

CURRENT TRENDS IN CLOTHING AND TEXTILES EDUCATION:  
HOW THEY HAVE AFFECTED SELECTED  
VIRGINIA HOME ECONOMICS TEACHERS

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Recent social changes in American family lifestyles have led many educators to rethink traditional curriculum decisions and to subsequently redirect secondary home economics programs. With the passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Act of 1984, new directions were established for vocational educators (Hughes, Kister, & Smith, 1985). Through the use of the ethnographic interview, the researcher investigated ways in which these changes have affected the clothing and textiles teaching practices of five Virginia secondary teachers of consumer and homemaking comprehensive classes. The researcher investigated the amount of time spent sewing, and the informants' justification for teaching clothing construction. The teachers were also asked to comment on their beliefs concerning current trends and their recommendations for future curriculum revisions.

The teachers interviewed expressed a greater interest in meeting the needs of their students than in following

current trends. In an apparent contradiction, they cited reasons for reduced interest and decreased need for sewing instruction but seemed reluctant to reduce or eliminate sewing instruction in the classroom. The amount of time spent during the school year on sewing projects ranged from none to nine weeks. The teachers interviewed spent an additional two to six weeks of classroom time in the study of other areas of clothing and textiles.

The informants' knowledge of current educational trends appeared to come from area supervisors, inservice education, and their peers. None of the teachers interviewed indicated they read professional journals. The results of this research provide implications for inservice education content related to clothing and textiles for home economics teachers.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

The type and amount of clothing and textiles instruction being offered in secondary classrooms is an important issue in the re-evaluation of home economics curriculum. This is not a new concern. However, in recent years, persons both within and outside the educational community have questioned the value of clothing construction education (Daly, 1988). The study of clothing and textiles has traditionally been an important part of the home economics curriculum. The majority of the classroom time devoted to clothing has generally been spent on construction (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983).

A review of the writings of current educational leaders indicates a consensus of opinion that clothing construction should no longer take up the majority of the time spent on the study of clothing and textiles in home economics classrooms. According to Burge (1983), middle school home economics teachers in Virginia in the early 1980's spent 25% of their classroom time for the year on clothing construction. She stated that the classroom time spent in this area outweighed the importance of these skills in the

present or future lives of the students.

There are opinions in the literature both for and against teaching sewing skills in consumer and homemaking classes. Some authors report that public school sewing has a negative effect on students (Koontz & Dickerson, 1985), while others are strongly in favor of the possible creative benefits to be derived from sewing instruction (Loker, 1987).

In the past decade there has been a decline in home economics enrollments throughout the country. One of the reasons given for decreased enrollment included a failure to recognize changing needs and attitudes of students (Huck, 1984).

Redirecting secondary home economics programs has become a major emphasis of many vocational home economics educators. With the passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, new directions were established for educators. The broad goals of the act include strengthening the economic base of the nation, developing human resources, and increasing productivity. Consumer education and clothing and textiles were listed among the areas of instruction related to the stated purposes of the act (Hughes, Kister, & Smith, 1985).

Title III Part B of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (1984) specifically states,

From the portion of the allotment of each State under section 101 available for this part, the Secretary is authorized to make grants to States to assist them in conducting consumer and homemaker education programs. Such programs may include (1) instructional programs, services, and activities that prepare youth and adults for the occupation of homemaking, and (2) instruction in the areas of food and nutrition, consumer education, family living and parenthood education, child development and guidance, housing, home management (including resource management), and clothing and textiles.

According to the act, consumer and homemaking education grants may be used for improvement of instruction and for program development. Although clothing and textiles is designated as a possible area of study for consumer and homemaking, sewing is not a priority area. In order to improve and develop, home economics education needs new directions for its consumer and homemaking programs. Redirection of these programs requires the identification of changes in society and in the American family. Change must then take place to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for today's youth and their families (Kister, Smith, & Hughes, 1985).

The purpose of this study was to explore some of the trends taking place in the clothing and textiles area of the high school home economics curriculum.

The researcher investigated the role of clothing and textiles, and specifically of clothing construction, in the secondary programs.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore current trends in the clothing and textiles area of secondary home economics education. To give the reader a better understanding of current beliefs regarding these curriculum revisions, the literature review includes information about the history of this area of home economics education and the changes in American lifestyles that have caused home economists and other educators to rethink the skills and concepts that have traditionally been taught in the clothing and textiles area of high school home economics.

#### A Brief History of Clothing and Textiles Education in Home Economics

The teaching of sewing as a part of clothing and textiles and its importance to home economics education is not a new controversy. As early as 1915, debate over the importance of sewing instruction was a topic of interest. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 provided funding for public school vocational education, including home economics

education. But this Act was still only a bill before Congress when Helen Louise Johnson, Chairperson of the Department of Home Economics for the General Federation of Women's Clubs, wrote a letter in which she made the following statement (Johnson, 1915):

I wish it might be possible to impress upon those who do not understand what we comprehend under the subject of home economics, that if cooking disappeared as wholly from the home as sewing has that still home economics would be taught, and that we would be pleading for its introduction into schools. One of the things which astonishes me is that, after all these years of strenuous work and endeavor on the parts of those who are leading the home economics movement, there is this common misunderstanding of what we include under this term. Cooking and sewing, as such, are such minor parts of home economics that every endeavor must be used by those who represent this group of subjects to prevent any move which would seem to emphasize the activities of the household as being of major importance, instead of means to a very much greater end, which home economics definitely teaches.

With passage of the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917, support for the traditional areas of clothing and textiles and foods in home economics continued, but emphasis was also placed on the skills and techniques required for child care, management of resources, care of the sick, housing and home furnishings, and family relationships (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1936). During the 1940's the emphasis focused on finding solutions to economic, political, and social problems. The 1950's brought

attention to family-centered teaching and began to face the issue of personal development and the increasing dual role of women as both homemakers and wage earners. In the 1960's home economists were looking for new directions and an interdisciplinary approach that encompassed fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, and the physical and biological sciences. During the 1960's and 1970's researchers such as Herbert Blumer, James Laver, Erving Goffman, and Roach and Eicher studied and published increasing amounts of research data regarding the sociological and psychological aspects of clothing behavior (Kaiser, 1985).

During the 20th century, fluctuation regarding emphasis within clothing and textiles has occurred in the professional home economics literature. Chowdhary and Meacham (1984) conducted a study in which they measured the subject matter emphasis of five areas of clothing and textiles by the number of published articles in the Journal of Home Economics and the Home Economics Research Journal. From 1911 to 1960 the study of textiles ranked number one in the percentage of articles published. In the decade of the 60's there was a marked increase of articles published relating to consumerism and the sociological and psychological aspects of clothing and textiles. Textiles regained its number one ranking in the 70's while interest

remained high in the sociological and psychological aspects. For the entire length of time studied, 1911 to 1980, textiles ranked number one in frequency of articles published, consumerism was second, historical textiles and costume was third, sociological and psychological aspects was fourth, and clothing construction and design was last (Chowdhary & Meacham, 1984). This study would seem to indicate that the study of textiles has always been strong and that consumerism and the sociological and psychological aspects have taken on increasingly greater significance in recent years. Clothing construction, which has taken up as much as 25% of the total school year's instruction (Burge, 1983) has been ranked at the bottom in importance as measured by the number of articles published in the two major professional home economics journals. Therefore, one could reasonably question the efficacy of spending a disproportionate amount of time on the subject area that seems to have the least emphasis in the professional literature.

Some writers have indicated that public school sewing instruction has had a negative rather than a positive effect on teenagers. Koontz and Dickerson (1985) reported that experience in home economics sewing classes had a tendency to discourage students from future home sewing. Many young people considered sewing as a duty to be



performed at some time in the distant future. According to Koontz and Dickerson (1985), those students who learned to sew in school were less likely to continue sewing than those who learned from their mother or another relative.

