, by studying traditional basic subjects: 3 Rs (reading, writing and mathematics), science, classical art, history</p> <p>Teach facts not principles using content preselected by teacher; students have no say – they have to <i>master</i> the essentials</p> <p>Core curriculum may have to change so students can still be taught to value hard work, respect authority and self-discipline, and accept societal standards rather than challenging them</p>
Academic Rationalism (disciplinary mastery)	<p>Per its name, this approach deifies (privileges) <i>reason</i></p> <p>Intent is to prepare citizens who can make <i>rational</i> judgments and partake in an existing society by dealing with duty, truth, being, and beauty</p> <p>Using subjects deemed <i>worthy</i> of study (e.g., science, mathematics, literature), cultivate students' intellect, so they can reason; precludes fringe subjects such as home economics, music, drama, and physical education, which are presumed to dilute ability to learn how to reason</p> <p>Assumes that, unless <i>all</i> schools teach only a core of worthy subjects that students must <i>master</i>, a common educational foundation will be missing in society, which will then suffer due to lack of logical and well-reasoned citizenry actions</p>
Curriculum as Technology (outcome-based)	<p>Now called <i>outcome-based</i> education, this approach depends on students <i>mastering</i> teacher-selected content</p> <p>Sequenced organization of content is presumed to ensure <i>efficient</i> learning</p> <p>Also called <i>teach-to-the-test</i> approach, it depends on lots of <i>standardized</i> testing and routinized and rote (memorization) learning</p> <p>Teachers and state create <i>measurable</i> behavioral objectives (intended learning outcomes and learning objectives)</p> <p>Heavy focus on <i>competencies</i>, predetermined <i>standards</i> and is task-focused (often uses technology to deliver the curriculum)</p>
Cognitive Learning Processes	<p><i>Cognition</i> means the mental acquisition of knowledge and understandings through thinking, experience, and senses</p> <p>Cognitive learning assumes that, because it is impossible to know everything, teachers show students <i>how to think</i></p> <p>Students learn <i>how to inquire</i> instead of learning just content (facts and information)</p> <p>Subject matter is a tool to develop intellectual prowess; students gain thinking skills they can use far beyond the formal classroom well into their lives; the curriculum is process oriented rather than task oriented</p> <p>Students learn how to think in all sorts of circumstances by problem posing and solving – <i>thinking</i> their way through life (learn to be lifelong learners and thinkers)</p>

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FOCUS ON SELF	
Self-actualization (personal relevance, humanistic, holistic)	Focus is on helping learners realize their full potential and aid in their individual development, growth, and autonomy Because the intent is for students to learn how to cope with problems that have personal significance, teachers choose topics and content matter that are relevant and meaningful to students Teacher is facilitator who balances students' interests with social-cultural needs Rather than teaching students how to solve social issues, these issues and curricular content are used to help students become evolved, self-governing agents Teacher provides a resource-rich learning environment so students can explore and “come into themselves”
Progressivism	Very child-centered approach; considered forward thinking because it challenges the traditional perennial, essential, and academic rationalism approaches whereby students have no voice or say in what they learn or how Intent is to create independent thinkers acting for the public good, meaning classrooms are democratic and include moral education and character building to foster self-esteem Curriculum intentionally meets the needs of each child who develop at different rates Content (chosen by teacher and students) reflects children's experiences, interests, and abilities; teachers are “in charge” but students do as much as they can; students are viewed as learning partners Students learn by doing (experiment, explore) with others
FOCUS ON LINKS TO SOCIETY, ECOSYSTEMS, AND HUMANITY	
Social Reconstructivism	Learning is for the betterment of society; shared societal values are central (take precedence over individual needs) Schools serve society, so needs of society and social issues determine curricular content; the latter reflect pressing problems facing human kind Intent is to reform (reconstruct) society through schools; therefore, must teach students how to be socially responsible, critically conscious, and active participants in social change Students learn critical thinking, controversial issues, reflection, self-awareness
Personal-global (transformative)	This is a blend of cognitive, self-actualization and social reconstructivism philosophies – leading to transformation and change Students are taught to live and responsibly participate in a globally interdependent society using a future-oriented curriculum The <i>well-being</i> of the entire world (humanity, other species, and ecosystems) is the focus of the curriculum ensured through teaching sustainability, personal responsibility, holistic and integrated thinking, global citizenship, ecological stewardship, interdisciplinary thinking, and critical thinking and reflection Each person is continually in the process of <i>becoming</i> while seeking full personal integration into changing environments to ensure social change
Existentialism	Focus is on <i>humanity</i> as whole, the human <i>existence</i> , and the human condition Students are thus taught to analyze the human condition (e.g., poverty, war, freedom, justice, sustainability, equality) To deal with what they learn, students are also taught that they have the <i>freedom</i> to make choices, but that choice comes with heavy <i>responsibilities</i> , because every action has consequences for humanity Hand in hand, students are taught to question everything (resist imposed answers and perspectives), which means creating space for them to discuss heavy subjects <i>freely</i> and to think <i>independently</i> With teachers ensuring a heavy focus on the arts, ethics, philosophy, drama, novels and poetry, students grapple with the <i>meaning of life</i> (joy, angst, anger, suffering) as they strive to understand their existence as a human being

