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| Sustainable Development and Home Economics Education |
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Abstract

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| In order to include sustainable development in educational curriculum and instruction in an educationally defensible manner, home economics teachers must have an adequate conceptualization of sustainable development and a process for systematic integration otherwise approaches could be adopted that are more akin to training or indoctrination. |
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Sustainable Development and Home Economics Education

Mary Gale Smith, Ph.D.

What is the relationship between home economics education in schools, and education for sustainable development? This question is pertinent given that the United Nations has declared 2005 – 2014 The Decade for Education for Sustainable Development supporting efforts to infuse this concept into all educational settings including teacher education and school subjects.¹ In order to include sustainable development in educational curriculum and instruction in an educationally defensible manner, home economics teachers must have an adequate conceptualization of sustainable development and how it fits with the goals and purposes of home economics education².

This is essential to avoid approaches that are more akin to training or indoctrination³.

Sustainable Development/Sustainability/ Education for Sustainable Development –

¹ The point here is that sustainable development is not a school subject but a topic that should be included in a variety of subject areas, see for example, Learning for a Sustainable Future, Canadian Sustainability Curriculum Review Initiative: Rationale, Context and Scope. North York, Ontario, Canada, 2006. www.lsf-lst.ca

² In the field of home economics, Marjorie Brown has frequently argued for conceptual clarity and research that explicitly addresses the fundamental premises and underlying philosophic basis of home economics education. Conceptual research of this nature is designed to make vague concepts more precise and thus more useable in guiding curricular development, see Brown, M. *Philosophical studies of home economics in the United States: Basic ideas by which home economists understand themselves*. Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 1993; Brown, M. *Philosophical studies of home economics in the United States: Our practical-intellectual heritage. Vol. I & II*. Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 1985; Brown, M. *What is home economics education?* Department of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN. 1980. Eleanore Vaines has also written extensively about moving from ego-centric perspectives to eco-centric perspectives using ecology as a unifying theme, see, Vaines, E. Ecology as a unifying theme, *Canadian Home Economics Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1994, pp. 59-62. For elaboration of her work and its implications for the field see Smith, G., Peterat, L. & de Zwart, M. Home economics now: Transformative Practice, Ecology and Everyday Life, Pacific Educational Press, Vancouver, BC. 2004.

³ Bob Jickling's paper is most often cited in this regard. See Jickling, B Why I Don't Want My Children to be Educated for Sustainable Development. *Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol. 23 no. 4, 1992 pp. 5-8. See also, Ohman, J. 'The Ethical Dimension of ESD – Navigating Between the Pitfalls of Indoctrination and Relativism.' In Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Pre-School through Upper Secondary and Teacher Education, Inger Björneloo & Eva Nyberg (eds), U N E S C O Education for Sustainable Development in Action Technical Paper N°4 February 2007.

Problematic?

What is sustainable development? There are literally hundreds of definitions of this term.⁴ Even definitions cannot completely capture the full meaning, value, and implications of the terminology especially the underlying ideologies. Philosophical inquiry is best suited for this type of research and yet there is little evidence of this⁵. As a result there are those who claim that sustainable development is an oxymoron⁶ as it can imply continued economic expansion, capitalist neo-liberal political views and policies, and consumer consumption. This type of development/growth is not sustainable⁷. Perhaps to address this concern, sustainable development has morphed into sustainability, a ubiquitous term that is little more than a slogan adopted without regard for the underlying values of social interests being served⁸. What should be sustained?

Education for sustainable development with no globally unified conception of sustainable development is bound to be problematic. People with fundamentally different values can use the same language and mean completely different things. Many suggest

⁴ Three hundred definitions of sustainable development and sustainability were identified by Dobson in 1996 and no doubt the numbers have increased exponentially in the past 10 years, see Dobson, A, *Environmental Sustainable: An Analysis and Typology*, Environmental Politics, Vol. 5 No. 3, 1996, pp. 401–428.

⁵ For example, Birney complains about the lack of attention to this in Birney, A Education Events in Johannesburg that were Attended by Education Coordinator of UNED-UK. *Sustain[ED]: Education for Our Common Future*, vol. 4, pp. 4-7, Stakeholder Forum, London, 2002. See also Robottom, I. Some Conceptual Issues in Education for Sustainable Development. In *Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Pre-School through Upper Secondary and Teacher Education*, Inger Björneloo & Eva Nyberg (eds), U N E S C O Education for Sustainable Development in Action Technical Paper N°4 February 2007 and Worster, D. The Shaky Ground of Sustainability, in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, G. Sessions (ed.) Shambhala, Boston, MA, 1995, pp. 417–427.

