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Requirements for Textile Product Knowledge in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising Curricula

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REQUIREMENTS FOR TEXTILE PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE
IN MARKETING AND FASHION MERCHANDISING CURRICULA

A RESEARCH REPORT PRESENTED TO
DR. JOHN M. RITZ
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF EDUCATION 636

FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF SCIENCE,
SECONDARY EDUCATION

BY: CAROLYN H. JOSEY
JULY, 1979
This research paper was prepared by Carolyn H. Josey under the direction of Dr. John M. Patterson in Education 636. The report will be submitted to the Graduate Council as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Science in Education.

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Graduate Program Director  

7-31-79  

Date
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.............................................ii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION.............................................. 1
   Statement of the Problem.............................. 2
   Objective.................................................. 2
   Background and Significance of the Study........... 2
   Limitations of the Study............................... 3
   Basic Assumptions....................................... 4
   Procedures for Collecting Data....................... 4
   Definition of Terms..................................... 5
   Overview.................................................. 7

II. A REVIEW OF LITERATURE................................. 9

III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES............................... 17
   Development of the Test Instrument.................. 17
   Pilot Test............................................... 18
   Population.............................................. 19
   Data Collection......................................... 19

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY................................. 21

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.................... 25

BIBLIOGRAPHY................................................. 28

APPENDICES

A. Test Instrument......................................... 32
B. Test Administrative Instructions.................... 38
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Test Results Grouped By Fiber Category</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overall Test Results</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is designed to determine what textile product knowledge is required by entry level employees in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising. It will compare these requirements with the knowledges that students leaving high school programs in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising currently possess, in order to determine what additional knowledges must be taught.

Most experts agree that a command of textile product knowledge will facilitate an intelligent appraisal of standards and brands of merchandise containing textiles. Recognizing the fact that textile product knowledge is necessary, and fact that students are currently given limited instruction in this area, there appears to be a need for expansion of the Distributive Education curriculum. This gap can be met by developing a textile unit of study. The major question posed is what should such a unit contain. This study should answer that question.
Statement of the Problem

The primary purpose of this study is to determine what type of textile product knowledge is needed to meet the requirements of Marketing and Fashion Merchandising students entering today's job market.

Objective

To determine what textile product knowledge must be taught in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising curricula in order to prepare graduating students for entry level jobs in apparel and accessories merchandising.

Background and Significance of the Study

Studies by Lynch and Crawford have postulated a need for textile product knowledge as a critical entry level job skill for salespersons of apparel and accessories. However, this researcher found no current marketing curricula containing reference to textiles as a subject for study by high school students.

Since the importance of textile product knowledge is recognized, it is necessary to identify what and how
much knowledge should be taught to marketing students. In order to do this, a determination must be made of the difference between minimum entry level knowledge requirements and the level of product knowledge that the marketing student currently brings to his first job.

In his 1977 Study, "Broad Content Outline for Marketing and Distribution", Lynch cites certain critical entry level skills necessary for completing certain critical tasks. In this study the task "translate label information with selling points" is a critical entry level skill. In order to complete this critical task, it would be necessary for a student to have some specific training on textile knowledge. Therefore, the study is significant for curriculum development in Distributive Education.

Limitations of the Study

The suggested guidelines for a curriculum will be developed in this study. These guidelines will be limited in application to students in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising. Complete learning objectives will not be written; a comprehensive listing of knowledges to be taught is the goal. Collection of data will be limited to subject matter experts
(department managers in fashion situations, distribution educators) and exiting Marketing and Fashion Merchandising students.

Basic Assumptions

It was assumed in this study that:

a. Even though Fashion Merchandising and Marketing students are two distinct and separate groups, they are both preparing for entry level jobs in a similar employment market.

b. The employment market will require similar entry level skills throughout the entire State of Virginia.

c. Marketing students entering the employment market have similar home backgrounds and prior school backgrounds.

Procedures for Collecting Data

Senior high school students in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising were tested (Appendix 1) to determine the level of textile product knowledge they currently possess. This procedure was accomplished on Jun 4, 1979, near the end of the school year. No specific information concerning textiles was presented prior to the test. This test provides an indicator of the tex-
tile product knowledge that students take with them from the current Marketing and Fashion Merchandising programs. Results of the test were evaluated against the entry level knowledge requirements as determined in personal interviews with subject matter experts.