Although the majority opinion favors decreased emphasis on sewing, there are also voices in favor of teaching sewing in our public schools. Loker (1987) stated that sewing can be used to develop creativity, personal and marketable skills, recognition of quality, and self-esteem. The American Home Sewing Association is a strong advocate for secondary home economics courses that teach sewing skills. Their Washington lobbyist, Del Smith, made the following statement: ". . .as with other aspects of life, parents are depending more and more on the school system to teach their children what used to be taught at home" ("Update On Education Game Plan," 1981).

Changes in American Lifestyles  
and Their Effect on Home Economics Instruction  
in Clothing and Textiles

The American family has changed drastically in recent years. Between the years of 1970 and 1985, the number of families supported by women increased by almost 90% (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1986). About 25% of

households with children are now headed by single parents; many are mixed or blended families; and an increasing number are dual-earner families (Cripps & MacDonald, 1986).

The changing role of women in the household has had a profound effect on every area of home economics. At the turn of the century, nearly 90% of women in America were in the household during the day (Coleman, 1987). Since World War II women have been entering the workforce in increasing numbers. As of 1985, just under 55% of American women over the age of 16 were employed outside of the home for pay (Cripps & MacDonald, 1986). For these women and for those who still make homemaking their primary career, technology has revolutionized the way in which tasks are done in the home (Norton, 1984).

Men and women are assuming new roles, both at home and in the workplace. Because of this, there is an overlap of duties between work and the family (Cripps & MacDonald, 1986). Additional roles accompanying the combining of parenthood and career leave less time available for the home construction of clothing.

Changing economic conditions, social standards, and moral values are leading to increased sexual activity resulting in increased teen pregnancy. In 1984 nearly 10,000 teenagers under the age of 15 gave birth. For teens in the 15 to 19 age group, there were a total of 469,682

live births. Also, in 1984 the rate of childbearing of unmarried women rose to the highest level since 1940 when records were first kept (Pecoraro, Robichaux, & Theriot, 1987). Because of changing roles, there is less time for clothing construction and a greater need for consumption information. Teens in increasing numbers need to have knowledge of the selection, care, and maintenance of clothing for children as well as for themselves.

Before the turn of the century, much of the clothing worn by the family was made within the home. Members of the family, or extended family, produced and cared for the clothing. This situation no longer exists. Today, most clothing is purchased ready-to-wear and is frequently laundered or dry cleaned outside the home or by someone hired to perform this service.

Role changes within our society have also resulted in changes in the home economics classroom. Today's high school home economics classrooms contain a mixture of both young men and women (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983). Both sexes are generally quite interested in clothing and appearance during the teen years. Emphasis should be placed on a curriculum that is up to date in terms of the interests and needs of the students. Other important considerations are an assessment of current and future lifestyles, up-to-date equipment and facilities, and an

ability to relate knowledge and skills learned in clothing to other aspects of daily living and learning (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983).

Family changes and changes in the make-up of classes that include a wider mix of students in terms of sex, ability, socioeconomic background, race, and religion require home economics teachers to reevaluate course offerings. In Michigan, a new curriculum has been adopted for high school home economics classes (Atkins, 1985). It contains topics related to clothing and textiles that are integrated into six units: essential health and living, personal living, family living, parenthood/child development, consumer education, and life management. Content areas such as nutrition and foods, clothing and textiles, and housing and home furnishings may appear to have been eliminated. However, they have been addressed as basic necessities as they relate to particular lifestyles or life stages within the six areas listed above. All skills had to meet the following criterion: Is it a skill that at least 60% of the students will need or perform frequently in their lifetime? The belief of the educational leadership in Michigan was that tasks such as clothing construction did not pass this test (Atkins, 1985).

In a study at the University of Minnesota, six home

economics teachers were interviewed concerning skills that students need to develop in order to prepare to live in a rapidly changing world. In the area of clothing and textiles, there was agreement that the following skills should be included: how to care for and repair clothing, how to evaluate clothing needs, and how to budget and shop for clothing. The sample did not agree on clothing construction. This would seem to indicate that some of them believed clothing construction should be taught and others believed it should be omitted. The teachers said that the most important things they teach are attitudes toward oneself and others, decision-making skills, and management of personal resources and environment (Heinowski, 1986).

A 1983 study at Pennsylvania State University dealt with reconceptualizing clothing and textiles curricula. The participants believed that teaching construction skills to the exclusion of other important skills resulted in an inability to meet the changing needs and interests of today's students. Since there has been a marked decline in home sewing over the past two decades, the participants questioned if construction skills were actually needed or used by today's families (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983).

Only one of the 20 recommendations that resulted from this study contained mention of teaching construction

skills. The study acknowledged the value of some manipulative skills in producing a tangible product and providing a satisfying experience for students who do not achieve in other areas (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983).

In the current Virginia curriculum guide for Life Management Skills I, three of the nineteen content/concept areas pertain to clothing and textiles. One of the three areas contains the implementation of consumer decisions in constructing and purchasing clothing and accessories. Construction is the major part of this content area and suggested activities include construction of a simple blouse or shirt and either pants or a skirt. The other two content/concept areas relate to (1) operating and maintaining sewing and equipment and supplies and (2) maintaining and repairing clothing and accessories (Virginia Department of Education, 1988).

The 1980 Virginia curriculum guide for Family Living has only three out of fifty-two concept areas devoted to clothing and textiles. The three concept areas include the following: making small purchases (food and clothing), clothing maintenance, and careers in clothing and textiles. The only suggested activities related to construction involve altering a personal garment and repairing a garment. Construction of a garment is not mentioned (Virginia Department of Education, 1980).

A comparison of these two guides for Virginia comprehensive consumer and homemaking courses shows inconsistency in dealing with clothing and textiles curriculum. The older guide does not include clothing construction for Family Living, while the 1988 guide for Life Management Skills I does. Although these are two separate courses, they are both comprehensive in nature. If it is the belief of the Virginia Department of Education leadership in home economics education that clothing construction should be reduced or deleted from the curriculum, then Virginia teachers may be receiving mixed messages.

As a result of the gap between what is taught in existing home economics programs and the social, economic, and political realities of daily life in America, clothing and textiles education currently has mixed support. Federal legislators and government policy reflect minimal understanding of home economics programs in general, and possibly less acknowledgement for clothing and textiles education (Daly, 1988). State departments of education are frequently proactive in supporting alternate directions in clothing and textiles education, and in some instances have mandated change (Daly, 1988).

Technology has changed the aquisition and maintenance of clothing and textiles from production to consumption in

today's household (Norton, 1984). Ready-to-wear clothing can be produced in a quality and price range to suit the needs of most Americans. Therefore, home sewing is no longer a necessity but a hobby (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983). Many more states may follow the lead of Michigan in its requirement that skills which are taught in home economics classes must meet the needs of a majority of the students.



## Chapter 3

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Statement of the Problem

A review of the professional literature regarding clothing and textiles instruction in secondary home economics programs indicated that differences may exist between the recommendations of experts and actual course content. A better understanding of the concerns and practices of the selected classroom teachers would give insight into the beliefs and opinions of some of the current teachers in Virginia. The findings of this study provide a groundwork for more intensive research using other methodologies and collecting information from larger samples. This further research could indicate the sources of teachers' information and their teaching beliefs and practices. Supervisors could then plan future inservice efforts to address these issues. They would be better able to maximize the type and amount of information provided in order to achieve the desired results in classroom instruction. Those persons responsible for course content might be more likely to assess the needs of today's students when planning future curriculum for consumer and

homemaking courses. Teachers--those ultimately responsible for carrying out the education of our young people--would benefit the most because they would be better prepared to teach.

