



The Domestic Scientist at the Dewey Laboratory School

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Abstract

What has become known as the Dewey Laboratory School was established at the University of Chicago in 1896 and was in operation until 1904. There is an abundance of literature about its founder, John Dewey and the educational philosophy of the school but the contribution of the women teachers who implemented the lessons and reported on their daily work, has been relatively unnoticed. Thirty-two years after the school closed, two of the teachers wrote of their experience at the school (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936) and more recently Durst (2010a) investigated four of the teachers—Anna Camp, Katherine Camp, Althea Harmer and Mary Hill. As a home economics educator, my interest was drawn to Althea Harmer. She was a graduate of domestic science whereas the other teachers had degrees in science and history. In particular, I analyze five of the articles that she published between 1900 and 1904 when she was employed at the school as a domestic science teacher and department head. My purpose is two-fold: to make visible the contribution of the domestic scientist who taught at the Laboratory School; and to explore the ways her reports can inform contemporary thinking about the curriculum and pedagogy of home economics.

KEYWORDS: HOME ECONOMICS HISTORY; DEWEY LABORATORY SCHOOL; HOME ECONOMICS CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

Setting the Context—The Laboratory School

In 1894, John Dewey was hired as head of the department of philosophy at the newly founded University of Chicago. The department also included pedagogy which would eventually become a separate department that he also headed. Dewey then founded University College Elementary School, also known as the University Laboratory School, or just the Laboratory School or even the Dewey School (Knoll, 2015).

The school opened in 1896 and Dewey directed it until he left Chicago in 1904. It was designed as a space to experiment with his evolving theorizing of education outlined in *My Pedagogic Creed* (Dewey, 1897) and further developed in *The School and Society* (Dewey, 1899), and *The Child and the Curriculum* (Dewey, 1902). He believed that the child's interests should be central to pedagogy and the goal of education was to nurture social and moral dispositions, individual responsibility and democracy. He believed that education should develop a child's capacities that enable them to become an active and constructive participant in the life of society. Rather than passive conformity or rote learning, he advocated learning grounded in active exploration and experimentation in practical real-world experiences; an education for living. This is often described as learning by doing or hands-on learning. He believed that education should begin with common experiences. Subjects were integrated connecting reading, writing, history,

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spelling, arithmetic, and science to everyday life (Tanner, 1991). “At the Laboratory School the ‘common center’ of the curriculum was located in the study of the ‘social occupations’—cooking, textile work, and shopwork” (Durst, 2010a, p. 5) giving prominence to domestic science and manual arts.

It was the teachers at the school who provided the pedagogical mechanisms to implement Dewey’s theoretical perspectives (Durst, 2005, 2010a, 2010b; Hai, et al., 2020). Dewey advocated connecting thought and action through collective inquiry. Emphasis was placed on experimentation with teachers researching and reporting on their work at the school (Durst, 2005)—a forerunner of what is now teacher inquiry or teacher action research (Benn, 2010; Peterat & Smith, 2001; Smith & de Zwart, 2016). Thirty-two years after the school closed, two of the teachers wrote of their experience at the school (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). More recently, Durst (2010a) investigated four of the teachers—Anna Camp, Katherine Camp, Althea Harmer and Mary Hill—in order to get a better understanding of the life of teachers in the school. Katherine Camp is also mentioned as one of the 10 women who influenced Dewey (Aldridge et al., 2014).

As a home economics educator, my interest was drawn to Althea Harmer, who taught domestic arts and sciences at the Dewey School from 1897 to 1904, and also served as director of that department (Durst, 2010a). She was the only teacher with a background in what is now known as home economics. Althea Harmer had studied domestic science at the Drexel Institute and Pratt Institute. Both were private universities set up by businessmen and philanthropists who wanted to promote practical education for the working class. Anthony J. Drexel founded the Drexel Institute in 1891 in Philadelphia (Drexel University, 2026) whereas the Pratt Institute was founded in 1887 by Charles Pratt in Brooklyn who set out to create:

a school in which students should receive a thorough technical training along various lines of industry, which training should uphold the dignity of manual labor, and at the same time develop an appreciation of the artistic beauty of work done in the best possible way. (Manahan, 1905, p. 342)

