



**Doctorate in Educational Psychology Professional Training  
Programme**

**A qualitative study of ELSAs' and children's  
experiences of the ELSA programme.**

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**Part One:** Literature Review

**Part Two:** Research Article

**Part Three:** Critical Reflections

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DEdPsy.

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## Summary

This thesis is divided into three parts. A description of each part is given below.

### Part one: Literature review

The literature review sets the context for the research article that follows. It begins by presenting a definition of social and emotional learning (SEL) before discussing different theories of how we develop socially and emotionally. The literature review then explores different methods of encouraging social and emotional development in school and discusses research that suggests there is a link between SEL and educational outcomes, whilst considering the importance of implementation factors and the possible influence of type III error.

The literature review concludes by summarising the importance of exploring users experiences of SEL programmes to investigate the possible influence of implementation factors on their effectiveness. In addition, it is argued that by exploring users' experiences of SEL programmes researchers can learn more about what factors facilitators and users consider as important. These may or may not extend beyond implementation factors.

### Part two: Research article

The research presented in part two is a qualitative study of ELSAs and children's experiences of the ELSA programme – a programme that is designed to enhance students' emotional literacy. The results revealed that implementation factors, along with ELSAs' self-confidence and personal qualities were important variables that contributed to the development of a relationship with the child. The ELSA-Child relationship was deemed pivotal to the change process. The ELSA-Child relationship was an overarching theme that also emerged from the child transcripts. Factors contributing to its development included the qualities of the ELSA, confidentiality, sessions being fun and enjoyable and the availability of ongoing support.

### Part three: Critical review

In the final part of this thesis the researcher presents reflections on the contribution this research has made to knowledge focusing on the development of the research question and the underlying epistemology, as well as the strengths and limitations of the research. This section also explores the role of the research practitioner and considers the influence of reflexivity, involving participants in the research process, power imbalances and ethical considerations. This section concludes by exploring the researcher's reflections of using qualitative methods.

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## Abbreviations

ALNCo	Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator
BPS	British Psychologist Society
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CoF	Circle of Friends
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ES	Effect Size
HCPC	Health Care Professional Council
LA	Local Authority
RAD	Reactive Attachment Disorder
SA+	School Action Plus
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEBD	Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator



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**Part One:** Literature Review

## Introduction

In 2007 the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that children in the UK scored the lowest on a range of well-being measures in comparison to children from 20 other industrialised countries. In response, the children's commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green, said:

'We are turning out a generation of young people who are unhappy, unhealthy, engaging in risky behaviour, who have poor relationships with their family and their peers, who have low expectations and don't feel safe' (BBC, 2007).

Four years on and the riots across England in 2011 fed into the belief that Western society was in crisis and failing children and young people (BBC, 2012).

In 2013 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) stated that the most frequent primary need for pupils at school action plus (SA+) was social, emotional and behavioural needs, accounting for almost a quarter of SA+ children (24.9%). In 2014, it was the third highest primary need for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Wales (13.6%), after moderate (23.6%) and general (23.6%) learning difficulties and speech language and communication difficulties (13.9%) (Welsh Government, 2004). Considering this, it is undeniable that social, emotional and behavioural needs are prevalent within UK schools.

However, historically within Western education, the main focus of school has been to encourage academic attainment, focusing mainly on cognitive ability rather than emotional well-being (Weare, 2004). However, Greenberg (2010) argues that schools are, 'by virtue of their central role in the lives of children and families and their broad reach' (Greenberg, 2010, p. 28), an ideal environment to identify, intervene in and remediate social and emotional difficulties.

Current conceptualisations of intelligence have also evolved. Gardiner (1983) proposed a broader theory of cognitive functioning, stating that there are seven different types of intelligence (i.e. logical-mathematical, spatial, linguistic, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal). Each type of intelligence was considered equivalent in terms of importance, and as such emotional intelligence was considered just as important as other forms of intelligence. More recently, Salovey and Mayer (1990) published an article that conceptualised emotional intelligence as the ability to appraise, express, regulate and utilise one's emotions to solve problems – and there has been much controversy around the misinterpretation of meaning behind Goleman's (1996) book *Emotional Intelligence: "Why It Can Matter More Than IQ"*. Goleman (2008) asserts that whilst intelligence is likely to 'be a much stronger predictor than EI of which jobs or professions people can enter... EI trumps IQ in "soft" domains, where intellect matters relatively little for success [and] when comparing people with roughly the same educational backgrounds (like MBAs or accountants) – which is exactly what goes on in human resource departments of companies every day' (Goleman, 2008).

The focus on emotional intelligence in education remains controversial. For example, Paul and Elder (2007) argued that 'the life cycle of the emotional intelligence movement illuminates the typical patterns of fads. First a new "wonderful idea" is born. It is then popularised and spreads. Then people begin to see its weakness, its vagueness, its lack of applicability and substance' (Paul & Elder, 2007, p. 51). Whereas Craig (2007) argued that encouraging young people to 'focus on the self and feelings can easily encourage narcissism and self-obsession, thereby undermining young people's well-being, rather than improving it' (Craig, 2007, p. 2). Craig (2007) argues that focusing on social and emotional learning wastes resources and distracts from a large number of social and cultural changes that have a detrimental influence on young people's well-being (e.g. family breakdown, materialism, poor diet). However, more recently research has linked social and emotional learning to academic attainment. Durlak,

Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based social and emotional programmes. They reported an 11 percentile-point gain in achievement for students who participated in these programmes, suggesting that social and emotional learning (SEL) is related to positive academic outcomes. However, Humphreys (2013) states that rather than being a 'panacea' for all educational ills, 'it is important to qualify statements about the effectiveness of SEL and take a more measured approach of its promotion' (Humphrey, 2013, p. 138).

The current research explores the experiences of emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) and the children they worked with within two local authorities in Wales. The aim of the ELSA programme is to enhance children's emotional literacy, which falls under the broader umbrella term of SEL.

This literature review sets the context for the research article that follows in part two of the thesis. The literature review presents an operational definition of SEL, theoretical stances on how SEL develops, explores different methods for teaching SEL in schools and then presents a discussion of the current research base on the effectiveness of SEL on social and emotional well-being and educational outcomes. The literature review then leads onto an overview of the ELSA programme and the rationale for the research presented in part two of the thesis. Part two of the thesis presents a qualitative study of ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme. The findings are discussed with reference to relevant research. In part three, the author's reflections on (i) the contribution to knowledge the research has made and, (ii) the role of the research practitioner are presented.

## What is social and emotional learning?

### Importance of defining SEL

SEL is considered an ‘umbrella term’ for a variety of psychosocial educational programmes in schools that are designed to address the social and emotional well-being of students. This is a very broad remit and organisations such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) have tried to clarify what is meant by social and emotional well-being by breaking it down into three components: emotional, psychological and social well-being.

*“Emotional well-being:* this includes being happy and confident and not anxious or depressed. *Psychological well-being:* this includes the ability to be autonomous, problem-solve, manage emotions, experience empathy, be resilient and attentive. *Social well-being:* has good relationships with others and does not have behavioural problems, that is, they are not disruptive, violent or a bully.” (NICE, 2013)

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) highlight the different aspects of social and emotional well-being. However, it could be argued that the definition does not go far enough in acknowledging that social and emotional well-being is also linked to age and stage of development and, as some educational programmes claim, it can be taught.

### Current working definition of SEL

To ensure that interventions in school are based on rigorous research and are credible, SEL must be operationalised. A clear operational definition guards against the results from one programme being used to justify the use of another programme. Operationalising exactly what is being measured safeguards against the false conclusion that SEL programmes are ineffective

if based on research findings from studies that fall out with an agreed definition of SEL (Humphrey, 2013).

This research adopts a definition by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL). This definition has been used by other researchers such as Humphrey (2013). It offers a broad generic definition that fits with current understanding of social and emotional well-being (e.g. emotional, social and psychological aspects) as well as the importance of regulating one's emotions and behaviours to achieve goals, make responsible decisions and maintain positive relationships throughout life.

'Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions". (CASEL, 2015).

In addition, CASEL go a step further in offering an explanation of how best to develop social and emotional well-being. They offer a definition of what social and emotional learning programmes should consist of if they are to facilitate the development of social and emotional well-being. These are namely, supportive relationships, enjoyable activities and systemic support that extends beyond the classroom.

'SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging and meaningful. Social and emotional skills are critical to being a good student, citizen and worker; and many risky behaviours (e.g. drug use, violence, bullying and dropping out) can be prevented or reduced when multilevel, integrated efforts are used to develop students' social and emotional skills. This is best

done through effective classroom instruction; student engagement in positive activities in and out of the classroom; and broad parent and community involvement in program planning, implementation and evaluation.' (CASEL, 2015).

Whilst SEL may be a skill set that can be taught, the next section of this review will look more exclusively at other theoretical stances on how children develop social and emotional skills that extend beyond the classroom.

These include interactions with others and cultural influences. The sections that follows on from there will explore how SEL is taught within schools and discuss research on the impact of SEL on educational outcomes.

### **How does SEL develop?**

Whilst there are many variables that may influence the development of social and emotional well-being, exploring all of these areas would be beyond the scope of this thesis. This section of the thesis will focus on the influence of early childhood attachments, interactions with others and culture.

#### Early childhood attachments

Geddes (2005) argues that 'over the last forty years attachment theory has become a major developmental paradigm for understanding human social and emotional development' (Geddes, 2005 p3). She argues that having an understanding of a child's early relationship with his or her caregiver can be pivotal in understanding his or her thoughts, feelings and behaviours in school.

Bowlby (1973) argued that early attachments were vital to the development of an internal working model of attachment. This model forms the foundations for how a person constructs his or her perceptions of self and others and influences how they interact with the world around them. For example, Bowlby argued if a child experiences 'good enough' parenting

whereby his or her needs are consistently met (e.g. fed when hungry, soothed when upset) he or she will develop a secure attachment with their caregiver. Over time the child will develop a positive sense of self worth and perceive his or her self as lovable and valuable. He or she will also develop a more trusting perception of those around them, viewing them as available, responsive and helpful. Children who have developed a secure attachment in early childhood are more likely to understand how to express themselves to have their needs met appropriately and have a socially constructed view that adults can be trusted and are responsive to their needs.

Children who have not had the opportunities to develop a secure attachment with an early caregiver (e.g. experienced trauma, loss, abuse or neglect) are likely to engage in a range of behaviours in an attempt to communicate or meet their own needs (e.g. attention seeking, hostility, becoming withdrawn) and have a lower self worth. Whilst they may seek attention from the adults around them indiscriminately, their lack of trust in those around them prevents them from forming a lasting positive relationship with adults. In other words they are likely to exhibit a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (Bomber, 2007, 2010; Geddes, 2005).

Moran (2010) highlighted similarities between the behaviour exhibited by children with Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and those with social and communication difficulties. Many of the behaviours she identified, including attention seeking, self-regulation difficulties, aggressive behaviours towards peers and staff, and poor emotional vocabulary, suggested that the lack of a secure attachment at an early age could have a significant bearing on the child's ability to socialise and communicate their feelings and needs appropriately. Within a therapeutic setting, Moran noted that that the main difference between the two groups was the ability for a child with RAD to form a relationship. She notes:

‘the children generally arrive with some ability to make a relationship with another person, albeit often in an idiosyncratic and inappropriate

way. Part of the therapeutic intervention was to directly address these issues, helping the youngsters to understand their own constructions of relationships, the way they may have been developed and become unhealthy skewed, and how they might change things so that their future relationships could be more successful and helpful' (Moran, 2010, p. 47).

For Moran (2010), behaviours are alleviated through the formation of a trusting and safe relationship with an adult so the child can reflect, make sense of their experiences and, with support, express their needs and find their own way forward. Both Bomber (2007, 2010) and Geddes (2005) call for the prioritisation of relationships in school and the need to reframe our understanding of behaviours and needs in terms of attachment. In doing so the child's behaviour is perceived as communicating an attachment need that can be appropriately understood and met.

#### Play and interaction with peers

Children develop a sense of awareness of social roles and the perceptions of others is through play. During role play, children take on the roles of others and familiarise themselves with the corresponding social conventions of how to act and how different people respond in different social situations. Interaction with peers helps children to develop key social competences like cooperation, turn taking, and developing and expressing a sense of empathy (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000).

In adolescence, friendships play a key role in the development of self. Many young people go through 'phases' where they try out different social identities in the process of constructing their idea of who they want and do not want to be. It is during adolescence that young people begin to develop more emotional independence from their caregivers, and higher-order aspects of friendships (e.g. trust, reciprocity and intimacy) are experienced and form the foundations of what one expects from future relationships (Smith and Cowie, 1988; Ericson, 1968).

Considering the importance of peer relationships, when a child or young person experiences bullying or rejection from his or her peer group, he or she may miss opportunities to develop key social competences or experience greater social anxiety. Although as Greco and Morris (2005) note, social anxiety may be a barrier to making friends in the first instance and be influenced by a lack of social skills. Interactions with peers in adolescence appears to be critical to the development of self-worth and future life status. In a 12 year study of 60 young adults who reported friendships or peer rejection during adolescence, Bagwell, Newcomb and Bukowski (1998) found that friendships in adolescence were associated with greater life success and enhanced future self-worth. Peer rejection was associated with psycho-pathological symptoms in later life. Although this suggests that friendships may be a key factor in predicting well-being in later life, it is possible that underlying psycho-pathological symptoms in adolescence may have been a barrier to making friends in adolescence and a key factor influencing life success and self-worth, rather than a consequence.

Given the importance of friendships in childhood, adolescence and adulthood, developing friendship skills are often the focus of both universal and targeted SEL interventions. At a universal level, SEL may be targeted at a whole-class level, developing children's ability to reflect on the importance of friendships, how it might feel to not have friends, and how they help each other (Newton, Taylor & Wilson, 1996). Similar work may be conducted at a targeted level (e.g. one-to-one or small groups) but there are several considerations one must make. For example, it may be that the individual work is helpful in teaching and practising social skills with an adult, and a small friendship group may enhance students' feelings of social acceptance (Derosier & Marcus, 2005). However, research by Fredrickson, Warren and Turner (2005) found that removing children from their class setting into smaller targeted friendship groups did not have the expected effect. Their research found that the target children did report greater feelings of

acceptance when they were in small groups. Conversely, in a different primary school population, McLaughlin (n.d.) found that the same friendship programme was attributed to positive changes in the target child's self-esteem and confidence. Both Fredrickson *et al.*, (2005) and McLaughlin (n.d.) note the importance of implementation factors as possible extraneous variables that may influence outcomes. The variation in findings on how effective friendship interventions lend support to Humphrey's (2013) assertions that practitioners must refrain from borrowing research from one intervention to support or refute the effects of another. Furthermore, implementation factors may play a key role in explaining variations in outcomes amongst SEL programmes.

