

CAREER EDUCATION FOR ASIAN WOMEN¹

The term 'career education' is a very recent one; it has only been used since 1971, hence it is an evolving concept which may embrace more than one definition.

The easiest way to clarify this concept is probably to define what it is not.

First of all, career education is not **vocational education**. Although both are concerned with the world of work, career education is designed for all students from kindergarten through secondary school and even through college and university. On the other hand, vocational education is training in job-entry skills for students who want to go to work.

Secondly, while career education is designed and implemented by teachers, it does not require the creation of a new course. It can be worked into existing classes, identifying the unit in the curriculum into which career education concepts of self-awareness and the like can be infused. This type of infusion can and does revitalise the curriculum and makes regular instruction more relevant and more meaningful to students.

Finally, career education does not only mean informing students about various occupational opportunities. Career information is only one of the important components; the others are self-awareness, educational awareness, career planning, decision-making and development of employability skills.

Women's Employment Needs

Much has been written about the "brain drain" or the loss of highly trained professionals from one nation to another. Little has been said about the loss to a country of women who are not only unemployed or underemployed but discouraged from fully utilizing their energies and potentials⁽²⁾

An ILO study pointed out that "More conscious, specific and intelligent attention needs to be given to women's employment needs and problems, if they are to be partners in development. If they are left behind in the process or not enabled to catch up, the consequences can be grave from an economic as well as the social and human point of view. This would entirely be at cross purpose with the basic aims of the world politics on employment and human resources development."⁽³⁾

(1) Excerpts from an address prepared by Mrs. Santamaria, associate professor in the Dept. of Guidance and Counseling at De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines, and given at the AWI Career Counseling Conference, Singapore, June 27-July 3, 1979, at the Regional English Language Center; published in *Asian Woman*, vol. IV, no. XII, Sept. 1979, p. 6.

(2) See *Al-Raida*, no. 9, vol. II, Aug. 1979, p. 11, "Women's Response to Migration," by Mrs. Saneya Saleh from the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

(3) *Asian Woman*, op. cit., p. 8.

Increasingly more women in Asia, comprising all sections of society, are motivated to go on to higher education and to have careers for the same reasons: they and their families need the income; they are dissatisfied with their current life-style of being confined to the home and having to do only home-related activities; they need self-fulfillment, status and prestige; they need to have authority to make a positive contribution to society.

The high cost of living, increased education and new aspirations, access to creches and day-care centers which facilitate child rearing, lighter household chores because of electrical gadgets and domestic help fast getting to be a luxury as housemaids themselves are trying to improve their status, increasing acceptance of birth control and family planning, are forces that impel women to combine home and career.

Basic Tasks

Therefore, career education for Asian women must focus on some basic tasks.

1. The development of positive attitudes towards the self, leading to greater and increased self-awareness and acceptance of one's self as a human being with an identity separate from that of the husband and children.
2. Career awareness of having access to information about career opportunities other than the traditional occupations of teaching, nursing, clerical work and so on.
3. Educational awareness of having information of various opportunities for training and education and for continuing education.
4. Develop the ability to use information in making decisions to identify options, to take risks and bear consequences and to decide on alternative courses of action.
5. Make career plans which involve identifying short-range goals to achieve long-term goals.
6. Develop skills in scheduling and efficient management of time, of combining both home and work duties and setting up priorities.

A Positive Self-Image

The development of a positive self-image is crucial, since many cultural factors have inhibited or restricted a

woman from thinking freely about herself and making informed and rational decisions as to the direction she must take.

A woman needs to be convinced of the joys and challenges of combining a family with a career. She needs to know where and how she can start. She must also be informed of the problems and difficulties that will be encountered and, just as important, to know how other women have coped with these difficulties and succeeded. She needs role models who will not only inspire and encourage her **but help her overcome the feelings of guilt for not conforming to the traditional sex-role stereotype.**

Providing Necessary Guidance

In selecting a career, a woman should be helped by guidance counselors in making decisions based on a realistic appraisal of employment and advancement opportunities, and on how the career will satisfy her own needs, abilities and interests. She needs help in choosing a

career area which she herself wants, not one that has been thrust upon her. Research has shown that women have the same aptitudes as men for skilled and technical trades; that some women really do have manual dexterity, hand-eye coordination, form and space perception. They can be good mechanics, machinists, type-setters, electricians, just as some of them are as competent as men to be engineers, physicists, architects, oceanographers, etc.

A Promising Future

There is a promising future for the women of Asia. Old attitudes are changing. Society now accepts women as salary earners and career builders. The weight of public opinion is gradually shifting in favour of family women having careers. The participation of the educationists will give leadership and support that a career education program needs. While many of us are not the direct implementors of the program for women, our positive attitude and active support are the basic ingredients of a sound program of career education for Asian women.