This study provides some insight into the teaching practices of selected home economics teachers in Virginia. The beliefs of experts in home economics public school curriculum concerning classroom activities may not coincide with those of the classroom teachers. Using the findings from this sample, suggestions are made for areas of further research and implications for inservice education are discussed.

Clothing construction seems to be the most controversial area of the five selected clothing and textiles curriculum (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983). This study gives an indication of what some classroom teachers are continuing to emphasize regarding clothing construction and if the amount of teaching time and emphasis has shifted to other areas of clothing and textiles instruction. Individual reasons for these practices are explored.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the teaching

practices of selected Virginia secondary home economics teachers in the area of clothing and textiles in order to find out how these practices related to the suggestions of experts in the field. The study was limited to teaching practices in the comprehensive courses of Life Management Skills I and Family Management Skills.

#### Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are provided to clarify the meaning of terms used in this paper.

Consumer and Homemaking--courses designed to prepare students for the occupation of homemaking. The primary emphasis is on consumer education for personal and family use (Virginia Department of Education, 1984).

Life Management Skills I--the designation given by the Virginia Department of Education for the first full year of general home economics instruction for grades nine through twelve. It has previously been referred to as Home Economics I or Consumer and Homemaking I (Virginia Department of Education, 1984).

Family Management Skills--the designation most often used for a course approved by the Virginia Department of Education and designed to provide basic consumer and homemaking instruction to students in the 11th or 12th grade who have had no previous high school consumer and

homemaking course. This course is also referred to in some materials as Family Living (Virginia Department of Education, 1984).

Ethnography--a form of research used for analytic descriptions or reconstructions of intact cultural scenes and groups. Ethnographies recreate the shared beliefs, practices, artifacts, folk knowledge, and behaviors of a group of people (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Informant--the person being interviewed for the purposes of an ethnographic study.

### Research Procedure

The ethnographic interview was chosen because of its flexibility and the unique contributions it can offer education. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), the ethnographic interview can strengthen overall research that is used to develop policies and produce innovations in education. It can also help teachers, administrators, and parents be aware of and understand the diversity to be expected from students and school communities, as well as encourage educators to respond more flexibly and appropriately to their charges. Ethnography can also show the connections among research activity, educational

theory, and pragmatic concerns. Policy makers and consumers of education can form more accurate expectations about what schools, families, and other agencies can do to direct and enhance education and socialization.

Unlike a survey, the ethnographic interview does not depend on design controls, sample size, and assumptions of equivalence. It aims for comparability and translatability of generated findings (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The goal of an ethnographic study is to grasp the informant's point of view, and to realize that person's view of the surrounding world. Rather than studying people, ethnographic researchers learn from people (Spradley, 1979).

According to Spradley (1979), the interview itself can resemble a friendly conversation. The interviewer can work with little awareness by the informant by merely carrying on a friendly conversation while introducing a few ethnographic elements. Introducing questions, or ethnographic elements, too quickly will make the informant feel as though the interview is a formal interrogation. By working in this manner, the informant will often feel more relaxed and will give the interviewer much more information than could be gleaned from a formal interrogation or a survey. This format also allows the interviewer to explain questions that the informant may not understand at first.

### Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations. The ethnographic type interview is not designed to give the effects of specific treatments or the statistics that can be obtained with a survey of a larger sample. Thus the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other populations. The interviewer starts with a conscious attitude of ignorance and depends on the informant to give a clue as to the meaning of actions and events to the people to whom understanding is sought (Spradley, 1979). Because of this format, results can be unexpected, some significant factors could possibly be overlooked, and questions can be raised which need further investigation. The interviewer must be constantly aware of topics the informant has covered and be sure to lead the informant over all the issues to be discussed.

There were inconsistencies in this study's procedures that could influence either the data compiled or the conclusions drawn from the data. The one informant who had to be interviewed by phone may have responded slightly differently than if the interview had been conducted in person. The study includes only information the researcher learned from one personal interview with each informant. There were no observations of classroom teaching or collaborating evidence from other sources. The researcher

took all of the information from a single interview and did not include any follow-up interviews or observations in the study. These limitations, must be taken into account in interpreting the findings.

#### Questions Used to Guide Research

The questions used as a guide for this research were developed to achieve the purpose of exploring the trend away from teaching sewing as a part of the clothing and textiles curriculum. The researcher was also interested in the teachers' apparent knowledge of this trend and their individual reactions to it.

1. What part does clothing and textiles instruction have in the total curriculum of the selected teachers?

2. Are teachers using sewing as a part of their curriculum? If so, what is their justification for doing so and how much time is devoted to it?

3. Are the teachers aware of the trend away from apparel construction? If yes, what or who do they believe has had an influence on this trend?

#### Selection of the Sample

Ethnographies are characterized by the investigation of a small, relatively homogeneous and geographically bounded,

study site (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Therefore, five teachers of secondary consumer and homemaking classes were chosen from within the state of Virginia. All of the schools were within a five hour drive of the researcher, and the researcher was not previously acquainted with any of the informants.

The informants were chosen so as to give a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural settings, as well as a mixture of affluence and non-affluence of the areas surrounding the school in which the informant taught. Members of the faculty of the Division of Vocational and Technical Education of the College of Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University helped identify schools that were in urban, suburban, rural, affluent and nonaffluent areas of the state. The Virginia Educational Directory (Virginia Department of Education, 1987) and the Directory of Virginia Teachers of Home Economics (Virginia Department of Education, 1987) were used to locate the names and school phone numbers of the home economics teachers within each area chosen. The researcher called schools in each area until a consumer and homemaking teacher with either a comprehensive life management skills or family management skills class was located. That teacher was then contacted by phone to set up an interview. Letters confirming the date, time, and place of the interview and explaining its purpose were then sent to



each teacher, school principal, and area supervisor. Only one principal had any objection to the personal interviews being conducted at school. The teacher involved asked if she could be interviewed by telephone and the interview was completed.

### Discussion of the Procedure

The ethnographic interview provided the researcher with flexibility and an opportunity to discuss the situation with the subject. Questions were repeated or explained if they were not understood by the subject. The interviewer queried the subjects for additional information if a response was unclear or vague.

The questions were designed to reveal the attitudes and teaching practices of selected Virginia home economics teachers. In preparation for writing the questions, the researcher reviewed current professional journals and literature to determine present trends and attitudes of home economics leaders concerning clothing and textiles curriculum in secondary education. The researcher field tested the interview with a local high school home economics teacher to better determine the amount of time needed for the interview. The field test also helped determine further revisions needed to clarify the items before interviewing teachers for the completion of this

research.

The information at the beginning of the interview revealed background information necessary for the study. The size of classes, the region of the state, the course offerings available to students, and the work load of the teacher were established at the beginning of the interview. Often the teachers included information in one answer that covered one or more other items. Therefore, the researcher had to constantly be aware of which items had been covered and which had not. The interviewer guided the conversation in such a manner that all items on the list were included. An attempt was made to discuss items in the sequence listed as closely as possible.

#### Administration of the Interview

The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted either during the teacher's planning period or after school. The conversations were recorded on audio tape for accuracy in reporting the data collected. The questions asked were identical in each interview. However, because of the nature of the ethnographic interview, additional information was sometimes interjected by the informant. This allowed the researcher flexibility to investigate any factor that had bearing on the results of this study.

