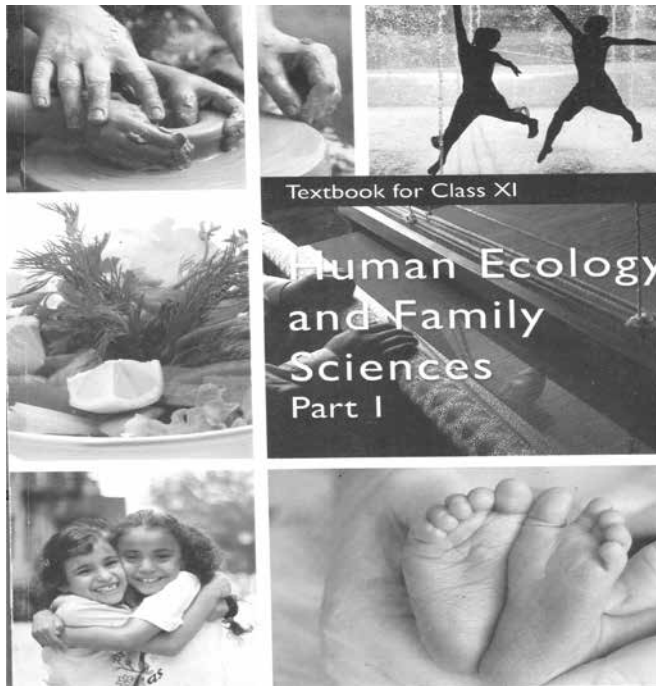

REPORTAGE

Human Ecology and Family Sciences: NCERT's Initiative towards an Innovative Curriculum—A Brief Report

SUSHMA JAIRETH*



Introduction

Human Ecology and Family Sciences (HEFS) will certainly be remembered as an innovative curriculum by NCERT for its initiative in recasting the subject

of Home-Science in modern and contemporary perspectives.

Home Science as a discipline has always had the distinction of having gender bias and gender stereotyping. The

*Professor, Department of Women's Studies, NCERT, New Delhi-110016.

conventionally defined subject of Home Science lacked the so called women's perspective in its very title, content and methodology. "Home-Science syndrome" as mentioned by Hansa Mehta in her report of the committee on Differentiation of Curricula between Boys and Girls (1962-64) says it all.

In the democratic and socialistic pattern of society which we visualise,



Nature Walk



Painting

education will be related to capacities, aptitudes and interest which are not strictly related to sex. There would, therefore, be no need in such a society to differentiate curricula on the basis of sex. In the transitional phase in which we are at present certain psychological

difference between men and women as well as certain divisions of social functions based on them will have to be accepted as a matter of fact and as a practical basis for building up the curricula for boys and girls. While doing so, however, care should be taken to see that values and attitudes which are essential in the long run are increasingly built up in men and women and that no step is taken which will tend to perpetuate or intensify the existing differences (Hansa Mehta Committee report 1962-64).

As a discipline the subject of Home Science needed a facelift which was long overdue due to the concerns of professional outlook, gender identity and gender dignity. These concerns have been very effectively taken up in the position paper of Focus Group on Gender Issues in education (2006). NCERT as an apex body took the responsibility of reflecting the radical change in this discipline of Home Science for creating a new system of knowledge as has been done in other subjects. The curriculum of Human Ecology and Family Sciences, formerly known as Home Science, has been reframed adhering to the principles and guidelines of National Curriculum Framework-2005. The new nomenclature is based on the uniqueness and professionalism of the course, one that reflects gender equality and would attract both boys and girls towards the discipline. The curriculum of Human Ecology and Family Sciences has attempted to break away from the conventional framework of the discipline of Home Science in significant ways. In the new conceptualisation the

boundaries between different areas of the subject have been dissolved. This has been done to enable students to develop a holistic understanding of life in the home and society.

