Effective safety education revisited

As the risk education adviser for RoSPA I am often asked to explain what I think is the most effective approach to safety education for school age children and young people. In 2006 RoSPA and the PSHE Association published '10 principles for effective safety education'. These 10 principles have been described in this journal (Summer 2008 Guiding Principles, p8-9) and a briefing paper can be downloaded from the safety education section of the RoSPA website http://www.rospa.com/safetyeducation/policy/ten-principles.aspx They formed the basis for the resource profiler, developed by the Child Safety Education Coalition http://profiler.csec.org.uk/

Principles of effective safety education

A review of the evidence for effective safety education has suggested that resources should address 10 principles:

1. Encourage the adoption of, or reinforce, a whole school approach, within the wider community
Resources may deliver all or part of whole school approach and should encourage or reinforce a whole school approach. A whole school approach encompasses the formal and informal curriculum, policy (both as written and as implemented) and the relationships among staff, pupils, parents, carers, with other agencies and with the wider community.

2. Use active approaches to teaching and learning (including interactive and experiential learning)
Active approaches to teaching and learning include all strategies in and out of the classroom where the learner:
- *seeks out information for him or herself,*
- *develops a physical skill,*
- *engages in discussion about a topic in pairs or groups (interactive learning),*
- *is engaged in problem solving independently or in a group,*
- *adopts a role, or considers an issue from someone else's viewpoint.*

Active learning may draw on the learner's personal experience (experiential learning.) A resource should describe how to manage the classroom climate e.g. using ground rules, using distancing techniques.

3. Involve young people in real decisions to help them stay safe
Involving young people includes young people's participation in real decisions about keeping themselves safe, in and out of the classroom. Young people may be involved in designing or participating in surveys, participating in their school council, choosing which activities they want to take part in outside the formal curriculum, in peer education projects, in mentoring or peer support. Activities for young people should include identification of hazards, participating in risk assessment (e.g. assessing whether risks are trivial, tolerable or intolerable) and being part of actions to control or manage risk to themselves and others.

4. Assess children and young people's learning needs

Local and national evidence can help to identify factors that suggest children of a particular age or group are at risk. Teaching and learning strategies to address these needs should reflect the age and developmental stage of the learner, take account of social and cultural needs and the effects of gender on safety related behaviour and learning. Strategies to assess learning needs can involve open ended forms of questioning, whether through informal discussion, mind mapping, brain-showers and circle time. They may also include more structured formats, such as surveys, focus group discussions, interviews or 'draw and write' activities.

5. Teach safety as part of a comprehensive personal social and health curriculum

A comprehensive personal social and health curriculum helps children and young people learn how to keep themselves healthy <u>and</u> to stay safe. It provides opportunities to learn specific and transferable skills and knowledge in a wide range of circumstances, but with attention to feelings, skills, attitudes, values and attributes. Topics should be introduced in the early years at school and extended and revisited throughout the key stages, introducing more specific language, knowledge and skill as the child develops (spiral curriculum). A comprehensive personal social and health curriculum will offer pupils a specific time and place to learn about being healthy and staying safe (such as dedicated PSHE time) but will also be cross curricular, drawing on different programmes of study (e.g. maths, English, science, drama) to help young people access and use relevant information.

6. Use realistic and relevant settings and resources

Real life data and examples (but not those designed simply to shock) help to engage young people and to challenge misconceptions e.g. 'bullying is acceptable behaviour among children' or 'accidents just happen' where necessary. (Using data in this way is also known as a normative approach).

7. Work in partnership

Develop links with supporting agencies such as police, fire and rescue, local authorities, and educational charities where these add value to work carried out in schools and other settings. Work with parents/carers and members of the wider community by seeking their views, providing information and guidance and involving them in developing and implementing solutions.

8. Address known risk and protective factors

Risk and protective factors can be anything that is associated with a greater or lesser probability of a child or young person experiencing harm. Risk factors are not static and can be divided into several domains:
- *individual (e.g. knowledge or skill)*
- *school (e.g. policy)*
- *peer group (e.g. attitudes)*
- *family e.g. (parental rules) and*
- *community (e.g. crime).*

An understanding of risk and protective factors can help those designing and delivering safety education resources to focus on wider aspects of injury prevention and personal safety.