Two-year degree programs in departments of Domestic Sciences and Domestic Arts were established at the Pratt Institute during its first complete school year in 1888. Domestic Arts included topics such as sewing, dressmaking, millinery, and physical culture. “Besides instruction involving methods, these courses are designed to cultivate the pupils’ taste” (Manahan, 1905, p. 343). Domestic Science was held in a laboratory with kitchens that were a “housekeepers’ dream” well suited to “practical experiments in cookery” (Manahan, 1905, p. 343). The two schools of Domestic Science and Domestic Arts were eventually merged into School of Household Science and Arts, and in 1941 became the School of Home Economics (Pratt Institute Libraries, n.d.).

Althea Harmer graduated in 1896 from Pratt Institute's Normal Course in Domestic Science where Katherine Camp Mayhew was chemistry instructor (Durst, 2010a; Durst, 2010b; Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). In that same year she is listed as a post-graduate scholarship student in charge of the Maids' Class and Saturday morning classes for young children (Pratt Institute, 1897). The Saturday morning classes are described as "the most interesting" (Pratt Institute, 1897, p. 60). A description of two of her lessons provides an example of her approach to teaching:

Miss Harmer told them some interesting stories about chocolate; where and how it grows, the process by which it is made into the form in which we know it, and how it is adulterated. She had specimens to illustrate her points, and then allowed the children to prepare a cup of chocolate (Pratt Institute, 1897, p. 60).

Next, the little ones received a gift, a potato, which was followed by a series leading questions. The children were led to discover some of the facts the composition of the potato. For practical work they boiled it and mashed it having a very good time at the "taste" of one another's dishes which followed the cooking (Pratt Institute, 1897, p. 60).

In the fall of 1897, she joined the staff at the Dewey Laboratory School in Chicago (Durst, 2010a; Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). During her time at the school, Althea Harmer published six articles, one in the *American Kitchen Magazine*, one in the *Elementary School Record*, and four in *The Elementary School Teacher* journal (Knoll, n.d.). Each described how the curriculum was organized around domestic arts and domestic science content, specifically food preparation and textile arts. These reports were evidence of Dewey's philosophy that teachers should research their practice. In his words: "Unless a teacher is such a student, he [sic] may continue to improve in the mechanics of school management, but he [sic] cannot grow as a teacher" (Dewey, 1904, p. 256).

Purpose and Research Design

I characterize this as historical research. According to McBreen (1984), "the use of historical research in the field of home economics has not been particularly prevalent" (p. 539). Historical research is qualitative, interpretive research that seeks to "obtain a historical perspective on particular problems in the work of the profession" (Vincenti, 1989, p. 92). It seeks to interpret and explain the significance of past experiences, not merely to document them (Edson, 1986). Vaines (1997) asks us to consider three questions as part of reflective practice: What was? What is? and What should be? Knowledge of the "what was"—past history of home economics—is important in order to understand present concerns and contradictions, and future directions, "not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 210).

I focus this inquiry specifically on five primary source texts: the articles written by Althea Harmer describing lessons in the elementary program at the Laboratory School. My purpose is two-fold: to make visible the contribution of the domestic scientist who taught at the Laboratory School; and to explore the ways her reports can inform contemporary thinking about the curriculum and pedagogy of home economics. I provide a synopsis of each article and identify pedagogical themes. I follow this with a discussion of the findings placing them in the realm of Progressive Education and focussing on theorizing the pedagogy of domestic science/home economics.

The Harmer Publications

According to Knoll (n.d.), Althea Harmer published six articles during her time at the Laboratory School:

- Harmer, Althea (1900) Textile Work at the Dewey School. *American Kitchen Magazine*, 12, 137-138.
- Harmer, Althea (1900) Textile Industries. *Elementary School Record*, 1(3), 71-81.
- Harmer, Althea (1903a) Elementary Cooking in the Laboratory School. *Elementary School Teacher*, 3(10), 706-709.
- Harmer, Althea (1903b) Introduction to the Primitive Textile Work in the Laboratory School. *Elementary School Teacher*, 3(10), 710-717.
- Harmer, Althea (1903c) Basketry. *Elementary School Teacher*, 4(2), 116-119.
- Harmer, Althea (1904) Textile Work Connected with American Colonial History. *Elementary School Teacher*, 4(9), 661-672.

