

Home Education in Isle of Wight Middle Schools

In 1974 a young attractive Home Economics Teacher quizzically remarked 'I'm working in a purpose built H.E. room — does anyone know what the "purpose" is in the purpose building?'

This fundamental question sparked off a local Curriculum Development Project which has recently published a set of common core teaching materials for 9-13 year old children in Island Schools.

In attempting to define the problem being faced by H.E. Teachers five years ago it became apparent that:—

- (a) Most of the Teachers were unsure of the relationship of H.E. to the rest of the Middle School Curriculum.
- (b) There was no clear rationale for H.E. and the aims and objectives were not explicit.
- (c) The content differed widely from school to school which created difficulties in Curriculum liaison between Middle and High Schools.
- (d) Some H.E. teaching was being run by non-specialists.
- (e) Time allocation varied from school to school, as did numbers in H.E. groups — both factors reflecting the status of the subject.
- (f) Headteachers were becoming concerned about the proportion of their capitation being spent on cookery.

To try to overcome these problems a Curriculum Study Group was established at the Teachers' Centre. We first tried to find out about innovations in H.E. in the rest of the country and we quickly realised that we were very much on our own and were required to think through our own salvation from first principles, namely, from considering the characteristics of Middle School children and their relationship to present and future society.

Middle School Children

From their experience of Middle School Children the Teachers felt the following points important.

By the time the children reach the Middle School most of them will be capable of 'concrete operational thought'. That is, they will be able to understand a process, its reverse, and also the idea of physical quality and its conservation — e.g. volume. They should be capable of the logical solution of problems with several variables, as long as they can physically work through the solution. By the time they leave the Middle School *some* of them will have made the transition to 'formal operational thought' — thinking in abstract terms. H.E. can aid this transition, especially in lessons with objectives such as those outlined further on. Opportunities should be provided for children to identify, investigate and solve problems connected with the home. (This represents a shift in both content and teaching method from those of traditional H.E. teaching).

Many children are 'naturally' enthusiastic about, and interested in, learning. Some are not. It is our experience that H.E. offers opportunities to sustain and build upon the enthusiasm of the many; it can also help disinterested children to develop positive

attitudes to learning, perhaps because H.E. activities can be seen to be 'naturally' interesting and relevant to their lives.

The intellectual growth of Middle School children is often paralleled by physical growth — it is at this time that children experience a growth spurt which may make co-ordination difficult. By providing a variety of materials and techniques H.E. can help the children to refine their general co-ordination and to develop new skills.

Our and Their Society

There are certain predictions and reflections which can be made about our industrial society.

One thing to note is the increasing importance of our material environment, and the need for education to help us use, control and preserve it. This calls for an understanding of the range of problems that arise through the use and disposal of materials in our society; it also calls for the ability to handle materials. H.E. has a big part to play in helping children to get to grips with our technological society and the problems it produces, and to take their share of responsibility for conserving the environment.

Another related aspect of our society is the growth of opportunities for self-expression, particularly for girls and women. Working mothers may no longer have the time to pass on homemaking skills 'at the apron strings'; so H.E. will need to bear the responsibility. Another side of the same development is the need for H.E. to open channels for self-expression in the home, for the housewife, if not a working wife, will find that technological advance has freed her of much of the drudgery of household chores and given her more leisure time.

Although it is not clear how lifestyles in the 21st Century will be affected by increased technology it is fairly certain that people will still be involved in living and working together — probably in family units. It is therefore essential that H.E. provides the basis of knowledge, skills and values which enable people to be sociable, to make a home, and to sustain family life. We believe that the basis should be laid in the Middle School.

Following from this rationale it was possible to see several distinct contributions which can be made by H.E. to the Middle School Curriculum.

Contribution of H.E. to the Total Curriculum

1. Developing 'concrete' thought:

In the early years of the Middle School decision making and problem solving can be fostered by various types of experimental work, e.g. an investigation of the keeping qualities of various types of milk can lead to decisions about the most appropriate kind to buy for, say, a camping holiday.

2. Development of Literacy:

H.E. can provide many opportunities for practice in reading and language development e.g. a study of the language of advertising.

3. Development of Numeracy:

One of the strengths of H.E. is its emphasis on mathematical concepts e.g. comparison of different ways of paying for shopping items.

4. Development of Abstract Thought:

H.E. can provide children with opportunities to move from concrete to abstract thought, e.g. a practical investigation of the properties of fabrics could lead to abstract thought about the use of various fabrics for, say, a child's nightdress.

