The overall aim of the Safety for Life project is to form part of a comprehensive and broad-based safety curriculum.

Tony Pye
Safe as houses? A sniff of danger for 3,000 primary pupils

Early in 1994, 750 children from 22 primary schools in Calderdale took part in a Safety for Life programme organised jointly by Calderdale Healthcare and West Yorkshire Police. Written evaluation by both teachers and pupils testify to its success in raising safety issues, clarifying what the children themselves should do in an emergency, and promoting safety as an effective topic within the curriculum.

The emphasis is on the word 'effective'. Accidents are by far the largest cause of death and injury amongst primary schoolchildren; it is estimated that nationally around 10,000 annually are left with long-term consequences to their health as a result of accidents. It is clear that schools do take safety education very seriously indeed, but it is essential that a comprehensive overall plan, which allows for the growth of ideas, concepts and skills across the age groups, is adopted.

Active safety

'Being safe' as a concept must mean more than just avoiding accidents. Children need to take an active role in keeping themselves safe. They need to develop the personal skills of judgment, decision-making and assessing risks, and to have the self-esteem and confidence to apply them. Schools have an important part to play in developing these skills and in encouraging partnerships with parents, the wider community, and pupils themselves.

Refining the means to this end has taken several years, and the programme is still being evaluated. It began in 1989-90, when Crime Concern researched youth crime prevention initiatives from across the UK and published Youth Crime Prevention: A Handbook of Good Practice. One of the case studies led to the development of 'Cruicial Crew' schemes throughout the country.

Ineffective?

These were based on the belief that traditional crime prevention tackled effectiveness, and that the showing of videos such as Never Go With Strangers, followed by general talks on crime prevention, did not appear to be taken seriously by the children.

'Crucial Crew' came up with the idea of letting the children experience and participate in a range of realistic situations which were potentially life-threatening or criminal, and could be prevented.

In Calderdale, it was initiated by West Yorkshire Police, who approached the Education Department. The project involved a number of other agencies too (the fire and ambulance services, British Rail, and the electricity and gas companies). At that time I was the Advisory Teacher for Health Education.
However, even this scheme, whilst well thought out, did not go far enough in terms of the effectiveness of the children's learning outcomes. It was felt that much more work had to go on in the curriculum if children were going to learn and understand the concepts involved. A visit to a site that staged a range of scenarios, whilst enjoyable and no doubt memorable, could only be seen as a "one-off". Any input to the curriculum had to address the children's attitudes and develop skills in dealing with situations. This meant a longer programme over a period of time when teachers were able to discuss with children the issues raised and how they perceived situations.

An important aspect, which is not always considered, was to start with the schools and keep them involved right from the beginning. It would have been very easy for us, as organisations, to assume what children and schools needed. In the past, many assumptions regarding children's perceptions and needs have been made without checking out their starting-point. In this case, the same principle also applied to the staff and schools involved. If the work was to be effective with the children concerned, it had to involve the schools and be built into the curriculum.

Areas of concern

As a result, a small group of Headteachers had a meeting with the Crime Prevention Officer and myself to discuss the project. They all welcomed the long-term thinking of integrating the project within the curriculum, and identified several areas of concern which were affecting their schools and communities. These focused on:

- Theft
- Vandalism
- Fire
- Playing on roads
- Playing near railways
- Water safety

Regarding timing, the Heads felt that the early part of the spring term would be the most appropriate, and they agreed to co-ordinate training for the staff involved, and to make time available for planning. Year 5 was felt to be the most important group, since follow-up work could continue into the final year before secondary school. Also, it was felt that 10- and 11-year-olds are easily able to link behaviour with keeping safe. They are aware of personal skills such as looking ahead, knowing rules and being aware of other people, as well as seeking support from friends and the effect of peer pressure. It is therefore important that safety education for this age-group focuses on growing up and assuming responsibility for one's own actions and behaviour.

Exploring attitudes and discussing feelings around such issues as being in charge, using judgment, making rules and assessing risk are as important as the practical safety skills of how to react in an emergency and learning how to handle potentially dangerous things safely.

The children learned that emergency calls can be made from a pay-card kiosk without a card.

Triggers and scenarios

Eight schools were involved in the first pilot. There would be two strands to the input. First, the police and the fire service would visit each of the schools, and act as a trigger for the classroom work. Once all the schools had been visited, the children would be taken to a central site at Berrymere, where they would take part in a set of five scenarios, in groups of five or six pupils at a time:

- A road accident
- A bedroom fire
- A gas leakage at home
- Prevention of accidents on the railway
- Dangers associated with electricity

Each of these scenarios had a telephone available for use by the children, which was connected to a central control staffed by three 999 emergency service operators. The children were unaware of their presence, and this contributed to the authenticity when they dialled 999. Each call was amplified, so that the other children could listen in to the conversation. The staff that were responsible for the scenario could then advise on the correct procedure when making an emergency call to the various services.

The children were transported to the site by the Yorkshire Rider bus company free of charge. This gave the Yorkshire Rider staff an opportunity to talk to them about the problem of vandalism on buses.

The children wrote and drew about their experiences. Judging from their response, the visits by the police and fire officers to their school, and their trip to Berrymere, left a marked impression on them. They had to recall some of the information, and apply it to the situations in which they were involved: this proved particularly useful in the fire scenario, where they had to describe and act out what they would do if they were trapped in their bedrooms.

