

AN ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING EDUCATION IN SECONDARY FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES PROGRAMS

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A survey of secondary Family and Consumer Sciences teachers examined their backgrounds, information needs, and comfort levels for teaching housing, interior design, and home equipment. The study compared concepts teachers emphasized in their teaching with concepts they felt would be important for students to know in 2010. The sample of 100 teachers indicated they had some course work in these content areas but relied mostly on their past experiences. Few teachers had attended update sessions in the past 10 years, but interest in in-service education was indicated. A comparison of what teachers emphasized with what they felt important revealed that with one exception teachers did not teach what they felt to be important for their students' futures. Teachers particularly need updating in energy conservation and home maintenance to get their comfort levels in line with the concepts they feel are most important. Stronger in-service and pre-service education are warranted.

Human shelter is a basic human need. Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs, included shelter among the physical needs at the very foundation of all human needs. He theorized that without satisfying the basic physical needs, other needs, including safety, socialization, self-esteem, and self-actualization, could not be fulfilled (Lindamood & Hanna, 1979). Marcus (1997) described the home as A... a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard" (p. 2). Preparing adolescents to meet their present housing needs, explore housing-related careers, and gain insight into housing decisions as future homeowners and occupants should be integral parts of a comprehensive curriculum in secondary Family and Consumer Sciences. The extent to which such family housing concepts are taught, however, varies greatly among Family and Consumer Sciences programs across the nation.

As we evaluate secondary family housing education, it is found that little is known about the level of preparation of teachers for conveying housing, interior design, and home equipment subject matter at this level. In addition, few studies have investigated which housing topics are emphasized by secondary Family and Consumer Sciences teachers and which topics the teachers feel students should be knowledgeable about as future consumers.

Purposes of the Study

The first purpose of this study was to examine the educational backgrounds, the information needs, and the comfort levels of secondary Family and Consumer Sciences teachers related to family housing, interior design, and home equipment subject matter. Secondly, the study compared the concepts the teachers emphasized in their teaching in these areas with what

they felt would be important for students to know in the future. A third purpose of the study was to assess strategies and resources seen as most useful in structuring housing-related courses.

Review of Literature

Shelter is a necessity and an important consideration in fulfilling human needs (Jackson & Southers, 1993). Davis (1993) has described the home as the initial, continuing, and basic environment for human development. Konopka (1978) had a similar view of housing, stating that housing is a place where human beings find their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs met. Housing includes the whole way of life one considers desirable; it is also where culture is transmitted.

During the late 1800's and early 1900's housing and the physical environment were major problems confronting society (Klein, 1993). As a result, the study of laws, conditions, ideals, and principles concerned with man's immediate physical environment has been an essential part of Family and Consumer Sciences (previously known as Home Economics) since the development of the first curriculum at the Lake Placid Conferences in the early 1900's (Byrd, 1990; Horn, 1981; Klein, 1993). Byrd's (1990) review of literature related to Home Economics programs indicated that there was an early emphasis on family housing, and shelter was a basic part of the Home Economics knowledge base.

Over the years, new emerging themes have surfaced that have directly influenced housing and housing choices. Included among these are technology, environmental concerns, and housing affordability, as well as the needs of the aging population (Byrd, 1990). In the early 1990's, Byrd expressed a need for an update in the Family and Consumer Sciences knowledge base, including housing. This was seen as warranted because of changing education, business, and technological foci. Byrd felt it was imperative for teachers in Family and Consumer Sciences to continually analyze these changes and their impacts on courses and programs. Educating teachers about such issues, as well as encouraging their inclusion in Family and Consumer Sciences programs, are more important than ever as we enter the 21st Century. Byrd (1990) noted that an enhancement of the profession in the 21-century also demands a new paradigm for Family and Consumer Sciences in higher education. Courses of study at the university level need to include information about the ecology of the family in the physical environment. Kellett and Beard (1991) noted that in recent years the course requirements related to family housing in teacher education curricula have decreased.

A main concern Konopka (1978) voiced in relation to housing is its failure to meet the needs of one neglected group, the adolescent. Teens have a need for privacy and space of their own. Konopka has also noted that young people need to be made very aware of housing as a social phenomenon for which they share responsibility.

