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CREATE THROUGH SEWING

Special Studies
Ouachita Baptist University

Sharon Kluck

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Sewing today is an exciting and rewarding past-time. Whether you sew for economy or fashion, you have at your disposal superb fabrics in brilliant colors and interesting textures and weaves; you have patterns by famous designers; and you have a versatile and compliant helpmeet--your sewing machine... Sewing is an art and, as such, demands the discipline of an art. Bring to it desire, enthusiasm, and imagination, and it will give you in return a satisfaction that is unique: the joy of creating something that is truly yours.¹

Gaining a practical knowledge of the basic sewing skills and relating this knowledge in a laboratory was my objective as I assisted Mrs. O. L. Elledge in a beginner's sewing lab. Each Thursday afternoon from three to five o'clock Mrs. Elledge referred me to girls with a particular problem or who needed help in some way such as measuring a hem. Together "my student" and I attempted to solve the problem. From these problems I greatly increased my knowledge since there was such a variety of situations.

The first class project was a skirt made from pattern and material of the girls' own choice. Beforehand directions for choosing fabric and selecting the correct pattern size were given. Each girl, by measurement, determined her pattern type and size. While the tape measure usually told the story, girls in doubt of their correct size tried on standard pattern shells, checking fit. After purchasing the correct size pattern, each

¹Gladys Cunningham, Singer Sewing Book, New York: The Singer Co., 1969, Preface

girl pinned her skirt pattern together to examine for possible alterations. The patterns were then pinned on the material, checking grain and matching plaids or considering nap if necessary.

To be a successful seamstress the correct equipment is necessary. It is imperative to obtain the best possible equipment for the job. Sewing machines were furnished in the department, yet knowing the machine became essential to the girls for good results. Other equipment such as shears, pins, needles, measuring equipment, thread, bobbins, and sewing kits were obtained by the students for individual use.

Every girl made something unique. Although some used the same pattern, their materials, lengths, trims, and certainly experiences all varied. Many times the basic philosophy of the beginner that Mrs. Elledge had given the class went through my mind. "Don't be upset if you do not obtain perfection on your first try. Too much ripping on a garment can cause frustration and an end to sewing." The girls seemed to remember this too, for each did her best and turned out excellent results.

I have found it is one thing to understand a guide sheet, but it is another to explain it clearly to another. To be the perfect teacher this must be overcome so that the student may understand. If one can read directions well and understand them, she is on her way to becoming successful in her sewing.

Success as a seamstress also depends on the motive or desire. Some sew to relieve tension or to save money. However, most girls "sew not only to get the best value for the clothing dollar, but because they like to sew!"² This creative outlet allows individuality and self-expression necessary in becoming a well developed person.

Making it personally yours is the greatest advantage of home sewing, this intimate and distinctive touch that makes the costume a very personal thing. The woman who sews must continue to use her imagination and artistic talents as she constructs the garment.³

An increase in desire for self-expression and home sewing can be seen as a survey reports that seven out of ten girls list sewing as a hobby with the highest interest concentrating in the middle teen years.⁴

As girls learn to sew and express themselves, the desire to improve and master the skill results. "Home sewing is, like clothing manufacturing, a combination of art and science, and for this reason it is at once demanding and rewarding."⁵ The girls in my lab reached out for new experiences, always attempting something more challenging and also more rewarding.

²Talon Home Economists, "Teacher Is Key to Sewing Excitement," What's New in Home Economics, Vol. 34, October 1970, p. 41

³Allyne Bane, Creative Clothing Construction, New York: McGraw-Hill Brook Co., 1966, pp. 9-10

⁴Talon Home Economists, op. cit., p. 41

⁵Allyne Bane, op. cit., p. 1

The assorted experiences each one had will help her to improve and to build on the knowledge she has gained. It will then be possible to see which philosophy she has adopted toward sewing. The first philosophy is demonstrated by the average person. Her life style does not require high fashion, and she does not have "fashion daring." Patterns from Simplicity, Butterick, and McCall's will suit her best. The more fashion conscious individual, on the other hand, is drawn to Vogue, Spadea, and American Designer. She knows good design, good fabric, and has her goal at the couturier level.⁶

These two general categories can easily be used by professional people. The teacher and the student, however, regard this in a more detailed and personal way. By helping each girl develop her own philosophy of clothing, she can better understand her own specific attitudes toward dress and perhaps life itself.

When presenting sewing techniques and laying a foundation in clothing philosophy, the subject should be presented in an informative and exciting manner. The fundamentals of clothing construction must be accompanied by demonstration, the most effective presentation. Illustrative material is equally important. In order for it to be sufficient, the material should be "(1) concise yet adequate in information; (2) clear illustrations of demonstrated learning; (3) carefully planned and

⁶Ibid., p. 23

constructed to withstand repeated use; (4) compact in design for easy handling, filing, or storage with ready identification by subject matter."⁷ From a recent study it was found that "a complete permanent set of visual aid materials consisting of mounted samples, a completed dress, and posters [all of which] can be stored as a unit" are very effective in clothing classes.⁸ These three working together give the class an overall picture of the various steps in construction and how they are related.

As the interest in home sewing increases, new techniques and approaches are constantly developing to aid in teaching the basics and in actual construction.

The woman or girl who sews truly creates her own fashion and learns to be the best consumer while she's at it. From the original inspiration for a new garment, through the steps of a pattern and fabric selection, choice of notions and trims and use of her sewing machine, she is experiencing a part of the excitement generated in the fashion sewing world."⁹

The girls in beginner's clothing each learned new techniques and developed an attitude toward sewing, but they also used their creative abilities in actually constructing sleepwear, pants suits, fashionable separates, and party dresses.

⁷Talon Home Economists, op. cit., p. 43

⁸Charlotte M. Bennett and Barbara A. Carlisle, "Samples, Gormet & Posters Make Valuable Teaching Trio," What's New in Home Economics, Vol. 34, November/December 1970, p. 40

⁹Gail Devens, "Home Sewing Hits a New High," What's New in Home Economics, Vol. 34, November/December 1970, p. 26

The climax to a productive semester was a fashion show presented by these girls. With pride and grace each modeled the garments she had made, completing the ensemble with appropriate accessories.

By working with these girls from the pinning of their patterns through the fashion show, I gained a unique experience. Since I was privileged to actually work with them and to see their problems, I truly benefited from this learning experience.

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