Definition of Terms

1. Co-operative (Co-op) Education - A method of education in which a student spends part of his time in work experience.

2. Consumer Education - The process of educating the customer to become a more intelligent buyer of goods and services.


4. Distributive Education - A vocational instructional program designed to meet the needs of persons who have entered or are preparing to enter a distributive occupation or an occupation requiring competency in one or more of the marketing functions. It offers instruction in marketing, merchandising, related management and personal development.

5. Expert - A very skillful person, having
much training and knowledge in some special area.

6. Fabric - A material or cloth, formed of fibers or yarns.

7. Fashion - The current style or custom, as in dress or behavior; the mode for the present.

8. Fashion Merchandising - An elective course designed for students with an interest or career objective in the fashion field. The curriculum provides a study of fashion careers, personal qualities for success in the fashion field, influence of costume, how the fashion world operates, materials of fashion, promotion, selling, and merchandising of fashion profitably.

   (City of Norfolk Curriculum Guide)

9. Fiber - The basic unit used to fabricate textile yarns and fabrics.

10. Important Skills - Skills that are helpful for job performance.

11. Information Label - A tag that gives a description of the fibers in the item to which it is attached.

12. Marketing - A curriculum in which students
develop competencies necessary for full-time employment and job advancement in distribution. Emphasis in instruction is on merchandising, sales promotion and market research. Students are introduced to management techniques.

(City of Norfolk Curriculum Guide)

13. Optional Skill - A skill which is of limited value for job performance.

14. Product Knowledge - Facts about merchandise that will aid the consumer in selecting an article suitable for his needs or the salesperson in advising the consumer.

15. Textiles - All materials that have been formed into yarns or fabricated into cloth including those that have been felted, bonded or laminated.

Overview

In the first chapter the problem has been stated and elaborated upon. The review of literature in Chapter II summarizes the limited work that has been previously accomplished in this field. The tasks related to textile product knowledge that have been
found to be critical to entry level job performance are used as the basis for developing the survey instruments for both students and subject matter experts. Data collection procedures are discussed in Chapter III and the data itself is provided in Chapter IV. The summary and conclusions of the study are found in the final Chapter.
CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although there are many opinions on what Distributive Education is, or ought to be, Crawford has proposed a definition that has become generally accepted by the vocational education community:

"Distributive education is a vocational instructional program designed to meet the needs of persons who have entered or are preparing to enter a distributive occupation or an occupation requiring competency in one or more of the marketing functions. It offers instruction in marketing, merchandising, related management and personal development." (6,21)

Studies establishing the need for any of the major areas in the current Distributive Education curriculum are scarce. However, since the entire curriculum is being regenerated, incorporating competency-based educational concepts, previous work on curriculum areas is, for the most part, no longer valid.

The new Distributive Education curriculum proposed by the Virginia State Distributive Education Service (33), structures Distributive Education in
four levels. Level 1 teaches high school sophomores those skills and knowledges required in threshold level marketing jobs. Level 2 prepares high school juniors for entry level jobs. Level 3 trains seniors for mid-management positions, and Level 4 prepares high school post-graduates to be managers or owners of marketing businesses. Level 4 will probably be taught in a community college setting.

Fashion merchandising is simply a more specialized form of Distributive Education dealing with the marketing of apparel, accessories and home furnishings. It addresses the planning required to have the correct fashion-oriented merchandise in the right place, at the right time, in the right quantities, and at the right prices (24,175).

Under the proposed Distributive Education curriculum, fashion merchandising courses would be interchangable with Distributive Education Level 2, since they develop similar competencies. Conceptually, fashion merchandising could be taught using either the simulation or co-operative method of instruction. According to Ely, curriculum specialist for the Virginia Distributive Education Service, the new 4-level Distributive Education structure is a natural progression from the Crawford
research on competencies (5), through the Lynch study on broad content outlines (17), to the most recent Lynch study on the "Theoretical Framework for Instructional Programs in Distributive Education" (18).