5. Development of Motor Skills:

H.E. is able to provide a structured approach to skill development, so that children acquire skills to avoid frustration when producing an end product. A list of essential skills is included in the objectives of this project.

6. Expressive Behaviour:

H.E. can provide a variety of opportunities for expressive behaviour e.g. collage work with fabrics.

7. Aesthetic Appreciation:

H.E. lessons can be introduced to develop aesthetic appreciation to ensure that this quality is taught rather than caught, e.g. consideration of the combination of colours and textures in materials in the home.

8. Understanding the Environment:

The first stage in developing a personal sense of responsibility for the environment is the understanding of the connection between human actions and the environment, e.g. the connection between packaging and advertising, and its impact on world resources.

9. Satisfaction and Achievement:

In the past, H.E. may have over-emphasised the importance of producing end products, but they are important to provide opportunities for the satisfaction of achieving a finished article from raw materials. The end product should be seen as a means through which objectives are achieved rather than an objective in itself.

10. Specific Knowledge:

There has been a tendency in recent years for educationalists to suggest that learning how to learn is more important than knowledge itself. There is a core of knowledge in H.E. which is valuable and which should be taught – we are not born knowing how to sit up and run a home, or how to look after a family. Nor do we have a knowledge of materials which can later be applied to solve design problems.

Home Education or Home Economics

The above view of the role of H.E. in the Curriculum was thought to be wider than the claims which could be reasonably made for 'Cookery' and 'Needlework', 'Domestic Science' or 'Home Economics'. We have therefore tried to identify a new title for this area of the Curriculum. 'Home Education' seemed the most appropriate title.

What Should be the Aims of Home Education?

It was agreed that these aims relate to the Education of both boys and girls in H.E. See Table 1

The usefulness of these general aims may be in providing an overall view of H.E. in Middle Schools, but each aim has been broken down into more specific statements to help in deciding teaching strategies.

For example the aim

'To develop a discriminating and thrifty purchaser' was analysed further to reveal the objectives.

The pupil should be able to

- (1) read and study labels and instructions.
- (2) detect the true function or purpose of a product.
- (3) distinguish between products in terms of value for money, fitness for purpose, storage, etc.
- (4) define criteria for selection of products.
- (5) recognise sales techniques and gimmicks.

Course Content

In order to ensure that the course could be slotted into existing Middle School organisations, including carousel type courses, the content has been arranged on a 'unit' basis. To assist continuity and liaison twelve *core* units have been identified which it was considered should be taught in all schools. Other *optional units* were listed as suggestions or ideas.

Core units were selected to provide a balance between the following broad areas of study.

See Table 2

Core Units

Food and food sources	– Cow to Milk
	– Chicken to Egg
	– Grains
Clothing and fabrics	– Fun with Fabrics
	– A Stitch in Time
	– Fibre to Cloth
A Healthy Family	– Food in Balance
	– Out of Danger
Maintaining a Home	– Keep it Clean
	– Materials Today
Community and Environment	– At our Service
Consumer Education	– Let's go Shopping

Core Unit Example – 'Let's go Shopping'

It is not possible to include much of the content of the core units in this article but this extract from 'Let's go Shopping' may give an indication of the way in which each unit attempts to achieve the aims and objectives which are specified for it. See Table 3