⁶ Selby, D The Firm and Shaky Ground of Education for Sustainable Development, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2006 pp.351–365, uses the terms growth principle, instrumentalist conception of nature, and mechanistic worldview as shaky grounds for sustainable development. It is interesting to note that in the early 1990's a preconference to the CHEA annual meeting organized by the International Development committee put Sustainable Development on Trial and the conclusion of the meeting was that it was an oxymoron.

⁷ Boyd, D *Sustainability Within A Generation: A New Vision For Canada*. The David Suzuki Foundation, Vancouver, 2004 offers a Canadian perspective identifying over-consumption as the root cause of insustainability.

⁸ Popkewitz, T (1980) *Global Education as a Slogan System*. *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1980 pp. 303-316 provides an in-depth analysis of the inherent danger in slogan systems that are systematically ambiguous and can have multiple meanings. Although he is directing his attention to global education, I argue that sustainable development and education for sustainable development fall into the same category. Jickling uses slogan in reference to sustainable development in Jickling, B *Studying sustainable development: Problems and possibilities*. *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol.19 no.3, 1994 pp. 231-240.

that it is really environmental education⁹. But even in environmental education the underlying ideologies are not clear. Some environmental programs are designed for more efficient control and management of the natural environment for the benefit of human whereas others are concerned with the role of humans as integral with the ecosystem¹⁰. Some see ecological sustainability as a matter of identifying and measuring the carrying capacity of an ecosystem in terms of the level of resource extraction it can bear while others suggest that it requires new relationships between humans and their environment, between humans and their economic decisions, and among humans themselves that do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life. The latter involves fundamental shift in values, attitudes, and skills and questioning current understandings of development¹¹.

Education **for** sustainability sometimes labeled as sustainability education, education for sustainable futures, education for sustainability literacy is, like many educational concepts, essentially contested.¹² Jickling¹³, for example, takes issue with “for” pointing out that education “for” runs the risk of indoctrination and training rather than educating. For him, educating means “enabling students to debate, evaluate, and judge for themselves the relative merits of contesting positions¹⁴. Components of curriculum reoriented to sustainability have been identified as knowledge, issues, skills, perspectives, and values¹⁵. However, little attention is given about how to deal with

⁹ If you examine volumes such as Scott W. & Gough, S. (Eds) Key Issues in Sustainable Development and Learning: A Critical Review, Routledge, London 2004 you will see numerous references to environmental education and many authors who identify themselves as environmental educators.

¹⁰ The glossary provided by Complexity and Education, <http://www.complexityandeducation.ualberta.ca/glossary.htm>, states that “ecology can be distinguished from simplistic understandings of environment, which imply a separation between human beings (or other organisms) and the ecology in which they are embedded”.

¹¹ Capra, for example, identifies current understandings of development as a northern concept used in classifying economies as developed/developing/underdeveloped with a top down decision-making process in the control of power brokers, and argues for an alternative view that includes ecological and ethical values and honours cultural and local economies and grassroots involvement. See Capra, F. Development and Sustainability. The Center for Ecoliteracy last updated 2007 viewed Sept. 20, 2007 URL <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/publications/>

¹² Gallie, W. Philosophy and Historical Understanding, Schocken, New York 1964.

¹³ Jickling, B Why I don't want my children to be educated for sustainable development. *Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol. 23 no. 4, 1992 pp. 5-8.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 8.

¹⁵ UNESCO EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ACTION, Guidelines and Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability, Technical Paper No. 2 Paris, France October 2005.

values and ethical issues in the classroom. Pedagogically, aggressive shifts of learning approaches from the transmissive and teacher-centered towards the learner-centered, collaborative learning, discovery learning and learning that is active, relevant, and interdisciplinary are often recommended¹⁶. But, many teachers are deeply committed to teacher centered, didactic, lecture style approaches that are not suitable to instruction in ethics¹⁷ and may even increase the danger of imposing a preferred ideology upon students¹⁸.