### Culture influences

'Cultural beliefs and norms help interpret the acceptability of individual characteristics and the types and ranges of interactions and relationships that are likely or permissible' (Rubin, 1995, p. 611).

This has implications for SEL with regard to what behaviours are deemed 'concerning' and the subsequent responses by caregivers, practitioners and society.

Rubin (1995) reflects on different cultures' conceptualisations and responses to shyness or social inhibition. He notes that within a Western culture, trait or state shyness has been conceptualised as something that needs to be fixed. For example, he cites biological evidence that suggests that socially inhibited children experience higher cortisol levels, elevated heart rates and greater muscle tension than 'uninhibited toddlers' (Rubin, 1995, p. 611). Moreover, there is a general concern that a shy child suffers socially as he or she is reluctant to join in with his or her peers and engage in classroom activities. In contrast, shyness, in other non-Western countries, is conceptualised differently and responses to shyness are different accordingly. In China, socially inhibited behaviour is not viewed negatively. Unlike the competitive, individualised Western society, Chinese culture is considered collective and

being shy does not impact on group functioning. In fact, passivity is somewhat valued, as dominant, outspoken members of a group could damage a group's cohesiveness. Furthermore, children who are shy tend to be viewed as studious and independent. Chen, Rubin and Li (1999) suggest that in contrast with the literature that adds to a negative conceptualisation of shyness in Western cultures, research has shown that Chinese children who are considered socially inhibited have positive self-perceptions, good social relationships and high academic attainment.

Rubin (1995) argues that 'the very means by which people go about encouraging or discouraging the given behaviour may be culturally determined and defined. Thus in some cultures, the response to an aggressive act may be to explain to the child why the behaviour is unacceptable; in others, physical discipline may be the accepted norm; yet others, aggression may be ignored or perhaps reinforced' (Rubin, 1995, p. 612).

This has implications for SEL in terms of the types of behaviour that are perceived as concerning. Rubin (1995) highlighted that over half the world is not Western, thus our conceptualisation of what is or is not a social and emotional concern is likely to be a minority viewpoint. Shyness, for example, is not viewed as a worrying trait within Thai culture; instead, confidence is something that develops with age (Weisz, Suwanlert, Chaiyasit & Weiss, 1998).

Rubin (1995) states that cultures such as China are deemed more collective and the perceptions around social and emotional needs are passed from one generation to the next, whereas in Western culture, individualistic capitalism has persisted for generations. It may well be that rather than cultural differences leading to different ways of perceiving social and emotional needs, different cultures provide different experiences that impact on or influence children's and young people's perceptions of their social and emotional needs

In a project funded by the Leverhulme Trust, Dr. Helga Dittmar and Professor Robin Banerjee are currently exploring the effects of the materialistic Western society, and the ideals it projects on children's and young people's sense of identity and social and emotional well-being (Children's consumer culture project, n.d.).

Dittmar (1992) proposed that material goods have symbolic meaning, and ownership of such goods influences how we see ourselves and others. She gives the example of a child playing with a tea set and being told that she is 'nice' and 'generous' (Dittmar, 1992, p.84) and a boy who is told he is 'strong' and 'skilful' when playing with a toolset (Dittmar, 1992, p.86). These types of comments give symbolic meaning to the objects that represent personal qualities and attributes. Thus ownership of these items feed into the child's sense of identify and how he or she perceives him or her self and others. In the wider commercial world, it is common for advertisers to target audiences by attaching symbolic meaning to the product which 'sells' an identity or lifestyle to the consumer which they buy into by purchasing the products (Kajula, 2009).

Research suggests that materialism has a detrimental impact on emotional well-being. In three longitudinal studies of adolescents and early adults, Kasser *et al* (2014) found that placing value on material goods has a negative impact on well-being. Moreover they found that a reduction in materialism was associated with a greater sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness whereas those who placed more value on material goods reported feeling less autonomy, competence and relatedness. The authors theorise that when people become less orientated towards materialistic pursuits they feel more satisfied with themselves and have greater well-being. However, it could be argued that materialism is greater in people who feel less satisfied with themselves in the first instance. For example, people may buy the product in the hope that owning it will make them feel better about themselves.

Advertising has also been link to body dissatisfaction (Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004). The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders assert that almost 70 percent of girls aged between 11 and 18

years old believed that 'magazine images influence their ideals of a perfect body' (Pearson, 2011, para 4). Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2004) measured body dissatisfaction, mood and appearance comparison in adolescents after watching advertisements with an ideal 'thin women' (female condition) or a 'muscular man' (male condition). Both males and females reported an increase in negative mood and body comparison after watching the adverts. Although body comparison was greater in females and those who reported greater investment in their appearance. Exposure to the 'ideal thin women' increased body dissatisfaction in females. These findings are even more important when we consider the negative association between body dissatisfaction and self-esteem (Furnham, Badmin & Sneade, 2002; Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan & Eisenberg, 2006). Although arguably, correlation is not causation and low self-esteem may be a predictor of body dissatisfaction.

The 21st century has also seen the rise of the internet and, in particular social media. The aim of social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram is to help people stay in touch and share information like interests, opinions and personal events. In February 2014 Facebook had an estimate 1.23 billion users worldwide. Whilst western capitalist countries have embraced these developments, some countries such as North Korea, China and Syria have restricted the use of such websites within the population (Kirkland, 2014).

In the UK, Ofcom (2014) estimated that children between the age of 6-11 years old spent an estimated 10.5 hours per week on the internet. Children between the ages of 12 and 15 years of age spent an average of 17.2 hours per week on the internet. Both groups prefer social media to TV and Facebook was the most commonly used site, accessible from PCs, Tablets and mobile phones.

Whilst some researchers highlight the benefits of Facebook as a means of increasing social connectedness, increasing life satisfaction and reducing anxiety and depression in adults (Greive, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan & Marrington (2013). Others have aired a more critical view of its impact on young people. For example, ChildLine (2013) reported that they received an 87% increase in calls from young people in relation to cyberbullying in 2012/13 (4500 children) and both Welsh and English Governments have issued non-statutory advice to schools and agencies

working with children adolescents on how to deal with online bullying (Department of Education, 2014; Welsh Governmnet, 2011).

Facebook has also been linked to a phenomena call Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) defined as

‘a pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent. FoMO is characterized by the desire to stay continually connected with what others are doing’ (Przybylski a, Murayama, DeHaan & Gladwell, 2013, p. 1841).

Facebook provides people with a resources to create an online identity and share information about themselves and their life (e.g. having fun with friends and family, engaging in fun activties, pictures of things they have bought etc.) Considering the theories and research around materilaism and identity, it may be hypothesised that the information people share on social media has symbolic meaning (e.g. I am happy, I am loved, I do fun things, I am fun to be around etc) and people may be selective in the information they present in order to create a specific identity. In a study of 584 Facebook users, Krasnova, Wenninger, Wennionger, Widjaja and Buxmann (2013) found that passive social browsing (i.e. looking through the posts and pictures of people you have infrequent direct communication with) led to greater feelings of envy and life dissatisfaction. Moreover, Kross *et al* (2013) found that the more time people spent on Facebook, the less satisfied they were with their lives and the worse they felt about themselves. As measures of self esteem were not taken as a baseline before exposure to Facebook, the direction of the relationship between self-esteem and Facebook cannot be acertained. Furthermore, the study focused on adults so caution must be taken when applying to young people. Depite these limitations, together these studies raise some interesting hypotheses around the influence of social media in today's culture in relation to identity and social and emotional well-being.

## **SEL in schools**

As cases of social, emotional and behavioural needs have increased, so has the application of SEL programmes in schools. There are several ways that

SEL can be implemented within the school environment. This next section explores the different types of SEL and presents considerations from the literature on implementation issues.

Humphrey (2013) conducted a comprehensive review of the literature and formulated a taxonomy of SEL which gives a clearer understanding of how such programmes are implemented.

First of all, Humphrey (2013) highlights two key distinctions of SEL programmes. Universal interventions are preventative and delivered on a whole-school basis. They tend to be perceived as more inclusive because they are delivered to all children within the class or school, rather than singling out a few children or a specific child.

In contrast, targeted programmes are usually reactive to current concerns about a group of children or the specific needs of one child (Humphrey, 2013). Wilson and Lipsey (2007) argue that the outcomes for targeted interventions tend to be greater possibly because they are more intensive and/or the need is so great; a noticeable improvement is measurable at the end of treatment.

Both universal and targeted interventions can vary in terms of their method of delivery. For example, some programmes are run as a whole-school initiative and the principles of these influence the school policies and procedures. Others are taught in class, in groups or one-to-one using scripted manuals and sets of resources. Some will rely more on a flexible approach where the facilitator will be responsive to the specific needs of the group as they arise; others will follow scripted text. They also may vary in terms of how much parental and community involvement there is (Humphrey, 2013).

In relation to aggressive and disruptive behaviours, Wilson and Lipsey (2007) noted that the modality of SEL can vary (e.g. behavioural strategies,

cognitive strategies, social skills training), but typically, for universal interventions, they achieve similar outcomes. For targeted interventions, behavioural strategies were found to have greater impact on behaviours. This would suggest that with regards to aggressive and disruptive behaviours, environment consequences (e.g. rewards and consequences) are more effective than talking therapies and skills based training. It is important to reflect on Humphrey's (2013) assertions that relying on the evidence for one programme to justify the use of another is problematic. Considering this with Wilson and Lispey's (2007) findings, it may be argued whilst behavioural strategies were effective for targeted intervention for aggression and disruptive behaviours; they are not the most effective intervention for other social and emotional difficulties. For example Craig and McKay (2005) found that the Homunculi Approach, a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) programme for a child with social and communication difficulties, was an effective targeted approach that reduced one child's anxiety, depression and stress while enhancing his social competence as measured by standardised tools.

### **Why is implementation important?**

Variability in implementation can invalidate outcomes and lead to a type III error. This type of error occurs when poor implementation invalidates the conclusions drawn.

Domitrovich and Greenberg (2000) note that including details of implementation not only helps to evaluate the validity and reliability of the results, but may provide helpful information that can help future facilitators prepare for any difficulties and enhance future programme delivery.

### **Implementation of SEL in schools**

Humphrey (2013) suggests five factors that influence the implementation of SEL programmes that should be considered prior to programme delivery. These are pre-planning and foundations, implementation and support systems, the implementation environment, implementer factors, and programme characteristics.

These factors are important when evaluating programme effectiveness as they can be considered extraneous variables that may influence the outcome of the programme. They may vary across environments and as they may account for variance in the effectiveness of any given SEL programme, contributing to a type III error, they should be controlled for, or at the very least reported on, post hoc.

### **Pre-planning and foundations**

The planning for any intervention offers an opportunity to consider what type of SEL programme will be used and allows time to match this to the desired outcomes. Humphrey (2013) draws on research by Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk and Zins (2005) noted that the school's underlying attitudes, beliefs and expectations at the beginning of an intervention are pivotal to the intervention they choose and how well it is received in the school. For example, all members of staff should be aware of a need for change and amenable to the change process. Ideally staff should feel they have the ability (e.g. skills, time, resources) to bring about a change and the intervention should be prioritised and implemented as it is intended (Greenberg *et al.*, 2005).

### **Implementation support systems**

At the beginning of any intervention, training should be delivered on how to implement the programme. Humphrey (2013) notes that SEL training can vary considerably amongst programmes in terms of modality, teaching

methods, duration and frequency. As such this variation may play a role in terms of how well the programme is implemented. In the case of the ELSA programme (Emotional Learning Support Assistant Programme) in the UK, Osborne and Burton (2014) found that ELSAs perceived termly supervision (with their peers and an educational psychologist) a useful support system to problem solve collaboratively enhancing their confidence to support the children they worked with.

### **Implementation environment**

Humphrey (2013) notes that the implementation of SEL interventions are likely to be influenced by the management team within the school. For example, if the head teacher is enthusiastic about SEL then it is likely the intervention will be prioritised, a shared vision will pervade throughout the school and resources will be provided. Alternatively, any scepticism about SEL may lead to other initiatives taking priority, reducing the time and resources allocated. Humphrey (2013) drew on research by Gotterfredson and Gottfredson (2002) that explored a range of factors that may influence implementation. These included the mode of delivery, the content of the programme, and staff expectations. They found that leadership support had the strongest correlation with the quality of implementation.

### **Implementer factors**

Humphrey (2013) argues that that the facilitator's teaching ability and his or her own level of social and emotional development was likely to be pivotal to their ability to teach SEL programmes. Moreover in his earlier research he found that the implementers' conceptualisation of their role was an important factor that could affect implementation. For example, if a teacher felt SEL was out with the scope of their job, they were more likely to be resistant to implementing the programme (Humphrey, Lendrum and Wigelsworth, 2010).

That said, Humphrey (2013) points out that the importance of ‘implementer factors’ may be limited. In an evaluation of the HEAD start programme, Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Jones and DeRousie (2009) found that implementer’s characteristics were unrelated to the quality of implementation. However, considering Humphrey’s (2013) original assertions that one should avoid borrowing research for one programme to justify another and the variation of different types of programmes available (e.g. behavioural, cognitive, skills based), it may be argued that ‘implementer factors’ are more important to some programmes than others.

### **Programme characteristics**

Programme characteristics refer to the specifics of each programme e.g. who they are targeted for (e.g. groups, individuals, age), whether the resources are scripted, whether the materials are supplied with the programme etc. Humphrey (2013) summarised his findings from earlier evaluations of the SEAL programme in England, noting that giving the competing demands on teachers’ time, it is beneficial to provide clear guidance on how to deliver each session and provide set resources and materials. Otherwise, the implementation of the programme is likely to experience delays, and possibly, be discontinued. However, this finding may be limited to specific SEL programmes. For example, the ELSA programme website notes the following.

