Nurturing Critical Literacy through Practical Problem Solving

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Over the last 100 years, the moral obligations, responsibilities, and related perennial family problems have remained the same: address the perennial practical home and family problems to ensure quality family and community life. But the work of the family has evolved, becoming more complex with changing and diverse family contexts, values, and practices and with far-reaching moral/ethical consequences of our actions. Our interdependent earth community is experiencing increasing social, technological, and environmental change and complexity.

Consequently, families are facing unprecedented uncertainties and new challenges. In addition to taking technical action to providing the necessities of life, food, clothing, and housing, family members need to communicate with others quite different from themselves and interpret words and actions with multiple meanings in their families and more diverse communities. Ultimately, family members need to take critical social action in their families and beyond to ensure their own and their community's safety, development, and freedom from oppression. Society expects families to ensure that all social actions are ethically and morally defensible (Brown & Paolucci, 1979). Helping families achieve these valued-ends is a professional responsibility of home economics and family and consumer sciences.[1]

Critical Literacy: New Skills for Families

To meet these challenges, new knowledge and skills are needed by families to decide what to believe and do when faced with uncertainty. Just as technical literacy and homemaking skills were needed by family members at the beginning of the 20th century to understand the scientific and technological changes occurring then, critical literacy and its related social processes are needed now by family members at the beginning of the 21st century to address perennial and emerging problematic situations. Critical literacy skills are needed to understand, critique, and make changes to realize family members' aspirations and bring about humane and just social change in families and our earth community (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Grounded in critical science, critical literacy has two dimensions: (a) critical interpretation (hermeneutics) and (b) critical social action. In both dimensions, critical literacy uses language in all its forms--thinking, reading, writing, speaking, and acting--to interpret and critique words and the world for one's own and the community's development (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Harris & Hodges, 1995; Shor, 1999). Specifically, critical interpretation involves analyzing and critiquing the underlying meaning and distortions of language in texts (Brown & Paolucci, 1979). "Texts" may be written, visual, spoken, multimedia, and performance, as well as the silent, out-or-awareness, language of culture[2] in everyday family, work, and community interactions and associations. Although there are several versions of critical literacy based on different critical science theoretical perspectives, all of them involve analyzing and critiquing the underlying meaning of language—especially the underlying power relationships that can dominate and limit optimum development in families and communities, including the earth community.

Critical social action, sometimes called emancipatory action, involves using language to enlighten and educate self and others in our families and communities so as to enhance our critical consciousness of faulty communication, repression, and false consciousness. False consciousness means accepting, without questioning, the ideologies and practices of dominant individuals and groups who gain power at the expense of others (Freire, 1973; Rehm, 1999, p. 63). Examples of false consciousness include wastefully using natural resources, such as fossil fuels, without questioning the effect on the long-

term health and well-being of family members and our planet; buying highly advertised disposable consumer goods even though their cost overextends our budget and the packaging and product cannot be recycled; and enduring bullying by a family member or employer because that's just what happens in families and workplaces.

To enlighten self and others, critical literacy begins by "questioning" such everyday practices, communication patterns, power relationships, and identities. This is important because we live "in a world not yet finished, just, or humane," and family members need to continually "discover alternative paths for self and social development" (Shor, 1999). Through questioning and practical reasoning (including critical, creative, and ethical/moral thinking), critical literacy promotes reflection, especially self-reflection, transformation, and action. Thus, critical literacy includes the powerful questioning habits needed to communicate, solve problems, and take ethical action in families and communities. These questioning habits include probing beneath the surface meanings of words and actions to analyze, evaluate, and comprehend root causes of problems, contextual factors that influence our lives positively and negatively, alternative actions to status quo or unjust actions, and consequences of actions on self and others (Brown, 1980; Brown & Paolucci, 1979; Harris & Hodges, 1995; Rehm, 1999; Shor, 1992). Thus, critical literacy is a liberating learning strategy that empowers and frees individuals and families from naïveté and ignorance, distorted and deceptive communication, discrimination, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. This type of powerful reading, thinking, and questioning results in other-centered, ethical/moral action needed for optimum development in families and communities (Laster & Thomas, 1997; Thomas, 1996).