The Crawford Competencies are a listing by marketing knowledge classifications. The areas are divided into knowledges, skills and attitudes. Under each of the knowledges, skills and attitudes there is a list of the competencies necessary for jobs in the marketing area. Crawford lists a total of 983 competencies under seven knowledge classifications: advertising, communications, merchandising, human relations, math, selling and operations management.

The classification of selling contains the competencies concerned with textile product knowledge.

Crawford's Competencies were:

870 In determining customer's wants and desires during a sale.

871 In suggesting to customers items of merchandise or services that can be substituted for the unavailable or desired ones.

872 In listening for indications regarding the prices a customer wants to pay during a sale.

873 In relating merchandise benefits to a
customer's needs when talking about it.

In sensing a customer's objections and handling them as effectively as possible.

In suggesting larger quantities, related goods, and additional goods, in an effort to increase the average sale.

That suggestion selling is a service to the customer.

That the act of selling is helping the customer obtain maximum personal satisfaction for money spent.

That basic product information is necessary to demonstrate good selling practices.

That today's customer keeps up-to-date on recent developments, is often presold when she arrives in the store, is alert to new ideas, wants facts about the merchandise, and expects wide assortments."(5)

The Crawford Competencies emphasize the fact that textile product knowledge is a very necessary part of the selling process, but they do not specify which product knowledges.

Lynch took the Crawford Competencies and categorized them into basic social skills, economic
principles/concepts and marketing functions. He then validated the competencies with business. Business helped Lynch to establish what competencies are needed at each level of employment, entry, mid-management and manager/owner. For example, under the heading of "Selling" the following competencies are listed as critical at entry level employment;

- Suggest related items, accessory items, etc., to obtain multiple sales.
- Inform customers of merchandise guarantees or directions.
- Serve in an education capacity of acquainting customers with new styles or developments.
- Translate label information into selling points.
- Analyze products in relation to current trends such as fashion or style, innovations, novelty appeal, etc., so a better selling job can be done. (17)

Lynch assumes that this focus inables students to develop competencies applicable to many jobs at an occupational level, as well as prepares them for future advancement at advanced occupational levels. Transfer of learning and career development flexibility should
also exist through the occupational level approach.

All of these studies lead to the conclusion that the Distributive Education curriculum must be developed horizontally, integrating appropriate subject matter content in the appropriate level or levels. The basic blocks of instructional material have been identified. They now must be fleshed out and developed.

For both Distributive Education and Fashion Merchandising, product knowledge is a major curriculum building block. Both Crawford and Lynch identified knowledge of the product as being a critical job skill for sales personnel.

Ernst and Ashmore (7,151) maintain that nothing is more important than the salesman knowing his product. He may have the best personal qualities for selling and excellent verbal and math skills, but unless he knows his product, he will not be an effective salesperson. The good salesperson must possess three types of product information: physical features; features that relate the product to the customer; benefits of the product to the customer. (37,196)

Product knowledge, then, is essential to effective selling. Not only will it help the salesperson keep his sales presentation lively, and overcome resistance on the part of the customer; it will also assist in
building the salesman's confidence, increase his enjoyment of his work, and enhance his chances for promotion (7,153).

Product knowledge is of particular importance in fashion merchandising because such a large percent of fashion buying is discretionary on the part of the customer, and such a wide variety of styles, materials, quality, and prices are available. An additional motivating factor is the product knowledge possessed by the customer.

Thanks to a growing number of consumer publications, fashion customers are becoming better educated. Warmke, Wyler and Sellers (34,92) advise the consumer that the main sources of product knowledge are the hang tag and the salesperson. "The implication is that the salesperson had better know more about the information on the hang tag than does his customer." According to Wingate, Gillespie and Addison (37,120), today's customer is well informed and able to assimilate many diversified facts about color and design, texture, weaving quality, and price, before making a purchase. If the customer is better informed than the salesperson, he is likely to take his business elsewhere.