Treatment of the Data

Once the interviews were completed the tapes were transcribed and put on disks with the aid of a personal computer word processing program. One hard copy was printed for the researcher to use in sorting out and interpreting the data. The transcriptions were studied to find the answers to the predetermined interview questions. Numbers corresponding to specific interview questions were placed in the margins of each page to make the answers easy to locate. The information gathered was then compared to and discussed in relationship to the original three questions used to guide the research.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews conducted for this research were designed to give insight into the clothing and textiles teaching practices of selected Virginia teachers and how these practices relate to the changing lifestyles and perceived needs of their students. A total of five informants were interviewed. They were all teachers of secondary consumer and homemaking comprehensive courses, either Life Management Skills I or Family Management Skills. Although they sometimes called their courses by other names, the informants all taught one or more of these comprehensive courses. Information in this chapter will be presented in three sections: (1) Clothing and Textiles Instruction, (2) Amount of Time Devoted to Sewing, and (3) Current Trends.

#### Clothing and Textiles Instruction

All of the teachers interviewed taught at least four separate units of study during the school year in their comprehensive home economics courses. Some of the teachers

divided the time into equal segments of nine weeks. Others spent disproportionate amounts of time on the various areas of study, depending on the nature of the subject and the time necessary to complete desired activities. Table 1 shows the amount of time the informants spent on each of these units of study.

To obtain information regarding the part which clothing and textiles instruction had in the total curriculum, the researcher asked the informants to describe the general areas of study included during the year and the number of weeks spent on each study. They were also asked if they taught clothing and textiles as a separate unit or if it was included as a part of other units. The specific questions asked can be found in items 6, 8, and 9 of Appendix C.

When asked what part clothing and textiles instruction had in the overall curriculum the teachers had quite varied answers. Although the names of the units differed, some instruction in clothing and textiles was included by all teachers. One teacher did not teach clothing and textiles as a separate unit, but instead taught it as a part of a consumer economics unit within the curriculum for the Family Living class. The amounts of time devoted to clothing and textiles ranged from one to thirteen weeks.

All five teachers taught units on foods and nutrition

Table 1

## Time Spent on Areas of Curriculum Content

Names Given Units of Instruction	Minimum time in weeks	Maximum time in weeks	Number of teachers including	Mean time in weeks
Nutrition and food preparation	6	18	5	11.4
Clothing and textiles	1	13	5	8.4
Family and personal development	6	9	4	6.4
Parenting and child care	4	18	2	6.2
Housing and interior design	4	8	3	4.4
Consumer economics and management of resources	5	9	3	2.8

Note. All of the above units of study were part of 36-week consumer and homemaking comprehensive courses.

and the time spent ranged from 6 to 18 weeks. Four teachers taught units related to family and personal development. These units lasted from six to nine weeks. Two of the five teachers indicated they taught child development units. One teacher spent only four weeks on child development while another spent eighteen weeks. All teachers included either a unit on family and personal development or a unit on parenting and child development, and one of the teachers included both.

All the informants spent less time on housing and interior design and on consumer economics and management of resources than on the other units of study. The three teachers who taught housing units reported times ranging from four to eight weeks for this topic. Consumer and management units varying in length from five to nine weeks were taught by three teachers.

As indicated by the mean number of weeks for each unit reported in Table 1, the informants tended to spend the greatest proportion of the school year on foods and nutrition. Clothing and textiles was second, followed by family and personal development and parenting and child care. The two least popular units in terms of the amount of time devoted to them were housing and interior design and consumer economics and management of resources.

Amount of Time Devoted to Sewing

To determine the amount of time each informant devoted to sewing, the researcher asked the informants approximately how much time was spent on clothing construction. To determine the informants' justification for the above decision, they were asked to describe how lifestyles and student interests affect concepts taught, what changes, if any, had been made in recent years in that area of the curriculum, and what concepts related to clothing and textiles were considered most important to the students. The specific questions asked can be found in items 9, 10, 12, and 13 of Appendix C. Table 2 shows the amount of time each informant devoted to sewing.

Students in the Life Skills I course at one suburban school were permitted to make either a sample booklet or a simple garment, usually a skirt or an easy blouse, for girls, or a shirt, for boys. Although she was not currently teaching a class of Life Skills I, the teacher had taught it in the past and was aware of the policy of the department head in her school. She stated that the students in Life Skills I in her school learned sewing machine operation, talked about care of clothing, selecting becoming styles, and making simple repairs and alterations in addition to their sample booklet or simple garment. The students in this class spent about six weeks on their



Table 2

## Time Spent on Clothing Construction

Informant and class or classes taught	Total time spent spent on clothing and textiles unit	Total time spent sewing
Suburban #1		
Life Skills I	6 weeks	4 weeks
Family Living	1 week	0
Suburban #2		
Contemporary Living	13 weeks	9 weeks
Urban		<sup>a</sup>
Contemporary Living	9 weeks	3 weeks
Rural #1		
Life Management Skills I	8 weeks	6 weeks
Rural #2		
Family Living	11 weeks	8 weeks
Home Economics I	11 weeks	8 weeks

a

Students were allowed to substitute a needlecraft project for a garment.

clothing and textiles unit of which four weeks was spent sewing.

In justifying the position that she and her coworkers took regarding their clothing and textiles curriculum, this informant made the following comment regarding sewing in the Family Living classes. "I can't justify the time because there's too many other things to do in the curriculum." She indicated that this class devoted about one week to the study of clothing and textiles. Students discussed such topics as daily, weekly, and seasonal care of clothing, how to sort and do laundry, how to iron a tailored shirt and a pair of slacks, how to sew on a button and make minor clothing repairs, and how to hem a garment.

Suburban teacher number two spent thirteen weeks on clothing and textiles in the Contemporary Living class. Of that time, about nine weeks was spent on clothing construction. The non-sewing areas of the unit included topics such as textiles and the care of fabric, laundry techniques, wardrobe planning, and color analysis. In the sewing part of the unit, the students learned how to use the sewing machines and constructed a garment in which they learned to insert a zipper, make buttonholes, sew on buttons, set in a sleeve, sew on a collar, hem, and finish a garment. Before beginning to sew, they made a mini-sized garment to learn some of the techniques they would need for their garment. After completing the first garment, they

made a "quickie" garment using knit fabric. This project was usually a halter top, pull-on shorts, or a T-shirt. The school had a special fund to purchase materials for any student to whose family the sewing project would present a financial challenge.

This suburban teacher summed up her justification of the sewing projects in the following words. "Students today aren't learning sewing to sew. We teach sewing skills and how to use the machines, and things, but, we're really teaching them for consumerism, to evaluate ready made things, and to look at it that way. Sewing is not a means of having more clothes more economically today like it used to be. . . . By the time you add it up, they can buy a ready-to-wear something very much in the same price range. . . . So, even though we do sew a project, we're teaching the skills to evaluate--consumerism, largely."

The urban informant was the teacher with the least amount of teaching experience. She spent an equal amount of time, nine weeks, on each of her units of study. In her unit on clothing and textiles, three of those weeks were spent on a sewing or needlecraft project.

In choosing projects for class and justifying those decisions, the informant stated, "We're trying to get away from students doing a particular project in terms of the teacher indicates something that the student has to do. Becoming a little more individualized. . . . picking whether

they choose to sew or anything within the needle arts. . . . They knit, crochet, cross stitch, needlepoint, that type of thing." She also indicated that she covered such topics as wardrobe planning, hand sewing techniques, sewing on a button and hemming, laundry and ironing techniques, and careers in the area of clothing and textiles.

Rural informant number one indicated that she spent about eight weeks teaching clothing and textiles to her Life Management Skills I classes. Of this, about six weeks was spent on construction. She included such things as clothing selection and care and managing the clothing budget. Occasionally, if the students were interested, she invited guest speakers to come in and discuss "the color thing" with her students. She still taught clothing construction in her classes, but, expressed frustration with trying to do so. She commented, "It's expensive to sew, and time is limited. Others have probably influenced the opinions of children because they can go to the store and get things much faster than they could have constructed them, and just as cheaply, maybe cheaper, with factory outlets and those kind of things. The home hasn't influenced the child to spend the time necessary to do that kind of thing, so the child just doesn't see the need. . . . One little child. . . said, I just feel like I must be like grandmother. You know, they just feel like it is an antiquated thing that they're doing, and it's just to

please the teacher to get through it, and that's just too bad." She further indicated, "I will sew as long as the interest is there, but I can't do it if there's not any interest at all."