9. Address psychosocial aspects of safety e.g. confidence, resilience, self esteem, self efficacy

Psychosocial risk and protective factors are individual characteristics that may predispose children to injury, or to being a victim of bullying, violence or abuse. Psychosocial aspects of behaviour operate dynamically with environmental factors, reinforcing the importance of incorporating individual protective factors (such as confidence, resilience, self esteem, self efficacy) within a whole school, whole community approach.

10. Adopt positive approaches which model and reward safe behaviour, within a safe, supportive environment

It is helpful to identify the short and long-term benefits of maintaining safe and healthy behaviour, and of modifying behaviour that is harmful to health. Children and adults learn from observing and modelling the behaviour of others, including peers, and generalise their expectation of positive outcomes across different domains.

The 10 principles were developed from the evidence published in national and international peer reviewed journals up to 2005 which included studies from such diverse sources as playground safety for nursery age children to road safety for young pedestrians, bullying prevention, violence and self harm prevention. Where possible it draws on systematic reviews of larger studies.
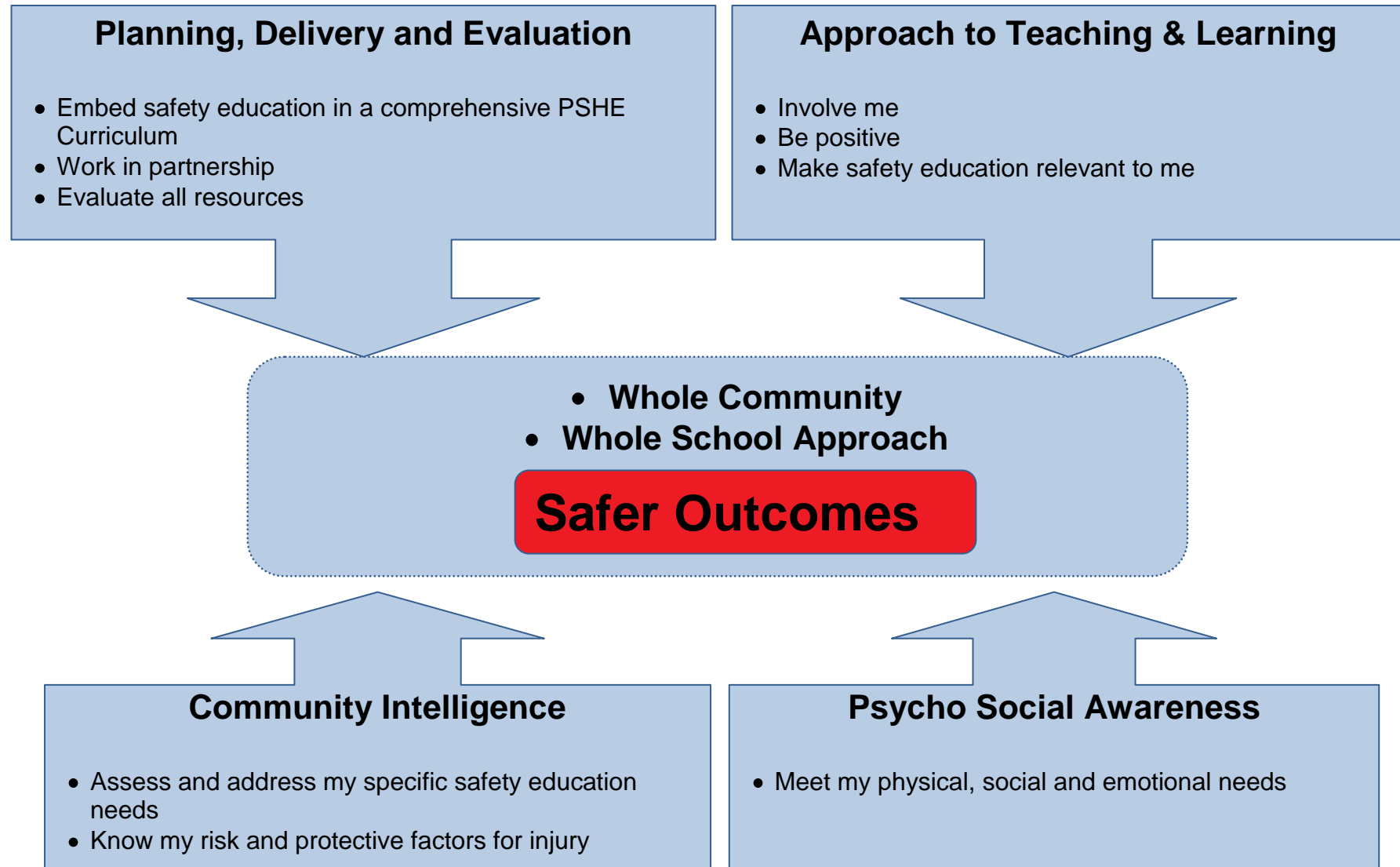
Recently a new review of the evidence for effective practical safety education has confirmed the conclusions of the earlier review: Mulvaney C, Watson M, Errington G. *(2012) Safety education impact and good practice: a review.* **Health Education** 112 (1) 15-30 http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/injuryresearch/publications.aspx