opposites: teacher-centered and student-centered, with the center point being Eclecticism—the borrowing of beliefs from more than one philosophical school of thought (Diehl, 2005; Oliva, 2001; Parkay & Hass, 2000). Others characterize this polarity, respectively, as traditional versus contemporary, or essential versus progressive, with the latter pushing back against the longstanding teacher-centered approaches that preclude student voice and agency. Perennialism, essentialism, and cognitive lean toward the traditional (teacher-centered) pole, and progressivism, existentialism, and social reconstructivism toward the progressive (student-centered) pole (Parkay et al., 1996). The popularity of these two overarching approaches swings like a pendulum (Diehl, 2005; Oliva, 2001; Parkay & Hass, 2000).

Royster (1983) wrote about watching the education pendulum swing over time. Cope (2018), an education consultant, recently identified four pendulum swings that she herself had experienced in the Americas over the last 30 years: (a) California’s 1990 *It’s Elementary* curriculum focused on holistic and integrated connections between academic subjects and the arts; (b) the U.S. 2001 legislation called *No Child Left Behind* that shifted from integration to individualism; (c) the 2007 Salvadorian collaboration between educators and artists to bring holistic balance back to education; and (d) today’s focus in the U.S. on differentiated, individualized instruction via technology under the auspice of meeting “the needs of ALL learners” (para. 6). She made no mention of the pervasive 1990s-originated STEM movement that privileges science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or the pushback STEAM movement (2010s onward) with the *A* standing for arts and humanities (McGregor, 2019)—a swing back to holistic and integrated.

Educational Philosophical Statements

Educational philosophical momentum and its preferred direction (teacher or student centered) seems to shift nearly every decade with some particular philosophies being incredibly persistent and resilient, especially the teacher-centered approaches that are much easier to measure and quantify than those focused on students (Cope, 2018; Royster,

1983). FCS and home economics educators must remain cognizant of this shifting popularity and where their own educational philosophy fits into the bigger picture. This philosophical awareness better ensures accountable and responsible teaching. And it can help interpret resonance with or resistance to state- or other-imposed curricula.

To aid in this self-awareness, all educators are encouraged to develop philosophical statements on education. That said, FCS and home economics educators may be thwarted in the process because they tend not to be socialized to this imperative. Previous and existing home economics and FCS methods textbooks tend not to address the issue of education philosophies (McGregor, 2020b). Notable (but modest) exceptions include Fleck (1980), who devoted one paragraph to the topic of “a philosophy of education [saying] teachers need a philosophy for guidance” (p. 254), and Hitch and Youatt (1995), who very briefly addressed educational “philosophical screens” (p. 77) when discussing how FCS educators should decide what to teach (e.g., social reconstructivism and essentialism). There was no explicit mention of educational philosophies in *Teaching Family and Consumer Sciences in the 21st Century* (Alexander et al., 2018), although there were chapters pertaining to cooperative learning, constructivism, and global education (i.e., student-centered learning). The dearth of information on this aspect of home economics education is problematic because “the nature of any educational program [is sharply influenced by] the philosophical convictions . . . of educators themselves” (Woodruff, 1961, p. 14).

To acknowledge and address this power, Lewis (2020) advised preparing a written educational philosophy statement, which would contain a teacher’s “most personal thoughts and beliefs on education” (para. 2). By association, this would require knowing about different educational philosophies (see Table 2) and being able to recognize them in narrative form and practice. The eventual philosophical statement would help educators procure, organize, interpret, and then apply information from others and themselves (internal reflection) to make decisions and take actions in and around the classroom and other learning environments (Boggs, 1981; Hitch & Youatt, 1995).

To facilitate this philosophical exercise, Lewis (2020) tendered a collection of questions to pose and ponder as one attempts to articulate and prepare an educational philosophical statement for oneself or to share with others (perhaps with school administrators or for reappointment, tenure, and promotion within the university system): (a) What is the greater purpose of education in society; (b) What is the teacher’s role; (c) What should students learn about and why (e.g., knowledge, skills, and dispositions); and (d) How do students learn best? Other questions include (e) What role should students have in deciding what is learned? and (f) What is the best way to assess if they have learned anything (Ornstein, 1991)? Answering these questions helps educators locate themselves in relation to particular educational philosophies, as they inform “core beliefs about the purpose, process, nature, and ideals of education” (Petronicolos, 2011, p. 1).