I was unable to find the article published in 1900 in the *American Kitchen Magazine*. I was unable to find the original source of Textile Industries published in *Elementary School Record* but it was included in the book published by Mayhew and Edward (1936) so I was able to read it there. The remaining four, published in 1903 and 1904, in *The Elementary School Teacher* were available with three of the publications focussing on textiles building on one another to make a unit of study.

Textile Industries (Harmer, 1900)

The original article in the *Elementary School Record* was reprinted in Mayhew and Edwards (1936) as an example of how industries are used as curricular material.

Synopsis

This article outlines how textile industries can be “studied in the school-room for illustrating the effect they have on social life and history” (Harmer, 1900, as cited in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 330). It is a very detailed account of how children were led through three stages of development in the textile industries—primitive, domestic, and factory.

Beginning with primitive implements—the distaff, spindle, and loom—each step made is traced out, and the mechanical advantage gained in the application of the force used becomes clear.

The household and domestic stage coincides with the colonial period. Here the educational value is in the broad, historical background furnished, and emphasis is laid on the social side. Attention is directed to the influence of occupation on community life, the growth of trade and trade centers and the manner in which these have shifted and developed, to the concentration of industries as conditioned by environment, and the climate and soils of areas where raw materials are produced. A general view is sought of routes of trade and means of transportation in the development of commerce.

In the factory stage emphasis is laid upon the invention of machines, showing the utilization of the forces in nature which give increased production. A review is made of machines from primitive times to the present. (Harmer, 1900, as cited in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 331-332)

In each stage, students were encouraged to “make their own deductions from simple experiments” and in the end “they were able to carry out the whole process from the handling of the fiber in its natural condition to the woven cloth” (Harmer, 1900, as cited in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 332).

Pedagogical Themes

The rationale for teaching textiles in this manner is evident in this excerpt:

...this method involves the *exercise of judgment*. The ability to think and the method of thinking are part and parcel of all the *reinventing* and the *rediscovering*. *Thinking does not occur for its own sake; it is not an end in itself. It arises from the need of meeting some difficulty, in reflecting upon the best way of overcoming it, and thus leads to planning, to projecting mentally the end to be reached, and deciding upon the steps necessary.* The tool and method of going to work are always seen to be dependent upon the material on the one side and the result to be attained on the other. These being given, to find the third term is the problem, surely as logical an exercise as any in geometry. It has the added advantage of *being concrete* and of calling the *constructive imagination* into play. (Harmer, 1900, as cited in Mayhew & Edwards, 1936, p. 335-336, emphasis added).

In sum, Harmer (1900) emphasized a problem-solving approach involving real concrete situations where children were lead through a process of defining problems and seeking creative solutions based on their own practical experiences and constructive imagination.

Dewey (1899) included a very similar description of the potential of the textile lessons saying:

we cannot overlook the importance for educational purposes of the close and intimate acquaintance got with nature at first hand, with real things and materials, with the actual processes of their manipulation, and the knowledge of their social necessities and uses. In all this there was continual training of observation, of ingenuity, constructive imagination, of logical thought, and of the sense of reality acquired through first-hand contact with actualities. (p. 24)

Elementary Cooking in the Laboratory School (Harmer, 1903a)

Synopsis

This article provides an overview of the ways cooking is used as a learning activity throughout the years of elementary education from kindergarten on. At the kindergarten level “foods such as cereals and fruits are selected, since these require the simplest preparation and but little variation in the manipulation of the materials” (p. 706). “Beginning with the simplest preparation of food to be served for luncheon, the children become interested in the materials used and the processes involved in the preparation of these materials” (p. 706). Six-year-olds also focus on cereals and fruits but the topic is broadened to “the occupation of the farmer and the miller,” and the “the various preparations of cereals are examined, the methods of preparation considered, and by means of experiments actually made the children compare difference in time required in cooking the different preparations and the reasons for this difference” (p. 707). Fruits and vegetables are selected in the following year. The approach is one of inquiry, and the material presented offers students possibilities for experimental work.