“The ELSA then needs to think about an interesting way to achieve the objective and the resources that they will need. It is strongly recommended that games and activities should be included rather than relying upon worksheets” (“elsanetwork”, n.d. para 3).

In the case of the ELSA programme the relationship between the child and the ELSA is considered a key part of the change process and should help the child develop emotional literacy. Considering this, it is plausible that programme characteristics such as scripted manuals, session planners and set materials may be more relevant to SEL programmes that are skills based

and less important to SEL programmes that focus around developing relationships. This is an area that requires further exploration.

It is clear that there are a variety of factors that could influence implementation and it seems that it is ecological in nature; in other words, SEL initiatives span different systems within the school. For example, school leadership can influence implementation at a macro level, the ethos of the school and available resources can influence implementation at a school level, and the qualities, characteristics and beliefs of the implementer and the children involved can influence implementation at an individual level (Humphrey, 2013; Domitrovich *et al.*, 2008). What is more, whilst each factor on its own may affect implementation, it is also likely that they overlap to have a potentially stronger positive or negative influence.

The way in which implementation is measured may have inherent limitations. On the one hand, given what is known in relation to different aspects of implementation, quantitative questionnaires can be designed and distributed to a large number of stakeholders exploring factors like whether they completed sessions as stated in the manual, how often the young person attended, rating the leadership in the school or the characteristics of the facilitators, etc. (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002; Domitrovich *et al.*, 2008). However, it may be argued that exploring implementation issues in this way assumes that each SEL programme carries with it the same or similar implementation issues. Without the inclusion of qualitative questions, a purely quantitative method poses the risk of excluding implementation aspects that may be of importance to a specific programme. It may also be argued that qualitative exploration of the possibility of implementation issues in relation to any given programme would help to protect against type III error, in that implementation issues relating to one programme would not be generalised to another. Although it does seem that there are general implementation issues that span across programmes (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor &

Schellinger, 2011; Magg, 2006), it may be argued that this list should not be treated as exhaustive.

## **SEL and educational outcomes**

So far, this review has presented an operational definition of SEL and different theories of social and emotional development. It has also outlined different ways SEL is applied in school and considered some of the difficulties with implementation that may have led to a type III error in relation to effectiveness.

The next section of the review will explore more closely the links between SEL and educational outcomes. It will look at universal and targeted interventions separately, because universal interventions tend to be preventative whilst targeted interventions are intensive and change driven (Humphrey, 2013; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

### **Universal interventions**

In a meta-analysis of 213 studies, Durlak *et al.*,(2011) calculated the average effect sizes (ES) between a range of universal SEL programmes and social, emotional and behaviour outcomes as well as academic performance.

One limitation of probability theory is type I error. Hypothesis testing using probability theory denotes that a larger sample is more likely to lead to a significant difference between variables. Hence the null hypothesis could be rejected when the measurable difference actually occurred by chance. Effect sizes overcome this limitation by indicating the size of effect of one variable on another. Effect sizes can vary from 0 to 1, with 0 being no effect. Cohen proposed that an ES of 0.2 is weak, 0.4 is moderate and 0.8 is high.

Returning to Durlak et al (2011) meta-analysis, the largest reported effect size was in relation to social and emotional skills (i.e. identifying emotions, conflict resolution, interpersonal problem solving) ( $d = 0.57$ ). Smaller effect sizes were reported for attitude to self and others ( $d = 0.23$ ), positive social behaviour ( $d = 0.24$ ), conduct problems ( $d = 0.22$ ), emotional distress (i.e. anxiety, depression) ( $d = 0.24$ ) and academic performance ( $d = 0.27$ ). Follow-up data was available for 15% of the studies six months after the interventions had ceased. The results indicated that the ESs were significant for all outcomes: social and emotional skills ( $d = 0.26$ ), attitude to self and others ( $d = 0.11$ ), positive social behaviour ( $d = 0.17$ ), conduct problems ( $d = 0.14$ ), emotional distress ( $d = 0.15$ ) and academic performance ( $d = 0.32$ ).

However, there is much debate in relation to how large an effect size needs to be to reflect a noticeable change in the real world. Hattie (2009) noted that an effect size of at least 0.4 is required for a noticeable change in academic performance, whereas Forness *et al.*, (1997) argued that typically only effect sizes of 0.60 and above are proof of effectiveness. Considering this and Durlak *et al.*'s (2011) findings, SEL seems to produce a noticeable change in students' general social and emotional skills but the positive effects on other outcome measures (i.e. attitudes to self, positive social behaviours, conduct problems, emotional distress and academic performance) were unlikely to be noticeable in the real world, despite being statistically significant. Moreover, the changes were not sustained and noticeable changes to the students' social and emotional skills were not evident at the six-month follow up.

Moreover, there are several limitations of Durlak *et al.*'s (2011) study that should be considered. Firstly, 53% of the studies in Durlak *et al.*'s (2011) meta-analysis relied on children's self-reports as a measure of outcome. Whilst accessing the child's reality of events may be considered a strength of the study, consideration has to be given to the level of each child's social awareness and receptive and expressive language skills. These skills

develop with age and consideration must be given to the validity and reliability of the responses of very young children.

Furthermore, there may be an issue of confirmation bias. Humphrey (2013) raises a key distinction between '*testable*' and '*measurable*' social and emotional skills. Humphrey notes that children may report changes in testable behaviours (i.e. on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your ability to...) but show no significant changes in *measurable* behaviours (e.g. child is shown a face and asked to name the emotion). Whilst *testable* measures of skills tend to be associated with positive SEL outcomes, *measurable* outcome measures may be a more objective tool for assessing a change in the target skill (Humphrey, 2013). It is plausible that the self-report measures of children included in Durlak *et al.*'s (2011) meta-analysis may have wanted to assert positive changes and/or, depending on how questions were asked, there may have been a tendency to give confirmatory responses. Testing for key measurable skills may have produced different post hoc results.

Durlak *et al.*, (2011) also reported that 24% of studies used measures with poor or no measures of reliability. Thus the differences in pre and post measures could be attributed to the lack of reliability of the measure rather than the effectiveness of the programme. Furthermore, 49% of the studies did not report any validity measures for the assessment tools they used. Considering this, there is no way of knowing if the measures were measuring the outcome stated or tapping into a different construct.

Lastly, almost half of the studies reviewed did not include details on implementation. Without a clear understanding of how each programme was implemented, we cannot draw reliable and credible conclusions on the effectiveness of any of the programmes. For example, it is plausible that programmes designed to enhance social and emotional skills had higher implementation quality than those targeting conduct problems. Therefore any lack of effectiveness may be attributed to implementation rather than the

SEL programme. A comparison of the implementation quality for each programme included in the study would control for the possibility of type III error.

### **Targeted interventions**

Targeted interventions are usually aimed at children who are exhibiting behaviours that lead educationalists to think that they are experiencing social and/or emotional difficulties to a greater degree than other children.

Targeted interventions differ from universal interventions in that they tend to be more intensive and change driven, and focus on a small group of children who are considered to have similar needs, or an individual child.

Wilson and Lipsey (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 249 studies, both school-based universal and targeted SEL programmes, and found that they had a positive impact on aggressive and disruptive behaviours (mean effect size range 0.20–0.35). However, they found that the effect of SEL programmes on aggression and disruptive behaviour was mediated by the quality of implementation and that ‘school might benefit from considering the ease of implementation when selecting programs and focusing on implementation quality once programs are in place’ (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007, p.12).

In relation to targeted interventions, Wilson and Lipsey (2007) found that the most effective programmes used behaviour strategies (e.g. rewards, token economies and contingency contracts) rather than cognitive-based methods, social skills training or counselling. When outcomes were compared for targeted one-to-one sessions and small group settings, the one-to-one sessions fared better. Wilson and Lipsey (2007) suggest that this may be because individual sessions are targeted towards a child with considerable needs and therefore there is greater room for improvement (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). Alternatively, it may be that the type of work conducted in one-to-one sessions (e.g. skills based) differs from the type of work completed in group

sessions (e.g. group discussion and reflection). It may be argued that it is during one-to-one sessions that the facilitator can focus on developing a key skill, rather than facilitating a reflective discussion that is more likely to deviate from scripted manual in order to meet the needs of different children in the group and remain relevant to their real-life experiences. There may also be more opportunities for children to practise skills when working one-to-one with an adult, or indeed the relationship that forms between the facilitator and the child during one-to-one sessions may be a factor in the change process (Moran, 2010; Geddes, 2005; Bomber, 2007, 2010).

However, there are several limitations of Wilson and Lipsey's (2007) review. Firstly, the results must be considered with caution due to the lack of reported reliability and validity of the measures used in some of the studies. The lack of test-retest reliability of some of the measures may account for pre and post changes in participants' self-reports. Furthermore, the absence of data on the validity of measures means there is no way of knowing if each measure assessed the construct it purported to measure. Almost half of the studies included in the review were unpublished. This avoided the dangers of publication bias (Higgins & Green, 2011) but the rigour of the research included in the analysis could not be attested to as it has not undergone an independent peer review. Given that over a third of the studies reported difficulties with implementation, a type III error cannot be ruled out.

Magg (2006) conducted a reviewed of 13 meta-analyses that explored the impact of social skills training on students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) and presented several considerations that question the conclusions and interpretation of the results reported in some studies.

Firstly, Magg (2006) argued that there seemed to be a tendency for studies to report significant effect sizes without considering the 'real-world' noticeable effect. As mentioned above, Forness *et al.*, (1997) argued that effect sizes over 0.60 reflect a real-world change, whereas Hattie (2009)

argues that a minimal effect size of 0.40 is necessary for noticeable change. This has considerable implications for how we interpret results and manage the expectations of stakeholders when they buy into SEL programmes based on beliefs around their effectiveness.

Magg (2006) points out that the variety of methods used in social skills training has implications for the generalisability of the results from any meta-analysis. For example, to purport that social skills training is effective ignores the possible variations that arise from the modality of delivery e.g. 'coaching, modelling, rehearsal, feedback, reinforcement, goal setting, instructions, discussion, peer training, problem solving, self-instruction, self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-reinforcement' (Magg, 2006, p. 8). Wilson & Lipsey (2007) found that whilst different methods (e.g. behavioural, cognitive, peer mentoring, social skills or counselling) did not impact on the outcome measures for universal SEL programmes, behavioural techniques led to greater outcomes in targeted SEL interventions.

It was also purported by Magg (2006) that a lack of participant information could have a considerable impact on the results. Children vary in terms of their difficulties and some researchers have already hypothesised that outcomes are greater when there is more room for improvement (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). If variations in outcome measures are related to the level of need, drawing conclusions from studies that have not considered this could lead to misguided interpretation of the results due to type I or type II errors.

Furthermore, Magg (2006) points out that targeted interventions are often limited to four to six weeks and questions the arbitrary decision that this is enough sessions to show a 'satisfactory' level of sustainable change that is generalised across different real-world situations. Periodic reviews would be necessary to ascertain this.

In 2003, Fredrickson and Turner explored the effectiveness of a Circle of Friends (CoF) group for children with special educational needs (SEN). They

found that whilst CoF was effective in increasing social acceptance of the focus child amongst his or her peers, the focus child's perception of social acceptance and his or her behavioural conduct did not change; nor did the teacher's ratings of the child's behavioural conduct or the teacher's perception of the general ethos of the classroom learning environment. Although CoF did lead to more social acceptance by the target child's peer group within the larger class setting, Fredrickson and Turner (2003) acknowledged that their measures may have lacked enough sensitivity to measure a change in the teacher or target child's ratings.

However, in 2005, Fredrickson, Warren and Turner monitored the effectiveness of CoF overtime and found that whilst social acceptance increased and social rejection decreased immediately after the initial whole-class CoF meeting (i.e. raising students' awareness of the importance of friendship, what they can do to support the target child), over the 6-week small group intervention that followed and for the rest of the school term (18 week follow-up), the target child's social acceptance began to decrease and social rejection from his or her peer group increased.

The results suggest that social acceptance was achieved when a universal whole-class approach was implemented but when the intervention moved towards a more targeted approach, i.e. working in small groups outside the classroom, the effect was reversed. By exploring the impact of the programme over time, Fredrickson *et al.*, (2005) were able to highlight how different approaches lead to different outcomes and the importance of matching interventions to the child's needs.

However, Fredrickson *et al.*, (2005) conceded that their conclusions were based on a small sample size and power calculations suggested a larger sample was required to enhance the reliability of the results. There was also some indication that a type III error may have occurred. The programme was initially implemented by an assistant psychologist but follow-up actions were agreed with the class teacher. As there was no measure of how well

these recommendations were followed during the follow-up term, differences in implementation quality may have influenced the results.

For Moran (2010), social and emotional behaviours are alleviated through the formation of a trusting and safe relationship with an adult so the child can reflect, make sense of his or her experiences and, with support, express his or her needs and generate his or her own coping mechanisms. Similarly, views on the role of attachment and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties have been proposed by Geddes (2005) and Bomber (2007; 2010).

This has implications for targeted SEL programmes, as it is likely the child or young person will form an attachment with the implementer as they work closely together on a one-to-one basis. Some researchers deemed the relationship that forms between the facilitator and the client just as important, if not more, than therapy itself as without a relationship, change cannot occur (Green, 2006; Safran & Muran, 2006).

Buckland, Rose and Greaves (2005) explored the experiences of school nurses, parents and children involved in a pilot programme to enhance emotional literacy via universal and targeted interventions. Several relationship factors were highlighted as contributing to the effectiveness of the programme, including how approachable the nurses were and the non-threatening, confidential environment they created. Similarly, Carnwell and Baker (2007) explored students', facilitators' and head teachers' perceptions of the Student Assistance Programme (SAP) that was implemented in small groups within 12 schools. The aim of the programme was to enhance students' emotional literacy and social competence. Students reported that key environmental and relational factors were pivotal to the programme's perceived success. These included developing a trusting relationship with each other and the facilitators, and having a safe place to talk confidentially about their feelings and experiences. Like Moran (2010), both studies highlight the perceived importance of the relationships that develop during targeted SEL interventions.