Housing decisions have major influences on the family's utilization of resources, and adolescents, as future consumers, need to understand the importance of housing decisions on individual and family well-being. When expenses for a home are too great in comparison to family income, the family's well-being is threatened (Jackson & Southers, 1993). This threat may include the loss of shelter and the intervention by social agencies. Effective educational programs can help prevent the need for such intervention (Davis, 1993).

Despite the fact that housing consumes a large part of a family's income and much of a family's work is directed toward meeting shelter needs and wants, housing-related courses are only taught four percent of the time in secondary classrooms. In the Family and Consumer Sciences classroom, little attention is given to housing decisions compared to other family topics

(Wooldridge, Sebelius, & Weber, 1991). Jackson and Southers (1993) have pointed out that housing decisions are a major task and concern of most adults, and the skills needed to make informed housing decisions should be implemented in secondary curriculum.

The types of family housing concepts taught in secondary Family and Consumer Sciences classrooms vary among teachers. Holt's (1988) Louisiana study asked teachers to indicate the amount of emphasis they placed on various housing concepts in their classrooms and how important they thought the concepts were for the students' futures. The results indicated teachers generally taught what they perceived as important, but some inconsistencies did exist. Holt noted that three of the housing concepts rated most important (home management, home repairs and maintenance, and household appliances and equipment) were not listed among the concepts emphasized most in the classroom. Interior design and decorating, on the other hand, were rated low in importance, but were emphasized the most.

Methodology

In this research, New Mexico secondary Family and Consumer Sciences teachers were surveyed to determine background characteristics; information needs related to housing, interior design, and home equipment; emphasis placed on these concepts in the classroom; and the perceived importance of these concepts for adolescents in the future. Specifically, the teachers were asked to project ahead to 2010.

Instrumentation

An instrument was developed to gather teacher and classroom information related to family housing, interior design, and home equipment subject matter in secondary Family and Consumer Sciences classes. The questions were divided into the following four sections: teacher information; information on courses where housing-related concepts were included; housing, interior design, and home equipment competencies; and educational resources.

The teacher information section requested information regarding the following: degree(s) earned; years teaching Family and Consumer Sciences; background experiences for teaching housing-related topics; courses or workshops on housing, interior design, or equipment completed in the past 10 years; feelings of adequacy and degrees of comfort associated with various housing-related topics; and desire for additional workshops or courses, including preferred topics.

The second section on classroom information assessed what is being offered in secondary schools in the areas of housing, interior design, and home equipment. Questions were asked concerning the specialized family housing courses taught and where housing-related concepts were integrated.

The competencies section made use of a rating scale to assess two variables as related to a list of 35 housing, interior design, and home equipment competencies. The variables were: a) how much emphasis was placed on each concept in the classroom and b) perceptions of how important each concept would be to the students in 2010. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of emphasis (2 = I put emphasis on this in my class, 1 = I teach something about this, 0 = I do not teach this) and perception of level of importance to students (2 = Will be very important to know, 1 = Will be somewhat important, 0 = Will not be important). The *New Mexico Vocational Home Economics Competencies* (1991), along with a survey instrument developed by Holt (1988), were used in developing the competency statements and format.

The last section on educational resources explored resource selection and preferences. Respondents were asked questions concerning resource types most helpful to them and resources used to structure their courses.

After the instrument was constructed, it was reviewed by four educators whose comments and suggestions were incorporated. The final draft was printed in a booklet format with a cover letter on the first page.

Data Collection and Analysis

The population included all 256 New Mexico secondary Family and Consumer Sciences teachers employed during the 1996-97 school year. Each teacher was mailed an instrument and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for returning the completed instrument. A follow-up postcard was mailed approximately two weeks later to remind teachers to complete and return the survey. Of the 256 surveys distributed, 100 usable surveys were returned for a 39% return rate. Since some respondents only completed a portion of the questions, there are some inconsistencies in total numbers reported. Frequencies and percentages were computed on all coded data.