Pedagogical Themes

Harmer (1903a) describes the learning potential of cooking in the following excerpts:

“the value of the work is in the nice handling and careful use of materials, and in the forming of habits of neatness and order” (p. 706)

“cooking has particular educational value... giving opportunity for individual work, initiative, and independence, and also in calling for group work, which encourages a spirit of helpfulness” (p. 706)

“the children become interested in the materials ...mak(ing) it possible to introduce simple experiments previous to the cooking, which enable them to work out the formula and the steps used in preparation of the food” (p. 706)

[through experimentation] “increased power of observation is the result, and skill is acquired in handling materials and in controlling processes” (p.708).

“The children become acquainted with simple chemical and physical facts in relation to the action of heat and water on the food constituents” (p. 708)

“in connection with the history the children take up primitive modes of cooking out of doors...[that] serves as an occasion for the child to abstract the principle he [sic] has been using in connection with modern methods and apparatus” (p. 709)

In sum, Harmer (1903a) promotes inquiry, experimentation, and collaboration in integrative learning experiences that foster independence. There is also an emphasis on understanding the temporal interrelationships between past, present and future.

Cooking enjoyed a prominent position in the curriculum of Dewey’s school, because it integrated diverse disciplines of knowledge. Dewey frequently used cooking to illustrate his approach to teaching and learning. For example:

For the child simply to desire to cook an egg, and accordingly drop it in water for three minutes, and take it out when he is told, is not educative. But for the child to realize his own impulse by recognizing the facts, materials and conditions involved, and then to regulate his impulse through that recognition, is educative. (Dewey, 1899, p. 57)

The educative value of the cooking lessons continues because he is now studying questions of food values, menus, the cost of food, and the chemistry of food stuffs, and cooking...The kitchen becomes a laboratory for the study of a fundamental factor in human life (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, 296).

According to Mayhew and Edwards (1936), the approach to cooking at the Dewey school was “influenced by Ellen Richards, a contemporary of Dewey and founder of the Home Economics movement, who had written a book, *The Free-Hand Method of Teaching Cooking*” (p. 298). The underlying belief behind this approach was that a knowledge of the constituents of food, of the effect of controlled application of heat, and of the processes of solution and fermentation, would liberate the cook from the use of rigid recipes and foster creative expression in cooking.

Introduction to the Primitive Textile Work in the Laboratory School (Harmer, 1903b)*Synopsis*

This article is very similar to her 1900 article on textile industries. She describes a series of lessons exploring how fibres were used to create textile items for a model of early life in America. “The study of primitive forms of spinning and weaving is given in connection with the primitive history to illustrate further the life of people whose mode of living is simple and in direct contact with nature” (p. 710). The task was to make mats, blankets and clothing for the model “using only that which nature supplies” (p. 712). She goes on to explain how the children were led to determine ways to “adapt and invent weaves suitable to flexible and rigid grasses, invent simple looms” (p. 712). They examined four typical kinds of cloth: wool, silk, cotton, and linen beginning with fibers in the natural state, determining through trial and error how to create cloth for blankets for their models. In the process, “the children sorted, teased, carded, and spun. The different processes making up the series were thus brought together, enabling the children to realize as a whole this stage of the industry” (p. 717).

Pedagogical Themes

Harmer (1903b) describes the aim and benefits of this approach in these excerpts:

The aim is so to arrange the work that the problem comes to the child from his actual work, and, if possible, in such a way that he discovers the solution; i.e., each step in the process is so dependent on the nature of the material that the children make the steps logically and of their own initiative. (p. 712)

“The children work out the whole process in detail for themselves by means of a series of experiments.” (p. 713)

When the child has passed through these different periods by means of actual direct work with materials, and observation of historical and economic facts, he can, in visiting the factory, grasp without mental confusion the essential and underlying principles of machines and processes, and the more subtle points in the organization of factory life. In addition to his intelligent insight into industrial life, and into its effect upon social life in history, the child gains experience of a scientific and aesthetic nature (p. 711).

