

Food in Relation to Sustainable Development Expressed in Swedish Syllabuses of Home and Consumer Studies: At Present and Past

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Abstract

Little is known what the term sustainable development entails in relation to the school subject of home and consumer studies and the subject's knowledge area of food. The aim is to illustrate how food is expressed in national syllabuses of home and consumer studies at present and in the past, and its operationalization into sustainable development. Using qualitative content analysis, the results show three themes: (a) maintenance of the family and household, (b) maintenance of the earth's resources and (c) maintenance of the future generations. The first theme is characterized by concrete tangible judgements based on experiences of family members and is predominant in earlier syllabuses. The second and third themes are predominant in later syllabuses and show a movement into complex and abstract contemplations of global ecological, social and economic conditions for the purchase of food. The presentation of food in relation to sustainable development has changed over the years, consequently demonstrating the didactic challenge of home and consumer studies.

Keywords: Food consumption, home and consumer studies, home economics, sustainable development, syllabus

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INTRODUCTION

The meaning of the term sustainable development is not self-evident, and a spectrum of definitions and interpretations are presented in both national and international contexts (see, e.g., Mebratu, 1998; Ross, 2009). Nonetheless, the term has, over the past 20 years, become increasingly accepted as a guiding concept for political parties, companies, organizations, agencies, educational settings and so forth (Bonnett, 2007; Johannesson et al., 2011). The most quoted definition of sustainable development was introduced in the World Commission report 'Our Common Future', which described it as 'a development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The vagueness of this definition has led to many alternative interpretations that often are tailored to fit the user's specific interests. The practice of redefining the meaning of sustainable development to suit an adaptable purpose has been widely criticized by various researchers since it can lead to conceptual flaws (Blewitt & Cullingford, 2004; Bonnett, 2007; Lee, Holland, & McNeill, 2000; Mebratu, 1998). Others, however, believe that every attempt at redefining sustainable development is an important part of an ongoing dialogue that only strengthens the applicability of the term (Lee et al., 2000; Robert, Parris, & Leiserowitz, 2005). Regardless of the definition, there seems to be a consensus that sustainable development must be conceptualized at the very least in terms of three dimensions: ecological, economic and social (Summers, Childs, & Corney, 2005, p. 629).

With these ecological, economic and social dimensions as pillars, and with public education as one of the main action orientations towards sustainable development, the United Nations declared the years 2005–2014 as 'the decade of education for sustainable development' in December, 2002. This declaration called upon governments worldwide to strengthen their efforts to integrate sustainable development in teaching at all levels of education (Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2008). Since then, several researchers have pointed out the importance of studying the effects of this declaration, especially the implementation of education for sustainable development in formal education (Bagoly-Simó, 2013; Tilbury, 2009; Wals, 2009).

In Sweden, the requests of this declaration were addressed by adopting decisions that emphasize sustainable development in school law, the national curriculum¹ and subject syllabuses.² The current national curriculum in Sweden states that 'all teaching should illuminate how the functions of society and our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create sustainable development' (National Agency for Education, 2011b, p. 12). This statement addresses not only sustainable development in relation to the function of society and the way we work, but also in relation to how we live our everyday lives.

EDUCATION ABOUT EVERYDAY LIFE

The focus of the Swedish school subject 'home and consumer studies' is education about everyday life in the home and in the family. The international term for this

field of study is home economics, and it is taught in many countries around the world. The name and scope of this interdisciplinary field can vary by time and place, yet common to all versions is a link to everyday life at home and to home-related activities (Hjälmeskog, 2000). In Sweden, home and consumer studies is mandatory for all pupils ranging from age 7 to 16, for a total of 118 hours over nine years of compulsory schooling. The subject was introduced as a girls' subject during the nineteenth century, partly to resolve social problems connected to poverty and malnutrition amongst working-class citizens, since the Swedish government believed that the working class needed to learn to eat sensible food to cope at work (Hirdman, 1983; Hjälmeskog, 2000; Johansson, 1987). Food³ has thus been a central knowledge area to the discipline since its introduction, and remains so.

Knowledge areas such as textiles, clothing, family relations, interior design and childcare are all common topics in the international field of home economics (Darling, 1995), but are no longer included in the Swedish iteration of the subject. Today, the Swedish subject of home and consumer studies has, according to its national syllabus, three central knowledge areas: (a) food, meals and health; (b) consumption and personal finances; and (c) environment and lifestyle. The subject also includes three central subject perspectives that should permeate all teaching, namely, (a) health, (b) economy⁴ and (c) environment. These knowledge areas and subject perspectives are the basis for a learning process where thinking, sensory experiences and actions are interlinked in situations that involve preparing food, creating meals and other tasks related to everyday life at home (National Agency for Education, 2011a, 2011b).