Findings

Of the 100 teachers who responded, 94 reported that they had a Bachelor's degree, and 32 indicated they had a Master's degree. The vast majority had their undergraduate degrees in Family and Consumer Sciences/Home Economics Education, and approximately one third of the Master's degrees were in Family and Consumer Sciences/Home Economics Education.

Fifty-three percent of the respondents had taught 10 years or less, 31% had taught 11-20 years, and 16% had taught more than 20 years. The largest number of respondents (72%) indicated that they obtained their backgrounds in the content areas of housing, interior design, and equipment from their own experiences. In addition, a majority of the respondents also indicated that each of the following were experiences that described their background preparations: had only one college course in housing, had only one college course in interior design, and took a home equipment course.

When the teachers were asked to indicate courses or workshops they had attended in the last 10 years related to housing, interior design, or home equipment, fewer than 10% of the respondents had participated in updating activities. Workshops and courses attended focused on home management, interior design, lighting, and/or housing for special needs.

When asked about the adequacy of their educational background to teach in the three areas, 61% indicated they had adequate background in housing, 58% in home equipment, and 52% in interior design. The remaining respondents did not feel they had adequate preparation to teach in each area.

The concepts teachers felt most comfortable and least comfortable teaching are presented in Table 1. The seven concepts respondents felt most comfortable teaching about were selecting and using small appliances, kitchens and storage space, arranging furniture, selecting and using major appliances, designing a floor plan, housing alternatives, and selecting a place to live. The seven areas in which the largest number of respondents indicated they felt least comfortable teaching were home maintenance and remodeling, lighting and accessories, history of housing, selection and evaluation of home structures, mortgages and leases, energy conservation, and furniture styles and selection.

[Table 1](#)

When asked if they would take additional courses or workshops related to housing, interior design, or home equipment, 69% said they would. The topics of most interest are found in Table 2. Heading the list were home maintenance, lighting and accessories, energy conservation, and furniture styles.

[Table 2](#)

At the secondary level, specialized courses appear to be small in number. A specialized interior design class was taught by 26 respondents, a specialized home planning course was taught by 12 of the respondents, and a specialized home equipment course was taught by only three respondents. Teachers also reported covering these three topics in comprehensive courses such as Modern Life Skills or Independent Living.

A major focus of the study was to determine the amount of emphasis that the Family and Consumer Sciences teachers put on 35 housing-related concepts in their classes. In addition, they were asked to indicate how important they thought knowledge of each concept would be to their students in 2010.

An analysis of the level of importance revealed that 60% or more of the respondents rated 14 of the 35 concepts as very important. These concepts are included in Table 3. In the left column, importance ratings for these 14 concepts are reported. The right column of Table 3 contains data regarding the current emphasis given by the respondents in their Family and Consumer Sciences classes to each of the 14 concepts.

The three concepts receiving the highest importance level ratings were home safety and sanitation; energy conservation in homes and impacts on community, nation, and the world; and factors to consider when buying or renting. In addition to the concepts in Table 3, another 15 of the concepts were rated as somewhat important by a majority of the respondents. Only two concepts were rated by 20% or more of the respondents as not important. Those were period home styles and future homes (21%) and housing in other cultures (25%).

The only concept that was emphasized by more than 50% of the respondents in their teaching was home safety and sanitation. This was also the concept receiving the highest ranking in importance for 2010. The only concept that 50 percent or more of the respondents said they “taught something about” was career opportunities in housing and interior design. This does not appear in Table 3, as it was not ranked as very important by 60% or more of the respondents. Concepts not taught at all by 50% or more of the respondents included period home styles and future homes; housing for special groups; housing and communities - economic and social impacts and trends; landscaping the home; home construction and remodeling; and furniture - styles, quality, and needs. None of these concepts are in Table 3, as they were also not seen as very important by 60% or more of the respondents.

[Table 3](#)

The teachers were asked to check off on a list the four resources they felt were most helpful to them when teaching housing, interior design, and home equipment. In Table 4 one finds the top eight resources the educators perceived as helpful. Videotapes, models, samples, and ideas for activities topped the list.