Practical Problem-based Curriculum Model

In home economics and family and consumer sciences education, critical literacy processes are nurtured through practical problem-based curriculum experiences.[3] This approach was advocated by Marjorie Brown (1978; 1980) and used to guide curriculum work in Ohio, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Oregon, Maryland, and Virginia for middle, high school, and college courses (Johnson & Fedje, 1999; Fox, 1997).

Brown's critical science-based curriculum model includes five elements: First, courses, units, and learning experiences are organized around perennial practical problems of home and family: "What should be done . . . (in the home and family (or in the culture and society) in area of concern in order to achieve value (or values)?" (p. 21). Perennial practical problems are the recurring concerns of families—generation after generation and throughout each generation, but changing contextual factors require re-thinking what would be best to do. For example, What should be done to discipline our children? is a perennial practical problem but the changing developmental stage of children and other situational factors requires parents to rethink their actions continuously.

Second, broad concepts from multiple disciplines are developed to address the practical questions. These concepts include valued-ends concepts such as caring, respect, cooperation, morally defensible, and sustainable; context concepts such as human development and family resources; concepts of alternative actions such as moral discipline, permissive discipline, and autocratic discipline; concepts of consequences of actions such as enhanced development and constrained development; and concepts of processes such as practical problem solving, conflict resolution, democratic leadership, and balancing work and family responsibilities. These broad intellectual and interpersonal process concepts and resulting skills are needed in families, communities, and classrooms.

Third, teaching-learning processes include the concepts of self, interpersonal relationships, and modes of inquiry needed in families and democratic communities. Practical reasoning is a hybrid mode of inquiry used to address practical problems and decide what to believe and do. Practical reasoning conclusions are based on factual and value-based reasons. Factual knowledge from scientific reasoning is used in practical reasoning. Scientific and practical reasoning are complementary modes of inquiry for home economics.

Fourth, philosophical questions are addressed through dialogue and critical reflection. What values should be used to judge actions? is an example of philosophical questions needed in families and in classrooms.

Finally, learning in a democratic environment is emphasized. Teachers and learners learn together to identify concerns and address practical family problems.

Ohio Work and Family Curriculum

Based on this critical science-based model, the Ohio Work and Family curriculum for middle and high school students focuses on perennial practical problems and develops four sets of interrelated intellectual and interpersonal/social processes:[4]

- Practical reasoning and critical moral reflection for practical problem solving;
- Caring, respectful relationships, communication, and conflict resolution;
- Democratic, shared leadership in family, workplace, and community; and
- Management and balancing work and family responsibilities.

These intellectual and social processes are taught and then used to address practical problems throughout each course (Laster, 1987).

Broad practical reasoning concepts are reflected in unit/module objectives: contextual factors, values, alternative actions, and consequences concepts. Intellectual and interpersonal process concepts are also reflected in course and unit objectives (See examples in Kister, Laurenson, & Boggs, 1993).

Two major teaching-learning processes are used to develop the broad concepts and processes: (a) Cooperative Learning (CL) to develop interpersonal skills, leadership, and management; and (b) Practical Problem Solving (PPS) to develop practical reasoning, critical reflection, and other critical literacy processes. Both formal and informal cooperative learning methods are used (for examples, see Johnson & Johnson, 1991). The practical problem solving learning strategy has evolved through the years (Laster, 1984; 1987; 1993). This social inquiry version includes additional dimensions developed through critical reflection, dialogue, and study with students and teachers. Philosophical questions are raised throughout the practical problem solving learning process. Other information processing teaching models (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004), such as concept attainment, are used to help students develop concepts of process, context, values, actions, and consequences.

