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Starting at home: bringing environment into the curriculum

Girls that read The Times are more likely to drink wine while they do so.

This media titbit summarised a finding we made when analysing Health Related Behaviour data many years ago. We linked Year 11 girls' tastes in alcohol with the kind of newspaper read by their family (broadsheet, tabloid, or popular tabloid), and came up with the discovery that 'broadsheet' drinkers were the most likely group to report having drunk wine during the previous week.

Newspaper category was an early but very successful way of describing young people's home background. It is still used in the latest version of the questionnaire, and is a very reliable parameter for young people searching in their school's data for clear correlations with health-related behaviours.

In the course of the questionnaire's regular updating, a number of other 'environmental'

> **Home background**
> 4. Parents living at home
> 5 & 6. Younger and older siblings
> 7. Ethnic background
> 54. Family newspaper readership group
> 75. Urban/rural home location
> 76. Length of time at current address
>
> **Neighbourhood**
> 77. Quality and safety
> 78. Quality of school environment

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questions have been tried out; some have been retained, and others discarded. Version 16, on which *Young People in 1994* was based, included several questions relating directly to the young people's home background and local neighbourhood (see box).

I would like to present the responses to some of these questions, as published in *Young People in 1994*, and then to introduce the reader to a major publishing project within the Unit: *Cross-curricular Environment Education.*

Adults living at home

Table 1 shows that over 70% of the young people live with their mother and father. Of the rest, about 20% live with their mother (with or without another adult), and fewer than 4% with their father (with or without another adult).

Table 1. Parents living at home. (1994 data.)

Responses	Year 7 B	G	Year 8 B	G	Year 9 B	G	Year 10 B	G	Year 11 B	G
Mother & father	72.3	72.9	73.8	72.3	71.1	71.3	74.2	71.7	71.8	71.3
Mother only	12.7	15.2	12.3	13.0	13.6	13.9	11.2	12.6	13.0	14.0
Father only	2.1	1.6	2.3	1.6	2.3	1.8	2.6	2.3	3.0	2.2
Mother & stepfather	8.9	7.7	8.7	10.3	9.3	10.0	8.6	10.0	8.0	8.7
Father & stepmother	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.6	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.2
Foster parents	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.6
Other	2.6	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.3	2.1	2.0
Valid responses	582	613	9340	8936	3870	3865	7973	7570	2798	2601

Responses	Year 7 B	G	Year 8 B	G	Year 9 B	G	Year 10 B	G	Year 11 B	G
2 years or less	20.4	18.6	14.6	16.0	14.2	16.4	13.0	13.8	11.9	13.4
3 or 4 years	11.2	14.3	12.6	11.2	12.1	12.2	9.6	10.4	12.0	11.6
5 or 6 years	17.9	15.4	14.2	13.2	13.6	13.3	12.3	11.5	12.9	12.5
7 or 8 years	13.3	9.4	12.0	12.5	12.3	12.6	13.0	12.8	12.2	12.1
9 or more years	37.2	42.4	46.6	47.0	47.9	45.6	52.1	51.5	51.0	50.3
Valid responses	525	566	8291	8180	3434	3529	7536	7301	2559	2449

Table 2. The length of time the young people have lived at their present address. (1994 data.)

Table 3. The percentage of young people that rated the following local factors *adequate, good,* or *very good.* (1994 data.)

Responses	Year 7 B	G	Year 8 B	G	Year 9 B	G	Year 10 B	G	Year 11 B	G
Housing	82.9	87.5	83.3	86.9	82.9	85.3	90.3	92.0	85.7	87.4
Other buildings	80.4	84.4	78.6	82.8	79.1	81.3	86.2	87.7	82.1	82.4
Parks and play areas	59.9	51.9	55.2	54.3	51.2	48.5	60.0	57.6	56.9	54.1
Leisure centres, pools	61.8	64.6	62.5	64.4	59.3	60.1	63.9	65.0	59.2	59.6
Street cleaning	57.5	56.7	57.8	57.4	59.5	59.3	68.3	65.9	66.6	66.6
Road safety	66.4	67.0	62.8	63.7	63.8	63.5	69.7	67.0	67.5	66.8
Safety after dark	61.4	55.3	54.5	49.8	57.6	50.4	64.1	53.0	60.5	51.9
Safety during day	81.2	81.0	78.9	79.5	79.0	80.0	86.8	86.5	81.7	83.3
None of the above	12.3	9.1	12.8	9.3	12.8	10.1	6.2	4.3	9.6	7.0
Available sample	586	615	9377	8957	3896	3874	7993	7582	2806	2611

Table 4. The percentage of young people that rated the following school factors *adequate, good,* or *very good.* (1994 data.)

