

Homemaking and Wage Earning Through Home Economics

TIHERE thrives in American lore a general rationale which says that he who has had a mother and father at one time or other, most certainly qualifies as an authority on family living. Apparently we are a nation of such experts. Likewise with education, almost everybody has been to school. Ergo almost everybody is instantly prepared to make recommendations, often with vigor, in family living and in education.

Consequently when certain problems today make it necessary for many women to earn a livelihood, the pros and cons in this argument fly hither and yon like Milton's angels battling in Chaos.

Problems and Potentials

It is within this context that professional educators must try to give particularly sensitive and patient leadership. Lay citizens, having recently grown acutely aware of many disquieting statistics on youth's performance in both school and post-school living, nervously look to us to guide their youngsters effectively toward a rewarding role in a rapidly changing world.

Many of these problems which currently chafe us have existed since the

start of public education. School people have always felt concern for the children who have not blended into the system, but since alternate routes to productive adulthood were available, their efforts to accomplish this were not always viewed as crucial. Today, we cannot afford this luxury of underdeveloped talent. Expanded technological trends demand that the nation receive the most and the best from its people-power. Myriads of specialists are wanted for military and industrial programs.

An equally important demand comes from the very high value placed on individuals and on their potential in our culture. An awareness in depth of the social implications of these demands calls for a revision, drastic as need requires, of a school system which permitted millions of children to be filtered out and allowed to become less than they were capable of becoming.

Last year over half of the dropouts in secondary schools were girls. The major reasons: marriage or pregnancy, inappropriate curriculum and disinterest in

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school. From college the distaff dropouts run even higher, more than half. As a result, universities throughout the nation are initiating a variety of programs for getting women to return.

Tradition deems that the proper place for women is in the home. However, our better judgment tells us that first importance should be placed on women as individuals with dignity, rights and privileges. Many have fundamental needs which can be answered only by a job. Personal fulfillment is one. The second involves the need for two incomes in the family. It may be that the only way that many children can be raised in a worthy environment and can be given the background necessary for effective participation in society is to insure that these needs are met.

Because the consensus of American opinion seems to approve women at work, and because women are entering the working force in even greater numbers, public education must accept responsibility for their training. This is pragmatic. Many young women already are at work, though they have not yet finished high school. In 1963, twenty-two and one-half million teen-agers spent eleven billion dollars, much of which they had earned themselves. It will be up to educators to keep our work-oriented youth in school, help them become skilled and prepare them to live in a quickly changing world. Our girls are a special challenge because most of them will have to prepare for a dual role: homemaker and careerist.

Toward attaining these goals, home economics has a unique contribution to make. Success on the job and success in family living go hand in hand. Preparation for skill alone has not ever insured vocational or professional realization of individual potential. How people react

to others . . . how they dress . . . what they say (or don't say) . . . how they feel about themselves . . . their ability to assume responsibility . . . how creative they are . . . how well they manage their time, energy and money—all of these have an effect on the job they do, whether it is being a businesswoman, the wife of a businessman, a teacher, or a nursemaid.

While we are concentrating on the dropouts and the culturally deprived, the more intellectually or socially endowed young people should not be neglected. On the contrary, important contributions to their education can be made through home economics education. This need not be done in isolation; indeed, there is good reason to bring them into the context of the maladjusted. Their capabilities can become a valuable resource for members of their own age group who feel hindered by the school environment, who feel intellectually inferior, socially unacceptable, or frustrated over family status or finances.

Education for Change and Growth

Recently the federal government initiated legislation (Public Law 88-210) that gives financial support for training youth for employment. There are many opportunities, that will evolve or already have evolved, which offer much help for this kind of educational program.

Federal support is not new to home economics. Laws were passed almost 50 years ago to give emphasis and financial support to vocational education. Home economics was embodied in this wide category, and homemaking classified as a vocation for women. This same law, this same philosophy, holds true today. Home economics education has never

centered interest either on the academically gifted or culturally deprived. It has never used standardized tests extensively to compare accomplishments of individuals, classes or schools. Instead, home economics education has attempted to focus interest and learning on the worth of an individual, the need to grow as a person within one's own abilities and interest, on interest in successful living, and development of vocational aptitude when such was needed.

The academically gifted girl enrolled in home economics has gone to college when finances have allowed; often while there she majored in home economics. Many graduates who specialized in home economics hold top positions today in a related profession, business or industry. Others have finished high school and have taken jobs for which their classes in home economics prepared them. These women are quite likely among America's happiest and best adjusted wives, mothers and careerists.

