

# Curriculum 11-16: Home Economics\*

## The development of the subject

Home Economics was introduced into the curriculum of the secondary school in the nineteenth century and its aim at that time was to improve the living standards of the poor. Pupils were given instruction in cooking nutritious economic meals, making and caring for clothes and household articles, and observing the rules of hygiene. Cookery, sewing, housewifery and laundry work were seen as essential elements of the curriculum for girls.

Teachers of the various aspects of home-making soon began to realise that the value of the subject amounted to more than its component parts, and a series of names intended to indicate this has been used over the years. The subject is now known internationally as Home Economics. It includes studies of the needs of the individual in the community, and of the best uses of human and physical resources in the context of home and family life. This title points to the present day emphasis within the subject on an increasing awareness of the importance both of the family and of the smooth running of the home in an ordered society. The subject now assists in the general development of girls and boys as individuals who will contribute positively to society.

Home Economics has elements in common with many subjects found in the secondary curriculum. Its particular contribution is that it combines knowledge drawn from the sciences and arts and applies it to experiences which pupils can relate directly to their own lives. Such experiences, which may be practical, give meaning and reality to theoretical work and help many girls and boys to understand and accept otherwise difficult concepts.

## Course content

There is a wealth of knowledge to be gained through studies of people in relation to:—

- i. homes in the local environment, including ergonomics and homemaking.
- ii. food and nutrition, including economic, practical and social aspects of food selection, cooking and serving,
- iii. textiles, including the nature and care of fibres and fabrics; fashion and design in relation to clothes and furnishings; embroidery.
- iv. health and safety, including personal and food hygiene, and the choice and use of equipment.
- v. consumer needs, including current legislation.

It is the development of the ability to organise and manage resources, including time and money, in relation to this knowledge which is the real core of the subject. Through these studies which are concerned with the practicalities of living, girls and boys can begin to acquire the expertise and personal resources necessary to meet the demands which adult life will make on them.

This is a big step forward from the original aim of improving the living standards of the poor, and teaching methods have changed accordingly from those of simple instruction and demonstration to

others which afford opportunities for investigation and problem solving.

## The curricular areas

Clearly a subject related to homemaking, including food preparation and dress and textiles, has a positive contribution to make to the creative and aesthetic education of pupils. Not only does it develop the senses but through studies of colour, texture, form, efficiency and fitness for purpose in the home and environment, much is done to improve pupils' awareness of design and capacity to recognise quality.

Home Economics has strong links with science and contributes to scientific thinking, understanding and skills. Although there are differences of emphasis and content, there is a core of shared knowledge and interests, such as:—

- a. conservation of energy, its measurement and wise use within the home and environment,
- b. the chemical nature of food and methods of processing it.
- c. microbiology, preservation of food in the home; additives to processed foods.
- d. the structure and properties of fabrics, and developments in their manufacture and finish,
- e. the understanding of terms such as heat and temperature in relation to methods of cooking, including the uses of infra-red and micro-wave equipment.

Many mathematical processes are involved in home economics and through practical activities pupils gain a greater understanding of difficult concepts.

For example, the calculation of quantity, weight, volume and proportion is needed in the study of food and nutrition. In management of the home, consideration of area, shape, size and capacity is important. Measurement and economical use of fabric is part of work in dress and textiles. Consumer education, which includes money management and shopping, requires intelligent estimation and accuracy in computation.

There are many opportunities to stimulate pupils' language development. In practical situations they learn to follow written and verbal instructions, and the spontaneous discussion between pupils and teacher and between pupils which can grow out of these activities provides valuable stimulus for pupils to express themselves. Much of the work involves direct handling and observation of materials; in the process, pupils learn to question, to frame their own ideas and to express individual points of view. The technical language of the subject provides important new vocabulary for all pupils. Pupils for whom English is a second language find it easy to learn the

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appropriate English structures and vocabulary in the practical situations provided by Home Economics. Good use of the wealth of literature related to home, food, fashion and society not only gives perspective to the work the pupils are doing, but helps with the development and enjoyment of language.