Social Inquiry: Practical Problem Solving Learning Model

As a professional field, home economics education prepares learners for responsible family and community citizenry. This requires social inquiry into what to believe and do in these social settings. The major way humans learn and develop is through problem solving and relationships with others, first in our families and then our communities. Furthermore, learning in a democracy depends on “a holistic curriculum based simultaneously in experience and philosophy, working and thinking, in action and reflection” (Shor, 1999). This social inquiry practical problem solving learning model is designed to implement such a curriculum. It can be used in the classroom with home economics learners, in the family, and in community groups. Thus this learning model is both content (knowledge and processes to be learned to guide our actions with others) and a teaching approach for helping family members and home economics students learn. This model is organized around five processes which incorporate critical literacy processes, especially critical-creative-ethical questioning. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Social Inquiry: Practical Problem Solving Learning Method for Nurturing Critical Literacy [Critical literacy processes are italicized]

Note: ↕ means teachers and learners continue to use processes above and below the arrow.

Process 1. Democratic Learning Community Development:
Organize learners to facilitate social critique, dialogue, self-reflection, cooperative learning, caregiving, and collective action through democratic class participation

- Establish democratic culture of moral equals and interaction patterns that encourage optimum development: sensitivity and responsiveness to each others' needs; reciprocity (mutual sharing); and encouraging, supportive relationships focused on helping each other learn.
- Organize classroom for learners to easily interact face-to-face in small groups (ideally: 2-4 learners) and use authentic community learning resources.
- Develop and revise classroom rules together; share self-reflections on social philosophical questions.
- Provide reminders for practical reasoning questions, types and examples of values to use to judge actions/choices.

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Process 2. Problem Posing-Problem Identification – Critical Consciousness Raising:
Raise critical consciousness of practical problem/social issue/concern, including root problems, by analyzing context for cues to problem: change in context, value conflicts, and/or oppression.

- Provide scenario reflecting practical problem/social issue using facts, statistics, newspaper article, video clip, pictures, and/or personal experience story of teacher or students—especially social issues concerning students.
- Analyze scenario for contextual factors involved and write on class reasons assembly chart for class reference.
- Use and help learners locate reliable, relevant community resources for factual information.
- Ask critical consciousness-raising questions to help learners analyze cues in context for change, conflict, and oppression (See examples of questions on Table 2).

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Process 3. Practical Reasoning (PR) – Critical-Creative-Ethical Questioning:
Question and collaborate with others to collect, organize, understand, and critique knowledge and actions needed to decide what to believe and do (See examples of questions on Table 2)

- Ask basic practical reasoning questions.
- Ask conceptual and probing PR questions to gain deeper meanings and insights.
- Ask critical-ethical/moral reflection and moral reasoning questions of self and others.
- Use think sheet/reasons assembly chart to represent problem and evaluate possible solutions:

PR Think Sheet (Reasons Assembly Chart)

Problem/Concern: What should be done…(in the home and family (or in the culture and society) in area of concern in order to achieve value (or values)? (Brown, 1978, p. 21).

Contextual Factors?	Criteria: Valued-ends?
Choices – Actions?	Consequences of actions—on self? Others? Short-term? Long-term?

Critical Reflection Questions (See Table 3 for examples and list) :
Conclusion - Choice of Action(s):
Reasons: 1. 2. 3.

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Process 4. Critical Reflection and Critique/Judgment:

Critical questioning of self and others—continuously probing and critiquing: evaluating, testing, and judging best social action:

- Analyze and evaluate reasoning and actions from multiple perspectives.
- Ask critical-ethical questions of self and others (See Table 2):
- Select morally defensible actions, i.e., actions that are helpful not harmful to self and others, now and in future
- Formulate generalizations for future.

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Process 5. Critical Social Action:

Individual and collective social action: Private and public care giving, social advocacy, and moral-political action in family and community to transform our conditions for optimum human development

- Ask technical questions to plan way to take action and achieve goals/valued-ends: Who? What? When? Where? How?
- Facilitate technical, intellectual and social skill development of learners for family and/or community action:
    - Model: Representation, idealization, and demonstration of needed process;
    - Facilitate guided and independent practice in authentic (real-world) contexts and experiences;
    - Facilitate evaluation-feedback from self, others, and natural consequences in real-world experience.
- Take action in the home, family, community; begin practical problem solving process again.

