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Democracy Begins in the Home

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STRESSING the importance of having the American family express democracy at its best in their daily lives, Dr. Mary Stewart Lyle, professor in the Department of Home Economics Education, has written *Adult Education for Democracy in Family Life.*

The family is one of the powerful forces shaping the present and future of democracy, and the book stresses the importance of adults furthering their out-of-school education in community-planned programs.

Miss Lyle wrote the book to reveal how democracy is practiced in the homes of a typical Iowa community and to propose adult education which will promote conscious and effective democratic living in the homes and in the community.

Miss Lyle chose a community as a source for her information which represents an average Iowa town in population, educational facilities and other factors. The town has a program of adult education which has not been fully developed.

A sample of one-tenth of the town families and one-fourth of the farm households illustrates the points which Miss Lyle wishes to emphasize.

Six criteria were used as a basis for judging the quality of the home life and its relation to democracy. The first states that physical surroundings and environment promote healthful living and stimulation to intellectual growth.

Although the physical conditions were reasonably good, the interviewer found that one-fourth of the farm homes and one-fifth of those in town were habitually cluttered. The homes of one-eighth of the families interviewed were unclean to the point of being harmful to the health of the family members.

The survey shows that seven out of eight homes have conditions favorable to the promotion of healthful living and intellectual growth.

Miss Lyle concludes that beauty in the home also exerts influence on the personality and intellectual growth of family members. "Aesthetic surroundings suggestive of gracious living, which might exert some positive influence upon the growth of personality and afford some stimulus to intellectual activity" were characteristic of only 13.3 percent of the homes visited.

Stimulation of intellectual growth through publications was investigated. Six and seven-tenths percent of the homes visited had no books; 20.8 percent had no magazines, and 12.5 percent had no newspapers. The two homes which boasted libraries of more than 100 books were those of a minister and a minister's daughter, who had inherited her library. Bibles, old school books and children's books were most common. Only six town homes and four farm homes displayed recent books, including *Berlin Diary, Inside Latin America,* and *Mrs. Miniver.*

Investigation of the second criterion, "Is the pattern of family living such that stimulation is furnished to meet new situations and problems with insight and intelligence?" showed that less than half the homes furnish such stimulation. It is interesting to note that homemakers who had attended college were not included in the majority which failed to incite achievement.

The third criterion concerns family members voluntarily sharing according to their abilities in making plans and carrying responsibility. Miss Lyle found that family members share responsibilities of home life and earning, but only half of them share in the joint planning and choice of family goals.

The fourth criterion, "Family members respect the opinions and personalities of each other," was well-established in the families questioned, but Miss Lyle believes there might have been some lack of cultivating individual personalities.

The fifth judging point, recognizing and developing talent or ability in family members, received little attention in the homes visited.

Concern for the world at large, the sixth and last criterion for judging democracy in homes, was limited to a small number of families. They were not opposed to improvement in the community, but they were unconcerned about it.

With these conclusions about the status of living democracy in the Iowa home, Miss Lyle gives her recommendations for adjusting adult education to meet the demands of this living: Courses in an adult curriculum would include furnishing the home, making the best use of home equipment, planning meals suitable to the family's taste and finances, budgeting family finances and planning recreation for the entire family. Every course would emphasize the promotion of democracy in home life.

These plans for curriculum additions should be formulated as objectives by the adults thinking with the leaders in terms of the democratic understanding and practices to be cultivated over a period of years.

An education program for adults begins at the point from which adults are interested in furthering their education. That program may begin with the latest canning techniques or the better use of fuel, but it must continually raise the issue of what constitutes the democratic way for today's family.