



REVITALIZING HOME ECONOMICS

BY BETTY MUTH

At the beginning of the school year, Jane called me to explore the possibility that her daughter, Carol, might eliminate home economics from her class schedule. Carol's day was filled with math, English, Bible; all the "essential" subjects plus several musical organizations.

Home economics seemed the least essential and the best choice for elimination. Why? Because Jane's own experience with home economics made her consider it nonacademic. Do Jane and others in the community view home economics accurately? Is it really just cooking and sewing, a "Mickey Mouse," nonacademic course?

Carol did enroll in my home economics class. She gained some new experiences and insights and came to enjoy herself as the year progressed. But the final reward came in June when she told me how delighted she was with the class and how much she valued its content.

What Is "Academic"?

A look at the curriculum at many an

academy will raise some questions about its balance. Does it incorporate the SDA goal of educating the head, hand, and heart? Or is it trendy, incorporating every new topic that gains media notoriety? We have seen a scramble to include computer programming, AIDS education, and other topics into the curriculum. Proponents of these topics have advanced convincing arguments for reshaping the cur-

riculum in certain ways.

However, the speed at which the changes occur and the stridency by promoters of special interest topics has badly confused the public about what is relevant in education. Relevance is not simply a matter of responding to pressing national problems of the moment, nor is it the need to cater to the transient whims of each student. For education to achieve its goals, it must be concerned with producing constructive Christians, happy young people whose lives have meaning and value.

Of course, school also trains students for careers. However, the need to prepare a child for professional success should not cause education to emphasize marketable skills over skills for living.

Where Should Living Skills Be Taught?

Some argue that living skills should be taught in the home by parents who model these concepts. Of course, the

same can be said about religious education. But surely no one believes that religious education should occur *only* in the home. The same is true of education in living skills. Home economics can broaden and expand a student's skills and experiences beyond what he or she learns in the home.

In some families, parents may not have the background information or updated knowledge to teach their children, and a home economics class can thereby contribute to the students' growth. Single-parent homes and dual-career families all take a toll on the time parents can spend with their children. Home economics can play an important role in preparing these young people for successful lives.

How can educators refute the arguments favoring elimination of home economics and revitalize the subject at the same time? Here are some ideas:

Embark on a Public-relations Campaign

Create a favorable climate by embarking on a public relations campaign. Get the word out to parents and fellow teachers that home economics has many concerns. Its curriculum embraces topics as broad as family, home, health, and success of the individual. Explain that equal time is given in the home economics program to the five areas of the discipline: (1) family life, (2) foods and nutrition, (3) housing and interior design, (4) consumer economics, and (5) clothing. They may be surprised at the breadth and relevance of the content.

Is home economics really just cooking and sewing, a "Mickey Mouse," nonacademic course?

Build Faculty and Administrative Support

Give concrete information about the course content, for even professionals in education may hold misconceptions about home economics. Use every opportunity to incorporate skills learned in other classes into the curriculum, including library research, writing assignments, applied math skills. Make the faculty aware of this by communicating the experiences and successes students have in these areas.

Consider a Name Change

If the name "home economics" conjures up visions of a particular course that does not realistically represent the current class content, change its name. Choose a new title that appeals and applies to both male and female students.

Reorganize Home Economics Classes

General home economics classes usually enroll mostly ninth grade girls. Some

of the topics that could and should be covered are lost on this group. For example, child development and parenting, which would be of more value to junior and senior students.

Consider offering small segmented classes, breaking up the topics and teaching them to different levels of students. Stress the importance of these classes to various career connections, such as family life or human growth and development for a social sciences career. Consumer education is important for a business major. Foods and nutrition is relevant to a medical or health-related career.

Encourage Equal Education for All Students

As long as home economics remains an elective, males will tend to shy away from the class in favor of more "macho" courses like auto mechanics or drafting. Convince the administration or school board that parenting, nutrition, consumer savvy, and other areas covered by home economics are relevant and vital to male students.

No students, male or female, should find it necessary to choose between learning about the mechanics of a car and learning how to maintain his or her own body. Nor should students have to choose between a class in computers and one teaching parenting and child care skills. All of these topics ought to be required of every student.

With child abuse on the upsurge it would be tremendously helpful for stu-

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dents to understand child development, as preparation for the challenge of parenting.

Our denomination has prided itself in demonstrating healthful eating habits through cooking schools and other means. However, our own young people are not as concerned as they should be about correct eating habits or a healthful diet. They will not choose good foods just because they are told to do so; they will participate in healthful living only if they understand the benefits to be derived. The future health and well being of tomorrow's church members and leaders depends on getting this message across to today's students.

Make the Course Academic

This does not mean that applied techniques be eliminated, but that theory be taught, homework be assigned, and testing be based on solid facts and information learned in the class. Without a solid curriculum, no amount of public relations or catchy names and phrases will change people's ideas about home economics. Once a quality program is in place, promotion will be much easier and more successful.

For education to achieve its goals, it must be concerned with producing constructive Christians, happy young people whose lives have meaning and value.

Use Community Resources

One of the best ways to communicate the value of the revitalized home economics program is to use professionals as consultants for the class. Have a doctor speak on acne or a crisis center professional discuss teen suicide.

Hire Well-qualified Teachers

Teachers who have been trained in the field have had exposure to all five areas of home economics so that they can competently address each area in the curriculum.

Schools often tend to look for special-

ists in one particular area to teach home economics classes. Such individuals will probably feel most comfortable sticking to their own specialty, whether it be cooking or sewing or some other area, than spending equal time in all the areas of home economics. Teacher education is just as important for home economics teachers as for instructors in English, mathematics, or the sciences.

In Conclusion

According to Carolyn Purgraski, a consultant working with home economics teachers,

Many parents want their children to reach beyond the basics and to develop higher levels of thinking skills—analysis, evaluation, listening, and decision-making related to the social and human issues. And, in my opinion, no other course but home economics does this.*

The challenge, then, comes to teachers and administrators alike to rethink the curriculum so that education can achieve its full potential to improve the lives of their students. □

*Carolyn Purgraski, "A Required Subject," *Forecast*, 31:2 (October 1985), pp. 30-32.

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AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING PLAN

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To get out the message will require good organization and continuing effort. Dr. Lou Joanas asserts, "Whether we like it or not, Home Economics has a public relations function. . . . Public relations efforts cannot be a one-shot attempt; marketing must be a vital part of our careers."²⁰ Only as the ideas are repeated and reinforced will they gradually become known and accepted. "People need to hear a message three to ten times before they remember."²¹ Effective marketing will convince people that home economics today is much more than just "stitch and stir." □

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² Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View,

At the core of the home economics program lies the challenge of helping students, all students, to develop survival skills—not just preparing them for some profession or occupation but more importantly, for personal fulfillment.

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²⁰ Betty Lou Joanas, "Issues and Answers: What Are Your Newest Marketing Strategies for Home Economics Programs?" *Momentum*, 4:1 (Fall 1986), p. 3.

²¹ Shultz.