Rural teacher number two had a slightly different outlook and approach to her clothing and textiles units with her Family Living and Home Economics I classes. Of the approximately 11 weeks spent studying clothing and textiles in class, 8 weeks were spent sewing. She commented that the two classes, "learn to use a pattern and make a basic garment and learn all the basic techniques of sewing." However, she indicated difficulty in getting the students to purchase patterns, material, and supplies. She stated, "I run into the problem of them not being able to furnish themselves a pattern. They can't buy fabric. Last year I bought fabric for each person. . . That was the only way I could get any sewing done at all. . . so I took the money out of the instructional supplies, and I bought a few patterns, and I bought some fabric from the store where you can get it for 36 cents a yard. . . I just did the best that I could do." Other activities she included in her clothing and textiles unit included patching and darning, basic stitches and seam finishing, how to use the sewing machine, managing the clothing budget, color coordinating, embroidering with paints, and making a lavette for the doll used in the child development portion of the unit on child

care. She too expressed sadness and some frustration at the students' lack of interest in sewing. She stated, "Sewing is not a big thing here. I'd like for it to be. We have the nice sewing machines. I have the equipment to do it with. I have all the equipment that anybody would need, I think, to do a lot of good work in sewing if I could just find anybody interested. If I could just get them interested in it. I'm going to try again this year."

In an apparent contradiction, the informants cited reasons for reduced interest and decreased need for sewing instruction but seemed reluctant to reduce or eliminate sewing instruction in the classroom. The amount of time spent during the school year on sewing projects ranged from none in a Family Living class to nine weeks in a Contemporary Living class. The teachers interviewed spent an additional one to six weeks of classroom time in the study of other areas of clothing and textiles.

#### Alternatives to Garment Construction

The opinions and practices of the five teachers interviewed varied regarding the use of needlecraft projects as part of the clothing and textiles curriculum. The urban teacher believed anything within the needle arts was acceptable. She indicated that students were given a choice of projects such as knitting, crocheting, embroidering, or some other sewing project of

their own choice. Giving the students such choices, she believed, allowed for more creativity, individualized instruction, and flexibility in learning experiences. Cost of materials was also given as a valid reason for choosing something other than garment construction as a sewing project. Apparently this teacher believed some craft projects to be less expensive than constructing a garment.

Suburban teacher number two used needlecraft projects as incentives for her students. They were allowed to work on craft projects if they finished their other work early and needed something to occupy their time while the remainder of the class caught up. She used after school time for extra-curricular needlecraft classes. Parents were invited to attend if they so desired. These "extras" were made available to students during the winter months when sports and other after school activities would not interfere. She believed these craft classes helped foster good public relations with parents and gave the students an enjoyable extra-curricular activity.

Rural teacher number one made the following remark when asked if her students were allowed to use needlecraft projects as a valid sewing project: "I haven't stooped that low yet!" Apparently she believed craft projects had no place in a quality comprehensive home economics program.

Both suburban teacher number one and rural teacher number two were noncommittal about needlecraft projects.

They either believed them to be unnecessary, or simply had not considered them as either an alternative or a supplement to classroom activities.

### Teachers Perceptions of Students

In response to items 12 and 13 of Appendix C, informants gave the following information regarding students' lifestyles and interests. All of the teachers interviewed expressed some relationship between the students' lifestyles and the content of the courses being currently taught. Some of the comments were similar and some of them could be linked to the conditions that existed in the geographical area in which the schools were located.

The suburban informants were from different areas of the state and yet their responses indicated some similarity. Suburban informant number one cited the following in reference to her students and the effect of their lifestyles on what she could teach: "I think they're busy and they're spending their time out of the home much more than they are at home. I spent my free time at home on the sewing machine, and they don't do that any more." Suburban informant number two also referred to the busy lifestyle of her students. She indicated that she contacted the parents of her students to obtain feedback as to the effectiveness of her classroom activities. Although many parents were surprised by her phone calls, most of



them believed the calls to be a good idea and gave both positive and negative feedback. An additional problem of class scheduling was made apparent. This informant believed that class content had to be appealing and relevant to the students or they wouldn't take the class at all. Most of the students (approximately 90%) were in the college-bound curriculum and had, at most, one or two electives for which all non-required courses competed. All non-required, non-academic teachers in the school felt pressure to offer classes that would keep their programs viable. The county had a mandatory student/teacher ratio and if enrollment in a class fell under 20 students the class would be dropped.

The urban informant gave an affirmative response when asked if she believed lifestyle affected her clothing and textiles curriculum. However, she could not, or would not, elaborate. She did indicate that the majority of her students were from rather low income families and that many of her students opted for a needlecraft project instead of a clothing construction project. The students believed a craft project was less expensive than making a garment.

Both rural informants referred to the economically depressed condition of the region in which their schools were located. Both indicated some reluctance on the part of their students to sew. Rural informant number two noted that since the county had gone to seven rather than six

periods in the school day, many of the elective and vocational courses had increased enrollment. She indicated that this move had also increased male enrollment in home economics and increased female enrollment in "shop" class. She also mentioned that several of her students were already living on their own. "Some of the children that I have now, even, live in apartments away from their parents. I mean by themselves--because they have part time jobs and they're already out on their own." Rural informant number one also referred to her students as children. She talked about a general disinterest in sewing. Her students believed that sewing was for grandmothers. Other reasons cited were that sewing was too expensive, the children didn't see the need, families didn't spend as much time together, and they had little time to care for clothing.

### Current Trends

The informants interviewed were asked to elaborate on recent changes they had noticed in their clothing and textiles curriculum, sources of information about changes, and recommendations for this subject area. The questions asked were items 5, 7, 11, 14, 15, and 16 in Appendix C.

Suburban informant number one, with thirteen years

teaching experience, commented, "The ability of the students is different. . . I think we're getting away from actual clothing construction because time doesn't lend itself to sew as much as it used to. The emphasis is on being able to sew as a hobby or a pastime rather than as a necessity. I still sew as a need, but, they don't and we have to weigh that. Do you have time to do that or can you go and choose ready-to-wear that is going to serve your purpose? So the emphasis there has changed to being able to be a good consumer as far as clothes shopping." She also noted less time in the classroom spent on clothing and textiles due to added curriculum in other areas.

The consumerism issue was also mentioned by suburban informant number two. She also added a number of other changes and causes for those changes. Males in the classroom was mentioned as presenting a challenge in finding patterns that could be worn and that were simple enough and appropriate for a class project. Fewer places to shop was cited as a factor that made teaching clothing and textiles more difficult if sewing was to be a part of the curriculum. She noted that she used to teach some flat pattern drafting and draping at the high school level. Today's students either do not have time in their schedules or are not interested. Her county had recently decided not to purchase sergers, even though they were cited as the new trend in home sewing. The reason given was that they would

be used for such a short period of time and thus the cost could not be justified. The publications that she had read recently were encouraging people to teach sewing in their homes and in retail fabric stores because it was being eliminated from the school curriculum.

Although she had been teaching just one year, the urban informant interviewed noted that she was aware of recent changes in classroom sewing projects. In her school, students were allowed to choose a craft project instead of constructing a garment. Anything within the needle arts was considered appropriate for a class sewing project.