Sustainable Development and Home Economics Education

Given the lack of conceptual clarity of both sustainable development and education for sustainable development it behooves home economists and home economics teachers to tread carefully into this territory. That said, it can also be successfully argued that the alternative view of sustainable development captured by Capra¹⁹ in terms such “as a creative process, characteristic of all life”, viewing development as a “multidimensional systemic process that is economic, social, ecological and ethical” working in the common good, and recognizing that “we are inseparable from the web of life of human and nonhuman communities” has been foundational to home economics in many ways since its inception and continuing today. The early founders choose “home economics” from the Greek noun *oikos*, meaning “home” and “economics” where the “eco” also used in “ecology” means stewardship or

¹⁶ Hart for example has identified teacher-led pedagogy, de-contextualized curriculum and standardized assessment as barriers to environmental and sustainable development education, see Hart, P. ‘Desires and Resistances as Drivers and Barriers to Environmental Learning and Sustainability: A Canadian Perspective’. In *Drivers and Barriers for Implementing Learning for Sustainable Development in Pre-School through Upper Secondary and Teacher Education*, Inger Björneloo & Eva Nyberg (eds), U N E S C O Education for Sustainable Development in Action Technical Paper N°4 February 2007. See also Sterling, S. *The Learning of Ecology, or the Ecology of Learning?* In *Key Issues in Sustainable Development and Learning : A Critical Review*, W. Scott & S. Gough, (eds.) RoutledgeFalmer, London, 2004 pp. 68-70 and LSF (Learning for a Sustainable Future) <http://www.lsf-lst.ca/en/nec/index.php>.

¹⁷ Paul, R. *Ethics Without Indoctrination*. Foundation for Critical Thinking. Updated 2007. Viewed Aug. 26, 2007, url: <http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/index.cfm>

¹⁸ Selby, D *The Firm and Shaky Ground of Education for Sustainable Development*, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2006 pp.351–365 refers to this as the overly skills/training orientation of much of the sustainable development literature. See also Jickling, B ‘Studying Sustainable Development: Problems and possibilities’. *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol.19 no.3, 1994 pp. 231-240; Jickling, B ‘Why I Don’t Want My Children to be Educated for Sustainable Development’. *Journal of Environmental Education*, Vol. 23 no. 4, 1992 pp. 5-8.

¹⁹ Capra, F. *Development and Sustainability*. The Center for Ecoliteracy last updated 2007 viewed Sept. 20, 2007 URL <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/publications/>

management of a household. Note the use of “home” not “house” to connote the caring relationship and the sense of attachment and “stewardship” the sense of caring for something. We still use the name home economics today and we have been encouraged by Vaines²⁰ to see the earth as our home and our practice guided by a moral vision. The International Federation of Home Economics identifies its ultimate goal as “the improvement of the quality of everyday life for individuals, families and households through the management of their resources”²¹. The terms “quality of life” and “management” require some clarification. For example improvement in quality of life can concentrate on the material quality of life and accumulation of material goods missing the ethical dimension and questioning consumption²² and management can connote control implying finding technical solutions with no regard for changes in human values or ideas of morality. There are ways of managing resources that are not controlling such as stewardship, implying valuing, cooperating, sharing, harmony and judicious use of resources such that there is no interference with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life. Some home economist have found “voluntary simplicity” a useful guiding concept to combat the waste which results from the “more is better” syndrome and highlight the value shift from excess consumption to frugal consumption, from individualism to ecological awareness, and from materialism to person, inner growth²³. In general, the well being of the family is inextricably linked to the well being of the planet so sustainability has to be on our agenda. How should it be addressed in public

²⁰ Eleanor Vaines in arguing for ecology as a unifying theme in home economics contrasts a mechanistic view of the world “where the world and people work like machines” the earth is to be “used” – control and order are valued with an ecological view of the world “where everything is related to everything in some way, where people see themselves as part of or “in” the environment. The central thesis is that our lives and long term well being are intimately linked to the lives and well being of the whole planet (animals plants included) – must recognize the interconnections between the parts and the whole, and between past, present and future. Vaines, E. Ecology as a Unifying Theme, Canadian Home Economics Journal, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1994, 59-62.

²¹ International Federation of Home Economics url: <http://www.ifhe.org/>

²² See for example Badir, D. Home Economics and Feminism. In E. Vaines, D. Badir & D. Kieren (eds.) People and Practice: International Perspective in Home Economics Vol. 1 No. 3; Brown, M. Philosophical Studies of Home Economics in the United States: Basic Ideas by Which Home Economists Understand Themselves. Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 1993; Sue McGregor has written extensively on consumerism, many of her papers are available at under research papers at <http://www.consultmcgregor.com>

²³See for example, Pestle, R. Voluntary Simplicity: A Lifestyle Option, Home Economics Education Association. Washington, DC, 1984.

school home economics classes?

