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RECONCEPTUALIZATION of the HOME ECONOMICS CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE.

Peggy Doris Siyakwazi
Department of Teacher Education
UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

Background.

Home Economics was introduced in Zimbabwe as domestic science, which was basically meant to train women as domestic workers of white settlers. The main emphasis was on simple cookery skills, laundry work, general cleanliness, cleaning of the house and basic mending skills. Practical skills were emphasized at the expense of the theory behind them. According to the Kerr Commission report of 1962:50

Domestic Science has tended to concentrate on skills rather than on the studies behind them and of which the skills are the practical expression. In this way, a lot of genuine interest in new approach to familiar situations could be lost and activities often become repetitious and unrelated to realities of life.

In the 1927 Hadfield Commission report, the emphasis was on educating the majority of Africans at primary school level to give them basic skills as better domestic servants of whites. The scientific development of home economics had humble beginnings. The history of home economics teaching includes efforts from church institutions such as Usher, Morgenster and Monte Cassino. According to interviews with Mrs Moyo October 10, 1994 and Mrs Gambiza June 4, 1994, the curriculum of mission schools and colleges lacked depth and prepared women for domestic services. The government's input came with the opening of a one-year course at Goromonzi secondary school. Later, came the T2B course at Mutare Teacher's college. This became popular in the late fifties until as late as 1973. Adjustments in teacher training programmes necessitated the phasing out of the T1 course at Gweru Teacher's college and transplanting of the T2 programme under the then Division of African Education, which operated as a two-year skills programme plus one year of education. In both secondary schools and teachers' colleges, the home economics curriculum follows a similar subject combination, such as food and nutrition, home management, fashion and fabrics and in some cases mothercraft. These subjects are artificially treated because the content is not deep in penetration and the curriculum which is general for the teachers. In addition, the text books used are not relevant to our situation. As a result, the teachers tend to use them as they are without any adaptation to suit the situation. Some of the equipment is in short supply and can only be used in urban secondary schools, as it is not suitable for rural school use. This presents problems because some of the teachers trained using the urban machines

cannot function effectively in rural schools. Such a situation forces people to ask how relevant the curriculum is to the present situation in Zimbabwe.

Relevance of the Home Economics Curriculum in Zimbabwe

Educational relevance to Skeel and Hagen, (1971) means school experience that should change the lives of students. In other words, the student must see the relationship between what is learnt in school and life experiences. This is also supported by Curle (1973) who suggests that there should be a link between the educational system and the community which the student is operating from. Busshoff et al (1981) sees relevance as a choice of objectives and the preparation of the curricula therefore, bringing education closer to aspects that matter to life, the natural and human environment, and the world of work fitting the individual to his environment.

It is very clear that the three authors are emphasizing the relationship between school and life situation. Brown (1980) discusses the importance of relevance in that the information giver tries to inject his/her own historical, cultural perspective and imposes his/her own system of values. Change in perspective and values regarding food for example, has wider repercussions than changes in the production of intake of food. The end result is that this imposition affects values, self and culture.

Relevance to Bruner (1973:114) has two meanings:

The first is what is taught should have some bearings on the grievous problems facing the world, the solutions of which may affect our survival as a species. This is social relevance. Then there is personal relevance. What is to be taught should be self-rewarding by some existential criterion of being "real" or "exciting" or "meaningful." The two kinds of relevance are not necessarily the same.

TERC (1986) was set up to review the curriculum in teachers' colleges in order to make it practical and relevant. The committee's emphasis was on national goals of education based on the Philosophy of Education. According to the philosophy;

- . theory should be combined with practice.
- . critical thinking capacity and problem solving skills should be developed in students.
- . research competence and technological understanding should be promoted, and
- . societal values should be recognized, explained and fostered.

As Professor Kamba, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe stated:

Our educational institutions must reflect the changes in our ideological thinking. If in our ideology we acknowledge that each Zimbabwean has a contribution to make to the socio-political development of our country, then we as educators must work out curricula guidelines that ensure that each Zimbabwean is given the best training to fulfill his/her task.

In this connection, Teacher Education and other Home Economic programmes should be geared to inform, educate and alleviate some of the problems each individual in society may experience.

The NEED for RECONCEPTUALIZATION.

One of the distinguished American educator and philosopher, John Dewey, (1974:499) said: "Democracy has to be born a new every generation and education is the midwife." This is a statement that addresses itself to the need for re-examining the curricula for relevance to the contemporary society.

It is generally accepted in curriculum design and implementation that curricula is dynamic and has a life span of a few years. In other words, revisiting curricula for the subject area is with the understanding that home economics must be born anew.

Many curricula are originally planned with a guiding idea of reconceptualizing them. He says, as curricula are actually executed, as they grow and change, they often lose their original form and suffer a relapse into a certain shapelessness. It is not amiss to urge that actual curricula be re-examined with an eye to the issues of continuity and development.

The concept "reconceptualization" involves a critical re-examination of what has been in existence in an effort to improve or make changes. In other words, the process of reconceptualization can provide the means for professionals from a particular society to re-evaluate local materials and cultural patterns to determine if and where they fit in home economics programmes. The process is necessary as home economic educators strive to rethink about their involvement and impact in a contemporary society.

Perhaps Toffler (1963:413-18) was on target when he said:

As for curriculum, the councils of the future, instead of assuming that every subject taught today is taught for a reason,

should be included in a required curriculum unless it can be strongly justified in terms of the future. If this means scrapping a substantial part of the formal curriculum, so it be.