Support System Elements. For the practical problem solving method to be successful in home economics classrooms, teachers need to provide learning support system elements for students. Authentic practical problem/dilemma scenarios with context description are needed to raise students' consciousness of social issues and power relations (See example on Table 2). This could be in the form of a printed or verbal story, a newspaper article, pictures, video clip, startling facts or statistics that illustrate the problem and its context, or real life experience in the classroom, school, or community.

Developmentally appropriate reasons assembly chart/think sheets[7] are needed to prompt students' questioning and data organization (see example on Table 1). Eventually, students will be expected to develop their own think sheets just as they will need to do in the future. Charts are needed to represent the problem and compile information when addressing complex issues. In Ohio, we have called these reasons assembly charts, "Think Sheets", because they help students think about the (a) contextual affecting the successful resolution of the problem/issue, (b) valued-ends that will serve as criteria to create or evaluate alternative choices and actions, (c) choices and actions, and their (d) consequences. Ultimately, the data collected help learners clarify their reasons for proposed actions. Having the contextual factors and valued-ends at the top of the chart helps learners create alternative actions and more easily compare the consequences of actions with the desired valued-ends to help them decide what to do. Through the years Ohio teachers have created many variations of "Think Sheets" and the developmentally appropriate questions to teach and have the learners use. Because practical problem solving requires practical reasoning, which is not a linear process, "Think Sheets" need to provide a flexible framework that encourages students to revise and add new insights.

Students also need practical reasoning (PR) prompters on handouts and bulletin boards. Ohio teachers find it helpful to post the types of values, basic practical reasoning questions, critical reflection-ethical reasoning questions, and resource evaluation questions in the classroom to help the teacher and students use them on their own. Access to family and community resources are needed to develop the literacy skills and concepts needed to address practical problems, e.g., internet resources and community resource people that students can use now and after they leave school.

Table 2. Example of Practical Problem Scenario

What Should I Eat for Lunch?
You and your friends are away from home and need to decide what to eat for lunch. Traditional Japanese lunch of (your choice) or fast food: hamburger, cheese, bun, mayonnaise, lettuce, tomato, onion, French fries, and large coke. What should you choose?

The most important element in the support system for nurturing critical literacy is a caring, respectful teacher who models ethical values and good practical reasoning. The nurturing teacher asks basic practical reasoning, conceptual, and critical-moral reasoning questions and encourages learners to also ask these questions (Browne & Keeley, 2004; Coomer, Hittman, & Fedje, 1997; Laster & Johnson, 2001). See Table 3 for examples of questions to ask and to teach students to ask themselves and each other. The teacher externalizes her thinking by describing what she thinks about while deciding what to do regarding actions that will affect other people, including the questions she asks herself. Furthermore, she takes moral/just actions. For example, she makes the classroom safe for all, including learners with diverse views, backgrounds, abilities, gender, race, sexual orientation, and wellness level. She also ensures voices of all students are heard in class discussion—so no one dominates—not even the teacher. This is done through small group dialogue and sharing conclusions and learnings with the whole group.

Table 3. Examples of Critical Literacy Questions to Ask Self and Others: Content to Teach in Families and Classrooms

Critical Consciousness of Practical Problem/Concern – Check for cues in context

- Ask context-related questions to identify social concern/practical problem and root causes:
  1. What changes have occurred in the context requiring action? e. g., family- or community-oriented change?
     - Changes in surroundings, resources, technology, knowledge, assumptions, and/or expectations?
     - Changes in social, political, historical, cultural, and economic factors?
     - Changes in development of self, children, other family members, group members?
     - Changes in relationships, expectations, needs?
     - Changes in wellness (stress, temperature, distress, pain, weight, etc.)?
     - Reduced or increased family and/or community resources?
  2. What are the conflict in values, goals, standards, cultural practices, and assumptions of those involved?
  3. What differences in cultural practices, assumptions, expectations, or relationships are involved?
  4. What oppression is involved? Ignorance and naïveté? Discrimination? Exploitation? Marginalization? Powerlessness? Cultural imperialism? Violence?
  5. What beliefs, distorted information, misunderstandings, or false assumptions contribute to this concern?
  6. What environmental conditions contribute to this problem? Unjust systems? Unjust laws/mores/rules? Unjust private/family or public policies? Uncaring or harmful relationships? Historical injustices?