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE TERM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The term sustainable development was introduced for the first time in the national home and consumer studies syllabus in 2011 (National Agency for Education, 2011a). The motivation for its introduction was to adapt the syllabus to better correspond with the overall national curriculum, which has been pointing to sustainable development as a vision in Swedish education since 1994. Adapting the syllabus text to incorporate sustainable development has, among other things, led to the subject aim: 'Pupils should be given opportunities to develop their ability to [...] assess choices and actions in the home and as a consumer, and from the perspective of sustainable development' (National Agency for Education, 2011b, p. 43). This revision has also led to the expiry of the former term 'resource management', which was defined as management of both human, economic and other material resources and natural resources (National Agency for Education, 1994, 2000b). The syllabus does not, however, clearly articulate what the newly introduced 'perspective of sustainable development' entails in regard to home and consumer studies. The link between sustainable development and home and consumer studies is, in the commentary material of the national syllabus (National Agency for Education, 2011a), expressed somewhat throughout the three subject-specific perspectives of health, economy and environment, where health is expressed as an aspect of the social dimension, environment as an aspect of the ecological dimension and economy as an aspect of the economic dimension of sustainable development. However, this link between

sustainable development and home and consumer studies is expressed on a highly general level, leaving out a more concrete understanding of what this could entail in the various knowledge areas practised in the subject, such as its substantial knowledge area around food. The lack of a unified and clear description of this linkage may lead to difficulties in implementing a shared view on sustainable development in the teaching practice, as well as difficulties in achieving the same goal and knowledge requirements of the syllabus.

In order to gain better understanding of what food and sustainable development could entail for home and consumer studies, the study of historical ways of describing food education bears particular interest, which is why a retrospective analysis has been chosen for the present study.

The aim of the study is to illustrate how the knowledge area of food is expressed in current and past Swedish syllabuses of home and consumer studies⁵ in relation to the subject-specific perspectives of health, economy and environment, and their operationalization into sustainable development.

The specific research questions are:

1. What aspects of health, economy and environment in relation to food are expressed in home and consumer studies syllabuses?
2. What differences and similarities can be found over time in and between these aspects, and how could the expressions of food be operationalized into sustainable development?

METHOD

Design

In order to gain an understanding of what education about food in relation to health, economy and environment entails in home and consumer studies, a qualitative text analysis of national syllabuses was chosen. It has been argued that historical documents bear witness to past events, providing background information as well as context within the chosen field of study (Bowen, 2009; Issitt, 2004). This is how the former national syllabuses will be viewed in this article.

According to Goodlad (1979), the study of curricula can be approached from at least three different analytical angles: substantive, socio-political and technical-professional. Through Goodlad's perspective, this study uses the substantive angle to analyze formal curricula, or in this case, formal syllabuses, that is, written documents that are officially approved by the state, to study goals, subject matter, materials and the like, which usually point to beliefs, values and attitudes that society wishes the young to acquire (Goodlad, 1979; Quennerstedt, 2008). This analysis thus focuses on *what* is expressed in the syllabuses, not *why* this content was chosen.

Selected Texts

The selected texts to be analyzed consist of all six national syllabuses published between 1962 and 2011. The starting point of the 1962 syllabus was chosen for

Table 1 Selected Syllabuses that were Analyzed to Illustrate How the Knowledge Area of Food is Expressed in Relation to the Subject-specific Perspectives of Health, Economy and Environment, and their Operationalization to Sustainable Development

Year	Name of Subject at the Time	Type of Document	Included in N.Curr:
1962	Home Economics	1. National Syllabus	Lgr 62
1969	Home Economics	2. National Syllabus 3. Commentary Material	Lgr 69
1980	Home Economics	4. National Syllabus	Lgr 80
1994	Home Economics	5. National Syllabus	Lpo 94
2000	Home and Consumer Studies	6. National Syllabus 7. Commentary Material	Lpo 94
2011	Home and Consumer Studies	8. National Syllabus 9. Commentary Material	Lgr 11

Source: Authors' own.

two reasons: (a) the introduction of the new Swedish nine-year compulsory schooling and (b) the introduction of home and consumer studies as a mandatory subject for all Swedish pupils, both boys and girls. These two frame factors apply to all six selected syllabuses. The names of the analyzed documents are based on Swedish abbreviations such as Lgr 11 or Lpo 94 (Table 1). For convenience, this article will henceforth ascribe the abbreviation N.Syll when referring to the text of a national syllabus and N.Curr when referring to an overall national curriculum, followed by the year of implementation. The documents analyzed are thus: N.Syll -62, -69, -80, -94, -00 and -11, as well as three commentary materials that support the assessment of knowledge requirements in each subject, available for N.Syll -69, -00 and -11 (National Agency for Education, 1962, 1969a, 1969b, 1980, 1994, 2000a, 2000b, 2011a, 2011b).