In both cases, Buckland *et al.*, (2005) and Carnwell and Baker (2007) raised important implementation considerations, including time pressures and unrealistic expectations of staff (Buckland *et al.*, 2005) and the availability of resources to sustain the programme over time (Carnwell & Baker, 2007).

Overall, there is evidence that links SEL to positive changes in social, emotional and behavioural outcomes and academic attainment (e.g. Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). However, limitations relating to validity, reliability and the risk of type I, II and III errors due to research design and the absence of information on implementation difficulties have been noted (e.g. Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007; Magg, 2006; Humphrey, 2013).

In addition to furthering our understanding of implementation issues, qualitative research exploring users' experiences of SEL programmes have also identified the importance of the relationship that forms between the facilitator and the client. This supports Moran's (2010) assertions that the child–therapist relationship may form the basis with which the child goes on to challenge his or her conceptualisations of how they interact with others or respond to events in the future. It also mirrors research finding from the field of psychotherapy whereby the therapeutic relationship is thought to be the most salient factor within the change process (Green, 2006; Safran & Muran, 2006).

However, research exploring the role of relationship between facilitators and users of SEL programmes is scarce and there appears to be a gap in our understanding of how important this relationship may be. The importance of the child–facilitator relationship to the change process would carry with it several implications, including identifying what factors are conducive in cultivating a trusting and supportive relationship, and how we support its development. The traditional view of SEL is that it is skills-based and can be taught (CASEL, 2015). This definition fits with the use of scripted manuals

and resources. If the relationship was deemed more, or as important as teaching skills, to the development of social and emotional learning then this may have implications for programme development, evaluating change and the support that is offered to both students and facilitators. For example, the goal of an intervention may be to form a trusting relationship, explore the child's reality of events and support them to find their own solutions, or it may be skills-based and focused primarily on learning new skills with the relationship as a by-product of this process. Alternatively, it may be a combination of both. The role of the child-facilitator relationship adds an additional complexity to SEL and may be viewed as another factor affecting implementation or, indeed, implementation factors may be conducive to or discourage the development of a trusting relationship.

Qualitative research is needed to explore facilitators' and students' experiences of targeted SEL programmes to develop a greater understanding of their experiences of social and emotional learning and what they deem to be the most important aspects of the change process.

## **ELSA programme**

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme was developed by Sheila Burton, an educational psychologist. Since it began, the ELSA programme has been rolled out across several local authorities in England and Wales. When an educational psychology service (EPS) begins to implement the ELSA programme, they recruit primary and secondary schools within the local authority that want to enhance the emotional literacy of students in their school. The EPS provides six days of training to learning support assistants (LSAs) from each school, covering a range of topics including bereavement, social skills, self-esteem, anger management, and friendships. Training is also delivered on practical skills including active listening, working with puppets, social stories and therapeutic stories. After

completing the programme the LSAs are called ELSAs – emotional learning support assistants.

During training, ELSAs are introduced to a variety of resources that can be bought from independent retailers which may help them in their role, as well as given a course manual that provides information on how to identify children's social and emotional needs as well as theoretical background on difficulties such as self-esteem and anger. The manual also contains practical suggestions and resources that ELSAs may find useful for session planning, implementation and evaluation (Shotten & Burton, 2011).

After training, the ELSAs work independently with a child or a group of children in their school. The ELSA is responsible for identifying targets, planning and delivering sessions, and evaluating outcomes. This may be done in collaboration with the child, his or her caregiver and/or the teacher but there is no prescriptive method for doing this.

To remain registered as an ELSA, the ELSA must attend termly group supervision sessions with other ELSAs and an educational psychologist. The aim of supervision is to guide the ELSAs in his or her reflection of his or her practice and provide ongoing emotional and practical support from the EP service. Further training opportunities are also offered at the discretion of the local authority and the ELSA network in the form of conferences and additional training days (e.g. counselling skills).

The ELSA network defines the goal of an ELSA's support is as follows:

'ELSA support is about developing a respectful relationship in which the young person is enabled to think about their situation without feeling judged or criticised. It is intended to be short-term purposeful support, usually to help develop new skills or coping strategies that enable the pupil to experience greater success. In order to know when an intervention should end, ELSAs need to work to specific programme aims that are realistic. These need to be stated clearly enough to know whether or not they have been achieved. Ideally they should be achievable within a school term. Sessions are planned with

objectives that build towards the programme aims.’ (“elsanetwork”, n.d., para 1).

The importance of the ELSA–child relationship is emphasised within the ELSA programme. Relational factors such as acceptance and positive regard are deemed important factors in the development of a therapeutic relationship along with empathy (Rogers, 1959). There is also a focus on SEL with reference to developing ‘new skills and coping strategies’. However, the ELSA network also points out that sessions should:

‘... not be about teaching or telling them [children] what to do, but about facilitating greater self-awareness in pupils and helping them to reach their own solutions and coping strategies.’ (“elsanetwork”, n.d., para 3).

This implies that SEL occurs from forming a relationship with the child and supporting him or her to find his or her own way forward. This mirrors Moran’s (2010) assertions. However, the definition above also states that an ELSA programme is intended to be implemented over a term. Reiterating a point raised by Magg (2006), it is unclear how this timeline is ascertained and whether it is long enough to form a trusting relationship and see a real-world sustainable change. If the premise of ELSA is on developing a relationship over time rather than teaching a prescribed set of tools, then does one term really suffice for the child or young person to develop his or her self-awareness and find his or her own solutions and coping strategies? Moreover, if the programme is reliant on the child developing a sense of self-awareness, does this have implications for the age appropriateness of the programme and its implementation in schools? These questions remain unanswered.

It seems that if the objective is to form a relationship with the child, then there is broad scope for how the ELSA structures sessions (e.g. talking, handicraft activities, playing games). Although it could be argued that these activities in themselves allow the child to develop and practise appropriate social skills (e.g. turn taking, listening), it does have implications for how ELSAs

approach casework – how long they set aside for building a rapport and clarifying key change issues, leaving enough time to tailor sessions to meet the child’s needs. If forming a relationship is a key component of the change process then consideration also has to be given to how sessions are brought to a close and what support is offered to the child when sessions end, and they no longer spend as much time as before with the ELSA.

It may be that ELSA sessions are the beginning of an ongoing process whereby the child develops self-awareness and explores his or her constructs around relationships and events with an adult he or she trusts. In doing so, he or she may gradually learn to cope with life events and learn to express emotions in a culturally appropriate way. Harris (2010a; 2010b) reported that in excess of 160 students in two schools had informal contact with an ELSA after sessions had ended. This suggests that the ELSA–child relationship may in itself become a coping strategy for the young person. This in turn has implications for how the ELSA programme is implemented over time to encourage and maintain sustainable changes and also how educational psychologists can best support ELSAs when supporting a greater number of children with varying difficulties. There may be more scope for training focusing not only on how relationships develop, but also how they change and how this could mean ELSAs support children on an ongoing longer basis.

Although very little is understood about ELSAs’ and students’ experiences of the ELSA programme, evaluations published by local authorities (LAs) suggest that the programme is linked to positive changes in students’ social and emotional well-being and their behaviour in school. However, more independent reviews are needed to validate these findings as research is often conducted by the implementers of the programme (LA) or the programme authors, thus it may be argued that they are not free from hidden agendas and experimenter bias. A fuller review of the ELSA programme will follow in section two of this thesis.

## Rationale

This literature review has highlighted the growing concerns in society that there is a need to support young people's social and emotional development (UNICEF, 2007; BBC, 2007, 2012; DfES, 2013; Welsh Government, 2014). Whilst some have argued that schools are best placed to do this, given their central role in children and young people's lives (Greenberg, 2010), others have argued that the inclusion of SEL in schools is ill-conceived and distracts from the underlying reasons that may be influencing students' emotional well-being (e.g. breakdown of families, poverty) (Craig, 2007).

SEL is of particular interest to schools as it has been linked to better academic and behavioural outcomes in education (Durlak *et al.*, 2011; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007). However, some have called into question the impact of SEL on students' social and emotional well-being, given the disparity between what is considered statistical significance and what warrants a real life observable change (Hattie, 2009; Forness *et al.*, 1997).

There are also more recent claims that involvement in SEL programmes may have a detrimental effect on students' behaviours. In a qualitative study of 12 to 14 year old children's experiences of a targeted SEL programme, Evans, Scourfield and Murphy (2014) found that being labelled as having social and emotional difficulties enhanced student's status with peers. Involvement in a targeted friendship group provided young people with a forum for "bragging' about and reinforcing anti-school activities, leading to deviancy amplification" (Evans *et al.*, 2014, p. 1). This study highlights the importance of talking to young people about their experiences to gain a greater understanding of why some programmes may not be effective and provide useful information that may help support young people in future. For example, (i) it may be more useful to target the underlying reasons of why a young person may present with social and emotional difficulties (Craig, 2007), and/ or (ii) SEL may be less about teaching skills, working through scripted worksheets or lesson plans and more about building a trusting

relationships with young people, to engage and empower them in their own change process, enhancing them to develop their own coping strategies and solutions (Moran, 2010; Geddes, 2005; Bomber, 2007, 2010).

The consequences of type I, II and III errors are well documented in psychological research (Robson, 1993; Haslam and McGarty, 1998; Humphrey, 2013; Huynh, 2005). Humphrey (2013) draws attention to the particular relevance of type III error when considering evaluations of SEL programmes. Humphrey (2013) notes that many programmes fall under the broad term of SEL and each programme may target different needs, be taught in different ways, be applied at a targeted and/or universal level and may be influenced by a range of implementation factors (e.g. leadership, implementer characteristics, variations in facilitator training). In light of these variations it is important to consider the differences in how different SEL programmes are implemented before generalising from the evaluation of one programme to support or refute another.

Humphrey (2013) argued that focusing only on outcomes and not exploring the experiences of those implementing a programme can lead to interventions being deemed ineffective when in fact they are not implemented as intended.

To date we know very little about the experiences of ELSAs and the children they work with. It is the intention of this thesis to explore the experiences of those implementing the ELSA programme and the students who are in receipt of it, in order to gain a greater understanding of their experiences. At present, we know what training is delivered to ELSAs and the types of resources that are recommended, but on the whole, ELSAs work autonomously to implement the programme in school and little is understood as to how they experience the programme. There is also a scarcity of research exploring students' experiences of SEL programmes. This research differs from previous research exploring ELSAs' experience as it is independent. At the time of the research, the author was not involved in the

training or supervision of ELSAs. Furthermore the qualitative method will allow both ELSAs and children to give their views of the ELSA programme without being guided by underlying assumptions about their experiences.

A recurring theme from the ELSA network is the emphasis on the importance of the ELSA–child relationship. It is suggested that it is salient to the change process. Moran (2010), Geddes (2005) and Bomber (2007; 2010) all highlight the key role adults can play in supporting young people to develop self-awareness, express their emotions and find their own solutions. However, there has been no research exploring ELSAs' and children's conceptualisation of the importance of the relationship that forms and factors that may encourage or discourage its development. This research will not ask ELSAs or children directly about their relationship; rather, they will be asked to talk about their experiences of the ELSA programme and what they perceive to be the most salient aspects of the programme.

Another interesting aspect is the way in which ELSA outcomes are perceived by ELSAs and children. Burton, Osborne and Norgate (2010) noted that whilst teachers observed a change in pupils' emotional literacy at the end of ELSA sessions, there was no change in the students' responses. Whilst Burton *et al.*, (2010) argued that students may not have been unaware of how they had changed; it could be argued that quantitative measures were not sensitive enough to measure changes in the children's perceptions. A qualitative study may enhance our understanding of how children perceive their experience of ELSA, what changes – if any – they perceive, and whether these changes are sustainable when sessions end. A qualitative approach may not only enhance our understanding but also highlight areas for future research.

It is proposed that understanding ELSAs' and students' experiences of the ELSA programme would be useful in broadening our current understanding of the ELSA programme and how it is perceived by those who facilitate and use it, as well as offering key insights into how the programme is

implemented in schools. These findings will be likely to have implications for how psychologists conceptualise the role of the ELSA, the experiences of children who use the service, and the training and support psychologists provide.



**Doctorate in Educational Psychology Professional Training  
Programme**

**A qualitative study of ELSAs' and children's  
experiences of the ELSA programme.**

**Student Name:** Sharon McEwen

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**Part Two:** Research Article

## **Abstract**

Emotional literacy is the ability to understand, express and regulate ones emotions and recognise the emotions of others. It falls under the broader term social and emotional learning (SEL). The 'ELSA programme' is a intervention where one or more teaching assistants within a school are trained in emotional literacy and provide intensive targeted emotional literacy support to a young person or group of young people. This study explored the experiences of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) (n=8) and the young people they worked with (n=7) using a semi structure interview. A thematic analysis revealed that 'relationships' seemed to be an important aspect of both ELSAs and children's experiences of the ELSA programme and pivotal to the change process. It seemed that the child-ELSA relationship was viewed by children as a coping mechanism in itself that children draw on to a varying degree after formal sessions have ended. Factors influencing the formation of this relationship were also identified. For ELSAs these included ELSA qualities, self-confidence and implementation factors. For children these included the qualities of the ELSA, confidentiality and sessions being perceived as fun and enjoyable. The results are discussed with reference to relevant research and the implications in relation to the implementation of the ELSA programme and the support offered by educational psychologists are summarised.

## **Introduction**

Emotional literacy is the ability to understand, express and regulate one's emotions and recognise the emotions of others. It falls under the broader term 'social and emotional learning' (SEL).