In sum, this article reiterates problem posing and solving and learning from experience in real life settings. Harmer also emphasizes embedding the learning in historical, cultural and ideological context and circumstances, and fostering an understanding of the whole event. Later Dewey uses these examples to explain that rather than teaching students a technical skill like weaving or sewing, these activities are “point(s) of departure from which the child can trace and follow the progress of mankind in history, getting an insight also into the materials used and the mechanical principles involved” (Dewey, 1907, p. 25).

Basketry (Harmer, 1903c)*Synopsis*

This paper describes in detail how basketry was used with 8-year-old students. “The same method was followed in the basketry as in the primitive work” (p. 116) referring to the previous publication. Basketry involved students collecting grasses outdoors and using them to create woven baskets. Harmer explains how selecting the grasses leads to a study of “the rushes, sedges, and grasses gathered, their condition of growth, and their general position in plant life” (p. 116).

The child's finished product is perhaps crude compared with the basket or mat made with prepared material, but what he gets from it is infinitely more worthwhile. This product contributes to an appreciation of nature, and through the control of nature's material he [sic] realizes the pleasure of artistic creation. (p. 118)

Thus on a trip to a museum, the students' attempts at basket making provided “experience to examine intelligently the Indian [sic] basketry” (p. 119) and allows them to “gain a clearer and more adequate conception of what the life of these people means than he could have obtained through any formal study of material transcribed by another” (p. 119).

Pedagogical Themes

For Harmer (1903c), starting with the historical development of topics in domestic arts and sciences provides the foundation for students to develop an understanding of the more complicated processes that follow. Learning as problem solving and experimentation, nature-based learning, and perspective taking are also highlighted.

The grasses are incidental perhaps and the child becomes lost in contemplation of all the living things which the particular region affords. He goes not so much, after all, for the facts, or the new materials discovered, as for the sake of fresh, healthy, and lasting impressions received, and the consequent enlargement of his [sic] point of view (p. 116).

Dewey in 1999 said much the same thing when he stated “these occupations in the school shall not be mere practical devices or modes of routine employment, the gaining of better technical skill as cooks, seamstresses, or carpenters, but active centers of scientific insight into natural materials and processes” (p. 33).

Textile Work Connected with American Colonial History (Harmer, 1904)*Synopsis*

This is the lengthiest of all the articles and includes several images—photographs and examples of student work. It indicates in the opening that it is the culmination of activities discussed in *Basketry* and *Introduction to the Primitive Textile Work in the Laboratory School*. It outlines how domestic activities were used as historical studies. “The child's understanding of the daily life of a people is vivified by reproducing their typical occupations. This realization of their daily struggles is insured by his [sic] use of the actual material and the methods of their time” (p. 661).

She reiterates from the previous articles how students investigating cloth and baskets from raw materials “makes it possible for him [sic] through his own experience to work out the evolution which actually has taken place historically” (p. 662). She argues “No mere observation of the finished product could give the child such an understanding of the structure and properties of these materials” (p. 663). This basis has implications for future learning. “In comprehending the growth of one social occupation, and its effect upon social life and history, he [sic] is better able to take up the more intellectual problems connected with a further study of economics in secondary and college work” (p. 670). In conclusion she states:

The result is that the child in each period of the industry has experience along several distinct lines of work: (1) the history which is the basis of the whole; (2) the inventive and experimental work, including science, physiography, chemistry, and physics; (3) simple problems in mathematics, in planning of implements, and in the technical construction of design; (4) aesthetic expression in color and design; (5) hand-work in wood-work and textile materials (p. 672).

Pedagogical Themes

The main theme of problem solving through practical hands-on learning activities that include experimentation continues. Harmer (1904) notes that “the problems presented here are concrete, in touch with practical life, and have a historical and social background which gives them a living interest” (p. 666). She goes on to state:

Only through his [sic] own actions and experiences can the child realize conditions other than his own; he is not capable of abstraction and theorizing. Names and dates mean nothing unless he can make them center about the activities concerned in history, and through them understand the vital forces which have resulted in social organization (p. 667).