DATA ANALYSIS

The syllabuses were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The three subject-specific perspectives of health, economy and environment served as the initial domains of the analysis. A domain is a specific issue of the text that forms a rough structure for the analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

The material was read through several times to obtain a general idea of the content. The focus during the initial readings was concentrated on expressions of food in relation to the three domains of interest. All text about food was extracted from the syllabuses and the available commentary materials, and was sorted into a matching domain. The same parts of a text could be sorted into more than one domain if the content referred to more than one perspective: for example, an excerpt could be categorized within both economy and environment. In the next step, the texts were sorted and divided into words, sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to

Table 2 Examples from the Process of Analysis and Construction of Meaning Units, Condensed Meaning Units, Codes and a Sub-category

Meaning Units	Condensed Meaning Units	Codes	Sub-category
Food and eating habits, commensality and everyday aesthetics are important parts of cultural heritage.	Food, eating habits and commensality important to cultural heritage	Cultural heritage (*commensality)	The cultural importance of food and meals
The school in its teaching of home and consumer studies strives to ensure that pupils develop skills in organizing, preparing and arranging meals as well as understanding the importance of meals for commensality, health, communication and culture.	Understanding the importance of meals for commensality, health, communication and culture	Cultural importance (*commensality) (*health) (*Meals and communication)	
Historical studies reveal that people in all cultures and social classes have always used meals not only for nutrition but also as social culture-bearers.	Meals not only used for nutritional purposes but also as social culture-bearers	Culture-bearer (*social doing)	

Source: Authors' own.

Note: *Codes categorized elsewhere.

each other through their content and context, so-called 'meaning units' (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The meaning units were then shortened into 'condensed meaning units' and given a 'code'. The various codes were compared based on differences and similarities and were then sorted into sub-categories (Table 2).

The final sub-categories were placed in a chart and compared between the six syllabuses, looking for similarities and differences over time (Tables 3–5). Finally, based on time-specific similarities and differences between the sub-categories and syllabuses, categories were created and presented with a theme (Table 6). The first author, who conducted the main analysis, had frequent correspondence with the co-authors during the entire analysis in order to maintain consistency and agreement within the group.

RESULTS

The syllabuses contain several expressions of food related to the three domains of health, economy and environment, with varying degrees of emphasis between the syllabuses. The results from the content analysis are henceforth presented for each of the three domains in the following order: (a) health-food expressions, (b) economy-food expressions and (c) environment-food expressions. The analysis of each domain

generated 11, 10 and 10 sub-categories, respectively, which were grouped together in relation to their presence in the six syllabuses (Tables 3–5). The grouping of sub-categories has in turn generated three main categories under each domain. At the end of the results section, a model of how these domains and categories can be viewed from a perspective of sustainable development is presented.

Health–food Expressions

Several expressions about food related to health were distinguished in the six syllabuses. The expressions were merged into 11 sub-categories, which are presented in Table 3. The expressions' occurrence in specific syllabuses is marked with an X.

Table 3 Occurrence of Expressions about Food Related to Health in Swedish Syllabuses for Home and Consumer Studies. The Expressions were Merged into 11 Sub-categories and the Occurrence in Different Syllabuses is Marked with X. The Sub-categories Generated Three Main Categories

Syllabus:		-62	-69	-80	-94	-00	-11
Sub-categories	Preparation of a 'Nutritionally accurate diet'	X	X	X	-	-	-
	'Dietetics' of meals and foodstuffs	X	X	X	X	-	-
	Diet in relation to performance and work capacity	X	X	X	X	-	-
	Risks and consequences with 'wrong' food	X	-	X	X	-	-
	Cooking methods in consideration of nutritional content	-	-	X	X	-	-
	Diet/food in relation to well-being and commensality	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Cultural importance of food	-	-	-	X	X	X
	Cooking methods in consideration of aspects covering health	-	-	-	-	X	X
	Evaluation of a meal's 'healthiness'	-	-	-	-	X	X
	The social and communicative dimension of food	-	-	-	-	X	X
	'Varied and balanced meals' and individual needs	-	-	-	-	-	X
Main categories:	1*		2**		3***		
* To regulate your diet to achieve good physical health.							
** To understand what food means to public health regarding wellness and commensality. ⁶							
*** To evaluate the 'healthiness' of food in social, communicative and cultural dimensions.							

Source: Authors' own.