A special effort has been made in making the curriculum appropriate for both boys and girls, living in different



AutoCAD Drawing of Kitchen



AutoCAD Drawing of Living Room



AutoCAD Drawing of Master Bedroom

contexts, including those who are homeless. It has been ensured that all the units address, in their content, the significant principles of equity, equality and inclusiveness. Sensitivity, understanding and critical analysis of issues of gender, diversity, plurality, inclusiveness, sociocultural heritage and indigenous knowledge as they impinge on quality of life of individuals and families have been interwoven through the entire course. The novel approach has made concerted efforts to integrate learning at school by building bridges with other subjects in the sciences and social sciences. The academic input in the new curriculum adequately reflects the interdisciplinary bridges and linkages with a strong component of vocationalisation as highlighted in the position paper of Focus Group on Work Education (2007).

Significant Innovations

The following innovations get reflected



Developing entrepreneurial skills

in the curriculum:

- The syllabus has been planned in a holistic fashion and not in the form of the existing areas of specialisation in Home Science,

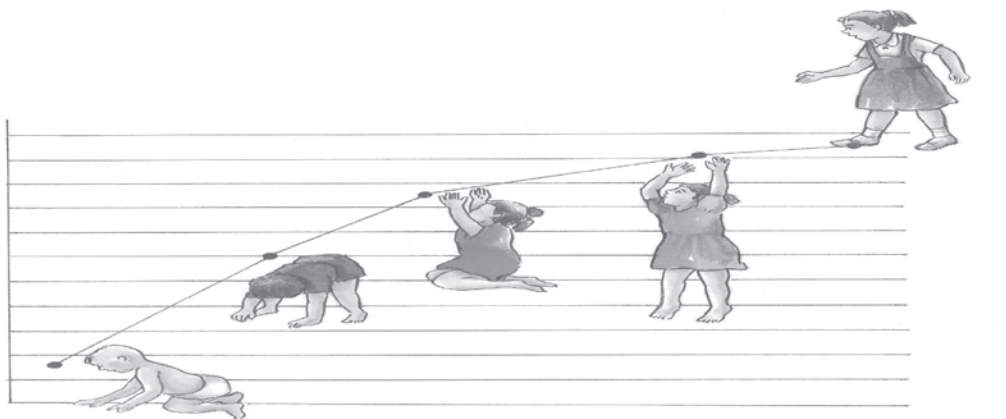
namely, Food Science and Nutrition; Human Development/Child Development; Textile Science and Apparel Designing; Extension, Education and Communication; and Resource Management and Consumer Science.

- The course has been evolved from the standpoint of the individual self, the adolescent, which would strengthen students' identification with the course. With the aim to enhance quality of life of individuals and families, the course has been focused on self in family in the micro context and society in the macro context.
- A two-fold perspective has been incorporated—one focusing on the life stages (childhood, adolescence and adulthood) and the other focusing on the developing self in context of family and society. The students, both boys and girls, would thus be able to get a retrospective as well as a prospective understanding of

human development in context.

In view of the above, therefore, two papers for classes XI and XII respectively have been conceptualised.

- Paper I for Class XI focuses on self and family, which will enable students to understand development during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The needs, challenges and concerns of each stage of development have been addressed along with the activities and resources necessary to enhance one's own and family's quality of life. The 'self and family' and the 'home' are focal points for understanding the dynamics of individual lives and social interaction. The rationale for using this approach will enable the adolescent student to understand herself/himself in the context of the family, which in turn is nested within the wider Indian socio cultural milieu.
- The different units in Class XI textbook have been structured



AutoCAD Drawing of Master Bedroom



Skills for Social Sensitivity

along the life stages—childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Relevant elements from each area of specialisation (of Home Science) pertaining to ‘self’ and ‘other’ have been interwoven in each unit in the form of needs, challenges, concerns and resources.

- Paper II for Class XII focuses on the larger social context and encompasses issues of career and social and public responsibility as well as rights. This has strengthened the professional character of the course and enhanced its relevance to students’ needs during their life stage. The needs, strengths and challenges of this phase of life

have been addressed along with mechanisms to access resources with the ultimate goal to improve quality of life.