Responses	Year 7 B	G	Year 8 B	G	Year 9 B	G	Year 10 B	G	Year 11 B	G
Hygiene	76.6	83.4	72.8	75.5	71.2	75.2	74.4	74.3	70.5	74.8
Safety	81.6	88.0	76.8	82.0	74.5	81.0	79.9	84.5	75.3	82.2
Time for recreationol	73.0	81.5	68.5	73.6	65.5	71.6	65.6	70.3	61.3	70.3
None of the above	14.5	10.1	17.6	13.3	19.0	13.5	14.1	9.9	18.7	12.7
Available sample	586	615	9377	8957	3896	3874	7993	7582	2806	2611

The categories *Mother only* and *Father only* include partners. Early data from the use of the Version 17 questionnaire suggest that more than half of the parents in these two categories are living on their own at home.

Duration of residence

Almost half of the young people have not moved for nine years or more (**Table 2**).

The slump in the housing market suggests that people are not wanting or finding it difficult to move, which could mean that school and neighbourhood communities are more stable than they used to be. However, this is a very local factor, and schools serving mobile communities may experience a very high turnover of pupils during a single year.

Rating local environment

The generally high percentage values in **Table 3** suggest overall approval for these environmental factors, varying little across the age groups.

The omitted categories are *poor* and *very poor.* Therefore, regarding *safety after dark*, it does follow that almost half the girls consider themselves vulnerable when going out at night.

Similarly, more than 40% criticise the local provision of *parks and play areas*, and almost 40% consider that the provision of *leisure centres and swimming facilities* is inadequate. Untidy streets also concern about 40% of the sample, more notably the younger age groups.

Rating school environment

From **Table 4** we see that the majority of young people consider their school environment to be at least adequate on each count. More girls than boys express satisfaction, and the older members of both genders appear to be less easy to please.

Looking at the *None of the above* category, which contains those young people dissatisfied with all three criteria, we discover substantial percentages of critical boys.

All the data in these tables are taken from the Unit's publication *Young People in 1994.*
Copies are still available for £30.00 including postage.

Want to/Able to	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9		Year 10		Year 11	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Have worthwhile career	65.0	65.9	70.6	71.8	73.9	75.8	79.2	79.6	72.9	74.9
	38.6	30.9	39.7	35.1	43.1	39.3	46.1	41.4	46.7	42.0
Continue in education	41.3	48.0	42.0	51.2	41.5	53.9	45.8	58.0	50.8	63.1
	33.6	37.4	35.2	39.7	36.6	44.4	44.8	52.4	50.1	60.3
Find a job	39.8	35.0	36.7	29.4	36.3	26.3	31.9	23.8	29.2	19.5
	29.0	19.3	24.4	17.0	23.0	14.1	22.4	14.4	23.6	14.3
Train for skilled job	59.2	56.6	58.2	56.9	60.8	58.0	56.2	51.7	44.4	41.7
	42.3	30.4	39.9	35.7	42.4	37.7	41.9	36.6	39.6	35.9
Set up own home	32.6	34.0	36.5	31.6	35.9	34.2	36.9	33.7	28.7	28.9
	27.8	25.9	26.9	22.4	25.8	21.7	24.0	22.2	18.7	18.3
Start a family	42.8	33.5	41.4	26.1	36.2	22.1	30.9	18.4	21.9	13.9
	34.5	26.3	32.6	21.3	31.7	19.9	26.7	18.7	22.6	17.3
Stay in neighbourhood	25.8	23.6	20.3	20.1	23.5	19.5	22.7	20.6	30.8	26.2
	21.5	22.6	25.9	27.4	28.6	27.4	34.0	35.5	42.4	42.0
Stay in current town	30.5	29.8	30.2	31.5	34.3	31.4	33.5	31.1	42.1	39.6
	26.3	28.5	31.3	33.9	34.9	34.4	38.8	41.5	47.2	49.5
None of the above	12.1	7.2	11.6	7.9	10.1	7.6	5.7	3.7	7.1	5.1
	25.8	25.9	25.0	23.2	23.3	22.0	17.8	15.4	16.4	12.8
Available sample	586	615	9377	8957	3896	3874	7993	7582	2806	2611

Table 5. The percentage of young people that *wanted*, and thought they would *be able*, to achieve these objectives. (1994 data.)