Fashion products fall generally into one of three categories: textile, non-textile, and a combination of
the two (36,8). An example of the latter category is a lamp with a silk shade and a brass base. Although a number of texts which treat the subject of textile product knowledge are available (1-4,9,10,12-16,19-21,23-30,32,35), all address textiles from a much more technical point of view than is necessary for fashion merchandising. No research has been found identifying those specific textile product knowledges that are required of fashion related merchandising positions. This study will contribute to needed literature in this area.
CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Development of the Test Instrument

A test instrument was developed and then validated using educational and marketing experts. In developing the test instrument, a draft list of textile product knowledges was first prepared using available literature, primarily the Lynch study (17), and a number of criterion test items were developed for each knowledge. A panel of five subject matter experts was then utilized to refine and verify the knowledges themselves, and to validate the adequacy of the test items.

In a structured interview, each expert was asked to rate each knowledge as unimportant, important, or very important, and to indicate whether the criterion test items adequately measured mastery of the associated knowledges. The experts were also asked to add any knowledges that had been omitted from the list, and to suggest criterion test items for them. The knowledges rated important or very important by a majority of the panel were included on the test instrument and admin-
istered to exiting high school students.

The panel of experts contained five members. A marketing expert was drawn from each of three marketing areas; apparel and accessories, general merchandizing, and home furnishings. These marketing professionals were required to have a minimum of five years full time sales experience in their respective areas, and current supervision of entry level employees. One high school and one university level educator was also selected. Each had at least five years experience in instruction of textile product knowledge to students in marketing disciplines.

The final test instrument included a total of 29 questions on the five major fiber categories: cotton, polyester, acrylic, nylon and wool. A copy of the instrument is found at Appendix A.

Pilot Test

Prior to administering the test instrument to the entire sample population, a pilot test was conducted. The test was administered to ten Marketing and Fashion Merchandising students in order to verify the understandability of the instrument and the reliability of the data.
Population

The subjects for this study were selected by use of a table of random numbers from all of the Fashion Merchandising and Distributive Education III classes in Norfolk City public high schools (Granby, Maury, Norview, Washington, and Lake Taylor). One hundred students, twenty from each school, were selected out of a total population of 800. Student availability on the test date reduced the actual sample to a total of 95.

Each high school in Norfolk offers a complete program of Distributive Education. Each program has at least one class section of Distributive Education III and Fashion Merchandizing. Only students in these sections who were scheduled to exit the program in June 1979 were selected, in order to determine their terminal level of textile product knowledge; i.e., the knowledge they will take to the job market.

Data Collection
(Test Instrument Administration)

For the test of the population, a test administrator was appointed at each school. A standard set of test instructions was provided to each administrator and each was asked not to answer any student questions not covered in the instructions. This was done in
order to place each of the respondents on an equal footing. Students were asked to grid their answers on a scan sheet, and were reminded that the test was not for credit and that their answers should be theirs and theirs alone. One class period (55 minutes) was allowed for completing the tests. A Copy of instructions to test administrators is found at Appendix B.

In order to minimize transfer of information among students, the entire sample was tested on the same day. June 4, 1979 was selected because it falls almost immediately prior to the point of exit.
This study was designed to determine the gaps between textile product knowledge required of entry level employees in fashion related businesses, and the actual knowledges possessed by the students leaving high school programs in Marketing and Fashion Merchandising in Norfolk City Schools.

Table 1 contains test results for individual questions, grouped by fiber category. When the percent of correct responses by fiber category is considered, cotton was clearly the fabric of which students are most knowledgeable (correct response rate of 62%). Polyester was the student's second most knowledgeable area (correct response rate of 50%). Acrylic followed close behind polyester (correct response rate of 44%). Nylon and wool were the fiber categories of which students displayed least knowledge (correct response rates of 34%).

The overall test scores shown in Table 2 plainly establish the gap between minimum required textile pro-
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duct knowledge and the knowledge currently possessed by the students. A mean score of 12.66 correct responses for the entire population equates to mastery of only 43.6% of required knowledge. The range in mean scores among the five schools was from 9.7 to 14.9, for a total range of 5.2. Standard deviations were similar for each school, ranging from 3.2 to 4.2 with a city-wide standard deviation of 4.1. Although this indicates a slight difference in knowledge possessed by students of different schools, the differences are not considered significant.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research report was to establish the textile product knowledge requirements of entry level employees in fashion related businesses and to determine whether students exiting the current Marketing and Fashion Merchandising programs in Norfolk City Public Schools actually possess these knowledges.