Table 3 shows significant differences between the syllabuses, which were placed into three main categories: (a) To regulate your diet to achieve good physical health, (b) To understand what food means to public health regarding wellness and commensality and (c) To evaluate the 'healthiness' of food in social, communicative and cultural dimensions. These main categories consist of sub-categories that are specific to N.Syll -62/-69, N.Syll -80/-94 and N.Syll -00/-11 and are presented

below with descriptions of why they have been regarded as characteristic within the *health* domain.

1. **To regulate your diet to achieve good physical health (N.Syll –62 and –69):**

Expressions of food in relation to health are, in N.Syll –62 and N.Syll –69, accentuated on nutrition. A nutritious diet is portrayed as having positive implications for household members' physical health such as oral health, work performance and the general health condition. Education about food is defined as 'knowledge of diet' and is described in terms of 'nutrition rules', 'appropriate dishes' (N.Syll –62), a 'nutritionally adequate' diet or an 'accurate diet' (N.Syll –62, N.Syll –69). Health risks are described as 'overly fed' or 'growing thin' (N.Syll –62), and the concept of calories is expressed to help estimate a good diet. Some of the more practical guidelines are to 'include vegetables in the daily diet' (N.Syll –62), 'to be aware of the significance of breakfast' (N.Syll –62, N.Syll –69) and 'to make portion and proportion calculations' (N.Syll –62, N.Syll –69). The above mentioned aspects emphasize a physical dimension of health and denote right and wrong ways to regulate one's diet to gain good health and physical capacity of the household members.

2. **To understand what food means to public health regarding well-being and commensality (N.Syll –80 and –94):**

The next main category contains, similar to the previous, the expressions of healthy diets as 'nutritionally accurate' (N.Syll –80) but shifts to the expression of 'well composed meals' in N.Syll –94. An accurate diet/well-composed meal is still emphasized as important to 'general health and work performance' (N.Syll –80, N.Syll –94). However, these syllabuses also introduce a new concept of health in connection with expressions of food, namely well-being: '[d]aily meals at home and at school. Their impact on health, work and wellbeing' (N.Syll –80). The term is further explained in N.Syll –94 as being linked to 'quality of life', which refers to the individual's physical, psychological and social well-being, as well as commensality (N.Syll –94). Moreover, 'togetherness at meal times' (N.Syll –80, N.Syll –94) and the importance of diet/food for 'physical and psychological development' (N.Syll –80, N.Syll –94) are highlighted. The health effects of food habits are thus not only described as aspects of nutrition and physical condition, but also as aspects of commensality and enjoyment.

3. **To evaluate the 'healthiness' of food in social, communicative and cultural dimensions (N.Syll –00 and –11):**

In the third main category, health-food expressions shift from the statements of accurate nutrition and work capacity to the statements about social and cultural values, such as 'the mealtime's significance to commensality, health, communication and culture' (N.Syll –00) and the proclamation that 'food and

meals are also cultural creations and fulfil a social function that is important for our psychosocial health' (N.Syll -11). The previous description of healthy food as 'nutritionally accurate' (N.Syll -62, N.Syll -69) or as 'well-composed meals' (N.Syll -94) transform into the use of the phrase 'varied and balanced meals', referring to peoples' varied individual needs (N.Syll -11), thus further downplaying normativity.

The expressions in this category thus go beyond the physical context and present a wider social context with cultural values and communication. The N.Syll -11 also incorporates expressions about the physical well-being of the workers producing the foods, which further expands the borders of health-food perspectives.

Economy-food Expressions

Within this domain, varied expressions of food in relation to economy in the six syllabuses were distinguished. The expressions were merged into 10 sub-categories which are presented in Table 4, and the occurrence in the different syllabuses is marked with an X.

Table 4 Occurrence of Expressions of Food Related to Economy in Syllabuses for Home and Consumer Studies in Sweden. The Expressions were merged into 10 Sub-categories and the Occurrence in Different Syllabuses is Marked with X. The Sub-categories Generated Three Main Categories

Syllabus:		-62	-69	-80	-94	-00	-11
Sub-categories	Economic planning and food purchases	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cost calculations of meals	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cost comparisons of foodstuffs and meals	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Thrifty management of cookware and foodstuff	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cooking methods in consideration of household costs	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cooking methods in consideration of costs to the environment	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Societal economic consequences of food choices	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Conscious and informed economic consumer choices	-	-	-	X	X	X
	Standpoints regarding economical sustainability	-	-	-	-	X	X
	Ethical positioning in an economic perspective	-	-	-	-	X	X
Main categories:		1*		2**		3***	
* To calculate different household food costs.							
** To understand what economic consequences food choices have on humans and the society.							
*** To contemplate various standpoints regarding economic sustainability and food.							