Buttons

Inadvertently the fire service had provided a dial telephone rather than the push-button type, and many children asked where the buttons were! They also learned that a fact of some them had not realised, which was that emergency calls can be made from a pay-card kiosk even without a card.

The whole process was reviewed by analysing questionnaires filled in by the staff, who also took part in a meeting to discuss the project and consider issues that had arisen and how the scheme might be improved. A part of one of these evaluations is shown on the next page. The request for some elementary first aid to be included within the course was also made by other teachers.

Many children also wrote to the various services, thanking them for the time and effort they had put in, and emphasising how much they had enjoyed the work.

This pilot scheme, involving eight schools, took place in January-February 1993. In February-March 1994 it was repeated with 22 schools, after a twilight session for staff to discuss the curriculum, planning, preparation and content. The events for each school's visit are shown in the box on the opposite page.

Each of the first five scenarios in the box was planned to last for fifteen minutes, including a few minutes at the end for questions. The groups then re-formed at the end for the tracks and child safety presentation (item 7 in the box).

Handbook

Before the second phase of the project, in early 1994, a substantial handbook had been
prepared. This contains worksheets on road accidents, dialling an ambulance, gas leaks, home fires and hazards in and around the home, and includes the following summary of what the project is about:

The project aims to provide the children with a stimulating ‘hands-on’ experience, through which they will develop an appreciation of the concept of safety. This experience will, it is hoped, be enjoyable for all concerned, whilst keeping in mind the tragedies which all too often befall our children.

The overall aim of the project is to form part of a comprehensive and broad-based safety curriculum. The day’s events are intended to reinforce previous input and provide a springboard for new topics that will focus on attitudes and personal skills as well as practical ones.

At the time of writing, plans are going ahead for the 1995 ‘season’. Every primary school in Calderdale is being invited to participate in a 3-year rolling programme, involving 11 agencies and about 30 schools in each year, a total of about 3,000 children. This means, unfortunately, that some pupils will not experience the project until 1997, but the fact that so many organisations are prepared to commit themselves to this long-term venture is a reflection of the success of the first phases of the scheme. I am also certain that the publicity and ‘gripe-vine’ will promote a review of the safety education programmes in many other schools. I should be delighted to hear from any other colleagues that have developed, or are thinking of embarking on, similar strategies.

‘Safety’ as a curriculum topic

John Balding writes:

Safety in its many forms has always been high on the list of priorities for parents, school staff, and the pupils themselves. For example, results for the nationwide primary health topics survey involving over 28,000 individuals, based on our Just A Tick questionnaire and published in 1989, showed ‘safety in traffic’ coming first in its group of 22 topics for all parents, teachers and health care professionals surveyed.

The table presents these results in more detail for years 5-6.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety in traffic</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>1st</td>
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<tr>
<td>First aid</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>2nd</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hygiene</td>
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<td>Fire safety</td>
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<td>4th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other safety</td>
<td>5th</td>
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</tbody>
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This has truly been an inter-agency project.

The report, Health Education Priorities for the Primary School Curriculum, and its companion volume, Parents and Health Education, can be purchased from the Unit for £5.00 each.

Anne Simpson is a school nurse at the Burgess Hill Clinic.

Helen West is the Health Education Administrator & Conference Organiser, Mid-Dowens Health Education Unit, Haywards Heath.

Hour-long modules guide teachers to a better understanding of health-related issues.

West Sussex school nurses teach the teachers

While the agenda of work for school nurses may have changed over the last hundred years, the importance of their work is in no way diminished; they are ideally placed to be the leading workforce in health education for our primary and secondary school-age children.

With these words, Professor J. D. Bain of Bristol University introduced the Amalgamated School Nurses’ Association 1992 report on current school nurse practice (1). One of the conclusions and recommendations was as follows:

Schools and teaching staff, presently faced with the need to examine their own practice in the light of the introduction of the national curriculum, should recognise a valuable resource in their school nurse colleagues, and seek to incorporate her expertise into their efforts to establish health-promoting schools.

An under-used resource

However, data presented in the report also shows that fewer than 10% of the school nurses surveyed had a teaching certificate, although over 60% would like to receive training in health education. This supports the belief that school nurses form a potentially very valuable, but currently under-used, health education resource.

This is the background to the decision by health education workers and school nurses in West Sussex to collaborate in the production of a set of training and information packs to be used to train school staff on various childhood health issues.

Originally, individual school nurses had been responding to requests from teaching staff for more information by their own individual presentations, put together on an ad hoc basis.

Structuring the approach

However, at a school nurse meeting in January 1992, it was decided that the needs for training and information could be better met by a more structured approach. The aim of the resulting project is to boost the competence and confidence of the adults who work with children by increasing their understanding of child health and assisting them to assess emergency situations and respond effectively to them.

Over the following two years, more school nurses became involved in writing and piloting the hour-long teaching modules. Many health and education professionals, representatives of local and national organisations, businesses and self-help groups gave generous support and advice. This has truly been an inter-agency project with funding coming from Mid-Dowens Health Authority, the former SW Thames Regional Health Authority, and private enterprise.

Janice Spence, Senior Health Education Adviser for Schools and Young People, has co-ordinated the project with help from the Consumer Affairs Department of Mid-Dowens Health Authority and the Research Unit, which has evaluated the modules from information gained as a result of piloting workshops.

An unexpected result of this collaboration