## The ELSA Programme

'ELSA' is an abbreviation for 'emotional literacy support assistant'. The 'ELSA programme' is an intervention where one or more teaching assistants within a school are trained in emotional literacy, and provide intensive targeted emotional literacy support to a young person or group of young people. The programme creators note the following:

'ELSA support is about developing a respectful relationship in which the young person is enabled to think about their situation without feeling judged or criticised. It is intended to be short-term purposeful support, usually to help develop new skills or coping strategies that enable the pupil to experience greater success. In order to know when an intervention should end, ELSAs need to work to specific programme aims that are realistic. These need to be stated clearly enough to know whether or not they have been achieved. Ideally they should be achievable within a school term. Sessions are planned with objectives that build towards the programme aims.' ('elsanetwork', n.d., para 1)

A search of Scopus, Psych-info and Ovid in January 2015 generated only one peer-reviewed journal article entitled 'Emotional literacy support assistants' views on supervision provided by educational psychologists' (Osborne & Burton, 2014). However, the ELSA network documents 13 unpublished evaluations of the ELSA programme by various Educational Psychology Services across England and Wales (see Appendix 1). Before summarising the findings from these evaluations, it is prudent to discuss the strengths and limitations of including unpublished research studies within a literature review.

Humphrey (2013) argues that given the diversity of social emotional learning (SEL) definitions, it is important to reflect on evidence that is specific to the programme of choice, as 'borrowing' evidence from one programme to support another could lead to the implementation of programmes that are not evidence based and potentially ineffective.

Although none of the studies evaluated here have undergone the rigour of a peer-reviewed process, all have been conducted or supervised by educational psychologists who undergo extensive training in research methods as part of their Masters or doctoral training. A core function of the role of an educational psychologist (EP) is 'research and evaluation', so all EPs should have experience conducting quality research (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and Conners, 2006).

It may be argued that including these studies overcomes the threat of publication bias to the validity of the review (Higgins & Green, 2011). However, in this case a conflict of interest cannot be ruled out. Educational Psychology Services invest in the ELSA programme, provide training and ongoing supervision to ELSAs, and promote the programme's use in schools. This is true of all 13 evaluations. What is more, three of the studies included – along with the only published peer-review article – were conducted either by the creator of the ELSA programme or by a research body affiliated to the EPS where the programme originated. Furthermore, as each of the 13 evaluations was written for a wider audience than academia, information pertinent to the methodology and analysis was often absent. This presents difficulties in evaluating the rigour of the research or credibility of the findings.

Whilst caution must be exerted when considering the validity, reliability and generalisability of the conclusions from the literature reviewed, these studies do begin to enhance our understanding of stakeholders' experiences of the ELSA programme. They are also the only evidence base available to EPs, parents, schools and students wishing to know more about the ELSA programme.

### **Current evidence base**

A review of a local authority's research evaluations of the ELSA programme indicates that ELSAs (emotional literacy support assistants) work at an individual, group and whole-school level, and work collaboratively with children, parents and staff to promote a better understanding of the child's needs in class, monitor change over time and raise the profile of emotional literacy within their school (Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2010b; Hill, O'Hare & Weidberg, 2013).

ELSAs consistently report that the training they receive is relevant to their role (Bravery & Harris, 2010; Russell, 2011; Cardiff Local Authority, 2012) but they would like additional practical experience running sessions and more training on the extensive range of difficulties presented to them (Bravery & Harris, 2010). Bradley (2010) noted 23 different change issues presented to practising ELSAs (e.g. self-esteem, self-harm, selective mute), whereas the training given to ELSAs focuses on five areas (bereavement, ASD, social skills, anger and self-esteem).

A consistent finding is that ELSAs vary in terms of how much time they have allocated for ELSA sessions which is dependent on their other responsibilities within the school environment (Bravery & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2010b; Bradley, 2010). The number of sessions offered varies considerably from 1–200 sessions (Bravery & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2010b; Bradley, 2010). Moreover, in excess of 160 students in two schools surveyed had informal contact with an ELSA after sessions had ceased (Bravery & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2010b). This deviates from the 'short-term' involvement advocated by the ELSA network and may be linked to the types of change issues presented or the level of need (Bradley, 2010).

The ELSA programme was consistently perceived to be a valuable resource within schools and attributed to many positive outcomes at a whole-school level (e.g. enhancing awareness of emotional literacy: Harris, 2010a; Harris, 2010b; attendance, behaviour, emotional well-being, relationships with

others and academic achievement: Bravery & Harris, 2010) and at an individual level (e.g. on-task behaviour, peer interaction, aggressive behaviours: Butcher, Cook & Holder-Spriggs, 2013; self-efficacy: Grahamslaw, 2010; conduct problems, hyperactivity, empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills: Burton, Osborne & Norgate, 2010).

However, whilst positive outcomes have been attributed to children in the ratings by ELSAs, class teachers and caregivers (Burton, Traill & Norgate, 2009; Grahamslaw, 2010), no significant differences have been found in children's self-ratings (Burton, Osborne & Norgate 2010; Mann & Russell, 2011).

Several explanations for the lack of change in children's self-ratings have been proposed. Firstly, the assessment tools used may not be sensitive enough to measure students' perceived changes. Secondly, ELSAs' ratings apply only to children's behaviours in schools, whereas the ratings by children may be a reflection of their behaviours across environments. If children continue to experience difficulties in contexts outside of school, this may be reflected in their scores. Lastly, a lack of self-awareness at the beginning of the sessions may lead to students giving inaccurate positive ratings, reducing the pre- and post-ratings gap (Burton, Osborne & Norgate 2010; Mann & Russell, 2011).

It could be argued that a more appropriate measure of change would be to explore what children and young people feel they have gained from their involvement in the ELSA programme. Butcher, Cook and Holder-Spriggs (2013) stated that not all emotional difficulties are measurable in overt behaviour. In their interviews with children, Hill, O'Hare and Weidberg (2013) reported that children developed practical strategies they could use when needed (e.g. walking away, keeping a smart bear nearby that helps with good sitting). Whilst these changes would not be measurable on a standardised test, they may be perceived as gains from the child's point of

view. Considering the scarcity of research available, there is relatively very little understood of children's experiences of the ELSA programme from their perspective.

Kellett (2005) argues that children are often excluded from the research process due to assumptions around their competency, knowledge of issues and limitation with expressive language. However, children offer a unique perspective of their world that may be distinct from that of an adult.

Considering that children have not amassed the same life experience in comparison to an adult, they may make sense of their experiences differently and therefore offer an alternative understanding of events (Mayall, 2000; Christensen & Prout, 2002). If expressive and receptive language is a particular difficulty, it may be argued that it is the responsibility of the researcher to utilise appropriate methodologies to access the child's views (e.g. pictures, simple language) rather than excluding their views (Clark & Moss, 2001). Not only is collecting the views of children in keeping with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989), but Kirby (2004) notes that many children experience increased confidence, enhanced self-esteem and personal growth from reflecting on their experiences during their involvement in research.

Whilst the current evidence base has begun to capture the experiences of ELSAs, the information gathered has used mainly quantitative methods. Where qualitative data has been collected, this has been to give ELSAs an opportunity to elaborate on their quantitative responses. One limitation of this is that ELSAs' responses remain limited to predetermined questions and the assumptions that may have influenced the experimenter's choice of quantitative question. Qualitative research, using a less structured interview, may be useful in obtaining a greater understanding of ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme.

## **Research questions**

What are ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme?

What do ELSAs and children perceive as the most important aspects of the ELSA programme?

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

The current study is based on a social constructionist paradigm. It is maintained that each ELSA and child will construct their own reality of the ELSA sessions. It is expected that their realities can be grouped into 'ELSAs' views' and 'children's views' as ELSAs facilitate the programme and children are the receivers. A cross-section of ELSAs and the children they work with were interviewed. The final interview was intentionally 'open' to avoid imposing assumptions on what was or was not important to ELSAs' or children's experiences. The ELSA interviews were framed as informal discussions about the ELSAs' experiences and the children's interviews comprised of two drawing activities to encourage discussion and make the child feel at ease.

### **Q-sort**

Each ELSA completed a Q-sort task. ELSAs were asked to identify what they perceived as the most important aspects of the ELSA programme. They were then asked if they would like to add or take away any aspects before placing them in order of their perceived importance.

### **Comic strips and poster design**

Children were asked to draw a comic strip timeline of their experience of the ELSA programme which illustrated the first session, a middle session and the last session. To elicit what children perceive to be the most important aspects of ELSA, they were asked to design two posters: one illustrating the 'best ELSA session ever' and the other illustrating the 'worst ELSA session ever'.

A thematic analysis was used to identify semantic and latent themes. It was not the intention of the research to generate a theory of ELSA or provide interpretation of how it works. Rather, it was exploratory study of ELSAs' and children's experiences. As such, a thematic analysis was considered the most appropriate method of analysis to gain a greater understanding of how ELSAs and children made sense of their experiences.

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Cardiff Ethics Committee and the research followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychology Society (BPS) and the Health Care Professionals Council (HCPC).

### **Participants**

In total 31 ELSAs were approached at three supervision sessions within two local authorities; 8 ELSAs volunteered to take part (25% response rate). Once permission was granted by the head teacher in each school, the ELSA contacted the child's parents to obtain parental consent.

Of the 8 ELSAs interviewed, 2 were included in the pilot and 6 completed the Q-sort task. The Q-sort was not introduced until after the pilot.

Parental consent was sought for 8 students. One parent did not consent so 7 children (4 males) took part in the study. Their ages ranged from 5 to 11 years old.

In total 7 children were interviewed; 2 were included in the pilot and 5 completed the Q-sort. Two children did not complete the poster or comic strip tasks as these were introduced after the pilot.

## **Materials**

A letter was sent to the head teacher of each ELSA's school requesting permission for the ELSA and a child they work with to be interviewed on the school premises (Appendix 2).

All ELSAs, parents and children were given information sheets and consent forms to sign (Appendix 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8). Children and ELSAs were also given a debrief sheet after the interview (Appendix 9 & 10).

A semi-structured interview schedule was used during the pilot interviews with children and ELSAs (Appendix 11). This was amended into two interview proformas which were less structured and introduced the topics for discussion and the instructions for the Q-sort task, comic strip timeline and poster design (Appendix 12 & 13).

A digital recorder was used to record each interview.

## **Procedure**

Each ELSA and child was interviewed in their school.

Consent was obtained from each of the ELSAs and each child on the day of the interview. The author read through the information sheet with each

participant, checking they understood what was being asked of them and were happy to take part.

The digital recorder was switched on at the start of each session.

The pilot interviews consisted of two ELSAs and two children. This experience informed the creation of the final, less structured interview proformas and the use of different tasks to facilitate conversation and learn more about ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme.

The ELSA interviews lasted approximately 30–50 minutes and each child interview lasted approximately 15–20 minutes depending on the length of time they took to complete tasks and talk about their experiences.

After each interview the ELSA and child were given a debrief sheet.

Interviews were transcribed manually by author and anonymised prior to the thematic analysis. Each step of the thematic analysis, description of the process, thematic maps and example codes with quotations are presented in appendices 14, 15 & 16.

## **Results**

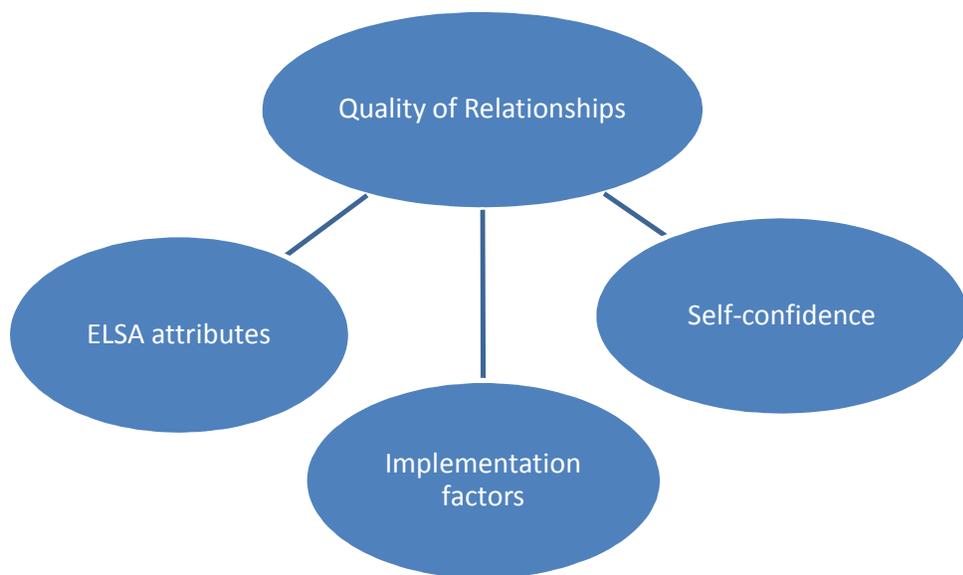
### **Research question i: What are ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme?**

#### **ELSAs' experiences of the ELSA programme**

An overarching theme to emerge from ELSAs' experiences of the ELSA programme was the importance of relationships and the inter-relationship between (i) personal characteristics necessary for being an ELSA, (ii) factors

around implementation of the programme and (iii) self-confidence. Thematic map one provides a visual representation of the overarching themes to emerge in relation to ELSAs' experiences of the ELSA programme. To maintain transparency, the subordinate themes and contributing sub-themes are presented in Appendix 15.

Thematic map one: the main overarching themes to emerge in relation to ELSAs' experiences of the ELSA programme.



ELSAs attributed a number of qualities that were important to being an ELSA. These were pivotal to helping them develop a trusting relationship with children, their families and school staff (Appendix 19, Q1).

ELSAs also talked about the importance of practical resources as being pivotal to creating a fun and special time for the child as well as tailoring sessions to meet their individual needs (e.g. practise skills, raise self-esteem, reflect on experiences) (Appendix 19, Q2).

These were considered a tangible example of how much the ELSA cares for the child and wants to spend time doing things the child enjoys. Over time, the sessions become a time for the child to relax, have 'time out' to talk about their worries or learn and practise key skills (Appendix 19, Q3).

In addition to the ELSA–child relationship, the relationships ELSAs formed with teachers and parents were also important. Engaging parents and caregivers in the change process was deemed useful for facilitating change across the home–school environments (Appendix 19, Q4).

Moreover, ELSAs talked about the need to understand that caregivers need support too and/or reassurance of what their child's involvement in ELSA entails as well as guidance on how they can get involved (Appendix 19, Q5).