Practical Reasoning to Resolve Practical Problem/Social Concern

- Ask Practical Reasoning Questions to collect, organize, and evaluate knowledge needed for issue:

Contextual Factors affecting resolution of concern?	Criteria - Valued-Ends/Goals for judging actions?
1. What human factors need to be considered? • Who are involved? People? Institutions? • Personal and social factors? Wellness? Stress?	1. What valued ends should be used to judge my/our/others' actions? • Aesthetic values?

Gender? Developmental level? Reasoning and other abilities? Resources? Socio-emotional? • Viewpoints (value perspectives) of each person involved? Safety? Economic? Spiritual? Moral/ethical? Legal? • What conflicts in values, goals, standards, and cultural practices need to be considered? • What differences in cultural practices, expectations, etc. need to be considered? 2. What environmental conditions need to be considered? Changed? • Power relationships and structures? Systems? Laws/mores/rules? private/family or public policies? • Resources: Technology? Knowledge? Skills? Money? Agencies? Supplies?	• Economic values? • Health values? • Safety values? • Environmental values? • Intellectual values? • Legal values? • Prudential values? • Moral/ethical values? • Ideological: Political values? Religious values? Cultural values? 2. What are our obligations and responsibilities? 3. What are the desired results for each family/group member? Family? Community? Earth community? 4. What is most important?
Choices – Possible Actions to resolve problem?	Consequences for self and others?
1. What actions can be taken to achieve our valued-ends? What possibilities can be created? • Technical actions? • Communicative or interpretative actions? • Emancipatory, ethical action to free self and others from - Distorted information or understandings? - Unjust systems? - Uncaring, harmful relationships? - Oppression? 2. What changes need to be taken to overcome negative effects on family or community members?	1. What are the possible short-term and long-term effects of these actions on self and others: family, community, society, earth community? 2. What will be the positive and negative effects on family? Individuals in family? Community members? 3. What would it be like for person most adversely affected? 4. What valued-ends achieved? Moral/ethical values? 5. What would happen if everyone did what we are proposing to do? Negative and positive effects?

- Ask Information/Resource Evaluation Questions to judge reliability of information
  1. Who is making this claim?
  2. Is this a credible source? Reliable? Educated and/or experienced in area of information? No biasing self-interest for personal gain or domination?
  3. Is this source the most up-to-date?
  4. What point of view (such as aesthetic, economic, environmental, intellectual, ethical, ideological) is reflected?
  5. What gaps, ambiguities, and inconsistencies are present in the evidence?

- Ask Conceptual Questions to probe and clarify meanings of concepts (of context, valued-ends, actions/choices, consequences, and processes) and develop shared understandings, valued-ends, and vision. Use as needed throughout problem identification, reasoning, and critical reflection processes:
  1. What does this mean?
  2. What is the meaning of this (concept)? What are its distinguishing characteristics? What are some examples of this concept? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this…(concept)?
  3. How is my/your meaning different from others' meanings?
  4. What personal, historical, and cultural/contextual factors affect the meaning and how we interpret this?
  5. What is your viewpoint?
  6. What are we assuming? Is this a false assumption? True assumption?
  7. How did we come to this unquestioned assumption?

- Ask Critical Reflection Questions to judge/evaluate/critique and decide what to believe and do—throughout reasoning and decision making process:
  1. What should we do? What would be best to do? Why?

2. What reasons (valued-ends, contextual factors needing to be considered, consequences of proposed action, relevant research findings) support our proposed choices/actions/conclusion/decision?
3. How strong is the evidence supporting the action we propose to take?
4. Do the facts and values support this choice/action/conclusion? (Probe: Are all our values/criteria, especially ethical criteria, met with this choice? Is this choice/action feasible considering the contextual factors? Are there positive long-term consequences for all affected?)