Life after leaving school

The young people were also asked to consider each item in the checklist in **Table 5** and to state whether or not (*a*) it was what they wanted to do, and (*b*) they thought they would be able to do it. The table lists *Yes* responses. There is a lot of information to summarise in this table.

1. For most of these items, more young people want to do them than think they will be able to do them.

2. The percentage wanting to *have a worthwhile career* or to *continue in education* increases with age, but so does the percentage that doubt if they will be able to.

3. There is a fall in the percentage wanting to *find a job*, or to *train for a skilled job*, with increasing age.

4. The percentage of boys and girls wanting to *start a family* drops by half between Years 7 and 11.

5. Up to GCSE age, the percentage of young people wanting to remain in their *neighbourhood* or *town* shows little change. In Year 11, however, it rises noticeably.

6. Unlike most of the items, more young people think they will be able to stay in the *neighbourhood* or *town* than actually want to.

These questions were largely prompted and developed by Health Care teams in Newcastle, in consultation with Departments of Public Health involved in City Challenge initiatives in Liverpool, Wolverhampton and London. They had the view that young people's beliefs in their own prospects, and their attitude to their home environment, were potentially important factors influencing their health-related behaviour and attitudes.

Clearly, young people anticipate possible disappointment over their future prospects; the table does not reveal if the 50% of Year 11 boys that say they *will* be able to take up further education are the same 50% that *want* to continue to study, but clearly the match is very close.

The diminishing desire to *start a family* as adulthood approaches is noteworthy. Does this reflect a hesitation on the part of more young people to get married?

Obstacles to employment

The first three reasons in the list in **Table 6** are the ones most likely to be chosen by the young people, and they all become more powerful with increasing age.

Some reasons change little among the year groups: these include *ethnic, sex,* and *neighbourhood* discrimination, and *unwillingness to move away.*

In most cases the boys' responses are higher than the girls', indicating that more of them perceive the reason as a significant obstacle to getting the job they would like.

The rising importance to the older age groups of *lack of qualifications* is exceeded by *lack of experience.* Does this reflect a 'catch-22' situation, where the youngsters feel that they cannot get into the work they want because they lack work experience?

The bottom line (*None of the above*) represents the percentage of young people that see no obstacle to getting the job they want. The fact that it is reducing with increasing age suggests decreasing optimism, although the levelling-out between Years 10 and 11 does suggest that a 'bedrock' of residual optimism is being reached.

'Environment' across the curriculum

We have been developing and trialling environmental education materials in co-operation with local schools. The aim is to provide schools with:

Responses	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9		Year 10		Year 11	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Few jobs available	44.7	41.3	51.5	51.5	53.9	56.2	64.6	66.9	63.9	66.9
Lack of qualifications	16.0	12.8	17.6	16.0	21.0	17.5	20.7	20.5	22.0	23.9
Lack of experience	16.7	13.5	21.2	18.7	25.9	21.9	29.6	28.4	33.7	30.3
Ethnic discrimination	5.3	2.3	5.9	3.7	6.0	3.8	4.2	3.3	5.2	3.8
Gender	5.1	7.2	4.9	11.3	4.6	11.5	3.2	11.1	3.5	10.6
Home neighbourhood	4.3	2.8	5.1	4.2	5.1	4.7	4.0	3.0	4.2	3.6
Becoming a parent	15.2	16.9	15.0	17.7	13.3	17.5	11.3	16.2	9.9	14.7
Family pressure	11.8	8.6	10.6	8.5	9.2	8.5	7.3	8.0	7.6	9.7
Unwilling to move away	13.3	10.6	12.7	11.2	13.7	10.5	12.1	9.8	12.7	11.6
Trouble with police	8.5	4.1	11.1	6.6	13.0	7.3	12.3	8.1	12.8	6.6
Other reason	2.7	1.1	1.4	1.5	2.1	1.3	1.8	1.5	2.0	1.5
None of the above	35.7	41.1	31.7	30.4	29.3	26.1	22.0	19.0	21.6	17.8
Available sample	586	615	9377	8957	3896	3874	7993	7582	2806	2611

Table 6. The percentage of young people that thought these reasons would reduce their chance of getting the job they wanted. (1994 data.)