The rural informants indicated disappointment with the changes they saw taking place in the clothing and textiles curriculum. Rural informant number one referred to the lack of places to obtain supplies for classroom projects. In the past, she had been able to get old pattern books free, and the selection of fabrics and notions was plentiful. Now her students "have to leave town in order to have much selection at all. . . so it's a special trip when they go to get their fabric." The nearest fabric store was over seven miles away. She also noted that today's projects were more simple. She could remember teaching tailoring to her high school students. Rural informant number two mentioned that her state supervisor was "down on" construction. The teacher believed that if she used more "book work" and less hands on instruction

that her enrollment would fall to nothing.

Both of the rural informants felt pressure from their state supervisors to cut back on the amount of clothing construction they taught. Rural informant number one stated, "Well, my state supervisor said 'good' when I told her I did not sew in the second year. And she says 'well good, well you know that's the trend'." Researcher, "How do you feel about that trend?" Informant, "When I have been having classes like I've had for the last four or five years, I felt great, because I was doing what she thought, apparently at that moment, anyway was right, because people just haven't been sewing. It's really difficult. I will sew as long as the interest is there, but I can't do it if there's not any interest at all." The comments from the other rural informant were similar. "Supervisors, lots of supervisors, don't want you to do clothing. They've been down on clothing and foods. This sounds awful for me to say, but it's true, they are down on clothing construction, and I think they're down on food preparation. Some of our supervisors are. I'm talking about the area supervisors, maybe state supervisors. They say 'some people think that all you do is sew and cook', and home economics is more than sewing and cooking. . . my supervisor doesn't like the way I do it. . . what I'm doing is what the children need, we feel like. I have the backing of our supervisor in the county and my principal and assistant principal. . . so

they say, 'go ahead and do exactly what you're doing'. . . she wants me to spend more time using a book, but if I did that, I wouldn't have one (student). . . Sometimes I think that people have been out of the classroom too long to know."

The informants gave eight reasons they believed responsible for the decreased time allotted for sewing projects. The two most often cited reasons were: (1) students spend very little time at home, thus less time is available for things like sewing, and (2) state supervisors encourage teachers to cut back or eliminate sewing from the curriculum. Three other frequently cited reasons were: (3) such projects can put a strain on the family budget, (4) there is a general disinterest in sewing by today's teens, and (5) ready-to-wear can be purchased for about the same price. Also mentioned were: (6) stores that sell fabric and sewing supplies are less numerous, often resulting in an inadequate selection or necessitating a long drive to purchase materials, (7) students do not see a need to learn sewing skills, and (8) appropriate patterns are difficult to find.

#### Sources of Information Regarding Current Trends

The teachers interviewed indicated that their area or local home economics supervisors were their major source of information regarding current trends in home economics

education. When asked question number five, Appendix C, the teachers indicated their supervisors were the most influential person regarding current trends. School principals were important in obtaining approval to make changes or maintain previous content and procedures. However, they were not instrumental in implementing change.

None of the teachers interviewed indicated they read any professional journals. This would seem to indicate they may not be members of their professional organizations either, since the journals come with membership. All of the teachers interviewed indicated they used popular magazines such as Better Homes and Gardens, Ladies Home Journal, Southern Living, and McCalls. The only magazine published for home economics teachers they read was Forecast. All but rural teacher number one indicated use of this magazine and its accompanying student publication, Choices. Forecast and Choices were used if the school provided funds for the subscriptions.

The teachers did not order publications such as Forecast if they had to pay for them from their own funds. The popular publications were brought into class because of home subscriptions or, in the case of suburban teacher number two, were furnished by the school.

#### Informants Suggestions for Clothing and Textiles Curriculum

The suggestions of the informants for the future of

secondary home economics programs were varied. Table 3 presents a listing of concepts and the number of teachers recommending each for inclusion. One suburban teacher believed that a year of comprehensive home economics should be required. After that, students should be offered a wide selection of one-semester courses to allow students to take a class that would not require the use of a full year's elective credit. She believed the comprehensive course should include the following concepts in its clothing and textiles section: operation of a sewing machine, simple repairs and alterations, care of fabrics (including laundry), spot and stain removal, and shopping skills.

Suburban informant number two voiced the same suggestion regarding the addition of one-semester courses to the program, citing tight college track schedules and a need for variety in students' schedules as the primary reason for one-semester courses. She expressed an enjoyment for teaching clothing construction but realized that students really do not need to know all that is taught. She listed the following as the major concepts that should be left in the curriculum: wardrobe planning, care of textiles, laundry and stain removal, color analysis, consumerism, suiting clothing to individual lifestyle, and developing a clothing budget.



Table 3

Informants' Suggestions for Clothing and Textiles Curriculum

Concept or Skill	No. of informants who believed this concept should be included
1. Consumerism (shopping skills)	5
2. Care of textiles	4
3. Laundry techniques	4
4. Spot and stain removal	3
5. Color analysis	3
6. Garment construction	3
7. Simple repairs and alterations	2
8. Wardrobe planning	2
9. Pressing and ironing techniques	2
10. Developing a clothing budget	2
11. Operation of the sewing machine	2
12. Suiting clothing to individual lifestyle	1
13. Hand sewing techniques	1
14. Careers in clothing	1
15. Out of season storage	1

The urban informant stated that her students liked sewing projects and, therefore, she believed they should be left in the curriculum. She did not mention any major changes that would be beneficial to the program already being offered. The concepts she believed to be the most important and the most vital to a good clothing and textiles unit included wardrobe planning, some hand-sewing techniques, laundry and ironing techniques, careers in clothing, a study of color, and garment construction.

Like her urban counterpart, rural informant number one believed basic sewing skills should remain a vital part of the clothing and textiles curriculum. She did acknowledge that perhaps it had taken too much of the curriculum time in the past. "I think some teachers have spent far too much time on construction, you know? If it was their first love, they just dwelt on it too much. I guess it's a good way of beating in some time if that's your cup of tea, but I don't think it should be done that way. Trends come and go, and maybe there is a trend back to doing some construction, but it has been meager for the last while." In addition to basic sewing skills, she believed clothing selection, care and storage, color, managing the clothing dollar, and care and use of the sewing machine should be included in the comprehensive home economics program.

Rural informant number two also believed that some

construction should be left in the curriculum. The major concepts she would leave in, or add, were care and purchase of clothing, laundry, pressing, spot removal, consumerism, and clothing repair.

The informants were unanimous in their belief that consumerism should have a part in the clothing and textiles curriculum. Care of textiles and laundry techniques were also considered important. Garment construction was considered at least as important as color and stain removal and was mentioned by three of the informants as a concept or skill that should be a part of the clothing and textiles curriculum. Other concepts and skills were mentioned by fewer than half of the informants.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore some of the trends taking place in the clothing and textiles curriculum of selected Virginia secondary teachers of comprehensive consumer and homemaking programs. Of special interest was how these teachers and their students were reacting to, and being affected by, the changing American lifestyles and how these changes were also reflected in the focus of clothing and textiles instruction within the classroom.

Although clothing and textiles instruction does not have the prominence it once had in high school consumer and homemaking curriculum, it still appears to have a very important part in the total curriculum. None of the teachers interviewed had eliminated it altogether. The least amount of time devoted to clothing and textiles was one week in a Family Management Skills class and the greatest amount of time devoted to it was 13 weeks in a Life Management Skills class. All of the teachers of Life Management Skills and one of the two teachers of Family Management Skills were still including some type of sewing project as a part of their curriculum.

The teachers cited reasons such as student preference for "hands on" instruction as opposed to "book work" and reading and discussion assignments. They believed this was one of the possible reasons students took home economics in the first place. For many students, especially those on an academic or college-bound curriculum, courses such as home economics were believed to provide a pleasant, but informative, break in the daily routine of math, science, and English courses. Several of the teachers expressed the opinion that if "hands on" projects were removed from their curriculum they would most likely have few, if any, students, and their already struggling programs would be dropped.