- Ask Critical-ethical/moral Reflection and Moral Reasoning Questions of self and others
  1. What are our ethical/moral obligations and responsibilities in this situation? .
  2. Whose interests are being served? Is this in my/your/our best interests? Others' interests? Long-term?
  3. Do the facts and our values, especially social justice and other ethical values, support this choice?
  4. Is our decision morally defensible?
     - Beneficial? Not harmful to self, family members, or community—now or in the future?
     - Everyone's best interest met? Not just the powerful?
     - Would I want to be treated this way? (Golden Rule[7] – Role reversal/reciprocity test)
     - Would the person affected want to be treated this way? (Platinum Rule – Personal and Cultural Perspective-taking test)
     - What would be the consequences if everyone were treated this way? If everyone took this action? (Universal consequences test)
  5. What do I/we/you need to do to make things right? What changes do I/we need to make?

Finally, creating a moral-democratic learning environment where students and teacher decide on the rules to govern their classroom experiences and decide what social action projects to undertake is important for preparing students for their community citizenship responsibilities (Lickona, 1991). The classroom is a real-life human relationships laboratory for learning how best to relate to each other.

Process 1. Democratic Learning Community Development. To nurture critical literacy that encourages intellectual, social-emotional, and moral development, the teacher models (and expects others in the learning community) to model a democratic culture of moral equals and interaction patterns that encourage optimum development: sensitivity and responsiveness to each others' needs; reciprocity (mutual sharing) and encouraging, caring supportive relationships focused on helping each other learn (Thomas, 1996; Bronfenbrenner, 1990). Establishing and maintaining a democratic learning environment is essential for developing critical literacy and a reflective democratic family leader and citizen. Diversity of experience, knowledge, and resources is celebrated and reflected in heterogeneous small learning groups (ideally 2-4 learners). Creating and revising classroom rules, other collaborative projects, and self-reflection on philosophical questions[5] during the first days and throughout time together develops the intangible spiritual dimensions necessary for learning (Garner, 2007). For example, writing and sharing their response to a philosophical question provides an opportunity for mutual sharing and celebrating class diversity and the importance of diversity in learning, What are my personal gifts, expertise (knowledge, skills), resources, experiences, etc. that I have to share with others in class? In my family? My community? Sharing knowledge through handouts and bulletin boards is one way home economics critical literacy teachers can coach learners to ask critical practical reasoning and other questions and identify valued-ends viewpoints in self and others during small group and class dialogue.

Process 2. Problem Posing-Problem Identification – Critical Consciousness Raising. Becoming critically conscious of social issues, concerns, and practical problems is the important first critical literacy process. Probing beneath the surface of texts or real-life situations for contextual factors, through observation and questioning, helps learners analyze cues in context (situation): changes that have occurred, out-of-awareness differences, value/viewpoint conflicts, and/or oppressive factors. Sharing a written scenario of a practical problem/concern provides a concrete example of social issues that may be taken for granted as unchangeable. Helping learners locate, evaluate, and use relevant community resources to clarify problem and use in the practical reasoning process is a life-long learning critical

literacy process. Finally, and most important, is asking critical consciousness questions, from a simple question, What is happening here? followed by more probing, thought-provoking questions. (See Table 3 for examples of critical consciousness questions). For example, text can be critically analyzed with this series of questions to extend learners' thinking (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004, p.41):

- Who is in the text/picture/situation? Who is missing?
- Whose voices are represented? Whose voices are marginalized or discounted?
- What are the intentions of the author? What does the author want the reader to think?
- What would an alternative text/picture/situation say?
- How can the reader use this information to promote equity?

Similarly, a parent might ask these questions when dialoguing with a four-year old about taking a toy from another child: What happened? What did you do? Was she playing with the toy? Would you want her to take the toy away from you if you were playing with it? What do you need to do to make this right?