Linking in with school staff between and after sessions had ended enabled ELSAs to monitor change, and ELSAs felt that their unique position within the school whereby they interacted with children, teaching staff, senior staff and parents meant they had become a more integrated and familiar part of the school environment. This in itself facilitated their role in identifying change, monitoring outcome, becoming familiar to children and creating a sense of availability whereby children could 'pop by' and see them if there was anything they wanted to talk about (Appendix 19, Q6).

Managing the expectations of teachers and parents was considered an important and challenging part of the ELSA role. Small changes to the child's presentation, noticed by the ELSA in ELSA sessions, did not always translate into noticeable changes at home or at school. Moreover, in some cases, parents raised concerns about their child's behaviour at home but this was not evident in school, or teachers raised concerns that were considered more appropriate for other agencies to address (e.g. behavioural support service) (Appendix 19, Q7).

ELSAs needed to feel confident in their abilities to explore different constructions around change issues, empathise and understand different realities of the same behaviours, and make decisions on when to intervene or signpost to other agencies (Appendix 19, Q8).

Self-confidence and self-evaluation of their own practice was frequently raised as challenge associated with working autonomously in schools as an ELSA, especially as resources tended to be home-crafted or adapted from existing school resources, leaving ELSAs wondering if they were 'doing it right' (Appendix 19, Q9).

Peer support, sharing resources with other ELSAs, using resources provided in training, liaising with teaching staff who understood their role within the school, and termly peer supervision with their link educational psychologist bolstered ELSAs' self-confidence, as did children's self-reports of their enjoyment of sessions and how useful they found them (Appendix 19, Q10).

Within the school environment, strong leadership and professional support was considered important in supporting ELSAs to work with parents and other staff members. Senior members of staff helped to promote the ELSA programme, raise awareness of emotional literacy and assist ELSAs with the identification of appropriate referrals, and could offer support to ELSAs when liaising with parents and staff. This seemed to be valued most when the expectations of teachers or caregivers were incongruent with the scope of the ELSA programme and reframing and/or further signposting to other services was necessary to ensure users felt listened to and supported (Appendix 19, Q11).

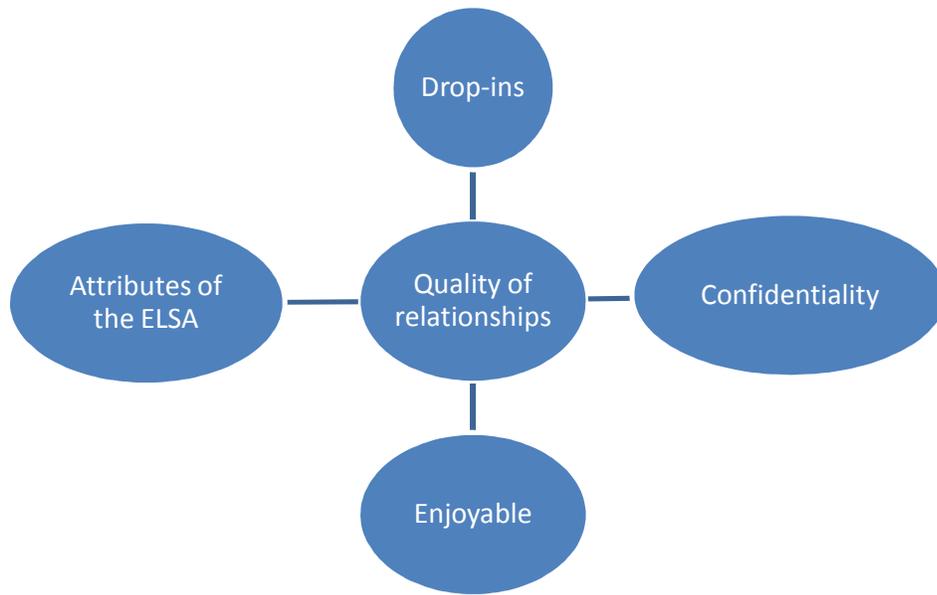
Leadership within the school was considered necessary for protecting time and securing practical resources like quiet areas to work, workbooks, games, handicraft materials, etc. that are regarded as pivotal for the creation of an enjoyable safe space for the young person and contributory factors in the development of the ELSA–child relationship (Appendix 19, Q12).

ELSAs talk about how their roles changed over time in response to demands on their time by school, and increase in children 'checking in' after sessions had ended. All ELSAs agreed that ending sessions abruptly seemed 'unnatural' given the relationship that developed between the ELSA and child over time and children's fondness of the sessions. All children attended 'drop-ins' or were invited to check in with the ELSA if and when they needed to. The perceived need for children to have continued access to the supportive nature of the ELSA–child relationship beyond the recommended time limit of one term highlights the value placed on the supportive attachment that forms between the ELSA and child (Appendix 19, Q13).

### **Children's experiences of the ELSA programme**

An overarching theme to emerge from children's experiences of the ELSA programme was the importance of relationships and factors that contribute to their development, including characteristics of the ELSA, confidentiality, drop-in sessions, and sessions being perceived as fun and enjoyable. Thematic map two provides a visual representation of the overarching themes to emerge in relation to children's experiences of the ELSA programme. To maintain transparency, the subordinate themes and contributing sub-themes are presented in Appendix 15.

Thematic map two: the main overarching themes to emerge in relation to children's experiences of the ELSA programme.



The children attributed a range of qualities and behaviours to the ELSA that helped to cultivate a positive relationship and enhanced the child's enjoyment of sessions (Appendix 19, Q14).

ELSAs were perceived as distinct from other adults in the child's life at school and at home. ELSAs offered children a safe space to talk openly about their thoughts, feelings and behaviours without the fear that they would get into trouble, take up class time or add to other people's worries (Appendix 19, Q15).

The resources ELSAs used were appreciated by children who valued the opportunity to learn new handicraft skills, play games and have fun (Appendix 19, Q16).

Children valued the time they spent with the ELSA, and talked about their enjoyment of sessions and how happy they felt as a result. They valued having someone to talk to and/or to take their minds off events in their life (Appendix 19, Q17).

In the first instance, though, it was important to the child to have time to get to know the ELSA, as some felt uncertain about attending sessions, frightened that they were in trouble (Appendix 19, Q18).

Children talked about ELSA sessions as a platform to form relationships with other children. ELSA group sessions and drop-in sessions were considered a good way of meeting new friends across different year groups, whilst inviting a friend along to the one-to-one ELSA–child sessions was self-affirming and a positive experience for the child (Appendix 19, Q19).

Confidentiality between the ELSA and child emerged as an important factor. Children sought reassurance that what they said would not be shared with others. They also valued having a safe physical space where children couldn't listen into their conversations (Appendix 19, Q20).

Children valued the ongoing support of the ELSA–child relationship that continued long after sessions had ended. It seemed that the relationship that formed between the ELSA and the child became a way of coping for the child (Appendix 19, Q21).

### **Research question ii: What do ELSAs and children perceive as the most important aspects of the ELSA programme?**

#### **ELSAs**

Each ELSA completed a Q-sort task where they were asked to identify what they thought were the key aspects of the ELSA programme and then place them in order of importance. The results are shown in Appendix 17.

The ELSA–child relationship was rated as the most important aspect of the ELSA programme by three out of the five ELSAs. One ELSA rated the

'qualities of the ELSA' as the most important aspect, whilst another rated 'appropriate referrals' as the most important aspect followed by the ELSA–child relationship. The consistent ranking of the ELSA–child relationship mirrors the main theme of 'relationships' that emerges from the ELSA interviews.

Furthermore, contributory factors that cultivate or undermine the development of the ELSA–child relationship were also identified. For example, the 'qualities of the ELSA' was rated as one of the top two important factors by three ELSAs. Similarly, implementation factors such as practical support, professional support, resources and protected time followed closely in the ratings.

## **Children**

To gain an understanding of children's perceptions of the most important aspects of the ELSA programme, each child was asked to create a poster of a best and worst ELSA session. Pictures of the poster are attached in Appendix 18. Children's verbal comments about their posters, along with statements or words that were written on their posters, are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Children’s descriptions of the best and worst ELSA sessions

<b>Best ELSA session</b>	<b>Worst ELSA session</b>
The ELSA would be calm, patient, happy, helpful, joyful and friendly	The ELSA would be mean, hateful, impatient and angry
Building things to play with (e.g. plane)	Fake people Breaking things
The ELSA would be kind, nice, helpful Feeling happy	Nasty people making me sad and make me not want to talk The ELSA would not be nice Doing school work
Playing Uno (i.e. card game) Building towers Quiet environment	Feeling scared Feeling terrified Noisy environment Playing games I don’t like
Singing	ELSA and other children shouting Me, hiding under the table because I’m scared

Children’s constructions of the best and worst ELSA sessions suggest that the qualities of the ELSA, doing activities they enjoyed, feeling at ease and happy, and having a safe, quiet environment were important aspects of their experience of ELSA sessions. It emerged from the interviews with both ELSAs and children that these were factors that were conducive to the development of a positive ELSA–child relationship.

ELSAs noted the importance of their personal qualities, the need for fun and child-led activities, and having practical support for successful implementation (e.g. resources and a safe space) as important in creating an safe environment, building rapport and nurturing a trusting relationship where the child felt at ease and happy to talk about their experiences. The children’s responses suggest that these things were also perceived as

important by children, and contributed to their experience of the ELSA programme and the relationship they developed with the ELSA.

## **Discussion**

The research questions sought to explore ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA sessions and identify the aspects of the ELSA programme they perceived as the most important. Overall 'relationships' seemed to be an important aspect of both ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme. Each sub-theme contributed to the formation or quality of relationship to a greater or lesser extent. For example, for ELSAs, the qualities they attributed as important to being an ELSA, their self-confidence, and factors around implementation of the programme in school (e.g. professional and practical support) are likely to cultivate or undermine a positive trusting relationship with the child, families and school staff. For children, the qualities of the ELSA, confidentiality, sessions being perceived as fun and enjoyable, and the ongoing support offered by the ELSA were important aspects of their experiences and again could cultivate or undermine the ELSA-child relationship. Furthermore, it seems that the ELSA-child relationship has become a coping mechanism in itself long after formal sessions have ended.

The main difference between the ELSAs' and children's responses was that ELSAs tended to focus more on the 'mechanics' of ELSA sessions (e.g. what is needed for ELSA sessions), whereas the children's responses focused more on their experience as recipients for the programme. That said, the themes that emerged from both ELSAs and children seemed to complement each other.

ELSAs noted that developing a trusting relationship with the child was pivotal to facilitating a change.

'Well nothing will work unless you have a relationship with these children.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 96)

Likewise, the relationship children formed with the ELSA was important to them.

'It was like good to be able to express about what was going on at home because I felt that I couldn't talk to my mum so to have someone I could talk to at school was really good.' (Child, 2; Line, 21)

The importance of the relationship within the change process is well documented within psychological literature (Green, 2006; Hougaard, 1994). The therapeutic alliance refers to the relationship that forms between a therapist and his or her client during treatment. Some researchers deemed the therapeutic alliance as just as important, if not more, than therapy itself as without a relationship, change cannot occur (Green, 2006; Safran & Muran, 2006).

However, usually in psychotherapy or counselling the client would continue to access support until they reach self-actualisation. This is in contrast with the ELSA programme, which is designed to be time limited over a school term. Both ELSAs and children highlighted the need to provide 'aftercare' or 'drop-ins' after focus sessions had ended. This mirrored previous research by Harris (2010a, 2010b) who suggested that as many as 170 students in their sample continued to access the school ELSA after formal sessions had ceased.

It could be argued that by the end of ELSA sessions the child's needs have changed and there is less need for focused sessions, but it could also be argued that for all of the children interviewed, the ELSA programme had in itself become a way of coping. Children noted that it was important to be able to 'drop in' to talk to the ELSA when they felt they needed to. It seems that the ELSA-child relationship is possibly perceived as a 'safe' base by children where they return to when needed as they grow, develop and face different challenges in life. This is reminiscent of the 'circle of security' that describes

the secure attachment that forms between a child and a caregiver. The caregiver provides a safe base for children to return to as they explore their world with confidence, learn to manage their emotions, and grow and develop (Marvin, Cooper, Hoofman & Powell, 2002).

For children, friendships with other children were also a positive aspect of their experience of the ELSA programme. Inviting friends to sessions created self-affirming opportunities for children to hear their friends say nice things about them, whilst group work and drop-in sessions provided opportunities to meet children from different year groups. Creating opportunities for young people to make and maintain friendships was important in creating a happy and enjoyable experience. Some children reported that their friends 'were kinder to them' now that they had completed ELSA sessions. Whilst children's perceptions of themselves and their interactions with friends may have changed as a direct result of hearing other children say nice things about them (Cooley, 1902), it is also likely that their social skills will have improved through their interactions with the ELSA and other children in their group. The skills may be enhanced via modelling (Bandura, 1977) or scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976), but the therapeutic relationship that forms between an ELSA and child may also be important in supporting the young person to explore their constructions around relationships, assess how their constructions have developed, and consider the things they may need to change to enhance their future relationships (Moran, 2010).

Working closely with parents and other staff members to identify, facilitate and monitor change emerged as important for ELSAs. Whilst this reflects an ecological understanding of the child, it raises challenges in terms of maintaining the confidentiality of the child. Concerns around confidentiality could threaten the development of a trusting relationship between the child and the adults around him or her. Given the perceived importance of confidentiality by children, as the possible impact this could have on the ELSA–child relationship, this raised important considerations for the training

and guidance educational psychologists (EPs) offer ELSAs in relation to confidentiality. Auckland and Hart (2003) suggest clear guidelines and professional supervision are key in bolstering professionals' confidence around information sharing, especially in cases where the child was not perceived to be at risk but information sharing could be of benefit to the child.

Professional and practical supports in school were factors ELSAs identified as confidence building. This mirrored previous findings by Osborne and Burton (2014) who found that supervision enhanced ELSAs' confidence to 'put ideas into practice when working with children and of feeling able to offer advice, information and support to colleagues' (Osborne & Burton, 2014, p.149). The importance of professional and practical support is also well documented in the evidence base around implementation of social and emotional learning programmes (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk and Zins, 2005; Elias, Zins, Graczyk & Weissberg, 2003; Raudenbush, 2008). The current research suggests that when schools 'buy into ELSA' they should be reminded of the importance of both professional and practical support within the school environment, as these are important to both the implementation of the ELSA programme and the development of the ELSA-child relationship that is considered pivotal to the change process.

