

A Generating Home Economics Curriculum is You

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When the young bride sliced off the small end of the finely glazed ham, her husband asked with surprise, "What is the purpose of such a gesture?" A look of importance and seriousness brought with it the nebulous answer that she wasn't sure, but her mother had always done it and her hams were delectable. Soon after this incident the bridegroom had an opportunity to ask his mother-in-law why she cut the small end off the ham before she popped it into her oven to bake" Her answer was equally earnest but she, too, was not quite sure why. She was positive that that slice was one of the secrets of her success. Her grandmother had always done it and she was distinguished for her rare cuisine. The latter, overhearing, entered the conversation with delighted chuckles. Her so-called secret was a practicality: the pan in which she had had to bake ham had been too short and, that slicing had been her solution of her problem.

Change racks us and supports us. The tensions between "tradition" and "the new" are a constant. Change is a phenomenon of history that is ageless but besets us today because of the speed with which it engulfs us. There is no need to change for change's sake; that seems obvious. But what is not so clear is that, because of the new bodies of information in every area that we teach, every method we use needs constantly to be reviewed, evaluated, and applied in light of the findings. To act without such purpose and reason is folly in the highest degree.

John Gardner, in his dynamic volume, Self Renewal,¹ refers to this as "stability in motion." It is with this process and ability continually to review and renew that I am basically concerned with regard to the secondary home economics curriculum. Applied, it is defined as follows: It is the constant evaluation and re-evaluation; the continual updating, with candor and freshness of vision, of what is to be taught in home economics in the secondary schools. The process is, however, dependent on the ability and the latter pre-supposes a mentally healthy individual who is able to face the paradoxical frustrations and excitement of dealing with the process.

Traditionally, professional home economics has been a production-oriented area of applied study. It has evolved, in our era, into a consumer-oriented applied discipline that is concerned with the welfare of the individual, the consumer and his family. Dr. Mervin B. Freedman of Stanford University gives some insights into some of our problems in the following:²

Much of the unrest and dissatisfaction that currently exists on college campuses stems from the student's realization that he is being trained for a world that soon, won't exist. Underlying all protest is the feeling among students that they are being swindled by their education. The Industrial Revolution is ending in the United States. Perhaps it is already over. A new era -- that of automation and cybernation -- is hard upon us. And the consequences of the termination of the Industrial Revolution -- for the individual and society -- are enormous. Students are restless and dissatisfied because they recognize, not always consciously, that the education they are receiving is not functional to the world they will inhabit in 10-20 years time.

In that quotation are identified some of the stumbling blocks that confront secondary home economics curricula. The question of subject matter must be explored, but some more basic questions are equally important. What is a healthy functioning- individual in, this new era? (See David Reisman's The Lonely Crowd.³) What is this creature called the consumer? What does "the family" mean in the context of 1966 as well as of the future? Those who would answer these and related questions quickly cannot understand the complexities of the culture (and sub-cultures) in which we move and breathe and have our being.

For example, Dr. Sarane Boocock, writing in Women's Education Quarterly of the American Association of University Women, recently observed:

We need to experiment with new modes of family living. Available evidence indicates that the employment of married women, once thought to herald the demise of the family, is in itself neither 'good' nor 'bad' for marriage and children It is becoming evident that it is too costly to the community as a whole, as well as to the individual family -- for the woman with college training to devote herself exclusively to two or three children and a houseful of appliances....

Getting over a second major stumbling block that can impede "stability in motion" in the secondary home economics curriculum is dependent, of course, on our having hurdled the first. But once given some insights into the myriad factors concerning the individual, the consumer and the family in this new age, the thoughtful professional home economist must face the ever-present, evolving issue of: What content is reasonable to teach in the light of what I know?

The curriculum of public education is supposed to reflect the culture in which-the pupil exists. Education is further committed to interpreting the present and to attempting to envisage and project into the future the needs and demands of this generation.

Content, then, must impart the present and the future - In essence, it must impart techniques for living thoughtful and productive lives. An excitement about and some methods for learning in order to facilitate continual growth outside the bonds and motivational structures of formal instruction are imperative, for instance. The ability to absorb change can be a result.

At the crux of all this is a possible third obstacle -- the group and the individuals that are the KEY to innovating such, a dynamic relevant curriculum. The home economics teacher is in a powerful position. Her acceptance of the responsibilities of the commitment is critical .

In her peculiar situation and in her particular way, the truly professional home economist has the potential to make a difference. Quality teaching reaps untold rewards, but it requires dedication and work. To rely on platitudes, old ideas in a new era, outdated, references and tattered materials is not professional nor can such reliance be considered, in one sense, real teaching. Such attitudes and actions distort the teacher's commitment to meaning merely the holding of a "job."

To face issues (to fail and succeed), to seek some insights, to find some realistic tentative answers require energy, vision, total health and courage, characteristics of an educated woman in love with life in general, and with continual learning in. particular. To paraphrase John Dewey's comment on the educated person:

When one stops climbing mountains to find what is over the next mountain then such mindless stagnation spells spiritual and intellectual death.

If you now envisage yourself working night and day, if I seem perched on some unattainable cloud, perhaps the understanding of education has been clouded by myth. There are, indeed, no

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discrepancies between work and play.. The separation is one that we in home economics tend to perpetuate. These contradictory learning experiences and attitudes were evident in an article I reviewed recently.⁴ In a management lesson the following viewpoint was cited: "I manage my time so that I can get everything done (implied 'dirty work') so that I can "play." I submit that "work" and "play" are not two rigid categories but aspects of one's attitude toward the tasks in question.

The "total" woman and her professional commitment should be one. What has this to do with the secondary curriculum in home economics? If we are educated women, home economists by degree or fate, functioning healthy individuals-in a culture running at breakneck, amazing, threatening speed, the very richness of our total lives can speak. From our own experience we can empathize and instruct our students with realism. No set categories of work and play. Contributions and satisfactions are one and the same: they are nurtured by each, other.

Today there are no definitive, secure, rigid, black-and-white answers to the individual, the consumer and the family -in our society. There are no pat curriculum books, journals or magazines that can tell us what to teach to our particular group of students. The impact of what we teach and of how we choose to disseminate that information depends, in the end, on the professional teacher. Innumerable sources give us clues, but the insights and interpretations are our challenge and responsibility. To attune and relate to the society in which our pupils live now and will be functioning in the future is the call. Their lives must be prepared for "stability in motion."

FOOTNOTES

1. Gardner, John L., Self Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society. New York: . Harper Colophon. 1965
2. Freedman, Mervin, The Nation Education. Summary. Vol. 18, No. 13. September 1965. London: Connecticut: Croft Educational Service.
3. Reisman, David, with Nathan Glazer, and Revel Denney, The Lonely Crowd. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1963.
4. Lee, Dorothy, "Discrepancies in the Teaching of American. Culture." Reprinted from Education and Anthropology. George D. Spindler, Editor. Stanford, California: Stanford University, Press, 1955 .