Through concern with people, the subject is directly involved with the ethical, social and political areas of experience. It aims to create positive attitudes toward health and safety, and to develop in young people a sense of responsibility towards themselves, the family and society. The study of child development shows ways in which the adult influences the young child and emphasises the responsibilities in parent and child relationships. Examination of the emotional, intellectual and physical needs of children often helps teenage girls and boys to recognise the nature of their own difficulties and to see ways in which they may overcome them. Much of the work is based on the relationships of individuals within society and through this it contributes to pupils' social development in the growth of self-knowledge and sensitivity towards others.

#### **Skills and attitudes**

The acquisition of social skills is developed in a wide variety of formal and informal social situations, for example, preparing, serving and eating meals with both friends and strangers; visits to stores, nurseries, old people's homes and hospitals. These experiences increase a pupil's ability to cope with the unknown and the unexpected, and build confidence and pleasure in meeting a wide range of people in different places.

Manipulative dexterity and the ability to use tools safely and efficiently are important in pupils' learning, and traditionally there is a craft element through which many skills can be learnt. To consider this in isolation, however, diminishes the overall contribution of home economics to the development of the pupil.

The sensory skills are enhanced through progressive practical and experimental work with food, textiles, household equipment and materials.

Organisation and management skills, which are almost impossible to learn theoretically and in isolation, form a main strand in home economics education. In practical situations, pupils are constantly faced with the need to identify priorities, solve problems, make decisions, compare alternative methods of working, and above all, to plan and organise a variety of activities so that they can be fitted into a limited span of time and completed satisfactorily.

The skills of communication are of paramount importance in this subject which depends upon the ability to receive and transmit ideas and information. Practical work provides many opportunities for listening, talking and writing, but it also necessitates the interpretation and use of diagrams, graphs and symbols, for instance, in the care of clothing, in the use of equipment and in studies of nutrition.

Home Economics has an influential part to play in the formation of personal habits such as self assessment, self discipline, self reliance, perseverance and concentration. These can be strengthened through tasks which challenge pupils' ability to work within the constraints of time, money and materials.

Attitudes of friendliness, co-operation and tolerance towards other people are encouraged through social activities and courses which take pupils out of the classroom and into the community.

A responsible attitude is developed through care and concern for the home and the environment, with particular reference to the design and safety of equipment, the packaging of consumables, the

economical and safe use of fuels and the conservation of energy.

#### **Essential experiences**

All pupils come to school with some knowledge of the home and the people living in it; this knowledge must be recognised when courses are being planned, and the school philosophy, the local area and the identified needs of the pupils should be taken into account.

Pupils should have the following experiences:—

- i. the planning, organising and co-ordinating of work.
- ii. opportunities to observe, experiment, solve problems and make independent decisions and judgements.
- iii. practice in reading, abstracting, summarising and recording information and in transmitting it orally and in writing.
- iv. the use of food, fabric and other materials, equipment and money in order to develop the relevant skills and appropriate expertise in handling them,
- v. opportunities for meeting and working with a variety of people and for making contact with outside agencies.

Work of this kind must be planned; it must be cumulative and progressive, and appropriate time must be allowed.

#### **Pupils' attainment**

The level of achievement reached by the age of 16 years will depend on the motivation, ability and experience of individuals both in the home and at school.

The criteria for the selection of content must be the identified needs of pupils at home, in school, at work and in the community. Although no precise levels of achievement can be prescribed, by 16 all girls and boys should have enough knowledge and practical competence to be able to:—

- i. feed themselves sensibly,
- ii. be aware of the need for money management,
- iii. look after their clothes and other possessions,
- iv. maintain good health,
- v. begin to understand the importance of co-operating with other people.

Their course should have given them the confidence to think and act independently and should have equipped them to know when, where and how to seek help. They should be able to understand and follow spoken, written and diagrammatic instructions, and to communicate effectively. They should have acquired the initiative and perseverance to plan and carry through tasks to a satisfactory completion, and have the confidence and ability to work alone and with others. They should have developed skills appropriate to their abilities in the handling of food and textiles to enable them to find enjoyment and satisfaction in practical and creative work.