“The scientific method is followed throughout. The child is made conscious of the problem and seeks his own solution” (p. 672). “Pedagogically considered, this is the most important result of the work—this making the children scientific and self-reliant in their attitude of mind” (p. 671).

The notions of agency, independent thinking, and perspective taking were also highlighted in Mayhew and Edwards (1936):

The aim of the study of the period of American colonization was not to cover the ground, but to give children of this age some knowledge of how social processes were used to secure social results, how obstacles were overcome and means contrived to attain these results. The ulterior problem was by this method to bring the child to recognize his own need to secure practical and intellectual control of such methods of work and inquiry as would help him attain desired results in his own life situation (pp. 176-177).

In reviewing the five articles that Althea Harmer authored during her time as head of the domestic arts and science department at what is commonly known as the Dewey School, four overlapping pedagogical themes that form the foundation of her approach to home economics education appear to dominate:

- **learner focussed**—related to students' everyday life, connecting the subject matter to the needs, desires, interest, ability level, of the student, exploring topics that interest students, giving them the opportunity to identify and pose problems, and actively participate in experimentation.
- **experiential-** and **problem based-** learning from experience with real concrete problems. Also referred to as active learning or learning by doing, this pedagogy involves problem posing, experimenting, invention and re-invention.
- **learning to learn**—knowledge or knowing is for the sake of doing something with the knowledge. This pedagogical theme is underpinned by the assumption that knowledge is constructed, contextual, emergent, integrated and created through creative and critical thinking requiring constructive imagination and teaching students how to think rather than what to think.
- developing **civic mindedness** such that students are independent thinkers yet able to collaborate, and be socially responsible. This pedagogical theme is underpinned by the belief that schools should prepare for active citizenship in a democratic society. One of the questions the teachers of the school asked when planning their curriculum was “What can be done to bring the students into closer relationship with their home and community?” (Edwards & Edwards, 1936, p. 26).

Discussion

These themes working together and are commonly connected to Progressive education.

Durst (2010a) suggests that the work of the women at the Dewey school places “their experiences in the historical context of Progressive-era experimentation” (p. 55-56). Home economics was introduced into schools about the same time that the Progressive education movement was a prominent influence. Home economics was “shaped by the hopes and ideals of the Progressive movement” (Apple, 2015, p. 54) such that “early home economists considered the overtly Progressive orientation of their field to be its distinguishing characteristic” (Apple, 2015, p. 58).

Progressive education is described as a “many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals” (Cremin, 1961, p. vii). With its emphasis on improving home life through hands on learning and applying academic knowledge to real-life situations related to students' daily lives and the natural world, home economics is deeply connected to progressive education. The movement was dominated by an educational philosophy that focusses on preparing students to live in a changing world emphasizing democracy and citizenship. The intent was to create independent thinkers acting for the public good (McGregor, 2022). Progressive education advocated active learning through doing, experimenting, and problem solving rather than merely passive absorption of course content.

Progressive education arose in response to industrialization and increased urbanization that characterized the second half of the 1800s. There are those who argue that the same principles are required for the massive changes of the 21st century (Wulandari, 2021). For example, Tanner (1997) in examining the literature on the Dewey School concluded that many of the ideas that Dewey and teachers such as Harmer were putting into practice are prominent today in actions such as “relating the curriculum to children’s life and experience, integrating the curriculum, teaching critical thinking and problem solving, stimulating creative thinking, supporting collaborative decision making by the school staff” (p. xii). Tippet and Lee (2017) identified 20 contemporary pedagogies associated with 21st Century learning, including active learning, cooperative learning, critical pedagogy, problem- and project-based learning, and traced their genesis to progressive education.