Source: Authors' own.

The table shows minor but important differences between the syllabuses, and the syllabuses are clustered in the same way as in the previous table. The three main categories are: (a) To calculate different household food costs, (b) To understand what economic consequences food choices have on humans and the society and (c) To contemplate various standpoints regarding economic sustainability and food. These are presented below with descriptions of why they have been regarded as dominant within the economy domain.

1. **To calculate different household food costs (N.Syll –62 and –69):**
 In the early syllabuses, expressions of food related to economy were primarily connected to creating sound economic thinking among pupils and providing experience with economic planning in regards to thriftiness and carefulness with money, materials and foodstuffs. The syllabuses expressed that pupils should be able to choose between different goods by ‘setting quality and usability characteristics in relation to price’ (N.Syll –62, N.Syll –69) and ‘to know the cost of everyday food’ (N.Syll –69). The syllabuses list the tools for accomplishing these tasks as ‘proportion calculations’, ‘price calculations’ and ‘selection studies’ (N.Syll –62, N.Syll –69). The characteristic of this category is thus to educate pupils to calculate the household food costs, in order to make thrifty and economically wise choices in the household.

2. **To understand what economic consequences food choices have on humans and the society (N.Syll –80 and –94):**
 The economy-food expressions in N.Syll –80 and N.Syll –94 are, in addition to ‘calculate household costs of food’, also targeting education on how to make purposive choices among the wide range of goods and services. This requires, according to the syllabuses, knowledge of economy and quality, as well as an ‘understanding of what consequences’ food selection has for humans and the environment (N.Syll –94). Although N.Syll –80 contains several expressions related to economic resource management, it is not explicitly linked to food. However, this syllabus emphasizes the consequences and costs of ‘littering and damage to the environment’, as well as the household responsibility of these consequences. The content of inquiry is thus not only the ability to calculate household food costs, but also to understand the economic consequences that food selections could bring to humans and the society.

3. **To contemplate various standpoints regarding economic sustainability and food (N.Syll –00 and –11):**
 The 2000 and 2011 syllabuses raise another dimension in addition to the two previous categories. They both refer to ethical positioning and to contemplate various standpoints in relation to different household activities. For instance, noting that the choice of a particular product ‘could be good for the environment, but much worse for your own economy’, and to

‘focus under which labour and environmental conditions a product has been produced and how it may have affected the price’ (N.Syll -11). The 2011 syllabus expresses a core content that proposes students to establish ‘standpoints when choosing goods and services [...] such as food, from the perspective of economic sustainability...’ (N.Syll -11).

The 2000 syllabus is, however, more general in its formulations, for instance, when it refers to the role of home and consumer studies as training pupils in ‘ethical positions and a reflective approach’. These comments nevertheless imply a large and broadened view of the economic considerations to be taken into account in food-choosing situations such as what underlying factors are implied in the price, and the consequences of these factors.

Environment-food Expressions

Ten sub-categories were distinguished within the environment-food domain, and are presented in Table 5. The occurrence in specific syllabuses is marked with an X.

Table 5 Occurrence of Expressions of Food Related to Environment in Syllabuses for Home and Consumer Studies in Sweden. The Expressions were Merged into 10 Sub-categories and the Occurrence in Different Syllabuses is Marked with X. The Sub-categories Generated Three Main Categories

Syllabus:		-62	-69	-80	-94	-00	-11
Sub-categories	Methods to prolong the durability of foodstuffs	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Utilization of seasonal resources	X	X	X	X	X	X
	‘Household management’ of natural resources	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Cooking methods in consideration of environmental perspectives	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Management of residues and leftovers	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Food choices and their impact on the global environment	-	-	X	X	X	X
	Planning, choosing and buying environmentally friendly meals	-	-	-	-	X	X
	Standpoints regarding environmental sustainability issues	-	-	-	-	X	X
	Ethical positioning in an environmental perspective	-	-	-	-	X	X
	Food production, transport and environmental labelling	-	-	-	-	-	X
Main categories:	1*		2**		3***		
* To make use of what we have got.							
** To be conscious of the imbalance of earth’s natural resources.							
*** To act in support of forming an environmentally sustainable development regarding food.							

Source: Authors’ own.

The main categories of the syllabuses include: (a) To make use of what we have got, (b) To be conscious of the imbalance of earth's natural food resources and (c) To act in support of forming an environmentally sustainable development regarding food.