The changing role of ELSA (i.e. from one-to-one and group work with children to drop-in sessions) may have implications for how EPs and schools support ELSAs. Humphrey (2013) noted that as the needs addressed by social and emotional learning (SEL) programmes become more complex and the number of participants with differing needs increases, programmes are more likely to become diluted or discontinued. Considering this, there is likely to be scope for more exploration of the changing role of ELSAs in schools and the possible consequences the changing role may have on ELSA training, school resources and the type of support ELSAs require.

One strength of the current study was that it accessed the views of children directly, providing an expert view of their reality (Mayall, 2000; Christensen &

Prout, 2002). One interesting finding to emerge was the positive evaluations children attributed to the ELSA programme. Children reported that they felt happier, that the ELSA programme was beneficial and that they had more friends after ELSA. In the past, quantitative research has failed to show any statistical changes attesting to the benefit of the ELSA programme from the child's perspective. Considering this, it may be argued that the use of standardised measures is unsuitable to measure the gains perceived by children as in relation to the ELSA programme, and qualitative measures may be more suitable. Kazin (1999) argues that in the absence of statistical evidence on the research effectiveness, interventions can be deemed clinically effective if perceived as beneficial by the person receiving it.

The current research is not without limitations. Firstly, the study did not control for variations in the role of the ELSA and controlling for one particular method of implementation may have generated a greater understanding of the specific experiences of ELSAs utilising that method of delivery. That said, previous research notes the diversity of delivery inherent to the role of an ELSA. As all of the ELSAs interviewed had experience of individual work, group work and drop-ins, it is argued that the population was representative of the 'typical' ELSA role.

Secondly, the study did not control for the number of years an ELSA had been in the role for, previous experience of social and emotional learning programmes, or attendance at follow-up ELSA training conferences. As our experiences shape our constructions and realities of events, it is arguable that controlling for these differences may have produced different results. Future research could control for this variable.

Overall, the relationship that forms between the ELSA and the child is an important aspect of both ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme. The types of qualities that ELSAs report they have and the trusting, caring environment perceived by children is similar to that of a therapeutic alliance (Hougaard, 1994; Green, 2006; Safran & Muran, 2006).

Whilst much is written on the importance of the therapeutic alliance in facilitating change, this is an unexplored area of the ELSA programme that warrants further investigation.

For ELSAs, the importance of relationships extends to parents and teachers in terms of managing expectations, clarifying key change issues and engaging them in the change process. Given the importance of the ELSA–child relationship, this presents challenges in maintaining the trust of the child in relation to sharing information outside of sessions.

It seems that for both ELSAs and children the importance and value of the ELSA–child relationship is enduring. Rather than the ELSA programme lasting for a school term, it seems that the ELSA–child relationship has in itself become a coping mechanism that children draw on if and when they need support, long after formal sessions have ended.



**Doctorate in Educational Psychology Professional Training  
Programme**

**A qualitative study of ELSAs' and children's  
experiences of the ELSA programme.**

**Student Name:** Sharon McEwen

**Student Number:** C1220474

**Part Three:** Critical Reflections

## **Contribution to knowledge**

This section of my reflective account is structured around what I consider to be the key variables that influenced my research project's contribution to knowledge. I will begin by outlining the development of my research question and consider how my epistemological beliefs underpinned my choice of methodology and analysis. I will conclude by acknowledging the methodological strengths and limitations of my research which should be considered when evaluating its contribution to knowledge.

It is hoped that by reading my research reflections, the reader will have a greater understanding of why I made particular research decisions and how these eventually led to what I consider to be a unique contribution to knowledge.

## **Development of the research question**

As a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) I attended the six-day training course on ELSA. This was my introduction to the ELSA programme and since then I have had the opportunity to work collaboratively with ELSAs and consult on cases where the children meet regularly with the school ELSA.

Through my interactions with educational psychologists and school staff I was privy to conversations that focused around the benefits of the ELSA programme to children, ELSAs and the school, but I also listened to concerns relating to the implementation of the ELSA programme. These included organisational factors around supervising an increasing number of ELSAs, how to plan supervision sessions to provide the right type of support for ELSAs, and how to work with the 'leadership' in some schools to raise the profile of the ELSA programme and support the school ELSA in obtaining resources.

These experiences spurred my interest in how we deliver the ELSA programme and support ELSAs. I began to wonder about how ELSAs and children perceive the ELSA programme – not just in terms of outcomes, but in terms of their overall experience, what they think is important about the ELSA programme, benefits they might associate with it, and what they perceive to be the facilitators of and barriers to its success.

A review of the literature revealed that there was only one peer-reviewed published study of the ELSA programme. The majority of the research had been conducted by local authorities, doctoral students or a research team that was affiliated with the local authority where the programme was developed (see Appendix 1). Positive findings were consistently reported; however, there were several limitations of the research base. Firstly, most of the research was unpublished. In academia, the rigour of the peer review process attests to the quality of the research (Humphrey, 2013). Secondly, research conducted by local authorities or the programme developers is not independent, and researcher bias and/or a 'halo effect' may have influenced the methodology and/or interpretation of results (Robson, 1993; Thorndike, 1920). Thirdly, whilst quotations from ELSAs, parents, school staff and students consistently affirmed the benefits of the ELSA programme, the method of analysis was not transparent. This may have been because the evaluation papers were written for a wider audience than academia, but nonetheless, without a transparent methodology, the reader cannot attest the validity and reliability of the results.

It also struck me that whilst research had been conducted to evaluate the outcomes of the ELSA programme, there was a gap in the research exploring ELSAs' and students' broader experiences of the ELSA programme. Although outcomes could be part of an ELSA's or child's experience of the ELSA programme, I posited that by giving ELSAs and children an opportunity to talk about their broader experience of the ELSA programme, we could gain a greater understanding of what they think are the most important and valued aspects of the programme. I contended that this

would be a rich source of information that could be used to inform further implementation and supervision of ELSAs, leading to greater outcomes for children and young people.

### **Underlying epistemology of the research**

In keeping with a constructivist paradigm, I believed that each student and each ELSA would construct his or her own reality of the ELSA programme and each reality would be equally valid (Rubin & Bellamy, 2012). It was my belief that knowledge is a social reality; my presence as a researcher would influence what I was trying to measure and how I interpreted the results (Forshaw, 2007). Considering this, it was of utmost importance that I chose a method of data collection and analysis that was in keeping with my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Unlike a positivist approach, I did not believe that there was a single reality of ELSAs and children's experience of ELSA (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Rather I posited that there would be multiple realities and to understand the experiences of an ELSA or a child I had to explore each reality to make sense of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A positivist approach would seek to measure the single external reality using objective measures (Robson, 1993). As I believed that each ELSA and child would have their own reality and that their realities may be influenced by different experiences, assumptions, beliefs, etc., I required a method that would give me the flexibility to explore their experiences in enough depth to understand the world from their perspective. I chose semi-structured interviews as my method of data analysis as this gave me the structure I needed to focus on the ELSA's and child's experience of the ELSA programme, whilst maintaining enough flexibility for the ELSA and child to tell me about the things that were important to them (Robson, 1993).

A thematic analysis was deemed the most appropriate method of analysis over both interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and grounded theory – both of which are tied to ‘pre-existing theoretical frameworks’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). IPA and grounded theory are based on phenomenological epistemology whilst the current research was interpretivist in nature. I sought to gain a greater understanding of users’ experiences of the ELSA programme rather than exploring the meaning that users may assign to their experiences (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006) or deriving a distinct theory of the ELSA programme (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

### **Strengths of the research**

#### **The voice of ELSAs and the children they work with**

One of the main strengths of this research is that it has given ELSAs and the children they work with an opportunity to express their views on the ELSA programme. In the first instance I piloted a semi-structured interview with two ELSAs and two students. The experience left me with a feeling that I was missing something important. After reflecting on the design I wondered if I had structured the pilot interviews to a level where interviewees could not give me a true picture of their reality of events. In doing so, the conversation did not flow as freely as I had hoped and I felt that ELSAs and children sometimes seemed unsure of why I was asking something (maybe because it was of no real importance to them); sometimes their responses veered off onto a tangent as if to tell me what they wanted me to know rather than answering my question. I subsequently changed my interview to include more open questions, making the interview schedule less structured. I also included drawing tasks for children to reduce the ‘interview-style’ environment. This included asking each child to draw the first, middle and last session they had with the ELSA. Each child described the session and I explored what was happening in their picture, what they were thinking and feeling during each session, and if this changed. Children also completed a poster of the best and worst ELSA session. Some children drew what was

happening; others preferred me to write the words, e.g. noisy, quiet, etc. One child asked to do a rating scale instead. I used this method flexibly as it was intended to make the children feel at ease and stimulate conversation. On reflection, different methods (e.g. the child drawing, me drawing for the child or rating scales) may have led to more variability in the results.

By interviewing both ELSAs and students I am also able to contribute a unique perspective from both the facilitators and the recipients of the programme. I was unsure of the variability across schools in terms of the implementation of the ELSA programme so I only interviewed children the ELSA had worked with in the past. It was hoped that this would ensure each pairing provided feedback on the same event and avoid having a sample of ELSAs describing one-to-one work and a sample of children describing group work with an ELSA. However, it is arguable that the ELSAs may have based their responses on the array of experiences they have had as an ELSA rather than focusing on a specific child, or indeed the opposite could be true in some cases. It is likely that each ELSA may have answered questions based around the evidence that he or she recalled at that moment in time, which in turn may have influenced the results.

### **Involving participants in the analysis**

Each ELSA was asked to generate a list of aspects they felt to be an important part of the ELSA programme. They then placed them in order of importance.

Participatory research involves participants generating research questions that interest them, conducting research, analysing and reflecting on the findings, and inciting change as a result (Krishnaswamy, 2004; Cornwell & Jewkes, 1994). Whilst the current research did not go far enough to be called participatory research, involving ELSAs in analysis of their own responses for part of the process did shift the balance of power to the participants. Usually

with research, the researcher holds the most power during the analysis as they interpret the data. During the Q-sort, ELSAs were asked to put their responses in order of importance and this shifted the balance of power from the researcher to the ELSA, as they were in control of identifying the most important aspects of the ELSA programme from the many aspects they identified (Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009; Cornwell & Jewkes, 1994). This enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings.

### **Inter-rater reliability**

The transcripts and a list of possible codes were sent to two inter-raters. One inter-rater was a retired senior lecturer and the other a research fellow. Both had extensive experience in qualitative analysis. Each inter-rater was asked to look for explicit examples of codes I had identified within the transcripts and to make suggestions for additional codes or challenge any codes they disagreed with. Each of the inter-raters agreed with the codes I had identified; none were added and none were challenged.

After the codes were agreed, each coder and I discussed how the codes should 'fit together' to create themes and how best to begin interpreting the data. The interpretation of codes was a very organic process that evolved as I checked for patterns across the transcripts and discussed my interpretation with the inter-raters. For example, 'working with parents' formed a theme that was later subsumed by 'confidence' and 'implementation'. The theme of 'working with parents' also contributed to the overarching theme 'relationships' as this included the quality of relationships with children, teachers and parents. In all honesty, this was the stage I found the most challenging as I was concerned that I would impose too much of my subjective interpretation onto the data whilst trying to make sense of it, rather than letting the data 'speak for itself'.

Having the support of inter-raters was helpful as I was able to discuss my concerns with them, they were familiar with the transcripts and the process of qualitative analysis, and they were unaware of my initial assumptions at the beginning of the research. I also continually reflected on the guidance by Braun and Clarke (2006) around semantic and latent themes, and followed their guidance to ensure my analysis was transparent (see Appendix 14).

However, it is important to acknowledge possible limitation to the process I used to obtain inter-rater reliability. Firstly, in the beginning the inter-raters agreed completely with my coding of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that codes should not emerge from the data; rather, they should be explicit. If the examples are explicit then we would expect the codes generated by each rater to be the same or very similar (e.g. 'I'm happy now' = code: 'emotion/happiness/positive outcome'). However, there is the possibility that by providing the inter-raters with predetermined codes, I influenced their constructions. To guard against this, I could have asked each inter-rater to code the transcripts without a coding schedule.

Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman and Marteau's (1997) research found that inter-raters tended to code very similarly. The differences usually emerge with interpretation. I would agree with this based on my experience. The inter-raters and I had many discussions around how to group codes and interpret the data. Although there were no 'major' differences between our interpretations, there was more need to share our justification around our interpretation of how themes interacted together, whether one theme would be better to stand alone or if it should be subsumed by another main theme.

Finally, although both inter-raters had considerable experience of rigorous qualitative research, they were already known to me as colleagues. It could be argued that I unconsciously chose both inter-raters from other people I knew because I thought they would hold similar viewpoints to me and therefore be more likely to agree with my analysis. This may have accounted for the agreement of the codes and a unanimous interpretation of

the data. Using an independent group of coders would have guarded against this limitation.

## **Limitations of the research**

### **Sample size**

I presented the research to 36 ELSAs in total and 8 took part (22% rate). Each ELSA identified a child he or she worked with to take part. Parental consent was obtained for 7 children. Thus the total sample was 15. Although Depster (2011) stated that a sample of 6 to 8 is suitable for a professional doctorate thesis, the results need to be treated with caution as they are based on a small sample and may not generalise to the larger population of ELSAs. It should be noted that the themes had reached a point of saturation and no new themes were emerging in the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) considered saturation of themes as a marker for when to stop collecting data.

### **Validity of children's responses**

Children were asked to complete a comic strip of their first, middle and last ELSA session. I then prompted each child to name his or her feelings and thoughts at each point in time and explored any changes he or she felt had occurred. There are two difficulties with this method. Firstly, the students were asked to recall an event in the past. Retrospective memory can be inaccurate (Hassan, 2005) and the students' current feelings towards the ELSA may have influenced how they described their earlier sessions.