The new review has encouraged me to take a fresh look at how to present the evidence to promote a more holistic and balanced approach to safety education in schools.

When encouraging practitioners and those developing resources to use the evidence for effective practice I have always emphasised that no single resource, whether it is a book, an adventurous activity or web based game is likely to fulfil them all. However, this has sometimes led practitioners to adopt a rather piecemeal approach, where a resource relates to only one or two principles, leaving it unbalanced with respect to the others.

The result of all this thinking is a new model reflecting the evidence as before, based on 5 domains with 'safer outcomes' at its heart. This new model does not supersede the 10 principles but shows how you can use them to adopt a more balanced approach to safety education:

Domains of Safety Education

Planning, Delivery and Evaluation

- Embed safety education in a comprehensive PSHE Curriculum
- Work in partnership
- Evaluate all resources

Approach to Teaching & Learning

- Involve me
- Be positive
- Make safety education relevant to me

- **Whole Community**
- **Whole School Approach**

Safer Outcomes

Community Intelligence

- Assess and address my specific safety education needs
- Know my risk and protective factors for injury

Psycho Social Awareness

- Meet my physical, social and emotional needs

The first domain [*Planning and Delivery*] includes two of the original 10 principles and describes the most effective approaches to planning and implementation. Crucially we have added evaluation into this domain to emphasise the importance of continually updating the evidence base:
- embed safety and risk education, within a comprehensive curriculum for PSHE education (P5);
- work in partnership with professionals and voluntary sector colleagues with knowledge and expertise in injury prevention (P7);
- evaluate all resources

The second domain [*Approach to Teaching and Learning*] describes the most effective approaches to teaching and learning based on three of the original 10 principles:
- involve children and young people interactively in their learning (P2,3)
- take a positive approach, reinforcing and rewarding safe behaviour (P10)
- make the activity relevant to the child's interests and needs (P6)

The third domain [*Psychosocial risk and protective factors*] refers to the fundamental needs of the individual child or young person for:
- physical
- social
- emotional
- safety and wellbeing (P9)

The fourth domain [*Community intelligence*] emphasises the importance of starting where children are and using local and national evidence and expertise to support the specific safety education activities by:
- assessing and addressing children and young people's specific needs in safety education (P4)
- monitoring and raising awareness of the local and national priority injury risks and protective factors (p8)

The fifth and overarching domain [*whole school, whole community* approach] reflects the importance of adopting an ecological approach to safety education, providing an environment in which the safer option is the easy option, encouraging children and young people to be able to keep themselves safe, wherever they are (P1)

If you are selecting or developing new resources, please take a closer look at the detail of the 10 principles but also consider how by incorporating an element from each of the 5 domains you will be providing an evidence-based and balanced approach to safety education.