

# **Integrating Development Education/Education for Sustainable Development into the teaching of Home Economics with a particular focus on ethical and ecological consumerism**

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## **Introduction**

Home Economics is a multi-disciplinary subject composed of three core areas of study: Food Studies; Family Resource Management; and Textiles, Fashion and Design. It focuses on the fundamental concerns of individuals and families at societal and global level. Home Economics develops core knowledge, skills and attitudes through active methodologies and engages students in the development of critical thinking, social responsibility and participatory action. The holistic and integrative approach of Home Economics means the subject is ideally placed to incorporate a wide range of sustainable development principles. The ability to draw from such disciplinary diversity is a strength of the Home Economics profession and demonstrates the important role the discipline can play in stewarding the well-being of future generations.

## **Research Aims and Objectives**

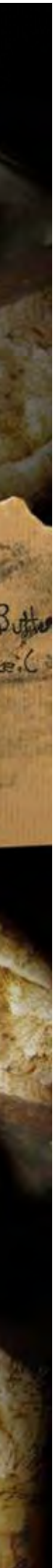
This paper documents baseline findings from a research project funded by the Ubuntu Network and Irish Aid. This project endeavours to reorient Home Economics teacher education in order to address ESD themes. It aims to challenge assumptions, philosophies and frameworks in order to engage in critical discourse of current accepted practice regarding the integration of ESD in teacher education.

## **Research Context**

St. Angela's College, Sligo is the only third level provider of Home Economics teacher education in Ireland. The Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) Home Economics degree is a professional and academic programme designed to provide participants with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to effectively teach Home Economics and their chosen elective. This research was conducted with first year (B.Ed 1) pre-service teachers, all of whom were female, during the academic term 2006/2007.

## **Research Methodology**

Action research was the chosen methodology as it facilitated the initial examination of professional practice in relation to the teaching of ESD on the B.Ed programme and subsequently provoked change in the teaching and learning towards ESD themes. It was essential that



ESD was not seen as a separate entity but fully integrated within the teaching of the discipline Home Economics.

The initial stage of the research project was reconnaissance which involved a questionnaire being distributed to pre-service teachers. A detailed review of the modules on the B.Ed programme also took place. As a result of these findings an educational intervention was developed and implemented. Post intervention the questionnaire was redistributed to pre-service teachers. Additionally, through an experiential process, students completed written reflections detailing their experiences, attitudes, feelings and comments towards sustainable issues.

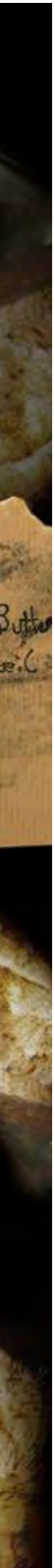
### **Research Process**

Initially, in order to ascertain the current level of integration of ESD themes on the B.Ed programme, a systemic and detailed analysis of the B.Ed 1 modules took place. An audit took place of the possible reorientation of the three core areas of Home Economics on the B.Ed 1 programme in order to integrate the themes and goals of sustainable development.

Pre-intervention, a questionnaire was distributed to the B.Ed 1 pre-service teachers of the 2006/2007 academic year. Participants were asked to rate their awareness, attitudes and behavioural patterns

in relation to ethical and ecological consumerism in response to a number of statements in order to ascertain incoming positions. This data was then analysed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 14.0. The results were employed to support the development of a cross curricular education intervention in the core areas: Food Studies; Family Resource Management; and Textiles, Fashion and Design.

Food Studies is a core element of Home Economics and Year 1 students undertake two sub modules; 'Nutrition, Diet and Health' and 'Food Preparation and Culinary Skills'. The Food Studies course is designed to develop an understanding of nutrition and diet as they relate to good health, consumer evaluation of food commodities, food constituents and core culinary skills (St. Angela's College, 2008). Students received lecture input in relation to ethical and ecological food systems and studied the impact of their purchases from a sustainable perspective. Subsequently, students planned and executed an ethical and ecological cookery session using products that were locally sourced, organic where possible and Fair Trade. A tasting session involved a comparative sensory analysis of various Fair Trade and organic products.



**Figure 5 - Food Studies**



Textiles, Fashion and Design in B.Ed 1 allows students to explore textiles as a renewable resource and introduces the use of textiles in the home and the built environment. It exposed students to ethical and eco-friendly consumerism in relation to textiles and clothing. The module coursework assignment was reoriented to require an emphasis on eco-friendly and ethical consumerism (see samples in Figure 6). To meet the design brief students employed the use of natural and organic fabrics and dyes and integrated recycled fabrics and notions into their textile products where possible.