The teachers interviewed seemed to be offering contradictory statements. They indicated that students believed sewing to be old fashioned and unnecessary and that they could buy ready-to-wear more economically than they could sew. One teacher noted that the students probably did not need all the skills that were currently included in the clothing and textiles unit pertaining to garment construction. Nevertheless, four of the five teachers included some sort of sewing or craft project in their classroom instruction. Many of the students were either not interested in sewing or found the expense too great for their budget. Yet, all of the teachers believed the removal of "hands on" instruction from the classroom

would be a deterrent to enrollment.

All of the teachers expressed a need to keep their program attractive to their current and prospective students in order to maintain their enrollment. They blamed some of the drop in enrollment in recent years on increased high school graduation requirements. Three of the four experienced teachers had been asked to teach classes other than home economics one or more times in the past because of the lack of enough home economics students for a full program. If their enrollment dropped, the teachers knew that they would have to teach something they believed themselves less qualified to teach. This could put pressure on these teachers to continue teaching things that are fun, but that might not be as relevant to the current lifestyle of today's students as they once were. The teachers interviewed seemed reluctant to give up teaching some of the projects they had done in the past even though they would admit that the students did not need to know all that was being taught.

The most often given justification for sewing in class was the value of the project to influence the students to be good consumers. The teacher who taught only one week on the subject of clothing and textiles had eliminated any kind of sewing because she could not justify the amount of time it required. Since there were so many things that needed to be included in the overall curriculum, she could

not justify spending the time sewing. The teachers who continued to include garment construction in their curriculum believed the students needed basic sewing skills, even though they would probably use that knowledge primarily to make them better consumers of ready-to-wear clothing.

The use of craft type projects as acceptable classroom activities seems to be a new issue in the controversy over clothing construction in the curriculum. The comments of the teachers interviewed raise new questions about clothing and textiles curriculum. How much time should be spent on sewing projects? What constitutes an acceptable classroom activity? Do classroom activities reflect the philosophy of current leaders in the field? If these teachers seem at odd over the acceptability of craft projects in the classroom, there may be other teachers in the state who are also facing the issue of using craft projects in their curriculum.

Teachers noted the fact that the lifestyle of their students did not leave much time for activities such as sewing. Young people have less free time than they used to, and the free time that they do have is most often spent away from home. Heavier class loads also contributed to the decreased amount of time students had for both fitting the class into their schedule and for sewing at home.

All of the teachers expressed awareness of the trend

away from apparel construction in home economics classes. They also expressed a greater desire to meet the needs and wishes of their students, the students' parents, and school administrators more than the suggestions and wishes of state supervisors that they cut back or eliminate clothing construction from their curriculum. Their classrooms were their own domain and they were the ultimate judges of what was best for their students.

State supervisors, home economics educators, and journal articles cite the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (U. S. Congress, 1984) and its provisions as one basis for their re-evaluation of consumer and homemaking curriculum. The classroom teachers interviewed were either unaware or only vaguely aware of any change in federal legislation. They seemed either unaware or unable to see the relationship between what they taught and how it could be affected by federal legislation.

None of the teachers indicated that they read any of the professional journals in which such legislation and its effects on vocational education were discussed. When asked to discuss helpful journals and magazines they mentioned only Forecast and popular magazines. Therefore, the probability that current leaders in the field and current professional literature concerning the re-evaluation of consumer and homemaking programs had any influence on them was limited.



Some influences might not be as apparent as others. The informants could have been influenced by such things as their own personal enjoyment of sewing, a long standing tradition of teaching clothing construction, and the amount of clothing construction remaining in the curriculum guides used by Virginia home economics teachers.

The informants, however, indicated that they were influenced by the comments, especially the praise, of supervisors and administrators. The positive reinforcement given by a principal would make a teacher continue to do something that a state supervisor believed should be eliminated. At the same time, pleasing the state supervisor was also important. If basic objectives of the course could be met and still tailor the program to meet the students' needs and keep them interested and enthusiastic, the teacher believed she had accomplished her major goal and satisfied her peers as well.

In order to affect change of any kind in the teaching practices of these teachers, one would need to show them how that change would better benefit their students and increase enrollment and enthusiastic participation in the classroom.

## Chapter 6

### SUMMARY

Home economics education has long been included in federal legislation. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act continues this support of consumer and homemaking programs. It also continues to mention clothing and textiles as a part of the total consumer and homemaking curriculum by citing it as a subject area, but it is not listed in the priorities for instruction (U. S. Congress, 1984). The act is worded in such a way that there is an emphasis on serving such segments of the population as male students, disadvantaged and handicapped students, and single parents. The intent of the manner in which the consumer and homemaking programs are funded is to improve the effectiveness of programs in preparing the above mentioned groups for the work of the home and for combining homemaking and wage-earning roles. Thus, redirecting secondary home economics programs has become a major emphasis of many vocational home economics teachers (Kister, Smith, & Hughes, 1985).

For home economics leaders, the type and amount of clothing and textiles instruction being offered in

secondary classrooms seems to be an important issue in the re-evaluation of the home economics curriculum. The study of clothing and textiles has traditionally been an important part of the home economics curriculum, and construction has generally taken up the majority of the classroom time devoted to clothing (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983).

The purpose of this study was to explore some of the current trends in the clothing and textiles area of home economics education and to determine how selected Virginia teachers were reacting to and being effected by these trends. Of particular interest were the individual practices of these teachers concerning clothing construction and the motivating forces and needs that affect what they teach.

The ethnographic style interview was chosen to obtain information from five Virginia teachers of secondary consumer and homemaking comprehensive courses. In order to obtain the broadest possible perspective with the small group recommended for this type of interview, teachers were chosen from an affluent suburban area, an economically mixed suburban area, a non-affluent urban area, and a rural area of the state.

The researcher traveled to each school to interview each teacher in her own school setting. The purpose of the interviews was to study characteristics and behaviors of

the informants rather than the effects of specific treatments (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). With the exception of one teacher, who was interviewed by telephone, the ethnographic type interviews were conducted in a setting familiar to the informant in order to grasp the informant's point of view and to realize that person's vision of the world (Spradley, 1979).

Dealing with such a small group enabled the researcher to be flexible and discuss the issues in depth with each informant. The interviews did not show up any broad trends, but they did show motivations, problems, and successes that affected the selected teachers and their students.

All of the teachers interviewed believed the needs and interests of their students were the most important factors in determining curriculum content. Curriculum guides, department heads, principals, and area and state supervisors all played a vital part in developing course content. However, the ultimate decision was theirs as long as they stayed within the general guidelines and objectives approved by their immediate supervisor.

All five teachers believed clothing and textiles should remain a part of the comprehensive consumer and homemaking program. They differed on whether or not garment construction should be a part of that curriculum. The most often cited components they believed should be included in

comprehensive classes were consumerism, care of textiles, laundry techniques, spot and stain removal, color analysis, and construction. Also mentioned were simple repairs and alterations, wardrobe planning, pressing and ironing techniques, developing a clothing budget, operation of a sewing machine, suiting clothing to individual lifestyle, hand sewing techniques, out-of-season storage, and careers in clothing.

The teachers interviewed gave eight reasons for a decreased amount of time allotted for clothing construction and sewing projects in comprehensive consumer and homemaking courses: (1) Students spend very little time at home, thus they have less time for such things as sewing; (2) State supervisors encourage teachers to cut back or eliminate sewing from the curriculum; (3) Such projects can put a strain on the family budget; (4) There is a general disinterest in sewing by today's teens; (5) Ready-to-wear clothing can be purchased for about the same price as one can make the same garment in class; (6) Stores that sell fabric and sewing supplies are less numerous often resulting in an inadequate selection or necessitating a long drive to purchase materials; (7) Students do not see a need to learn sewing skills; (8) Appropriate patterns are difficult to find. Whether they believed the changes to be for good, or bad, all of them could see changes happening to the content of their

clothing units and to the way in which those units of instruction were being taught.