Considerations of sustainable development (adequately conceptualized) should be systematically integrated into home economics curricula. This means that it is neither a distinct field of study, nor a separate study to be inserted, nor an “add on”, but an interdisciplinary study to be blended into home economics to construct a larger unity. Since the late 1980’s, I have been using global education, as a way to rethink home economics education. Sustainable development education comes under the umbrella of global education along with peace, human rights, social justice, environment, futures education. Personally, I still prefer global education²⁴ as it provides for more breadth. Some of the ways that global education (including sustainable development) can shape the teaching and learning in home economics are:

Modifying the content to include a knowledge and awareness of:

- universal and cultural values and practices of families
- web of life interconnections of individuals and families and their environments
- current worldwide concerns and conditions affecting individuals and families and their environments
- origins and past patterns of family life and world affairs affecting living in family ecosystems
- alternatives and future directions for families and society²⁵

Developing the skills and attributes for critical understanding such as

- the dispositions of: open-mindedness, anticipation of complexity, resistance to stereotyping, the inclination to empathize, non-chauvinism²⁶ and a sense of optimism and responsibility for the future
- concept clarification
- systems thinking (thinking in terms of relationships, connectedness, and

²⁴ Not to be confused with globalization, see Smith, G. Making Distinctions: Globalization and Global Education, in Proceedings of Canadian Symposium V: Issues and Directions for Home Economics/Family Studies Education, Canadian Home Economics Association, Ottawa ON, 1999 pp. 82-91; and Bowers, C. Educating for a Sustainable Future: Mediating Between the Commons and Economic Globalization, cabowers.net, last updated on Jun 10, 2007, viewed September 15, 2007, URL <http://cabowers.net/pdf/Educatingforasustainablefuture.pdf>.

²⁵ Paraphrased from Case, R. Key Elements of a Global Perspective. Social Education, Vo. 57, No. 6, pp. 318-325.

²⁶ Ibid.

context)²⁷

- problem posing, questioning
- suggesting and analyzing alternative solutions (especially considering long term consequences)
- media literacy, eco literacy²⁸
- practical reasoning (deciding what is best to do for the long term positive consequences of self, others and the planet)

The valued end is students who are able to look at problems with a skeptical eye in order to raise value laden, ethical and moral questions, such as “What should be done about food security, adequate housing for all, child labour, families displaced by war and conflict, access to health care, the implications of our consumer culture?” and seek morally and ethically defensible ways of being. Such a vision does not become a reality without some avenue of enactment. For several years, I have used a process called lesson plan re-modelling²⁹. It is a four step approach as follows:

Lesson Plan Re-modeling³⁰

1. A Description of the Standard Approach:
 - the content and how it is traditionally taught
2. A Critique
 - why it fails to foster the goals of global education (including sustainability)
 - suggests what needs to be added or changed to raise global issues (including those related to sustainability), to motivate practical reasoning and student action
3. New Objectives are set for the Re-modelled Plan
For example:
 - students will become aware of the interconnected and interrelated nature of the world and their place in it
 - students will become more skilled at being conceptually clear in defining

²⁷ Capra, T. Ecoliteracy: The Challenge for Education in the Next Century, Liverpool Schumacher Lectures March 20. Center for Ecoliteracy, last updated 2007, viewed July 2003 URL: <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/>

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ I have borrowed and modified this process from Richard Paul and his colleagues at the Foundation for Critical Thinking. In Ethics Without Indoctrination Paul states “as people, students have an undeniable right to develop their own moral perspective — whether conservative, liberal, theistic, or non-theistic — but they should be able to analyze the perspective they do use, compare it accurately with other perspectives, and scrutinize the facts they conceptualize and judge as carefully as in any other domain of knowledge” Foundation for Critical Thinking. Updated 2007. Viewed Aug. 26, 2007, url: <http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/index.cfm>

³⁰ This process is further elaborated in Smith, G. & Peterat, L. Developing Global/development Perspectives in Home Economics Education. Canadian Home Economics Association, Ottawa, ON 1992.