**Figure 7 - Textiles, Fashion and Design**



**Figure 6 - Fairtrade and organic products**



Family Resource Management (FRM) is a core area of study within the discipline of Home Economics. It acknowledges the relationship between the family system and the environment and is based on the ecological systems perspective. FRM endeavours to facilitate and empower individuals and families to make wise and sustainable choices and decisions which can lead to an improvement in the quality of life.



As part of the module students participated in lectures (which incorporated active learning methodologies) on energy conservation, sustainable living, the green home, eco-cleaning agents and energy efficient choice of appliances. A field trip was organised to Rockfield Ecological Estate, Mullingar, which allowed students to experience sustainable living first hand. Students had an organic lunch and partook in craft workshops with sustainable materials such as weaving with natural dyed yarn from the farm.

**Figure 8 - Field trip to Rockfield Ecological Estate, Mullingar**



**Figure 9 - Weaving with natural dyed yarn**



Post-intervention, the questionnaire was redistributed to the pre-service teachers in order to establish any development regarding knowledge, attitudes and behavioural patterns of participants. Through a highly experiential process participants were afforded the opportunity to consider their own values and attitudes towards sustainable issues. A celebratory end of year organic and Fair Trade lunch for project participants took place. Participants were presented with a certificate of participation and students' work was displayed.

**Figure 10 - Samples of students' work**



**Figure 11 - A Sustainable Celebration**



The intervention involved a range of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary activities and coursework with a focus on sustainable development issues.

### **Evidence from this research**

Awareness in relation to ethical and ecological consumerism was low pre-intervention as evidenced by initial comments from the students. Participants could identify the value of integrating sustainable development issues, but this was not translated into action.



“ I hope to become more aware and hopefully help in making a difference by passing it on to future pupils

“ I would love to know about ethical and eco-friendly consumerism....  
“ I would think more about what products I buy... help me to make better choices as a consumer

Findings post-intervention highlighted the benefits of reorienting teacher education. Comments from participants showed an increase in attitude and behaviour towards sustainable themes:

“ I feel much more informed than before the project... I know more about sustainability, ethical and eco-friendly consumerism, which will help me make wise choices when shopping

“ I learned a lot about ethical and eco-friendly consumerism which is knowledge for life

Notably, pre-service teachers have begun to consider the impact of future oriented sustainable consumption. The shift in attitude towards sustainable development issues is evident from comments such as:

“ I feel it [the project] was a worthwhile experience. I can implement what I have learned in my teaching and influence my students, hopefully

“ I feel my knowledge is valuable in both my life and in my future teaching”

Emerging themes from this study demonstrate the benefits of reorienting Home Economics teacher education as having a positive influence on pre-service teachers’ attitudes, awareness and behaviour towards ESD themes.

Undoubtedly education has a profound influence and it is clear from this research that an examination of the requisite underpinnings and value base of Home Economics programmes is worthwhile in supporting a move beyond the technical towards an education that is more interpretive, critical and that really assists students to address pressing problems facing families, communities and their environments. This action research project prompted a process of reflection and action towards the reorientation of programmes within the Home Economics Department in St. Angela's College. It is an exemplar of the change that is possible in higher education programmes and demonstrates both the opportunities and challenges of reorienting towards participatory, process and solution oriented methodologies. An audit of Year One modules to emphasise an interdisciplinary approach to integrating SD themes was undertaken. Delivery of this programme utilises a constructivist and interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. Year Four of the programme was also reoriented to focus on three core themes of sustainability,



globalisation and interculturalism, with some students opting to research these issues further for their undergraduate dissertation. In general there is a greater awareness and engagement among all staff of SD issues. The Home Economics Department are also involved (in a wider societal context) in informing Irish national policy, for example a submission to inform the National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development.

## Conclusion

Quality education can be a key agent of change; initiating, promoting and achieving sustainable development. This study demonstrates the value of implementing methodologies in teacher education which facilitate critical and reflective thinking and which develop students' moral perspectives. Such curriculum innovations are proven to be a powerful vehicle for the transmission of sustainable development issues and can have a significant effect on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of pre-service teachers. These teachers have in turn an influential role to play in forming attitudes and values which are at the core of Education for Sustainable Development in future generations.

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