1. To make use of what we have got (N.Syll –62 and –69):

The analysis shows an absence of expressions about the natural environment in the two oldest syllabuses N.Syll –62 and N.Syll –69. However, even though these syllabuses do not refer to food in relation to nature, they nonetheless suggest sensible usage of natural resources through expressions related to thriftiness and rational cooking. For instance, the syllabuses refer to the utilization of seasonal resources and food preservation methods that prolong the durability of foodstuffs, meals or raw materials by 'canning, freezing, and hermetic boiling' (N.Syll –62), as well as methods of 'food storage' (N.Syll –69). These tangible methods taught to pupils could help utilize the earth's resources in a sensible way, but they are expressed as a means of enhancing the family's economy related to food, rather than as an attempt to avoid the exploitation of nature.

2. To be conscious of the imbalance of earth's natural food resources (N.Syll –80 and –94):

The references made to food and the environment is more obvious in N.Syll –80 and N.Syll –94. One of the subject objectives in the 1980 syllabus was 'to alert pupils about the unequal distribution of the earth's resources'. In the 1994 syllabus, one aim was for pupils to 'gain an understanding of how the individual consumer and the individual household affect the environment both locally and globally'. None of these expressions explicitly mention food. However, both syllabuses have related descriptions of food as a factor of environmental impact. Furthermore, the syllabuses note tangible actions such as reusing everyday things and sorting waste. In other words, the syllabuses of this time period show that households—as a part of the society—affect the whole earth. Moreover, the subject was aimed to teach pupils how to act in environmentally friendly ways, primarily through general household activities, but also through the management of food in order to prevent an imbalance of the planet's resources.

3. To act in support of forming an environmentally sustainable development regarding food (N.Syll –00 and –11):

In the most recent syllabuses, N.Syll –00 and N.Syll –11, the terms 'sustainable society' (N.Syll –00) and 'sustainable development' (N.Syll –11) are referred to in the context of handling natural resources. However, the more general formulations in N.Syll –00 made this syllabus difficult to categorize. It could be placed in the former category because of its general references to food as an aspect of local and global environmental impact, but it also refers to an awareness of the future with its emphasis on pupils'

active participation in ‘forming a conscious way of living and [forming] a sustainable society’ (N.Syll -00), with food and meals as important issues involved.

The N.Syll -11 is unlike N.Syll -00 more detailed in its descriptions and expresses numerous specific directives about food and the environment. For instance, it calls for a consideration of ‘how food and other goods are produced and transported, and how they impact the environment and health’, and directs students to understand ‘different forms of environmental labelling and their importance’. Even though N.Syll -00 has general statements of environmentally friendly ways to create a sustainable society, both syllabuses point in the direction of an environmentally sustainable future.

Operationalization into Sustainable Development

When viewing the domains—main categories and sub-categories that came from the analysis of the six syllabuses—three overall themes were formed, namely, maintenance of the family and household, maintenance of the earth’s resources and maintenance of the future generations (Table 6).

Table 6 shows the theme that characterizes each time period, and the arrows imply that the newer syllabuses have their own characteristics but still carry the features of their predecessors, excluding the previously mentioned language differences regarding diet/food.

The first theme, maintenance of the family and household, covers practical, hands-on tasks and calculations that are typically close to the pupil’s own experience in regards to food-related activities in the household. These tangible tasks and experience-based activities are present in all six syllabuses, yet with differences in motives and values that range from concern for the household and the family to concern for the consequences outside the home. This concern leads us to the second theme, maintenance of the earth’s resources, which emphasizes the importance of managing personal and shared resources. This reflects a more global focus that emphasizes personal responsibility and reflexivity beyond the immediate context of individual and family. The extension into the third theme, maintenance of the future generation, encompasses increasingly abstract and complex contemplations regarding the perspectives of health, economy and environment when managing food activities.

DISCUSSION

The main findings presented in this article show that the content and mission of home and consumer studies has changed and transformed into new complex ways of expressing the dimensions of food-related issues. The studied syllabuses contain three themes of education about food in relation to the subject perspectives of health, economy and environment. These themes—maintenance of the family and household, maintenance of the earth’s resources and maintenance of the future generations—imply a didactic challenge for teachers to incorporate while teaching about food and sustainable development.

Table 6 Themes Derived from the Categories within the Three Domains of Health, Economy and Environment

Syllabuses	Domains and Main Categories			Themes	The Overlap of Themes and Syllabuses		
	Health	Economy	Environment		-62, -69	-80, -94	-00, -11
-62, -69	To regulate your diet to achieve good physical health	To calculate different household food costs	To make use of what we have got	Maintenance of the family and household	←	→	→
-80, -94	To understand what food means to public health regarding well-being and commensality	To understand what economic consequences food choices have on humans and the society	To be conscious of the imbalance of earth's natural food resources	Maintenance of the earth's recourses			
-00, -11	To evaluate the 'healthiness' of food in social, communicative and cultural dimensions	To contemplate various standpoints regarding economic sustainability and food	To act in support of forming an environmentally sustainable development regarding food	Maintenance of the future generations			

Source: Authors' own.