Reconceptualizing a profession requires a thorough analysis of what exists, identification of the desired goals and determining the required changes. Brown (1984:54) said that "A profession does not change its mission whimsically but seeks to interpret it more adequately." It is important that a profession requires a formulation of a conceptual framework to guide the process. All various components that need change should be part of the framework.

STRATEGIES OF RECONCEPTUALIZATION.

It is important to reflect own perceptions of the definitions and mission statement of the profession. This would be done through dialogue and consideration of specific cultural contexts. There should be clear understanding of the context of programme existence.

When the mission is defined, examination of every aspect of home economic programmes to determine its relevance to the context should be done.

How should it be done? According to Murray (1990:65), the following steps would be important:

- a) develop and adopt a mission statement, philosophy and goals relevant to home economic educators.
- b) reorient the content and approaches in teaching home economics discipline at all levels of education based on:
 - (i) cultural values of the society;
 - (ii) indigenous knowledge relevant to the contemporary living;
 - (iii) research should be done and information used as a basis for planning programmes. The field lacks its own literature which could be used as the basis for programmes to operate at all levels.
- c) identify needs and priorities of families and individuals in the society.
- d) publicize the history, development and status of home economics profession within communities so that it is better known and understood by members of the wider society.
- e) critically examine and promote the integrative nature of home economics including indigenous knowledge.
- f) introduce problem-solving approaches and critical thinking in the teaching and learning of home economics.
- g) encourage participation of both women and men.
- h) expose students to appropriate practical skills relevant to the field of study.

- i) give students relevant technological orientations.

Murray's suggested process in reconceptualization agrees with the major thesis of this paper. The thesis emphasizes on the relevance of home economic programmes as they relate to cultural needs of the people. In other words, the thesis emphasizes the importance of an African definition and mission of home economics to serve the needs of individuals and families in society. In addition, the thesis calls for programmes that accommodate both traditional and modern methods of handling home economics.

A MODEL FOR RECONCEPTUALIZING HOME ECONOMICS CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION.

Prehm and Murray, (1989) in a conceptual framework for redefining home economics programmes identify global issues, perspectives from supporting disciplines, knowledge from home economics, systems of action. A conceptual framework is a guide which defines boundaries, content, processes and goals of a field of study. It helps to clarify and focus on relevant issues.

Figure 1

A conceptual framework for redefining home economics programme. Home Economics: An interdisciplinary programme.

Global Issues	Perspective from supporting disciplines	Knowledge from home economics	Integrating Perspective from home economics	Systems of action	Focus	Mission
Agriculture						
Food	Ecological	Family Studies	Management	Technical	Practical problems of individual and households	Optimal quality of life for individual families
Environment	Economic	Human Development	Development			
Population	Aesthetic	Textiles and Apparel	Values Problem Solving	Interpretive	Households	
Economics	Biological/physiological	Housing/art/design	Values reasoning	Critical		emancipatory
Energy	Psychological Sociological	Foods and Nutrition	Systems perspective			
Technology	Philosophical/Moral	Resource Management/consumer studies				
Governance	Historical/Cultural					

Source: E. Murray and M. Prehm, 1989 *Redefining the Role of Home Economics in development: a rationale and conceptual framework*. Consultancy report to ESHW (FAO) Rome (unpublished).

The first screen represents global issues which impact on all people. Seven issues identified impact on status and well-beings of individuals and families.

The second screen simply identifies home economic supporting disciplines. These are important as a basis for research and selecting relevant content in home economics.

The third screen represents some of the home economic subjects. What is important is to integrate knowledge from the closely related areas.

Vincenti (1986:3) discusses the purpose of integrative thinking as follows:

.....is to understand a concept by studying relationships, connections, and meanings from relevant disciplines. In home economics, its ultimate purpose would be to take action, or help clients or students take action which is both rationally and morally justifiable in solving a problem or improving a condition related to family, home, or personal living.

The fourth screen looks at integrating perspectives of home economics. Such an integrated approach assist students to see that:

Social change takes place more like the building of a web than the building of a chain. Many different casual strands cross and recross to form intricate designs in which each element has an independent role to play to some extent. But this does not mean that all of the strands are of equal size or carry equal weight; nor does it mean that the web has no centre or that it lacks overall structure. Harris (1981:12)

The fifth screen addresses itself to three systems of action as identified by Prehm and Murray namely; Technical, Interpretive and Critical Emancipatory. Technical action deals with knowledge and skills of very specific nature. In other words, it deals with the how to concerns of the families. The interpretative system of action is used to develop personal or group meanings toward the development of clearer communication. The critical emancipatory system of action is concerned with examining the forces which enhance or limit human development. The processes of critical reasoning, values reasoning, and reflective thought are used to determining which courses of action can transform society.

It should be noted that the three systems of action are interdependent. What is left is for home economists to choose which system or, combination of all three in seeking better solution to individual and family problems.

Screen six identifies practical problems of individuals and families. The approach addresses itself to culturally appropriate ways.

The last aspect of the conceptual framework addresses itself to the mission which is optimum quality of life for individuals and families.

Conclusion.

Home economics needs to consider the screens as discussed earlier on however, in reconceptualizing the curriculum, it should be noted that there is need to suit the requirements of a particular group of people and its society because these problems impact people differently.

Home economics in Zimbabwe therefore requires a new departure to cater for concerns of people and the realities of everyday living. The curriculum should be seen to integrate the life situations of the school and that of the home and community. It must be a curriculum that assists learners to deal with the complicated aspects of life.

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