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Preparing the Girl for Motherhood

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Preparin the Girl for Motherhood

DR. FLORENCE BROWN SHERBORN
University of Kansas

Given Before the Iowa State Home Economics Association.

THE IOWA HOMEMAKER

OTHERHOOD is a pretty inclusive thing, and adequate preparation covers a wide field. We would like to include in this preparation contributions from home, school, community and state. I shall confine myself chiefly to the responsibility of the school and, more specifically, the opportunity of Home Economics to this important matter.

Nothing more epoch-making has occurred in the history of education than the rise of Home Economics with its goal of “Better Living Thru Controlled Environment”. Beginning with the very fundamental matters of food and shelter and the orderly conduct of household business and administration, the science of Home Economics is now expanding to include the wider interests of the home-maker; public aspects of the household; municipal, state and national housekeeping; and, quite lately, attention is being given to the care of the child in the home, and still more recently, to the very basic matter of child-bearing.

It is timely that the scientific consideration of the home is well-rounded as it is at the present crisis in human affairs. Women have quietly burst an evolutionary humanism with rude cosmic surgery and left to the men and the women of the globe suddenly accorded political and economic equality with men.

There must be a Destiny which shapes our ends, else why should this stupendous things occur at the moment when a world war has shattered nationalism, enshrined traditions, gashed open the sores of humanity with rude cosmic surgery; and take the world war has shattered nationalism, enshrined traditions, gashed open the sores of humanity with rude cosmic surgery; and left to the men and the women of the world the joint responsibility of making the adjustments upon which destiny depends.

Women may not immediately figure largely in the legal and political aspects of the situation; this is not where they are needed but they have a less important part to play in the world which is here and must be set in order.

“Woman’s Sphere” has widened with a vengeance from the traditional four-walled “Home” within which her family ate and slept, to her community to her state, to her nation, and now, quite abruptly, she finds herself a citizen of the world. It becomes her responsibility to see that all these, home, city, state, nation, and supernation, are swept, and left to the men and the women of the world.

Home Economics is helping enormously in this situation. From College down to Junior High School, foods and household management are being taught and taught better and more practically year by year; and year by year more girls are being taught to keep the baby.

We must give the girl what she has to prepare for the task of motherhood.

The question confronting us as teachers of the women of tomorrow who literally inherit a new earth, is, what can we do to help them meet these tremendous responsibilities? In order to discuss this intelligently, let us consider some of the responsibilities of the home. No Home Economics has to offer toward their solution.

First. (Women will, as ever, be responsible for the physical comfort of the world.) Have you ever stopped to think how fundamental is simple human comfort to morals, to manners, to health, to achievement, and even to diplomacy? (As evidence of fact, it takes intelligence with which difficulties are settled by conference about a well-filled board.) If women did no more in the present crisis than see to it that the average household is well-insulated, and finds his slippers before the fire, they might find that they have helped tremendously in establishing tolerance and understanding of the come-down to a mere rower application, there is no manner of doubt but that a factor in the breakdown of many homes is the inability of the homemaker to keep her home, or her family, comfortably. Bad food and disorderly surroundings generate irritable nerves.

Unbalanced diet creates cravings which seek satisfaction in tobacco and stimulants. The malmoursored individual is always subnormal in efficiency and nervous control. The malmoursored child is handicapped from the start. The lack of a comfortable chair, a good light, and an engaging book drives man and boy, and sometimes the girl, to the street.

The solution appears simple. As a matter of fact, it takes intelligence and skill of a high order properly to feed a family in these days—while teaching others in this field involves grounding in nutrition, economy, science, education and art. It is often impossible to separate the food, the surroundings generate irritable nerves.

It is not enough to teach the girl to feed a family and manage a house. To feed a family and manage a house present from her obligation to know how hold before she marries or bears and rears children. She needs to know these things to live safely in a hotel! I see no escape, if humanity is to be saved to health and calmness of spirit, from the obligation of woman to master the problem here and now and in its practical aspects. As to what she will do in the future—the Lap of the Gods is spacious—we will lose in one thing more.

Second. (The mother as homemaker, is said to spend nine-tenths of the wages of the world.) I cannot quote authority for these figures, but it is certainly true that the homemaker have a great responsibility for the wide expenditure of the family income in these times of uncertain and fluctuating financial values and the increasing dependence of the average family upon the wage envelope and the pay cheque.

Health, Education, culture, all cost more year by year. To provide these ideals degree tax the skill and ingenuity of the mother as never before. Here again, Home Economics is saving the day by teaching budgeting, economic uses, household accounts, etc.

Third. The home may provide food and comfort and thrift and still fall short of an ideal. If it does not also provide training and education and the simplicity and good taste and an absence of disharmony in line and color. To surround the child with harmony during his impressionable years is certainly the duty and the joy of the mother. Here again, Home Economics is providing the answer in Home Decoration; Home Architecture; Sewing; Costume Design; etc.