[Table 4](#)

The teachers were asked to indicate their four major ways of structuring the housing and interior design content in their courses from a given list of possible strategies. The data related to the six strategies most frequently reported are found in Table 5. Using the textbook as a guide clearly is the most frequently used strategy.

[Table 5](#)

Conclusions and Implications

The data from this study indicate that a majority of the secondary Family and Consumer Sciences teachers responding had a very minimal amount of university course work in housing, interior design, and home equipment. College curricula do not appear to provide depth in these areas for future teachers. Most of the respondents noted that what they learned through personal experiences best described their background preparation for teaching these topics, and many did not feel adequately prepared to teach in these areas. Attention needs to be given to this deficit in university Family and Consumer Sciences teacher education programs.

During the past 10 years, few of the respondents had participated in updated activities. This may have been due to few workshops or courses being offered in these areas or because the teachers felt their experiences and preparation had prepared them well enough for what they needed to teach.

More relevant and convenient preservice and inservice training appears warranted. If workshops or courses are to be offered to meet the perceived needs of teachers, the focus needs to be on home maintenance, lighting and accessories, energy conservation, furniture styles, mortgages and leases, and remodeling. These were the topics most frequently mentioned as ones in which the teachers wanted future training. It is noted that all six of these topics were among the seven concepts that teachers felt least comfortable teaching. Two of these concepts (energy conservation and home maintenance) were also among the top 14 topics teachers saw as most important for students to have an understanding of in 2010.

The number of teachers teaching specialized courses in housing, interior design, and home equipment is quite low, and reasons for a lack of courses may be many. Budget cuts have forced many departments to cut course offerings, and student interest may be low in that they may not perceive the importance of these topics for their futures. Teachers may also not feel comfortable teaching the topics.

Concepts emphasized by teachers in their secondary classes varied widely. The only topic emphasized by more than 50 percent of the teachers was home safety and sanitation. The concepts with the next most frequent emphases dealt with the impact of values, needs, and lifestyles on housing decisions and factors to consider where renting or buying. These were followed closely by kitchen design and workable floor plans. Since only two of these concepts (kitchen design and workable floor plans) fell among the seven on which teachers indicated most comfort in teaching, it appears that more education needs to be provided to teachers on the other topics.

The concepts teachers emphasized, however, were not always the ones they felt to be very important for the students to know in 2010. In contrast, Holt's (1988) survey found that teachers generally taught what they perceived as most important with the exception of home management, home repairs and maintenance, and household appliances and equipment.

In this research, home safety and sanitation was high on the list of both important concepts and emphasized concepts. While energy conservation, factors to consider in renting or buying, factors contributing to a healthy environment, advantages/disadvantages of renting and buying, and rental lease agreements and home sales contracts were rated as very important for students to know in 2010 by 76% or more of the respondents, 41% or less of the teachers reported putting emphasis on these concepts in their teaching. Lack of knowledge and comfort, limited revision of curricula, and lack of teaching materials may be reasons for lack of emphasis on these concepts. If these are important concepts for students in 2010, a shift needs to take

place in what is being taught. Teachers need assistance in making these curriculum changes. It is likely that the life experiences these teachers are depending on to provide their background for teaching have not provided the needed knowledge base in these areas.

As noted earlier, the area of family housing has seen many changes over the past years with new issues emerging that affect the well-being of families in relation to their housing. Without opportunities for teachers to receive information relevant to future housing problems and issues, they will go into the classroom unprepared to help adolescents face the challenges of their future housing situations. This is especially true of young teachers who have not yet experienced many of the housing issues first-hand.

Inservice and preservice training needs to focus on helping teachers find the resources and ideas they need to become knowledgeable and comfortable in teaching the concepts seen as most important for students in 2010. Teachers need creative ideas and strategies for incorporating these important concepts into all Family and Consumer Sciences classes. While textbooks are the major guide for structuring of courses at this time, teachers need assistance in using other resources such as the Internet and the *National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences* (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences, 1998) to focus their curricula. Universities need to look at potential distance education course offerings in housing, interior design, and equipment to meet the needs of these teachers. Secondary teachers should be encouraged to be innovative in their approaches to housing, interior design, and home equipment education. Field trips to appliance dealers, interior design studios, or model homes would expose students to current market trends and products. Inviting professionals to speak to classes will not only provide useful information, but may also interest students in various housing, interior design, and home equipment careers. For those schools with Internet access, web sites now allow students to compare community demographics; shop for homes, mortgages, and appliances; and design interiors, just to name a few opportunities.