The test scores of exiting students plainly establish the gap between minimum required textile product knowledge and the knowledge currently possessed by students. A Mean score of 12.66 (correct response rate of 43.6%) not only establishes a gap but a sizeable gap. The score is far below acceptable levels of competence for entry level employees.

Test scores considered by fiber category show that students are more knowledgeable of some fibers (cotton - 62%) than others (nylon/wool - 34%). This indicates areas of greatest need, and may serve as a useful basis to begin a curriculum study.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings, observations, and subsequent conclusions of the study, the researcher submits the following recommendations:

1. That in designing the new curricula for Marketing and Fashion Merchandising, textile product knowledge be given a specific location and emphasis in the curricula.

2. That a textile product knowledge curriculum be designed and used in each Marketing and Fashion Merchandising program in Norfolk City Schools in order to fill the existing gap of knowledge.

3. That the textile product knowledge curriculum be used on a state-wide basis so that all Marketing and Fashion Merchandising students in the state will acquire the minimum knowledges (competencies) for entry level employment.

4. That the new curriculum be designed in the following manner:

a. Subject matter experts state wide be used to establish a listing of specific tasks and skills necessary for the four levels of the program.

b. The task and skills lists be used to generate objectives for the four levels. These objectives
would be verified by the subject matter experts.

c. The verified objectives be used to generate a teaching package for each level. Each package would contain all the necessary materials (teaching outline, projects, tests) and resources (books, visuals, games) necessary to teach the unit using competency based instructional techniques.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


22. City of Norfolk Curriculum Guide


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

TEXTILE PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

Year _______ How many years in the D.E. Program ___

If employed - where _____________________________

EVALUATE THIS SWATCH

You have a customer who asks you the following questions about a skirt made of polyester. Which answer is the best answer?

1. Can I wash this skirt?
   a) polyester is always washable
   b) this skirt is washable
   c) the skirt might lose its shape
   d) you should never wash a skirt

2. I really wanted dacron. What's the difference?
   a) polyester is better than dacron
   b) dacron must be blended with cotton
   c) dacron is better than polyester
   d) they are the same

In the next group of answers which answer is the best selling point for polyester.

3. a) is heavy and warm  4. a) colors must be pale
    b) is light and cool   b) takes excellent
    c) is a good year around  color
    d) none of the above  c) fades easily
        weight
    d) none of the above  d) all of the above

5. a) is very absorbent  6. a) easy to care for
    b) is quick drying     b) always needs dry
    c) is moisture resistant  cleaning
    d) all of the above     c) is good if you like
d) none of the above       to iron
EVALUATE THIS SWATCH

You have a customer who asks the following questions about a sheet made of cotton. Which answers are the best answers?

7. Is this sheet muslin or percale? Which will wear longer?
   a) it doesn't matter which the sheet is
   b) the fact that it is a cotton sheet tells you about the wear and length of wear
   c) the thread count tells you whether the sheet is muslin or percale and percale wears longer
   d) the thread count tells whether the sheet is muslin or percale and muslin wears longer

8. Is a cotton sheet cooler in the summer?
   a) yes, it's absorbent which makes it cooler
   b) yes, it's low absorbency makes it cooler
   c) no, it's very absorbent which keeps you warmer
   d) no, it's low absorbency makes you warmer

In the next group of answers which answer is the best selling point for cotton?

9. a) is heavy and warm
   b) is heavy and cool
   c) is light and cool
   d) is light and warm

10. a) skrinkage can be minimized in cotton
    b) cotton doesn't shrink
    c) expanding can be minimized in cotton
    d) cotton doesn't expand

11. a) cotton is very washable
    b) cotton doesn't withstand washing
    c) it's difficult to wash dirt from cotton
    d) it's best to dry clean most cotton

12. a) only basic color dyes do well on cotton
    b) cotton has a good affinity for dye
    c) cotton has a poor affinity for dye
    d) basic color dyes don't do well on cotton
EVALUATE THIS SWATCH

You have a customer who asks the following questions about a sweater made of acrylic. Which answer is the best answer?