Fourth. The hope of the world, the child. It never meant so much to bear a child as it now. At least, this is made more plain and artless, and a willing acceptance of it, the hope of the world. It never meant so much to bear a child as it now. It is not enough to have babies; we must have healthy babies. A whole group of writing prophets are calling our attention rather convincingly to the fact that the human race shows signs of spindling out at the top. Birthrates are decreasing, chiefly because of the failure of the intelligenti of the world to replace themselves; thus leaving the perpetuation of the race more and more to the lower strata who know no restraint, and among whom birth control could not be enforced with a standing army. How is the girl to whom we are trying to point the way going to meet this crucial problem, and what can Home Economics do to help her?

The time has come when, thanks to our somewhat impetuous birth control friends, no woman of intelligence need submit to unwelcome maternity. The result is that young women of today are having a real struggle between their natural maternal impulses and their dread of the vaguely fearful experience of bearing children. It is still more important that the girl be prepared to rear and train children. There are other factors, of course, some of which will be considered later, but what can he done about these just mentioned?

In a certain college course in Maternity and Child Care, the student is asked to have the habit of occasionally asking at the end of the final quiz—what are the girls more
or less willing to have children than they were before taking the course. Usually the girl—this finding is more or less willing because it is easier to face difficulties which are clearly understood and especially when they have some rational line of thinking. They have been trends, but no longer willing to be driven, and they now demand to see ahead the path upon which their feet are set, instead of going blindfolded by the way of the world with the virtuous maid.

Home Economics has been feeling its way into this field through teaching diet in more or less distorted and fragmented fashion. The actual preparation of the girl to meet the physical facts of the experience can, of course, come chiefly from physical science. Many departments of Home Economics teacher training now require both for pre-requisite courses in biology and physiology. A few also require in their majors, definite courses in Maternity and Child Care, and a very few pioneered in considering these subjects, open to all women students, regardless of their major subjects.

It is as it should be and is an illustration of the necessity for a more wholesome education should relate to living experience, and that it should permeate the student to live. Surely no experience in life is more vital to the individual or to the race than the creation and nurture of new life. Surely nothing is more intrinsically the right of the individual than that his own bodily processes and functions should be made known to him. It is his right to have these unfolded to him from the beginning household to the exigencies of the world.

The reproductive system was considered the most successful instance of this kind of cooperation which I have seen originated with a science teacher who enlisted the cooperation of the school nurse and Home Economics department. It would have been even more logical, had the suggestion come from the teachers of homemaking. I believe I can do nothing more helpful than to tell you about this project in this issue. Two hundred and fifty average B class girls in a large Junior High School constituted the unit. The science teacher prepared the way by giving a 25 minute biological presentation of a questionaire on Beauty. The girls were then sent to the Department of Home Economics in evaluating personal dietaries, from the physical education department in making physical examinations and giving corrective exercises, etc. The reproductive system was considered in its proper place, with a short biological preface in the same frank, definite, personal manner as were all the other vital functions. The cooperation had already been given incidentally as to the importance of prenatal diet and hygiene to the formation of good teeth, bone, nerves, etc. These girls were then sent to the Department of Home Economics for demonstrations in clothing and feeding of infants, and the school nurse demonstrated the importance of the infant doll, and was with a practical doll. Visits to baby hospitals and nurseries were contemplated, but were out of the question until existing limitations were avoided.

In this very inspirational piece of teaching, an effort was made to get an insight as to the background these girls brought to the subject of preparation of the child. This was done through a series of questionnaires which are so entirely suitable for use in any homemaking course that I will give them to you for what they may suggest. Confidence and enthusiastic cooperation were elicited the very first day by the presentation of a questionaire on Beauty.

1. Describe the most beautiful girl you ever saw.
2. What made her beautiful?
3. Has anyone as any girl may be beautiful?
4. What may any girl do to become as beautiful as possible?

The answers covered the range of personal opinions so completely that no other text-book was found necessary. While a text-book had been provided and purchased, it was never opened by any one. The teachers and students were encouraged to bring up personal experiences. Shortly, underweight girls were drinking mid-session milk; overweights were cutting out candy, conserve and sugar; in a few days, the boys were eating more fruit, water, and spinach rose in popular esteem. Active discussion resulted in the tabo of excessive cosmetics and increased attention to bathing and grooming the body. Not all because they wished to be perfect, or perfectly healthy, but just and merely because they wished to be simply, human, attractive girls and that they desired for themselves that all these factors entered into the matter.

The truth is the girl who has come through her elementary training, or lack of it, and lays her useful need before us.

As has been said, the needs of the mother of the future race cannot be met in one course, and a very basic part of her preparation is in the Home Economics. The true solution must come through a better integration of courses. This will and must come (and indeed, is already in the least part of unified and organic curricula spreads through education. In the meantime, I believe a real good deal can be done on the initiative of Home Economics teachers in carrying out joint projects with departments of science and school health.