Once written, this statement represents an “organised body of knowledge and opinion on education, both as it is conceptualised and as it is practised. [It] inspires and directs educational planning, programs and processes in any given setting” (Lambert, 2017, paras. 5, 7). The document is usually two or three pages in length and represents the beliefs and ideals underlying one’s approach to *thinking* about education (Petronicolos, 2011). Wearing an educational philosophy

hat, FCS and home economics educators would then continually (a) reexamine their educational beliefs; (b) question their ideas about education, society, and learning; (c) ponder what counts as education, teaching, and learning; and (d) reflect on their educational practices and actions (Lambert, 2019; Okoro, 2006; Petronicolos, 2011).

Illustrative Example

Also, once FCS and home economics educators have teased out their *own* educational philosophy, they can more readily discern which particular philosophy(ies) is informing any curriculum they are using, considering, or being told to use. Most curricular documents are prefaced with a written-out statement (or set of statements) (i.e., rationale) identifying and clarifying what the curriculum planners believed, valued, and understood with respect to what counts as education, teaching, and learning (Lambert, 2017). As examples, Table 3 illustrates a consumer education curriculum (Murphy et al., 1974) and the rationale for the first edition of the National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences’ (NASAFACS) (1998) national standards for FCS education (recently updated, NASAFACS, 2018).

These examples clearly illustrate different educational philosophies. The consumer education curriculum is a blend of individualism, rationality, and utility (satisfaction) with a concern for values

Table 3. Examples of Educational Philosophies Prefacing Curricula

<p>United States Office of Education’s Consumer Education Curriculum</p> <p>“The <i>Consumer Education Curriculum Modules: A Spiral-Process Approach</i> was developed to help an individual assume responsibility for gaining satisfaction and an improved well-being for himself [sic] and others in present and future generations by developing consumer capabilities, skills and understandings. Consumer well-being is a state of existence (life) characterized by the rationale approach to consumption of goods and services in a manner consistent with values influenced by a concern for one’s fellowman [sic] and the preservation of the environment” (Murphy et al., 1974, p. 4).</p>
<p>National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS) National Standards for FCS Education</p> <p>Rationale for Change</p> <p>“... There is widespread agreement that essential preparation for success [in life, relationships, family, career and society] includes acquisition of problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, communication, literacy, and numerical skills in applied contexts. Today’s students are the future leaders and members of tomorrow’s families, workplaces, and communities. They need to be able to act responsibly and productively, to synthesize knowledge from multiple sources, to work cooperatively and to apply the highest standards in all aspects of their lives. These factors call for a new set of standards for Family and Consumer Sciences (FAC) Education” (NASAFACS, 1998, p. 1).</p>

that respect the future, fellow human beings, and the environment. The focus is on the individual and the skills needed to assume the consumer role and ensure consumer well-being with hints of the personal/global philosophy. There is, however, no mention of family, family well-being, or even individual well-being. The NASAFACS philosophy represents students (no mention of individuals) as leaders who must be able to critically engage with knowledge, others, and the future by concurrently being responsible and productive. The focus is on teaching learners to be members of families, communities, and workplaces, which is much broader than just the consumer role.

It is normal for one of these approaches to resonate more than the other; that resonance represents its fit (or not) with one's educational philosophical statement. Personally, I used to align with the philosophy articulated in the consumer education curriculum (Murphy et al., 1974), but I now fit better with NASAFACS' (1998) message. And even then, I have reservations about the latter, because it does not directly intimate that FCS education should focus on individuals' needs as developing and maturing people striving to reach their potential. It feels like it is almost *too* family, community, and future focused with too little attention to progressivism (child and learner-centered) and self-actualization as an empowered individual. My reaction to Table 3 reflects my own learner-centered, global, transformative, and social reconstructivism educational philosophy.

Conclusion

Assuredly, others will read Table 3 and have a different takeaway. And *that* is the point of this commentary. It is imperative that FCS and home economics educators pay attention to what resonates with them. This lingering, reverberating echo (like after a bell has been rung) represents strong philosophical messaging. FCS and home economics educators must be attuned to the notion of educational philosophies and the role they play in their educational practice. Wearing philosophical blinders is not tenable. Educators have a responsibility to themselves, learners, educational institutions, and the public to be fully

aware of how they view education and learning and their respective connections to society.

Philosophy guides behavior—whether we know it or not.

Philosophy guides behavior—whether we know it or not. FCS and home economics educators should be fully aware and conscious of their beliefs about education so they can (a) be accountable for the consequences of their contributions to society, and (b) teach preservice educators to assume the same accountability when they become in-service teachers educating future generations. When a journal chooses to publish a commentary, it is an indication that the editor wants to advance the field by sharing perspectives to inspire future dialogue (Berterö, 2016). This commentary is thus an invitation to join the conversation about this compelling aspect of FCS and home economics practice.

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