The Swedish translation of *maintenance* has many connected meanings, such as support, protection, preservation, sustenance, care for, and so on, all of which refer to a type of conduct or action. Thus, the didactic challenge can be discussed in the context of norms and values that govern our actions in education about everyday life. This has been addressed by Noddings (2001) who introduced the concept 'ethics of care' in educational settings. The concept has further been criticized and developed in many other contexts, such as in the context of education for sustainable development in home and consumer studies by Hjalmskog (2006) who implores us to learn to care about those close to us—and those far away. In this case, one can either care for or care about something/someone. The difference between care for and care about is that care for is defined as a face-to-face situation in which one person cares in a direct position to the cared for. Care about is when a person cares about something without a meeting taking place (Hjalmskog, 2006). In relation to the present study, it could be argued that the first theme involves the first form of caring, caring for, in that it concerns the people and resources close to us, those who we meet face-to-face. The second theme moves into the wider public realm, involving a 'care about', concerning peoples and resources without a meeting taking place. The third theme, however, highlights a new complexity of caring, one in which the receiver or the cared for is in the unknown, predicted future. People and resources that you never meet can however be 'met' through media, but a predicted future is not so easily obtained, neither for the researcher nor for teachers or pupils in an elementary school, thus making the ideas of *caring* and *maintenance* multifaceted and challenging in the later syllabuses.

The didactic challenge can also be seen in the perspective of teaching and learning about the food chain. If using the metaphor 'from field to fork', the earlier syllabuses place more emphasis on the steps from getting crops from the field to consuming a meal at home (purchase, preserving, cooking, etc.), while the most recent syllabuses take a far broader and less linear view of the food chain. Rather, these later syllabuses take a circular view, 'from field to field', incorporating how different steps link back to previous steps such as how food is produced and how leftovers are put back into the natural cycle after the meal (circumstances surrounding production, transportation, composting, recycling, consequences of toxic substances, etc.). However, regardless of the approach, both old and new syllabuses have an immediate orientation towards consumers, which is also the main aim of the school subject according to the syllabus. Even though the main orientation is towards consumers, there are nevertheless references to other participants in the overall food system, such as the agribusiness and circumstances regarding production. However, the more detailed descriptions of circumstances regarding production are not the subject of the national documents of the syllabus today. Examples of such detailed descriptions could, for instance, incorporate the pros and cons of urban agriculture, genetically modified crops, production and eating locally manufactured food and so forth. The essence of the three themes clearly relates to food resource management, though with different arguments and different degrees of theoretical knowledge and knowledge in action, which with time seems to have been reformed into more abstract and theoretical contemplations about food.

The reason why the presentation of food has changed in the national syllabuses is likely connected with changing views of food and consumption in the society at large. Changing views on food in the Swedish society have many explanatory models. Bildtgård (2002) describes the shaping of modern eating (1935–1980) as a medical–political regulation of the eating norm. Aléx (2001) considers the societal development from a thrifty consumption norm to a reflexive, preferably eco-conscious consumption norm in Sweden, arguing that the Swedish consumption ideal must be seen against the background of recurring episodes of extreme poverty and hunger. Norms and values in all societies are variables depending on economic, social and political circumstances. Our interpretation is that the values and missions of the analyzed syllabuses clearly mirror varying political stances on the issue at different periods of time. However, *why* the presentation of food has changed in the national curriculum is not of interest in this article, rather the interest in this article is to illustrate that the presentation *has* changed and to consider what implications that change could have for the school subject of home and consumer studies.

Societal pressure on individuals to consume in a ‘proper way’ and to take responsibility for their own family’s welfare has been a Swedish norm for a long time (Aléx, 2001). The findings of the present study suggest that pupils’ responsibilities as food consumers has widened, and that such responsibilities are now also concerned with the cultural values of individuals and the awareness of a global environment, while the former being more about the family and the individuals in the family. The responsibilities are thus not necessarily great, but there is a greater requirement for reflexivity, theoretical insight and informed decision-making on an abstract level, rather than following a general norm and living up to fairly clear expectations.