- The emphasis for class XII is on ‘work and careers’ through the



Craft of *kantha* Embroidery

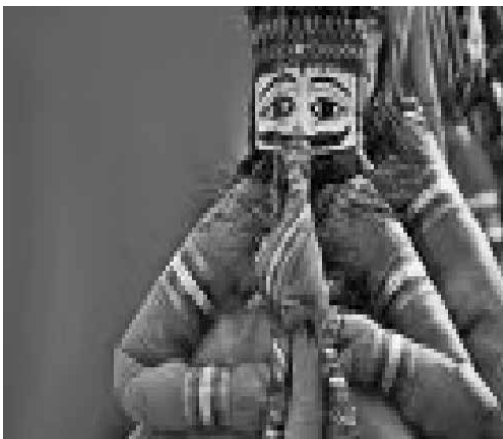
life-span. The textbook has taken a holistic approach to address the pertinent issues related to work, employment and careers, keeping quality of life in perspective, individually and collectively. In this context, work is perceived as essential human activity that contributes to the development and sustenance of individuals, families and society. Its value is not linked only to its economic ramifications. The student will be helped to explore the significance of work, jobs and careers and their interrelationship. To understand this concept, the student will be imparted life skills and work skills in the respective areas of HEFS. This will facilitate the acquisition of basic skills and orientation

to advanced professional skills needed for specialisation in the selected fields discussed in the course. It is significant that these skills will be useful for the student in her/his personal—social life, as well as serve as a springboard for pursuing a career in the future.

- The practicals have an innovative and contemporary character



Warli Painting of Maharashtra

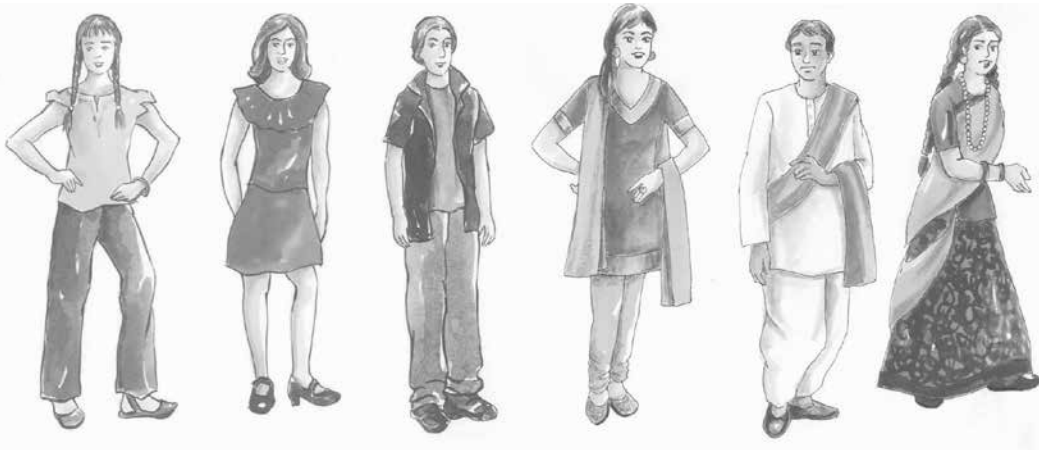


Puppetry Craft

and reflect the utilisation of new technology and applications that would strengthen critical engagement with the lived realities of people. The practicals have been designed to enable learners to gain insights and also have a bird's eye view of the tasks and challenges inherent in the various professional careers and avenues. Considerable emphasis is laid on 'construction of knowledge' through field exposure and first-hand experiences. The exercises and projects would help to encourage critical thinking, develop analytical and writing skills and eventually inculcate the 'passion to learn'. Many insights and 'seeds' of information have been 'sown'.