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cideration of the child in the home, the girls were asked to write a description of their dream homes, viz., the home they would like to have, how they would build it, furnish it, and people it.

These also were most revealing and showed a strong material interest in that they hoped for a good father. Several exhibited an interest which could not but be suggestive of emotional experience and interior excitement, and several stipulated that the prospective father should have no hereditary taint.

On the whole, the stories revealed a richness of emotional experience and interest which could not but be suggestive to any teacher, especially any teacher of home-making.

At the very last of this course, a question card was given, covering the following points:

1. In good society it is the rule that parties of young people shall always have one or more older persons, or "chaperones", present. It is also considered improper for couples of young people to go off by themselves, such as picnicking or joy-riding, without a chaperone; and it is considered good form for boys and girls to seek secret occasions to be together. What do you think about this?

2. How do you think boys and girls should become acquainted?

3. What age do you think boys and girls may begin to go together?

4. Do you think a girl should entertain a boy in her parlor with the doors shut?

5. Should they go picnicking or joy-riding alone?

6. Do you think boys and girls should meet secretly, keeping this from their parents? If so, when and why?

7. What is the earliest age at which you think a young couple may get married?

8. Do you think they should marry before the man has a steady job? Some money ahead? A home?

9. Should the girl also save up money for the home before she is married?

10. Should a girl earn money after she is married?

11. What should a girl look for in the boy she goes with? The man she marries?

12. Should a girl ever let a boy kiss her?

13. What do you think a boy should look for in the girl he goes with? The woman he marries?

14. Should a girl seek to have her family know the boy who wants to go with her before he goes with her?

15. Should a boy try to have the girl with whom he wishes to go with become acquainted with his family?

From the answers it was purported to make a composite social code, which showed that two hundred and fifty adolescent girls think young people ought to conduct themselves. It possibly would be unkind to check this too closely with how they actually do conduct themselves—but a declaration of standards is something!

One interesting showing was the fact that some valuable and helpful case studies were made possible. Certain girls revealed, more or less unconsciously, conditions which indicated fully relationships which correlated very closely with biased or bitter, or distorted attitudes and standards, as revealed in the questionnaires.

This stimulating material is to be assembled as a thesis, and I believe it will give some rather definite showings as to the status and significance of the everyday mother of tomorrow. This should be a contribution to the formation of an adequate curricula.

The main proposition, I believe the major responsibility, at the present moment, for the preparation of the girl for motherhood tests with Home Economics. If these girls were definitively and definitely focused upon the home and its needs? Effective accomplishments must come through:

1. Clear conception of the factors involved in
   A. Physical competency.
   B. Mental orientation.
   C. Emotional attitude.
   D. Personal adjustment and training.

2. Meeting these needs, as far as possible, in the Home Economics courses—and supplementing these with definite and well-integrated contributions from other departments and subjects.

The conclusion let me call the attention of this group of girls which faces woman's world and which is probably one of the biggest problems confronting civilization, indeed it may prove to be basic to the survival of civilization. How may these liberated 100,000,000 women perform their racial service in bearing and rearing children under the complexities of modern life, then? Italy at their definite focused upon the home and its needs?

Skillful direction of the interest of the class toward possible future problems will bring about accidents or curricula. But the thinking should be done by the class—the teacher should only guide.


(Continued from page 6)

To any family, problems will be constantly arising which call for solution. Skillful direction of the interest of the class toward possible future problems will bring about accidents or curricula. But the thinking should be done by the class—the teacher should only guide.

2. Formation of abilities, habits, etc.

A teacher should question her activities closely to determine whether she is seeking to develop possibilities or habits, ideals or skills. Whatever her answer is, it should decide the method of approach to a problem. Skills and habits can be developed only by repetition. Abilities may be developed with the use of less time and emphasis and the teacher should decide, for example, whether her class needs to develop skill in making rolls or merely the ability to do it when necessary. In attempting to develop attitudes and appreciations, still another method of approach is necessary and unless a teacher has an infectious interest and enthusiasm of her own, it would be wiser to confine her efforts to doing well the job of training her class in some of the "doing" abilities.

Correlation With Other Subjects in the Curriculum

Correlation with other subjects should be carefully planned with the cooperation of the school faculty. In addition to the sciences, there is fine opportunity to correlate with arithmetic, history and English.

(Continued in January Issue)

Maude Campbell, '05, accepted the position, October 1, as assistant textile and clothing specialist in the Bureau of Home Economics. Miss Ruth O'Brien, formerly of the chemistry faculty here, is in charge of the department.

Lois H. Pammel, '23, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. L. H. Pammel of Ames, and Lyle L. Blundell, '24, of Ottumwa, were married Sept. 15, at the Church of Our Savior in Brookline, Mass.

Margaret (Toots) Sloss, Ind. Sc, '23, has accepted a position as instructor and head of the freshman medical class at the State University of Iowa.