

The Experienced Home Economics Teacher of the Seventies

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Research Interest In past three years has been of an applied nature in working with the Department of Education in Alberta, in steering the development of a new high school curriculum for Grades seven to twelve. This has led to an interest in researching the possibilities of course programs for special students, and family relationships. A side interest is the development of a history of home economics in Canada.

The experienced Canadian home economics teacher today has the conviction that her area of interest contains a body of subject matter that can contribute to the development enrichment of our present and future society. She is aware that her main commitment is to assist in transmitting the culture to youth, and she has accepted this responsibility. As a trained educator, in a specific subject area, she has the assurance of her ability to give to youth what will enable them to develop their full potential in the society of man.

Home economics subject content is broad, encompassing as it does man's specific needs for food, clothing and shelter. Because of this, home economics has had a place on the secondary school curriculum of Canadian schools for enough years to gain significance. Nevertheless, in the swiftly changing systems within which we function, the present and the future of what we are doing must be continually analyzed, revised and re-vitalized. Time is always too short to improve ourselves quickly to any great extent. Yet we cannot stand still. The teacher of the present and the future will be the person who can straddle the river of change, and follow the stream from above with clear perception of its direction and flow.

In this article, I wish to expose a few ideas, with the hope that Canadian teachers of home economics will continue to be alert and ready to accept the changes we cannot avoid. The future of our subject depends on the influence of the experienced teacher, who has kept up up-to-date and leads her students into the newer approaches affected by technology, which, in turn, affects the family and the home. The student of this generation has been born into a world that accepts change. The teacher must accept it also.

Let us examine the background of home economics in Canada. We must admit that the basic content of our subject matter and the procedures used in its development have been adapted in large measure from the research and findings of our American counterparts. This has more in it to commend than perhaps we are aware. American educators were in a position to obtain more funds, for the purpose of developing programs, etc., at a much earlier time in history than were we Canadians. Furthermore, the philosophy established by the American Home Economics Association is based on the universality of the family. Consequently, Canadian home economists have no quarrel with adopting *New Directions*²-- a statement of philosophy and objectives -- as the basis for our beliefs in the development of home economics in the secondary schools and colleges of Canada.

Again, in 1967 the American Home Economics Association, assisted by the National Education Association, published a book on concepts and generalizations for high-school curriculum.' It is well for the Canadian teacher in-the secondary school to examine this publication. It is an outcome of the philosophy and beliefs that we Canadians also hold with regard to home economics. This particular publication is the result of several meetings of outstanding home economics scholars who devoted six years to compiling a working structure for the understanding and development of the concept approach to teaching the subject area content of home economics.

Perhaps at this point we might stop for reflection and ask ourselves:

1. What are we teaching in home economics today?
2. How are we teaching our subject content?
3. What means are we taking to pursue the changing needs of our present society?
4. Are we really aware of the evolution in our society caused by changes related to food, clothing and shelter that have been brought about by technology as well as the advances in sociology and psychology?
5. Or, are we still just cooking and sewing?

At this point I should like to discuss just the last of these queries. I do so because it is the easiest to be guilty of and it is the easiest to carry out in the classroom situation. Schools, like other institutions we know, are often slow to change. At the turn of the century the family unit was not as complex in its ability to function as it is today. Consequently, the challenge of the home economists then was to assist the family to adapt the changes in the technology as it affected the skills of home-making. This was a good thing and we did the job. Today, technology has lessened most of the skill problems with simplified appliances, convenience foods-and easy-care textiles. Consequently, our function now is of another nature. Food, clothing and shelter are still our sphere of interest, but the concept of the 'global village' has affected us. In view of the mobility of people of many cultures and of many social and economic levels, the commitment of the home economist is to meet the new challenge. The emphasis need not be on cooking and sewing, but on the nature of food, nutrition and clothing; the social and psychological aspects of food, clothing and shelter; consumer education; human and personal development; management and decision-making and housing.

While we must admit that the secondary school home economics teacher still has the obligation to teach her students the skills of her art, the emphasis must change. The teacher can no longer consider herself a success if:

- (1) She manages a well-organized laboratory;
- (2) She satisfies the student because she has developed a good product;
- (3) She satisfies the principal because she conducts an orderly classroom and the students are happy.

This is not teaching today. While the teacher still has the obligation to manage a classroom, and to satisfy her students and her superiors, she must go further. To clarify this, we can now say that there are specific elements she must study and apply:

- (1) The philosophy of home economics;
- (2) The subject matter content;
- (3) The student today;
- (4) The society today.

This kind of thinking leads us to the basics of curriculum and what it is, and what the commitments of the home economist are. The complexity and the explosion of knowledge have obliged us to think in terms of concepts that are true, universal and lasting. Unless the home economics teacher can sort out the concepts, teach for the students she has before her, the subject area of home economics will be submerged in the maelstrom of change, and will lose its significance in the secondary school curriculum.

Some preventatives for such a catastrophe lie in the leadership and initiative of the experienced teacher. The study of the home economics curriculum must become a continuous one. Otherwise the program developed in 1911 will become obsolete by 1975. The teacher, if she is truly a teacher, must commit herself to current readings in her area; she must keep a well up-dated library of books and periodicals; she must be professional enough to be a member of her association organizations. The home economics associations must sponsor

workshops, and our universities must make credit and non-credit courses available. A close liaison between university home economics professors and secondary school teachers is very advantageous and essential. The university professor has the obligation to keep up with new theories and learnings and techniques. The secondary school teacher has the advantage of knowing the problems, needs and requirements of the student in the classroom situation. This is what curriculum is all about. It is a waterfall with power and flow, it is a plunging, moving process that cannot be stopped although you can channel it and you can harness it.³

The past decades have seen the American home economics schools and colleges take the lead in establishing a body of knowledge. The 70s should see Canadian home economics leading in its own research and our schools should see a new emphasis which will adapt itself to the present and the future of the Canadian family and the society. The experienced teacher must give the leadership.

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