A difference of opinion as to the validity of needlecraft projects seemed evident. One teacher allowed students to use a craft project, one teacher was specifically against it, and the others did not mention it.

#### Areas for Further Research

A more in-depth ethnographic study could be undertaken in which the researcher would actually observe the informant in a teaching situation. By observing the teacher in the classroom, the researcher could better note the time and emphasis put on various aspects of instruction. The researcher would also be able to observe student reaction and comment on the instruction being given.

There was only one conversation with each teacher. Holding follow-up meetings with others to verify teachers responses, reviewing teachers' lesson plans, and increasing the number in the sample group would add information to the study.

This study provides data from only one source, teachers. Interviews with students, administrators, and parents would also be helpful. The needs and expectations

of these persons would be valuable in making future curriculum decisions. Follow-up studies with recent former students could give insight into the effectiveness of the classroom activities of the classes they had attended. Thus, additions and deletions to the curriculum would be more meaningful and tailored more closely to the needs of those persons being served by education.

#### Implications for Inservice Education

Information about differences among teachers beliefs and attitudes regarding curriculum in clothing and textiles can be useful in planning inservice education. More dialogue among administrators, supervisors, teachers, students, and parents should be encouraged during inservice meetings. Being aware of the needs and expectations of each group would enable educators to develop curriculum that is relevant to the lifestyle and needs of the students.

Teachers need more help in analyzing students needs and interests resulting from changes in personal and family roles. All of the teachers interviewed believed themselves to be the ultimate judges of what should and should not be included in their units of instruction. Although they indicated the use of curriculum guides, they also showed

independence in choosing areas of study and activities for their students. The best interest of the students was given as justification for the decisions they made. In order to convince a teacher to add or delete anything in the curriculum, that teacher would need to believe the decision was in the best interest of the students and would generate the most enthusiasm from the students. Thus, inservice education efforts that emphasize student needs may be most successful in encouraging teachers to make adjustments in the content of the clothing and textiles units within the comprehensive home economics curriculum.



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter Sent to Informants

Month day, year

Ms. -----  
----- High School  
Street Address  
City, VA ZIP

Dear Ms. -----,

Thank you for taking time to talk with me by phone on day,  
month date. I appreciate your agreeing to meet with me on  
day, month date, for an interview for the purpose of  
obtaining information and data for my Master's thesis.

I am using the ethnographic interview method of research to  
investigate current trends in home economics education.  
Your answers to the questions I will ask will help me  
determine how teachers in Virginia are reacting to and  
being affected by current trends in the field. All  
responses will be handled anonymously in the thesis and  
will be discussed so that no one will be able to tell which  
answers are yours.

The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and will  
take place during your planning period. You do not need to  
do anything to prepare yourself or your department for the  
interview. I am interested only in your responses to the  
questions I will ask and am not evaluating or judging you  
or your department.

If you have any questions you may contact me at home any  
evening between the hours of 7:00 and 11:00 pm. at phone  
number. My schedule on the Tech campus is hectic and I am  
difficult to reach there, however you could leave a message  
at phone number or phone number. If you need to reach me  
for any reason on the Sunday evening or Monday morning  
before our meeting, you can reach me in location at phone  
number.

I look forward to meeting with you.

Yours truly,

Ina C. Murphey

cc: School Principal  
Area Supervisor

APPENDIX B

Memo Sent to School Principal and Area Supervisor  
(accompanies Appendix A)

To: (name of school principal or area supervisor)

From: Ina Murphey

Date: (month) (date), (year)

Re: Interview with (informant's name)

I am using the ethnographic interview method of collecting data for my Master's thesis in home economics education and will be interviewing selected home economics teachers in Virginia. I need to interview a home economics teacher in (name of city or county) and have chosen (informant's name). She has agreed to meet with me and I am sending you the enclosed copy of the letter that (informant's name) will receive regarding my scheduled meeting with her on (day), (month) (date). If you have any questions you may contact me at one of the phone numbers listed in the letter.

Thank you and your school for your cooperation in this matter.



APPENDIX C

Questions Included in Interview  
with Informants

## Interview Questions

Name of person being interviewed \_\_\_\_\_

Name and address of school \_\_\_\_\_

Urban\_\_\_ Rural\_\_\_ Suburban\_\_\_

Affluent\_\_\_ Moderate\_\_\_ Non affluent\_\_\_

## Introduction

This interview is for the purpose of obtaining information and data for my Master's thesis which will investigate current trends in home economics education. Your answers to the questions I am going to ask will help me determine how teachers in Virginia are reacting to and being affected by current trends in the field. I will be recording the interview in order to be accurate in reporting your responses. However, no one but you and I will hear this tape. In the thesis, all responses will be discussed so that no one will be able to tell which answers are yours. The interview will probably take about 30 minutes. Would you like to ask any questions before begin.

Response:

## Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What subjects or class titles do you teach currently?
3. Have you ever taught any classes other than home economics classes?
4. What types of students do you have in your classes?  
(sex, size of classes, socio-economic background, ability level, interests, their reaction to home economics curriculum)

5. How do you determine what you will teach in the classroom? (professional meetings, journals, state curriculum guide, area supervisor)
6. What general areas of study do you include in life management skills and family management skills classes, and approximately how long do you spend on each?
7. What are some of the supplemental materials, magazines, and journals that you find helpful?
8. Do you include clothing and textiles instruction in other units of instruction or do you teach it as a separate unit?
9. Approximately how much time do you allot during the school year for clothing and textiles instruction? How much of that time is spent on clothing construction? (FMS & LMS I)
10. Describe some of the changes you may have made in the way you teach clothing and textiles and what you think has influenced these changes?
11. What four to six concepts related to clothing and textiles do you feel are the most important to your students?
12. In what ways do the lifestyles and interests of your students affect what you teach concerning clothing and textiles?
13. What reactions do your students have to various aspects of clothing and textiles instruction? What kinds of projects related to construction do you teach?
14. To what do you attribute the popularity (or lack of it) of the consumer and homemaking program in your school?

15. What recommendations do you have for the improvement of the clothing and textiles area of the consumer and homemaking curriculum in Virginia?
  
16. What are some major areas of concern for you regarding home economics education in your school or your area, or even in the state?

VITA

Ina Crouch Murphey

ADDRESS:

5914 Sierra Drive  
Roanoke, Virginia 24012  
Phone: (703) 366-4403

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND:

B.S., 1968 Longwood College, Secondary Education (Home Economics Education)  
M.S.Ed. 1988 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Vocational and Technical Education (Home Economics Education)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Home Economics Teacher--Junior High 2 years, Senior High 1 year; Adult Education Teacher--14 years; Self-employed Wedding Coordinator--10 years

REPRESENTATIVE PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Served as President of area Home Economics Teachers Association while teaching in Prince George County, Virginia.  
Assisted in development of curriculum and taught first co-ed family living class at William Byrd High School in Roanoke County.  
Taught clothing construction and tailoring classes for YWCA, Sears, and other retail sewing centers and civic organizations.  
Independently organized and taught both private and group classes in clothing construction, cake decorating, and candy making.  
Developed and operated a wedding service that included coordinating services, custom designed wedding and formal wear, floral design, and catering.  
Worked as a graduate research assistant for Marketing Education on a sex equity project for women in entrepreneurship.  
Worked as a graduate research and teaching assistant in Home Economics Education and in Clothing and Textiles.

MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

American Home Economics Association, Virginia Home Economics Association, National Education Association, Omicron Tau Theta, Phi Delta Kappa, Phi Upsilon Omicron.