In summary, secondary Family and Consumer Sciences educators are in need of updating and teaching ideas in family housing, interior design, and home equipment. Through expanded educational opportunities and new teaching resources, Family and Consumer Sciences teachers can feel up-to-date and comfortable in preparing our future consumers.

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Table 1
Comfort in Teaching Various Housing-related Concepts

Concepts	Comfort			
	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Top 7				
Selecting and Using Small Appliances	80	88		
Kitchens and Storage Space	82	87		
Arranging Furniture	75	81		
Selecting/Using Major Appliances	72	78		
Designing a Floor Plan	68	74		
Housing Alternatives	67	73		
Selecting Place to Live	64	71		
Bottom 7				
Home Maintenance/Remodeling			53	58
Lighting and Accessories			49	54
History of Housing			44	48
Selection/Evaluation of Home Structures			44	48
Mortgages/Leases			43	48
Energy Conservation			43	47
Furniture Styles/Selection			41	45

Table 2

Topics Desired in Courses and Workshops

Topic	N and %
Home Maintenance	23
Lighting and Accessories	23
Energy Conservation	23
Furniture Styles	23
Mortgages/Leases	22
Remodeling	22
Selecting and Evaluating Structures	21
History of Housing	21
Furniture Arrangement	21
Wall and Floor Coverings	21

Table 3

Perceived Importance of Selected Concepts in 2010 and Current Emphasis Given Concepts

Importance for 2010						Concepts	Current Emphasis Given					
Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important			Put Emphasis on It		Teach Something About It		Do Not Teach	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
71	82	16	18	0	0	Home Safety and Sanitation	53	60	24	27	11	13
71	81	14	16	3	3	Energy Conservation in Homes and Impacts on Communities, Nation, and World	20	23	42	49	24	28
70	80	15	17	2	3	Factors to Consider When Buying or Renting	35	41	26	30	25	29
67	76	20	23	1	1	Factors Contributing to a Healthy Home Environment	17	19	37	42	34	39
67	77	17	20	3	3	Advantages/Disadvantages of Renting and Buying	30	35	33	38	23	27
65	76	17	20	4	4	Rental Lease Agreements and Home Sales Contracts	22	25	28	32	37	43
64	74	17	20	5	6	Home Financing Alternatives and Types of Insurance	17	20	27	31	43	49
64	74	22	25	1	1	Family Values, Needs, and Lifestyle Impacts on Housing Decisions	37	42	35	40	16	18
62	70	22	25	4	5	Care, Repair, and Maintenance of Home and Its Equipment	19	22	36	41	32	37

Importance for 2010						Concepts	Current Emphasis Given					
Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important			Put Emphasis on It		Teach Something About It		Do Not Teach	
N	%	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	N	%
56	65	26	30	4	5	Selecting Household Appliances	26	30	31	36	29	34
54	63	29	34	3	3	Life Situations and Relation to Housing Needs	30	34	39	45	18	21
52	60	31	36	4	4	Workable Floor Plans	32	37	31	36	24	27
52	60	31	36	4	4	Designing/Arranging Efficient Storage	26	30	33	38	28	32
52	60	32	37	3	3	Kitchen Design	35	40	33	38	19	22

Table 4
Resources Helpful for Teaching Housing, Interior Design and Home Equipment

Type of Resource	Those Who Find Helpful (N and %)
Videotapes	60
Models/Samples	51
Ideas for Activities	50
Speakers	36
Field Trip Locations	33
Reference Books	32
Transparencies	31
Computer Software	25

Table 5
Strategies Used to Structure Courses

Strategy	Those Who Use (N and %)
Use Textbook as a Guide	60
Teach What Thinks Is Important	43
Use the New Mexico Family and Consumer Sciences Competencies	40
Ask Students What They Want to Learn	36
Use a Curriculum Guide	35
Teach What Comfortable With	30