There is currently a need for high school programs to provide separate courses for developing special skills for designated occupations available to young people in the community. Rua Van Horn, a home economist of wide experience who has worked closely with both the Manpower Commission and the Office of Education, points out four situations in which training for wage earning through home economics may be offered: (a) in the upper secondary grades; (b) in a post-high school program; (c) in the junior or community college; and (d) in the program of adult education.

Suggested curriculum guides for nine service occupations with need for home economics background have been developed. The nine guides deal with "Workers for Child-Day Care Centers," "Man-

agement Aid in Public Housing Projects," "The Visiting Homemaker," "Hotel and Motel Housekeeping Aids," "Supervised Food Service Workers," "Wardrobe Maintenance Specialists," "Companion to an Elderly Person," "Family Dinner Service Specialist," and "Homemakers Assistant." These guides do not exhaust the possibilities; there are many others that could be developed.

We need to look toward revitalizing the curriculum to meet the needs of more of our youth. As we contemplate the contribution home economics can and should make, we must realize there are many ways to improve a school curriculum and to enrich the lives of more boys and girls.

However, in such a climate of urgency there is a great need to proceed with caution. Any review of home economics programs should:

Evaluate the present program to determine how well it is making young women aware of their changing role in society and the new and different meaning of work. Are the skills they are developing adaptable to employment both in and out of a home? Where there is a need, revise, up-date and broaden the present high school curriculum to meet determined needs more effectively. Proceed positively and constructively to examine and discard that which is no longer appropriate and to hold to accepted values.

Analyze research to provide perspective. We must study research findings and determine what they really say. We must face issues that give credence, on one hand, to the role of women as wives, mothers and homemakers; and, on the other hand, tend to exert pressure for women to use their abilities in work outside the home.

Research reveals that women spend over 80 percent of the nation's income. Do they spend it wisely? Are they trained to make decisions about what to buy, about how to manage time, about being a success as a mother, wife and homemaker? Are they helped to use intelligently the vast amount of salesmanship, advertising and public opinion they face each day for the acquisition of material things? Have they been given any basis for determining the sources of help available when help is needed? Can they read and distinguish between authority and opinion? Do they know the real meaning of living: understanding the complex, the joys of giving, the satisfaction of just being, the gratitude of compassion? What does research reveal about why girls drop out of high school before graduation? We need to know how many girls who graduate from our own high school and enter college, do not stay there for the full term. We need to work in an atmosphere of experimentation.

Use resources. An increasingly education-oriented society is providing many helpful human and material resources. We must use these. We must become familiar with the many agencies of federal, state and local governments which are qualified and eager to help as rich instructional aids. We must enlist students, recruit alumni, parents and community leaders in planning, not in dictating, directions. We must develop with youth the understanding of working with them, not in an atmosphere of complete permissiveness nor one of complete dominance. We must bring together the teachers of language arts, mathematics, social studies, home economics and the vocational subjects to determine how each may more effectively contribute to a program geared to a world of work.

Emphasize all programs which can contribute to a higher quality of living and can affect as many students as possible. We must be slow to establish separate classes for those going to college and those going into a job at the end of high school. Many programs already give basic learnings that may require only short, intensive supplementary courses for job training. We must weigh carefully what is to be gained and what may be lost when we try to separate the "privileged" from the "underprivileged." It is possible that the privileged have as much to learn from mutual association as do the underprivileged. We must help all young people to face realistically the conflicting, contrasting, affluent, poverty-stricken world in which they, and we, live.

Provide vocational extensions of general programs to meet the special requirements of students who need early entry into employment. We must insist on the high quality of work expected by industry, allowing time for attainment of this quality based on the capability of each individual. We must organize, direct and evaluate special courses for training young women when the need is apparent and when the facilities are available. We must provide for adequate teacher orientation and for refresher training.

This is a big order. Perhaps home economics can point directions for the searchers. Like Maeterlinck's Bluebird, the answers may have been on our doorstep all the time.

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the most extensive ever provided to graduating seniors. A total of 10,866 of the Nation's 21,338 high schools participated in this program. Nearly 700,000 seniors received Employment Service help. Such cooperative efforts, which are increasing each year, help our young people immeasurably and avoid duplication and competition of effort.

It is most appropriate for *Educational Leadership* to have selected for its 1964-65 issues the theme "Schools and the Social Revolution"—a theme which is both timely and of national significance. The task before all of us is difficult, but well-coordinated efforts can be fruitful. By working together—educators, labor, business, industry, government at all levels, private and community agencies—all of our citizens can unite to preserve and nurture our most precious asset—the youth of America.

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