While the Dewey school was for elementary students there are those who suggest that the pedagogical themes are appropriate for any level of learning (Manke, 2019; Tanner, 1997). For example, Belliveau (2007) argues that the Dewey school’s use of cooking as pedagogy can be a model for interdisciplinary learning in contemporary higher education. For O’Neil (2015) cooking pedagogy particularly the themes of experiential learning by doing, experimentation, and “cooking to learn while learning to cook” is appropriate for teaching sustainability in higher education food studies. Whereas, Demas (2023) claims it can be used to enhance school curriculum for all ages. According to DeFalco (2016), Dewey’s ideas are “still timely” for vocational education as it “prize(s) freedom more than docility; initiative more than automatic skill; insight and understanding more than capacity to recite lessons or to execute tasks under the direction of others” (p. 59). Similarly, Schmidt and Allsup (2019) contend that Dewey’s theorizing is relevant for teacher education. Khamasi et al. (2021) describe how a culture of learning, identifying themes very similar to Harmer’s, can “inspire” home economics education.

Conclusion

According to Hai et al. (2020), Dewey “edited and published in the Elementary School Record in 1900” (p. 62). Whether the pedagogy reported by Althea Harmer was her method and theorizing or whether she was implementing Dewey’s or whether it is a combination of the two, is not clear. The processes she describes are very similar to her earlier approach with the Maids class at the Pratt Institute which was prior to her association with the Dewey school indicating that she may have influenced how domestic science was taught at the school. What is clear is that she strongly believed in teaching and learning underpinned by the pedagogical values she espoused.

I submit that Harmer’s theorizing is useful for today’s home economics educators, especially those who seek to move beyond transmissive to more transformative forms of pedagogy (Smith, 2017). The themes that run through her publications—active learning; experiential and problem-based learning; learning to learn fostering creative imagination, contextualized and integrative learning; and civic mindedness—are still relevant for home economics education. They align with a number of initiatives that are advocated for current home economics teaching and learning. Initiatives such: responsible living (Thoresen et al., 2015); interthinking (Taar & Palojoki, 2022); contextual learning (Smith, 2012); a culture of learning (Khamasi, et al., 2021); productive pedagogy (Reynolds 2002a, 2002b, 2003); social justice education (Dupuis, 2017), sustainability and environmental education (Maguire & McCloat, 2017; O’Donoghue & Wahlen, 2008, 2010); practical problem based curriculum (Laster, 2008); integrative learning

(Haapaniemi et al., 2019); bringing historical and socio-perspectives into home economics (Smith & de Zwart, 2017; Smith, 2025), and a curriculum of home coming and pedagogy of responsibility (Smith, 2022); to name a few.

Although there are endless accounts of the Laboratory school, its administration, the controversies, and so on (Fallace & Fantozzi, 2017; Knoll, 2015), there are none that specifically focus on the role of the domestic scientist who was part of the staff despite the fact that Dewey in many future publications used examples very similar to Harmer's publications to explain his philosophy. My intent was to bring the work of Althea out of the shadows much like Staring and Aldridge (2014) and Hall (2005) did for Evelyn Dewey and to speculate on the meaning it has for current home economics education programs. The home economics literature has little mention of Althea Harmer and her work at the school. In this paper, I analyzed her publications and teased out the main themes of her pedagogical approach noting that these themes, written over 100 years ago, are still relevant today. A reminder that the past can inform the present.

Epilogue

When the school closed, Althea turned to her textile background for a means to make a living. She opened an interior design business in Chicago. She gave up the business when she married Charles Russell Bardeen in 1905, a professor in anatomy. They moved to Madison Wisconsin where her husband later became the first dean of the University of Wisconsin Medical School. She had four children. Her son, John Bardeen, would go on to be awarded the Noble Prize in Physics twice (Hoddeson & Daitch, 2002; Hoddeson, 2008; Pines, 2013). John Bardeen became "internationally known for solving problems using a cooperative experiment-based approach built on overcoming specific difficulties, setting concrete goals, visualizing their achievement" (Durst, 2010a, p. 126). His biographers used the phrase from Harmer's (1900) publication "calling the constructive imagination into play" crediting his mother's contribution to raising a genius (Hoddeson & Daitch, 2002, p.14).

Althea Harmer Bardeen died in 1920 of breast cancer.

Biography

Mary Gale Smith is a retired home economics teacher and a sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia. She was worked in the teacher education program and in the Masters of Education Program in Human Ecology and Everyday Life. Her research interests include curriculum and pedagogy in Home Economics, Food Literacy, teacher professional development, and Home Economics history. **Email:** mary.smith@ubc.ca

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