A government report on how to achieve socially, ecologically and economically sustainable consumption (SOU, 2005, p. 51) proposed that home and consumer studies bear the primary responsibility for education for sustainable development amongst the school subjects in Sweden. The main argument for this was that home and consumer studies is a unique subject because of the combination of practice in care and technical rational thinking, efficiency, thrift, etc., as well as combining ‘the best of two worlds’ by teaching students to manage material resources in various ways while giving human values high priority. However, the proposal was not adopted in the revision of N.Curr-11. The dismissal of this proposal was discussed by Hjälmeskog (2006), who argues that it was a welcome but not an unproblematic proposal. She contends that the suggestion of making home and consumer studies bearing the main responsibility of education for sustainable development implies a major challenge for schools, since it would bring about a whole new way of thinking about and valuing home-related knowledge (Hjälmeskog, 2006, p. 61). She suggests that ascribing home and consumer studies, the primary responsibility of education for sustainable development would also require profound changes in the number of hours for the subject, clearer descriptions of the curriculum, revision of syllabuses and financial reinforcements for teacher training, facilities and equipment.

At present, the national home and consumer studies syllabus does comprise intentions to educate pupils about food in relation to sustainable economic, environmental and health dimensions, both locally and globally, as well as giving social,

communicative, cultural factors high priorities. The results of the present study show that the school subject has in fact undergone major changes in the national syllabus, without undergoing profound changes regarding hours, and clearer descriptions and financial reinforcements for teacher training. This observation demands a discussion of the responsibilities placed on teachers and of what quality or consistency we can expect from the education about food and sustainable development in this subject.

The effects of the United Nation's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in educational settings has been studied and discussed by Wals (2009, 2011) and many others (Bagoly-Simó, 2013; Jucker, 2011; Tilbury, 2009). Wals believes that studies about how education for sustainable development has affected various educational practices are of great interest in the field's development. He expresses that the challenge for future research is further theoretical and conceptual development. The results of the present study imply that the use of sustainable development as a perspective in the national syllabus of home and consumer studies is not unproblematic, while there is no clear definition of what the term entails. There is a need for a subject-specific language in relation to sustainable development in order to concretely illustrate what sustainable development may or may not entail for the practice of home and consumer studies. However, we argue, in line with Robert et al. (2005) and Lee et al. (2000), that any attempt to describe, clarify and conceptualize sustainable development is valuable in strengthening the usefulness of the term. The analysis and discussion made in this article is an attempt to contribute to the theoretical and conceptual development of sustainable development in relation to home and consumer studies.

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THIS STUDY

School documents, such as national curricula, subject syllabuses, local syllabuses and so on, have been argued to reveal how participants in an educational setting are involved in certain historically established beliefs, values, norms and attitudes (Almqvist et al., 2008; Quennerstedt, 2008). Curriculum documents are one way of approaching understandings of particular knowledge area (Englund, Forsberg, & Sundberg, 2012; Goodlad, 1979), which in this case is food and sustainable development in syllabuses of home and consumer studies. There may, however, be a risk of multiple interpretations of the concepts in the texts, in the sense that the syllabuses were written in different time periods and in different social contexts. It is not possible to claim an original or true meaning of the syllabuses, rather, the present study seeks to shed light on different aspects of food in home and consumer studies syllabuses. This article is concerned only with the area of food in relation to sustainable development, but the question could and should also be applied to other areas within the subject, such as laundry and general consumption. Furthermore, the choice of the three subject-specific perspectives as analytical domains made these aspects more visible over others, such as gender and globalization. Analyses of the syllabuses from these or other perspectives would naturally provide different results and different linkages to the perspective of sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study illustrates that the expression of food in relation to health, economy and environment in the national syllabuses of home and consumer studies has undergone major changes. This has led to new and complex ways of viewing the dimensions of food-related issues and consequently increasing the didactic challenge of operationalizing sustainable development in teaching. The results may be viewed as a starting point and as a contribution to a dialogue that will help strengthen the usefulness of the concept of sustainable development in home and consumer studies. This may be of importance to the theoretical and conceptual development of the field, both in the context of the specific school subject and in education for sustainable development in general.

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Notes

1. The Swedish national curriculum is issued by the government and contains fundamental values, goals and guidelines intended to characterize all teaching.
2. Syllabuses are national regulations of each subject's main content, goals and knowledge requirements.
3. The term 'food' in this article refers to nutrition, raw materials and foodstuffs, as well as the process of planning, preparing, cooking and managing leftovers.
4. In the English translation of the Swedish curriculum, the term 'finance' is used rather than the term economy. In this article however, the term 'economy' is used throughout due to the linguistic conformity that exists between the term and the remaining contents of the curriculum for home and consumer studies.
5. The included syllabuses for this analysis started in 1962, when the subject was still known as home economics. The name was changed to home and consumer studies in 2000.
6. Commensality is a concept used to describe eating together with others (Sobal & Nelson, 2003).

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