Table 1

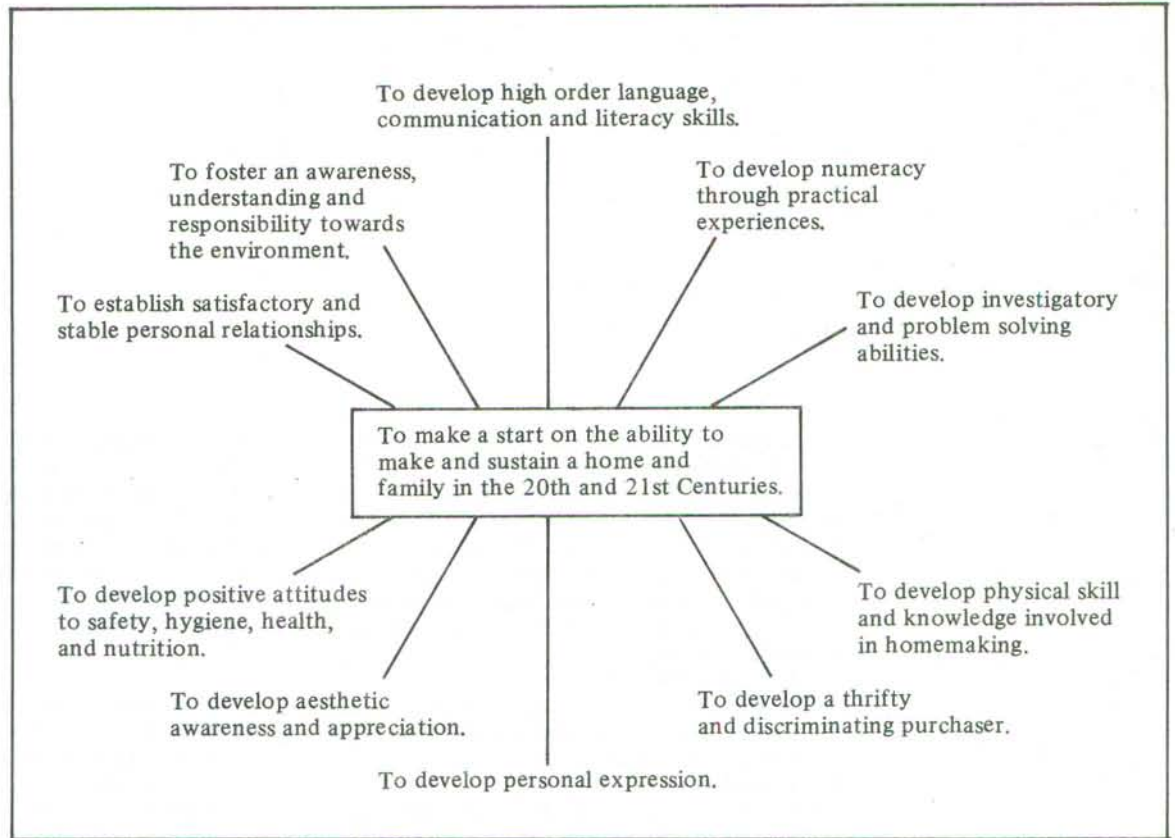


Table 2

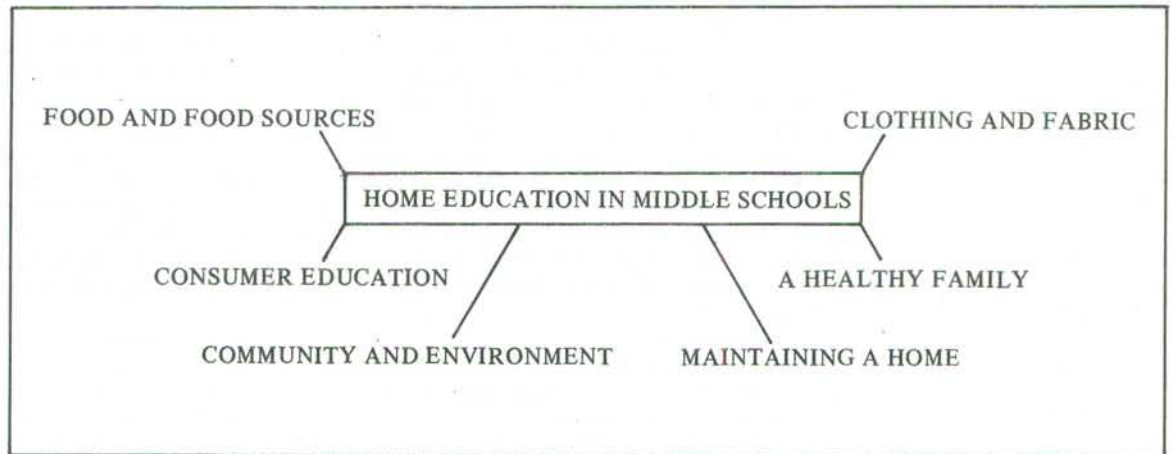
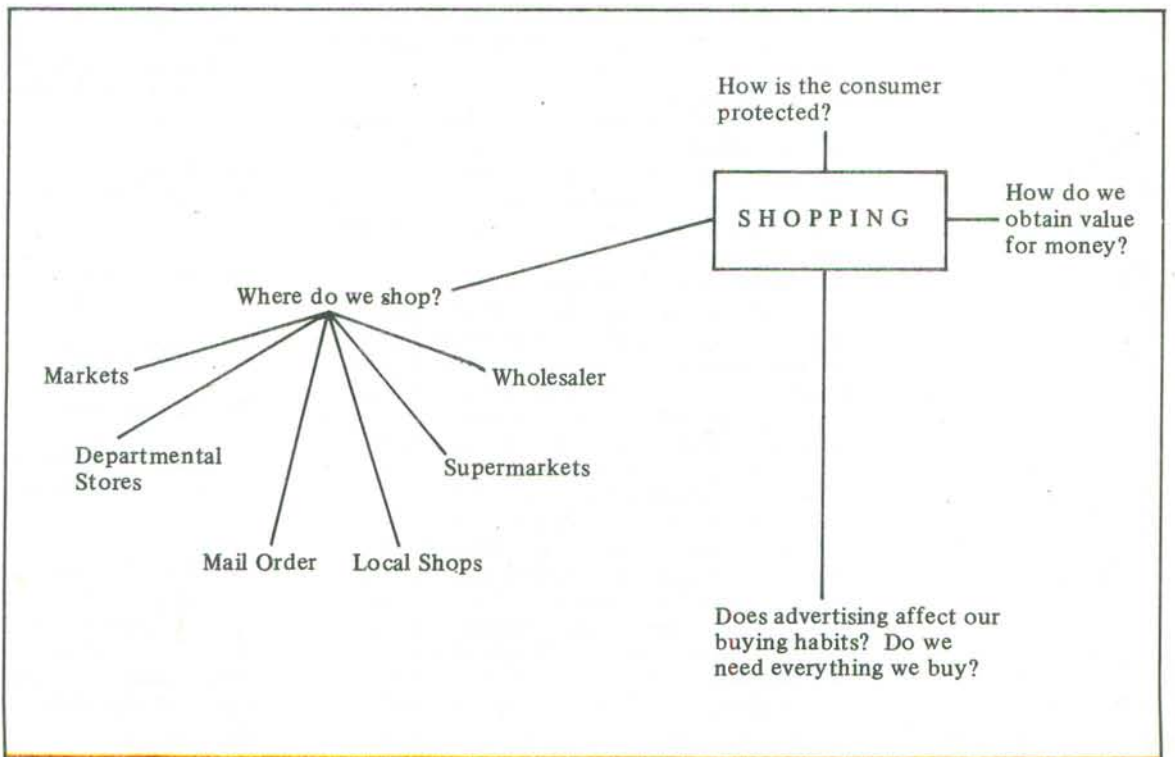