- problems and determining the roots of problems
 - students will have the opportunity to identify and confront racism, gender bias prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, scapegoating, and bias in articles, texts, television, film, case studies, etc.
 - students will learn analytic skills to critically examine the root causes of global issues and problems such as sustainability (e.g., identifying the underlying values/ideologies, various perspectives, ways of knowing)³¹
 - students will achieve a sense of multicultural understanding through a positive emphasis on similarities in belief systems, customs, and personal experiences.
 - students will learn strategies that could be used in dealing with conflict
 - students will be able to outline alternative solutions and consider the various consequences to themselves and others
 - students will reflect on actions taken
4. A Description of the Re-modelled Plan
- an outline of the new lesson teaching activities

Recently this process was used with home economics teachers and home economics student teachers who worked collaboratively to produce fourteen lessons through the Canadian International Development Agency's (CIDA) Global Classroom Initiative³².

Here are two examples:

Lesson Topic: Health for All

1. A Description of the Standard Approach:

The health unit of Planning 10 focuses on individual approaches to health and decision making related to health and safety. The lessons include analysis of health information particularly related to sexual health, drugs and alcohol, and road safety.

2. A Critique

There is an underlying assumption that students can control factors that affect their individual health. There is no element of social critique and/or understanding of the political, social, and economic influences on world health and individual health.

3. The Objectives of the Re-modelled Plan

Practical Reasoning Question: What should be done to ensure health for all?

Students will be able to:

- identify and explain the influence of poverty, environmental degradation, access to health care, population, natural disasters and war, and access to education on the health status of citizens

³¹ Sometimes this is referred to as a critical science approach, see Johnson, J. & Fedje, C. Family and Consumer Sciences Curriculum: Toward a Critical Science Approach. Gencoe/McGraw-Hill, Peoria, IL 1999. Intellectual rigour is the term used by Reynolds, Reynolds, J. Intellectual Rigour in the Home Economics Classroom, *Journal of the HEIA*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 19-23, 2002. - http://www.heia.com.au/heia_graphics/JHEIA93-3.pdf

³² As part of the agreement with CIDA these lesson plans are posted on the website of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation so they are accessible to other teachers. They are all downloadable from <http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6340>

- identify and explain the work of various organizations that work to improve the health of all world citizens
- suggest and assess actions that will work toward improving the health of all world citizens

4. A Description of the Re-modelled Plan

- students will participate in a simulated activity to become aware of the complexity of providing health care
- students will be introduced to the 12 determinants of Health from the Health Canada Website and in pairs or groups of 3 explain to class
- students will participate in a mock World Health Forum making presentations on actions that would improve the health of all world citizens

Lesson Topic: Living Simply so Others May Simply Live

1. A Description of the Standard Approach:

In many Food Studies courses, access to consumer goods and the latest kitchen tool or technology is taken for granted. Students are encouraged to test and use products and given suggestions on how to determine the best buy.

2. A Critique

Questioning the continual accumulation of kitchen tools, gadgets, and electronic equipment is not questioned. It amounts to the acceptance of a materialist culture. The long term impact of conspicuous consumption is not included.

3. The Objectives of the Re-modelled Plan

Practical Reasoning Question: What factors ought to guide consumer decision making related to kitchen tools and technology?

Students will be able to:

- assess the advantages and disadvantages of kitchen tools and technology
- determine the long term consequences of consumer demand for kitchen tools and technology and the environment and life in the countries of production
- explain the term voluntary simplicity
- make and assess recommendations for the reduction of consumer waste

4. A Description of the Re-modelled Plan

- students will examine kitchen tools and technology and determine what is appropriate in a variety of circumstances
- students will compare material possessions including kitchen gadgets, tools and technology in households around the world
- students will investigate the concept of simplicity noting the differences between developed and developing nations
- students will identify the long term consequences of the accumulation and discarding of kitchen “stuff”

In previous uses of the process, teachers have found that it becomes a way of thinking about lessons and when they commit to re-modelling in one course it often ripples out and they begin making changes in other courses. It can also inspire unit re-modelling and

year plan re-modelling³³.

Summary

Because education has a profound influence on students, it is unethical to yield to the latest pressure without question. It is my contention that without conceptual clarity and examination of the requisite underpinnings and value base of educational programs, we run the risk of promoting a particular point of view and indoctrination. When we have clear understandings, and pedagogical processes to implement them, then movements such as education for sustainable development/sustainability education can be powerful ways to move beyond the technical/instrumental in home economics education to include more interpretive, critical and moral perspectives that really assist students to address pressing problems facing families and communities and their environments.

³³ Chan, J., Fong, S., Ho, N., Isamura, D., Jensen, M., Shopland-Black, L., Smith, G., Vallis, A., & Yip, S. Bringing the world into your classroom: Teacher action research for global education. *Journal of Home Economics Education*, Vol. 34. No. 2, pp. 25-31, 1996.