Process 3. Practical Reasoning (PR) – Critical-Creative-Ethical/Moral[6] Thinking. Practical reasoning involves collecting and evaluating information needed to made decisions. This involves coming to an agreement on group goals—valued ends. Questioning, critical-creative-ethical/moral thinking, and critiquing are core practical reasoning processes—and core critical literacy processes. Dialoging and collaborating with others to decide what is best to do individually and collectively are the supporting social processes. In this process, the teacher and her students learn together--dialoguing and using practical reasoning to decide what to believe and do. This is the essence of nurturing critical literacy in the family or school: The teacher asks practical reasoning questions and reasons with learners to help them think through what to believe and do. Real world learning resources and reasons assembly charts support and help extend the dialogue and thinking. Practical reasoning questions include questions related to context, valued-ends, possible actions/choices, and possible consequences of those actions. Most importantly, the teacher encourages learners to reason and ask questions of themselves and others in their peer groups, their families, and communities to decide what to believe and do. This is taking reasoned action for the well-being of all.

Process 4. Critical Reflection and Critique/Judgment. Critical reflection and critiquing ideas, choices, and actions from multiple perspectives are core critical literacy processes. Family members and learners need to be encouraged to be critically reflective in all that they do—asking themselves, How will this affect others—now and in the future? Asking this basic critical-ethical question of self and others helps determine morally defensible actions (See Table 3). Forming generalizations to guide future practices is part of critical reflection, critiquing and life-long learning: to consciously ask self and others, What did I learn from this experience that will help me and others in the future?

Process 5. Critical Social Action. All critical literacy processes are focused on taking individual or collective social action. This includes private and public caregiving, social advocacy, and moral-political action in families and community. The purpose of this action is to transform our conditions for optimum human development. Social action can include home and family projects, community centered writing and/or speaking projects, community service learning, and public policy advocacy projects. In fact, "critical literacy can be thought of as a social practice in itself and as a tool for the study of other social practices" (Shor, 1999).

Learners need to plan the way to take action to achieve their valued-ends by asking themselves technical questions: Who? What? When? Where? They also may need to develop the social and intellectual skills needed to take action. If so, teachers and parents need to model the skill process, guide practice in authentic contexts, and facilitate self-reflective feedback from the learner, the natural consequences, and others in real-world experiences.

Conclusion. Critical literacy can be nurtured in real-world home economics problem solving experiences. Critical consciousness raising; critical, creative, and ethical questioning and thinking; critical reflection; critiquing; dialogue; and collective social action processes are life-enhancing processes for the 21st century. Critical literacy is a teaching strategy and everyday life strategy for a changing world.

Footnotes

[1] The name for the Home Economics profession in the United States was changed in 1994 to Family and Consumer Sciences to better reflect the scope and emphasis of the field.

[2] The concept of "silent language" of culture originated with the anthropologist, Edward Hall (1956/1981), and refers to the out-of-awareness dimensions of culture that we take for granted without questioning or thinking--often because everyone in the culture also acts in the same ways. These ways of acting reflects the uniqueness of the culture.

[3] Other critical teaching models are used and advocated by literacy educators, such as Freire (1970, 1973, 1992), Shor (1980, 1992), Comber & Simpson (1997), Dozier, Johnson and Rogers (2006), and McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004). All develop similar critical literacy processes: problem posing, critical consciousness, questioning, critical reflection, and critical social action.

[4] Ohio Family and Consumer Sciences standards, completed in 2007, integrate four sets of processes skills with slightly different labels: Think and reason critically; build interpersonal and collaborative skills; leadership and advocacy skills; and integrate life management skills. See www.ode.ohio.us

[5] Examples of other philosophical questions for self-reflection and social inquiry: Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? How can I make the world a better place? Why should I do that? How can I treat others as I would like to be treated? Why do I need to keep learning? How does what I know affect who I am? (Garner, 2007, p. 145)

[6] "Ethical" and "moral" are terms that are often used interchangeably. The central concern of the moral domain is human conduct (how we relate to each other) and character (kind of people we are) (Arcus in Johnson & Fedje, 1999).

[7] See the following websites for a comparison of the Golden Rule in the world's religions: http://www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html compares 8 religions; http://www.religioustolerance.org/reciproc.htm compares versions of the Golden Rule (a.k.a. ethics of reciprocity) in 21 world religions.

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