Table 3
Key Questions



Basic Scheme for 'Let's go Shopping'

This is not a four year scheme, but a short scheme which could run for about six weeks. It could be slotted in anywhere in the H.E. courses in the school, and adapted to suit years 1-4.

Some Basic Issues!

1. Why we buy things.
2. Where to go shopping.
3. Choosing the products we buy.
4. How we pay for our shopping.
5. Consumer protection.

This unit may be sub-divided or taught as a complete unit. Much of the work is suitable for first and second years and can, if necessary, be completed without the use of the Home Economics room.

Aspects of this unit may be introduced into a specific food study – considering value for money or availability, or as an extension of a production study, it may provide a link with the retail industry.

The importance of 'Shopping' as a core unit must not be under-estimated. In a highly material, consumer-orientated society it becomes increasingly important that pupils are conscientious shoppers and consumers.

It is suggested that children should be introduced to a thinking process about shopping which can be illustrated like this:

Identify Shopping Need

Investigate the Need in terms of function, cost, suitability of materials, aesthetics, social factors, etc.

Draw up a specification for the product to be purchased

Search around for alternative makes of the same product and compare cost, quality, etc.

Purchase the article

Evaluate the Purchase

(See Section 3 for two examples using this process).

3. Choosing the Product We Buy

Examples about identifying shopping needs.

It is suggested that children be led through the thinking process about shopping. Using examples as follows and having a range of products from which they can choose i.e. – turn your classroom into a mini-shop.

Example One

Identify Shopping Need:

How can I make myself as attractive as possible?

Investigate Need:

What factors make me attractive?

1. Hair.
2. Clothes.
3. Personality.
4. Decoration of face and hands.
5. Smell.

How much can I spend on 4? What do I want to decorate myself with – powder, lipstick, nail-varnish etc?

What colours would suit me?

Where would I want to wear it?

Specification:

From consideration of the above factors the specification might be: Dark Red Lipstick, Green Eye Shadow, and Dark Red Nail Varnish. Choosing between alternative products:

What makes the items?

Where can I buy them?

Should I go for low/high quality?

Where can I buy them at the lowest price?

Are they guaranteed?

Is it immediately available?

What accessories go with the product?

Purchase the article:

Decide the best way of paying.

Evaluation:

Am I more attractive?

To whom am I more attractive?