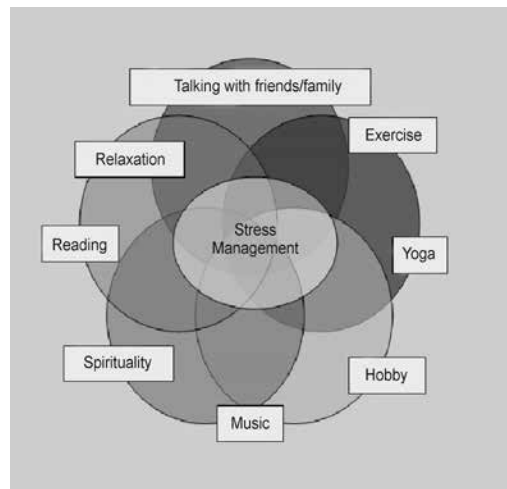
- The first unit /chapter is focused on life skills for livelihood, attitudes to work, work challenges, creativity, performance and productivity, social responsibility and volunteerism. The other chapters/units describe the five salient domains of HEFS. Within each domain, there are several fields that offer ample professional opportunities and occupational avenues. The syllabus and textbook attempt to bring to focus the scope and significance of each domain in the present day scenario, with inputs on knowledge and skills to be acquired and honed in order to be a professional.

The possibilities of teaching and research careers is ever present at



Apparel Designs for adolescents

all levels of education, be it at school or college or university. To the professionals in the specialisation of Food and Nutrition, the spectrum of opportunities is wide ranging from the service sector as dietitians, health care consultants/counselors to the food industry, in catering and food service management/institutional management, in accordance with the thrust of their educational inputs and acquired interests, skills and competencies. For professionals in Human Development and Family Studies, job opportunities range from being at several cadres of functionaries in social development organisations for children, adolescents, women and families, in early childhood care and education programmes to being professionals in counseling settings at various levels and age groups. Those trained in Fabric and Apparel find their future careers in textile design, textile or fashion or garment industry, and entrepreneurship.



Simple Techniques to Cope with Stress

Conclusion

Overall, various techniques of pedagogy in pursuing the course make a part and parcel of the new curriculum. Students and teachers in partnership can explore, think about, discover and discuss a variety of topics and issues. Further learning is encouraged

through selected exercises and review questions at the end of each unit. Some of the issues of current concern that have been addressed could not only be thought-provoking, but also foster sensitivity and social responsibility in the users of the textbooks of HEFS. Exercises in understanding region-specific opportunities and available resources have been included to encourage students to understand, appraise and appreciate their own socio cultural ethos and locales.

This deliberate departure from the earlier convention is to dispel the misconception about the discipline being limited in focus and scope to domestic science and art and craft. It is also to create an interest in the field for its varied, multidisciplinary strengths, both in terms of quality education and potential for professional avenues.

Conscious effort has been made to move away from stereotyped gender roles thus making the experiences more inclusive and meaningful for both boys and girls.

REFERENCES

- Report of the Committee on Differentiation of Curricula between Boys and Girls, Chaired by Hansa Mehta (1962-64)
- NCERT. *National Curriculum Framework* 2005. NCERT, New Delhi
- ____ 2006. *Gender Issues in Education: Focus Group*, NCERT, New Delhi
- ____ 2007. *Work and Education: Focus Group Paper 2007*, NCERT
- ____ 2007. *Minutes of the Home Science Syllabus Meeting held at NIE, NCERT on 20th December, 2007*
- ____ 2008. *Human Ecology and Family Sciences: Syllabus for Classes XI & XII as approved by NMC on 4th April, 2008*, NCERT
- ____ 2009. *Human Ecology and Family Sciences Parts I & II: Textbook for Class XI*. NCERT, New Delhi
- ____ 2011. *Minutes of the One Day National Review Committee Meeting for the Review of HEFS Class XII Textbook held at NIE, NCERT on 22nd March, 2011*
- ____ 2011. *Human Ecology and Family Sciences: Manuscript of Textbook for Class XII*, NCERT, New Delhi