LYNDA JONES

An ‘Interactive Health Education Centre’ for 9–11’s

The aim was to develop a positive interest in, attitude to and behaviour pattern for health in 9–11 year olds by a variety of routes (see box, bottom left).

Individual learning
School visits are often overwhelming, leaving children with a random range of experiences without cohesion or meaning. To help them make sense of the assorted experiences and information, there will be a series of ‘links’ between activities. Each individual child or group can then follow their own interests using the ‘links’ to form a logical sequence of very personal experiences and activities. It is hoped that this will develop a practical experience of self-directed learning and engender a sense of individual empowerment.

Classroom material
A range of pre- and post-visit work is to be developed. Before a visit, a classroom teaching pack will provide material to stimulate interest and raise awareness about how health is maintained and lifestyle issues. Following a visit, a comprehensive selection of classroom project packs designed to develop the content of the centre visit will be available. They will be linked to National Curriculum Attainment Targets across a range of subjects. They will allow interest aroused by the visit to be developed and explored along individual lines.

School programmes
The project goes further still. In order to consolidate the experiences and learning it is anticipated that a number of programmes will be developed which will run in schools. One such programme is already running in the USA, where children are taught specific interpersonal skills and then take responsibility for managing conflicts between other students. Such programmes can extend to bullying, eating policy, environmental issues, stress, exercise and leisure, and will form a model of good practice — in practice.

The cost
Schemes and programmes like this are ambitious and costly. While building space can be found, the themes must be designed and built, the teaching materials must be developed, written and produced, and the running costs estimated. The Berkshire Centre project is expected to cost around £250,000 to the end of its first year of operation.

The timetable
With a proposed opening date of autumn 1992 and an excess of 4,000 pupil places, the Environmental Education Centre is to be based on a local authority, is likely to become a popular and essential part of the educational experience for primary children in the area.

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The content
The ideas will be developed around a number of themes. For example, a central theme of food might focus, primarily, on the digestive system, with subsidiary modules of ‘food and diet’ and ‘an experimental kitchen’ for tasting, testing and adapting recipes.

The themes will be developed in three dimensions balancing genetics (what you are born with), the environment (external factors that affect you) and personal choice (what we do ourselves).

The requirements of the National Curriculum are focusing teachers’ attention, and so, where appropriate, the activities are built around Attainment Targets. A centre of this nature is, though, essentially one for health education, so no compromise is made over the integrity of the content in meeting the stated aims.

Water safety
Caring for pets
Conservation
First Aid

The twelve health education topics that are taught in the interest levels of 9–11 year olds.

to the individual will be minimised and the benefits will therefore be optimised.

There is a third, less obvious advantage. A population which adopts a healthy lifestyle early in their lives will reduce the cost to the NHS which they might otherwise incur over a lifetime – from teeth, obesity and

coughs and colds to cancer and heart disease.

Two, by adopting a better lifestyle early in life the degenerative damage

Three, by adopting a better lifestyle early in life the degenerative damage

The ‘interactive approach’
It is with this philosophy in mind that an Interactive Health Education Centre for primary children is being planned by West Berkshire Health Authority’s Health Promotion Centre.

Traditionally, health education values the process equally with outcomes. Within the educational philosophy of the Centre is embedded the concept of self-empowerment: action resulting from informed personal choice. The activities will use participatory involvement and include experiment, exploration and programmed interactive learning techniques. These will be set within the framework of a visual environment designed to excite and stimulate.

Modern technology is changing museums and exhibitions from places children visit to stimulate interest into centres of learning. The Berkshire Centre will be the first of its kind, but it will not be competing with the grander museum set-ups. Instead, it will offer an exciting and intimate local environment in which learning and exploration can take place at an essentially individual level.