13. Do I have to dry clean this sweater?
   a) no, it's acrylic and can be washed in cool water and dried flat
   b) yes, all sweaters should be dry cleaned
   c) yes, dry cleaning will help keep its shape
   d) no, it's acrylic and can be washed in hot water and dried in a hot heat

14. Will this sweater shrink?
   a) maybe, acrylic usually shrinks
   b) never, acrylic never shrinks
   c) maybe, all knitted fabrics shrink some
   d) never, knit fabrics don't shrink

In the group of answers which answer is the best selling point for acrylic?

15. a) acrylic is light cool fabric
    b) acrylic is a light year around fabric
    c) acrylic is a light warm fabric
    d) none of the above

16. a) acrylic yarns dry slowly
    b) acrylic is low in absorbency
    c) acrylic resists stains
    d) all of the above

17. a) acrylic is light resistant
    b) acrylic is heat sensitive
    c) acrylic is resistant to moths
    d) all of the above
EVALUATE THIS SWATCH

You have a customer who asks you the following questions about some curtains made of nylon. Which answer is the best answer?

18. Can I wash these curtains?
   a) these curtains can be washed in cool water and machine dried
   b) always wash nylon in very hot water and never dry it in a machine
   c) nylon curtains don't wash well - dry clean them
   d) none of the above

19. Is the blue color going to fade?
   a) nylon is very resistant to sun light
   b) nylon can take on other colors in the wash
   c) nylon maintains its color very well
   d) all to the above

In the next group of answers which answer is the best selling point for nylon?

20. a) nylon will blend with cotton
    b) nylon will blend with linen
    c) nylon will not blend with cotton
    d) nylon will not blend with linen

21. a) highly resistant to abrasion
    b) nylon is very strong
    c) nylon doesn't deteriorate
    d) all of the above

22. a) nylon shrinks
    b) nylon is highly flammable
    c) nylon does not shrink
    d) nylon is not resilient

23. a) when wet, nylon might break
    b) nylon takes a long time to dry
    c) nylon is absorbent
    d) none of the above
EVALUATE THIS SWATCH

You have a customer who asks you the following questions about a pair of slacks made of wool. Which answer is the best answer? (Hang-tag states - washable and lined)

24. Can I wash these slacks?
   a) no, never wash wool
   b) no, these slacks are not lined
   c) yes, the hang tag says its washable wool
   d) yes, the slacks are lined

25. Why are the wool slacks so much more expensive than the polyester slacks?
   a) the wool is more expensive
   b) the wool slacks take more construction
   c) the wool slacks are lined
   d) all of the above

In the next group of answers which answer is the best selling point for wool?

26. a) is heavy and warm   27. a) wool should be
   b) is light and cool    b) wool should be
   c) is a good year around weight    washed
   d) none of the above    c) wool should be
                           dry-cleaned
   d) none of the above    d) none of the above

28. a) wool doesn't dye well or evenly
   b) wool fabric dyes well and evenly
   c) wool only takes bright colors well
   d) all of the above

29. a) there is a difference between wool and hair
   b) camels hair is hair
   c) cashmere is wool
   d) all of the above
APPENDIX B

SURVEY ADMINISTRATOR

TEXTILE PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS for the survey are as follows:

1. administer on June 4, 1979

2. administer to 20 completing students.
   a) D.E. III
   b) fashion merchandising
   c) D.E. II

3. each student will receive a folder containing the following:
   a) a general purpose answer sheet
   b) a survey

4. on the answer sheet have the students grid in the following boxes:
   a) sex/race
   b) grade
   c) school code 003

5. the questions should be answered 1-29 on the answer sheet - even though the numbers on the questions do not match that system

6. have the students circle the correct answer on the survey itself

7. for instructions to the students the administrator should remind them this is not for credit - there should be no shearing answers - and to answer as correctly as possible

8. the students should be able to complete the survey in about 20 minutes and should have no questions (try not to give out too much information)

9. I will give you a call on Monday to arrange to pick the surveys up and to see how things have gone

10. collect the folders, answer sheets and surveys

11. PLEASE THANK YOUR STUDENTS for helping me with my research

Thank you very much for your time and help.
I'll talk to you on Monday.

Carolyn Josey
Lake Taylor High School
461-5111