Responses	Year 7		Year 8		Year 9		Year 10		Year 11	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Air pollution	37.8	33.3	29.5	43.1	21.8	32.2	28.1	33.3	16.7	33.3
Acid rain	27.9	26.7	25.5	28.5	19.0	18.9	19.0	22.2	15.5	18.7
Endangered species	58.1	78.5	51.7	73.8	44.4	70.6	49.0	73.0	53.6	70.7
Greenhouse effect	36.6	35.6	40.9	36.9	30.3	40.6	44.4	49.2	36.9	46.7
Working conditions	29.7	26.7	22.8	20.8	23.9	21.7	20.9	26.2	27.4	22.7
Holes in ozone	56.4	54.8	53.7	55.4	41.5	60.1	49.7	57.9	41.7	61.3
Use of pesticides	32.6	32.6	22.8	33.8	21.8	32.2	24.8	28.6	23.8	25.3
Wastage of materials	41.3	40.0	33.6	35.4	29.6	44.8	34.6	35.7	27.4	44.0
Water pollution	63.4	65.9	59.7	63.1	50.0	61.5	52.3	63.5	61.9	58.7
Destruction of habitats	69.2	75.6	62.4	70.0	51.4	73.4	56.9	71.4	51.2	72.0
Food safety	54.7	43.0	53.0	51.5	38.0	57.3	36.6	52.4	33.3	48.0
None of the above	12.2	8.9	14.8	13.1	26.1	7.7	22.2	5.6	26.2	10.7

Table 7. Data derived from pupils in one of the cross-curricular environmental education project schools. The percentages worrying *quite a lot* or *a lot* about these issues are shown.

- *The resources to carry out a cross-curricular audit.*
- *The means of recording the pupils' attitudes to environmental issues.*
- *Help in planning or revising the environmental curriculum using, if required, any of the numerous modules developed in the project schools.*

Curriculum audit

This is a snapshot of existing curriculum provision in a school, and is particularly appropriate in the case of cross-curricular themes. This is because questions of omission, overlap, progression, and continuity are much more difficult to resolve than in the case of single-subject issues.

Typically, each head of department or even each member of staff within it indicates what contribution their department makes to the topic in question.

Environmental concerns

The pupils' own environmental concerns need to be taken into account if the work is to thrive, and the Unit has developed an 'environmental questionnaire' to help measure knowledge and attitudes. **Table 7** is taken from the use of the questionnaire in one school. Among this particular sample it is seen that more girls than boys worry about the issues listed, and that the concerns with the highest rating are endangered species and the destruction of habitats.

Questions that may be asked of this and other tables from the environmental survey include:

- *Which issues attract the most attention or concern?*
- *How are the responses affected by age and gender differences?*
- *Do they match teachers' expectations, and if not why not?*
- *Can the data be taken back to the pupils for exploration or debate?*

Environmental project modules

A successful module within any curriculum area should:

- *Fit comfortably within the existing programme of study in its subject area.*
- *Achieve NC Attainment Targets or other requirements.*
- *Make a contribution to pupils' understanding of the environment.*

- *Include a 'feedback' component designed to support co-ordination.*
- *Be readily accessible to colleagues in the same subject area and exportable to other schools.*
- *Alert and prepare the teacher if the content involves sensitive or controversial issues.*

A three-day event

In the course of researching local environmental education initiatives we discovered that Coombeshead College, Newton Abbot, Devon, instituted three 'environmental days' for Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils towards the end of the summer term. The underlying theme was 'interpreting the natural world', and each curriculum area prepared its own programme around this theme. Wherever possible, outside agencies and experts were involved, and the whole of the town and its hinterland became their classroom.

The principal aim of the three days was to enable staff and pupils to interpret the natural world in whatever way they wished, freed from the constraints of normal timetabling and, whenever possible, going out into the 'natural world', experiencing it in new ways. It was intended to be an event that would increase everyone's awareness of their world, particularly their own locality and, where possible, to work with outside environmental agencies.

The activities included drystone walling, rhododendron chopping, pond building, surveying, observing wildlife, an urban housing study, and preparing a local tourist guide. Some of the outcome was integrated into subsequent schemes of work, and some pupils volunteered to continue the conservation work and to involve their parents too.

Conclusion

'Environmental education' is an attractive area for schools to promote because it is far less contentious than sex, drink, or drugs; it has great appeal to many youngsters and parents; it is so wide-ranging that all compulsory curriculum areas can easily find accommodation within it. However, we must not overlook the other 'environment' in which young people spend so much time — their own home, school, and neighbourhood.

Funding to support the publication of *Cross-curricular Environment Education* is currently being sought.