Do I feel more attractive?

Does the make-up suit the social occasion I bought it for?

Example Two

Identify Shopping Need:

I want some music I enjoy listening to and that is popular.

Investigate Need:

1. What type of music do I enjoy?
2. Who is my favourite artist?
3. What music do my friends like?
4. Who is top of the charts?
5. What do I like to see on the record sleeve?

Specification:

From consideration of the above points the specification might be 'The Bee Gees'.

Choosing between alternative items:

Which sound do I like best?

Which one will be in the charts longest?

Which one is on special offer – reduced 50 pence?

Purchase the article:

Decide the best way of paying.

Evaluation:

Is the music as good to listen to as I thought?

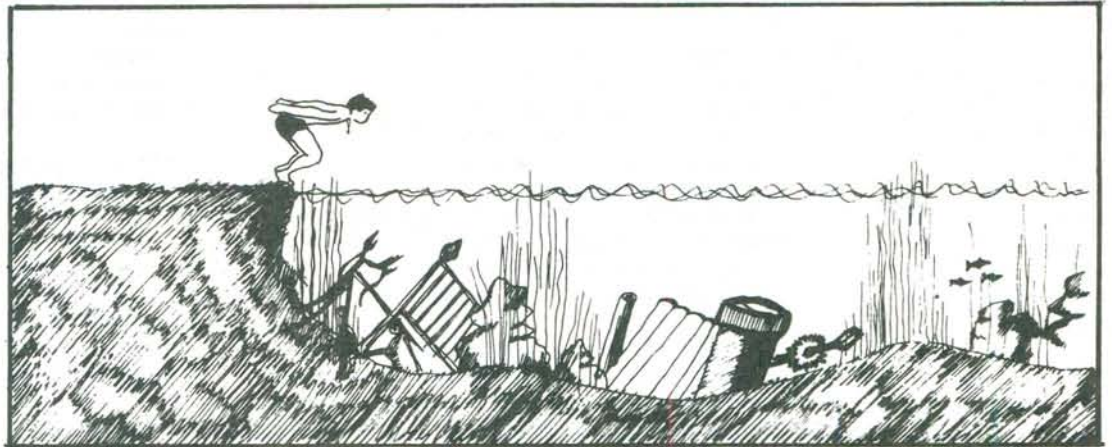
Is it still high in the charts?

Does the record sleeve decorate my room?

Using the same process pupils should be set similar problems about: sportswear, footwear, bicycles, birthday presents, etc.

Worksheet:
Safety on the beach.

1. Using this picture as a reference, discuss why you should never dive into water, unless you know what is below the surface.
2. Why must you never chase a beach ball, or any object that is being carried out to sea? Never use a lilo, rubber ring, or anything similar unless it is secured to the shore. Why?
3. You should you never paddle or wade out to sandbanks or around rocky headlands. Why not?
4. Why should you never bathe alone?
5. Why should you never bathe after having eaten or when hungry?
6. If you see a red flag flying, what does it mean?
7. What should you do if you find yourself in difficulty?
8. Never try to climb the cliffs behind a beach. Why?



Implementation

Although Island H.E. teachers have reached a consensus about what should be taught and why, and although they have a 240 page publication to support their teaching, there are many practical difficulties to be faced before all Island Middle Schools are in a position to implement the common core units.

Not all headteachers appear to be committed to H.E. as an essential part of the middle school curriculum and hence there are wide variations in time and resources allocated to H.E. from school to school. It is particularly important that headteachers in schools feeding the same high school should reach agreement so that discussions between H.E. teachers about curriculum continuity have a sound basis.

Although high school teachers contributed to the study group, some of them still have doubts about the suitability of the core units for middle school children, and reserve judgement about whether this 'new' approach to H.E. is as valuable as traditional ones. However they have expressed a wish to prepare new syllabuses themselves if the middle schools make a success of Home Education.

Perhaps the biggest problem of implementation lies in the high 'turnover' of H.E. staff in middle schools. Of the teachers who originally founded the study group, only one remains in the post. This turnover appears to add weight to the need for an agreed 'core' syllabus – it also points to a need for an induction programme for new teachers and a programme of in-service education to attempt to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to teach each of the units.

These problems must be faced as they arise on our small Island but in the meantime our teachers are willing to share their ideas with colleagues throughout the country in the hope that they prove useful starting points for discussion.

Anyone wishing to purchase their publication (Price £4.00) should contact: John Hilsum, The Isle of Wight Teachers' Centre, Upper Saint James' Street, Newport, Isle of Wight.