Secondly, I had no prior information on why each child was attending ELSA. All or some of the children may have experienced difficulties understanding their emotions or expressing them verbally. For some, this difficulty may have been specific to an event in their life rather than a generalised difficulty (e.g. understanding feelings around bereavement). In cases where children have a limited emotional vocabulary, this would call into question my results, as children may have used words or said the names of emotions they knew rather than giving an accurate and valid description of their feelings. However, during each interview all of the children were able to match a range of emotions (e.g. happy, sad and nervous) to the faces they drew or the emoticon stickers they chose to indicate their feelings. This was not a formal inclusion criterion but on reflection, given the importance of verifying their understanding of emotion, future studies should include this type of assessment within their inclusion criteria.

### **Voice of parents**

The ELSA network states that it is good practice to involve parents by informing them that their child will be meeting with an ELSA, and inviting them to discuss any concerns and the work that will be completed in sessions. Previous evaluations of the ELSA programme have included data from parents and have shown that parents have perceived positive changes in their child's thoughts and feelings pre- and post-ELSA sessions (Burton, Traill & Norgate, 2010). Working with parents is a recurring theme within the transcripts, and with hindsight it would have been interesting to have explored parents' views of the ELSA programme as well, as this may have led to more ways of facilitating parent involvement in the future.

## **Critical account of research practitioner**

In this section, I will reflect on my role as a research practitioner. This will include my reflections in relation to reflexivity, involving participants in the research process, considering power imbalances and maintaining ethical standards. I will also include a short summary of my own 'reality' of using qualitative methods.

### **Reflexivity**

From an interpretivist perspective, knowledge only comes to light through individual interpretation. However, interpretation is influenced by experiences, assumptions, beliefs, etc. (Forshaw, 2007). My knowledge of this made me very conscious of how my own assumptions, interests and beliefs may have influenced my interpretation of the data.

Steps I took to reduce the influence of subjectivity on my results included transcribing the interviews verbatim, ensuring initial semantic codes were derived from explicit quotations, and discussing latent themes that interpret the data with two other researchers, to ensure that the interpretation was not based purely on my own assumptions but rather that two other researchers agreed with my interpretation based on their readings of the transcripts.

Whilst I feel I have taken conscious steps to reduce the influence of reflexivity on my data, my interpretation may have been influenced by unconscious reflexivity. For example, I may have chosen inter-raters that share my view of the world, hold similar values and beliefs. As such they may have been more likely to interpret the data in a similar way to myself.

Forshaw (2007) notes:

'... a researcher may consciously accept that their processes and products are inextricable from their personal histories, whims, value systems and ideologies, but if there is one thing which psychologists

ought to be aware of it is that we are also driven by unconscious and semi-conscious needs and drives which we are not able or willing to publicly articulate. Consequently, when we speak of reflexivity, we only really deal with a small portion of our relevant life. The rest is hidden from the reader, and from ourselves.' (Forshaw, 2007, p. 479)

Had I taken a more positivist approach, I could have maintained more distance between myself and the data, as a numerical measurement or an objective measurement is a 'truth' that another researcher who uses the same measuring tools, method and analysis will find. From an interpretivist approach it is plausible that even the most transparent qualitative method could be replicated and a different 'reality' emerge. Another researcher, who holds different beliefs and assumptions and has a different set of life experiences, may interpret the data differently.

Considering this, whilst I have taken steps to enhance the validity and reliability of my research, there will always remain the possibility that my interpretation of the data and my contribution to knowledge were influenced by my presence as a researcher.

### **Involving participants in the research process**

For me, one of the advantages of a social constructivist approach is the opportunity to interact with participants. During the recruitment process I was humbled by the interest ELSAs showed in my research and the concerns they raised in relation to my research design.

When I was recruiting ELSAs at their group supervision sessions, a number of them reported concerns that asking the child to be interviewed may give him or her the impression that the ELSA had divulged the contents of the sessions to another person. There were concerns that this would be viewed as a betrayal of trust by the child and would fracture the relationship between the ELSA and child.

ELSAs also raised concerns in relation to the validity and reliability of my study. ELSAs explained that in some cases they had spent ‘months’ developing a relationship with a child they had worked with in an attempt to get them to ‘open up’ and talk honestly about their experiences. There was a concern that children would not answer my questions honestly, if at all.

ELSAs expressed concern that by choosing children to interview, they were ‘cherry-picking’ the children they thought would engage best with the interview process. As such the ELSAs wondered if the comments from these children would be a valid and reliable reflection of children who they perceived to be ‘more in need of ELSA’ but less able to engage with an interview process.

This experience has highlighted to me the value of consulting with stakeholders in the design of research projects. I found this experience particularly enlightening and it made me think more about participatory research. My research proposal and ethics application had led me to reflect on a number of the issues raised by the ELSAs prior to meeting with them. That said, it struck me how passionate the ELSAs were about the ELSA programme and the relationship they had developed with the children they worked with. There was a strong feeling that they wanted the programme to be evaluated with rigour and wanted all children’s views represented. Some ELSAs suggested that they would be the best people to complete the interviews, and others suggested that they had ad hoc data they had collected themselves on children’s perceptions of how they had changed. They suggested that this would be more useful as it was available for a greater number of children within the given school.

The ELSAs’ insights into the research process and their enthusiasm for the project made me reflect on how I could include participants more in all aspects of a research study. In the current study, I reviewed the original interview schedule and introduced a Q-sort task whereby ELSAs generated ideas and put them in order of importance. Whilst this may not go far

enough to be labelled participatory research, it was an example of how I sought to include ELSAs in analysing the data they generated. In the future I would be interested in including ELSAs in all areas of the research process, or facilitating participation research whereby they can create research questions relating to the ELSA programme that are important to them, explore and reflect on the findings, and facilitate change as a result of what they have discovered through the process (Krishnaswamy, 2004).

Working with children of various ages was challenging but an enjoyable and useful learning experience as a researcher. The children working with ELSAs ranged from Year 1 to Year 6. Whilst this enabled me to interview a cross-section of primary-school children, it presented challenges in accessing each child's views as receptive and expressive language skills differed considerably. Although there were far fewer utterances in the responses from younger children, I continue to believe that the best person in a position to explain what an experience is like for a child is the child themselves (O'Quigley, 2000). As such, I and others believe children should be given the opportunity to give their views (Mayall, 2000; Christensen & Prout, 2002; Clark & Moss, 2001).

To help the child feel at ease and explore his or her thoughts and feelings, I opted for a familiar task that would be relatively easy for each child (e.g. drawing). Talking and drawing tasks is a therapeutic method where the therapist talks to the child about what he or she is drawing (Allen, 1989). It is commonly used to help children with emotional difficulties talk about experiences and is a technique many ELSAs use. I elaborated on the technique by offering the child emoticon stickers which helped to prompt discussions around how the different people in the picture felt (e.g. the ELSA and the child). It was my impression that this was a good technique that put children at ease and helped to stimulate conversation.

## **Power imbalances**

Miller, Strier and Pessach (2009) have commented on the power relationships that form during the research process. For example, recruitment is one area of the research (with the exception of snowballing) that is 'controlled' by the researcher. As a researcher I tried to empower the ELSAs by asking their permission not only to take part but also for their permission to interview a child they worked with.

During data collection the ownership of power tends to be in the hands of the participants as the data is reliant on what they say (Miller *et al.*, 2009). I tried to elicit information from the participant by using various techniques to build rapport, including bringing biscuits, suggesting that the ELSA and I have a 'coffee and chat together', and admitting my naïvety with regard to their experiences of the ELSA programme. With children I helped them colour in, asked them questions to show I was listening and gave lots of praise on their drawings.

It is usually considered that power returns to the researcher during the analysis phase of research, and it is true that it was my interpretation of the data from all of the interviews. I did return power to ELSAs by involving them in the analysis of the Q-sort task but Miller *et al.*, (2006) state that ideally participants should be asked to read their written transcripts and be involved in the collation and validation of themes. The practicalities of revisiting every ELSA and child or running focus group sessions to negotiate themes was out of the scope of the current research but it is something that I will be mindful of in future research.

## **Ethical considerations**

Ethics was a constant consideration throughout the research, and my principles and practices were informed by the ethical standards of the Cardiff

University's ethical committee, the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Practice, and familiarising myself with literature focusing on ethical issues in research in education (e.g. Lichtman, 2013). The aims of the research were not hidden from the participants and ELSAs, children or parents gave informed consent. If a parent did not wish his or her child to take part, the child was not approached.

On the day of the interview, I read aloud the information and consent sheet (Appendix 3–8) to each child, stopping to check that they understood what I was saying. All children were told that they could stop the interview at any time and return to class and there would be no consequence to such a decision. I collected the ELSA's consent form on the day of the interview and gave a brief verbal summary of what I meant by 'anonymous and confidential'. Before the interviews began, I stated to both the ELSAs and children that I was not going to ask about the topics of conversation that they discussed during ELSA sessions. As well as ensuring I worked within ethical boundaries, I hoped that this process would be transparent and help me to build trust with the ELSA and the child.

After the interviews, I debriefed both the ELSAs and the children verbally and each were given a debrief sheet (Appendix 9 & 10). Whilst I did not think any harm would come to participants, they were signposted to supports within the school and given my contact details if they wanted to amend or delete anything they had said.

The interviews were transcribed, anonymised and saved to an encrypted USB stick to protect the anonymity of all participants and ensure the data remained confidential. Recordings were not outsourced to a transcription service as some ELSAs and children revealed identifying information and I felt more comfortable transcribing the data myself because I could be assured of how that information was anonymised and stored. To protect the identities of participants, there was a need to paraphrase and omit some details from the transcriptions when giving an example in the text. The

original data was submitted as part of the marking process for the doctoral thesis. Finally, all interviews were word-processed verbatim. Although this does ensure that the words the ELSA and child said were included and given equal attention, the emotional nuances that are communicated through tone were omitted. This is a possible limitation as the word-processed transcripts may not have been a true reflection of the tone of some utterances (e.g. sarcasm would be omitted).

### **My 'reality' of using qualitative methods**

At first I found using an interpretivist approach challenging as my previous experience was mainly in positivist research. In the past, I have always been able to detach myself from the data by using standardised methods and retaining objectivity (Robson, 1993). Using an interpretivist approach I was very aware of my own subjectivity and the possibility that my conscious actions (e.g. prompts, tone of voice, etc.) could influence my research findings. Whilst my awareness of this helped me to take steps to guard against this (e.g. being aware of my tone), on reflection I am also aware of the possibility that unconscious reflexivity could have influenced the research process (Forshaw, 2007).

In the past I have used statistics to falsify null hypotheses and calculate the likelihood of one variable influencing another by chance. The quantitative value provides a 'truth' that can be challenged, on the basis of sample size, extraneous variables, etc., but ultimately the interpretation and implications are based on an objective process of statistical analysis (Rubin & Bellamy, 2012).

In addition to feeling uneasy about my influence on the data at the data collection phase, I also had an uneasy feeling in relation to the analysis. The sequential and objective process that is inherent to a positivist approach was not conducive to a qualitative approach. Braun and Clarke (2006) publish

guidelines that I followed (see Appendix 14), but as they suggest, the process is flexible and the generation of codes, themes and the final interpretation was an ever-changing organic process.

‘It is important to recognise that qualitative analysis guidelines are exactly that – they are not rules, and, following the basic precepts, will need to be applied flexibly to fit the research questions and data (Patton, 1990). Moreover, analysis is not a *linear* process where you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is a more *recursive* process, where you move back and forth as needed, throughout the phases.’ (Braun & Clarke, 1996, p. 16)

This process of continually revisiting the data to check that patterns were evident throughout, and that the interpretation fit that data, was more chaotic than a positivist hypo-deductive method of analysis. I share this perception with other qualitative researchers (Nias, 1991; Woods, 2006). As I am now at the end of this process, I wonder whether if I were to do it again I would feel the same uneasiness. In the 1970s Burch suggested that with any new learning, the learner goes through a process of unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, unconscious competence and conscious incompetence (as cited in Adams, n.d.). It is plausible that due to my inexperience of qualitative research, my feelings around the chaotic nature and uneasiness with the analysis process were more a reflection of my conscious incompetence rather than the process itself. On reflection, having an active role in collecting the data and allowing myself time to reflect on what the ELSAs and children said, identify themes, and consider how these themes formed patterns throughout the data and fit together, gave me a sense of confidence in the conclusions and interpretation I generated. I also feel that I have a greater understanding of the realities of ELSAs and children involved in the ELSA programme. I do not feel that I would have reached this level of understanding using quantitative methods. I feel a positivist approach would have limited my understanding as the participants’ responses would have been limited by structured questionnaires or objective observations without exploring their individual realities. By asking ELSAs and children to tell me about their

realities I feel I have gained a more in-depth understanding of the factors that are important to them and how they make sense of their experiences.

The research process has been challenging and rewarding. I have a greater understanding of qualitative methods and the challenges inherent to the interpretivist approach. I am certain that what I have learnt over the course of this research will inform any future research I conduct.

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## Appendix 1: Systematic review of unpublished papers on the ELSA programme

**Table 1: Summary of aims, sample size, method and outcomes of unpublished papers on the ELSA programme**

Author	Research aims	Sample e.g. ELSA, parents, child, teacher	Method/ measures	Quantitative Outcomes	Qualitative Outcomes
Bravery, K. & Harris, L.(2010) Bournemouth	How much is ELSA valued in school? Is the ongoing support to ELSA sufficient? Does the training help the ELSA to do their job? What difference is the ELSA programme having on students' social, emotional and behavioural outcomes?	21 ELSAs from 14 different Primary schools  26 head teachers contacted 17 head teachers from different schools responded (n=13 primary; n= 3 secondary; n= 1 specialist school) (65% response rate)	ELSA – Semi-structure interview HT – online ad hoc survey	Descriptive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 ELSA's stated that the ELSA programme was 'quite', 'very 'or 'highly' valued in school</li> <li>• 4 ELSAs rated training as 'good'</li> <li>• 17 ELSAs rated as 'excellent'</li> <li>• 19 ELSAs reported in-school support as 'okay' or above, 2 reported it to be 'poor'</li> <li>• Perceptions of children's attendance, behaviour, emotional wellbeing, relationships</li> </ul>	Comments but no analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report that the educational psychologist is supportive</li> </ul> <p>What would optimise ELSA?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More time in training</li> <li>• More examples on how to run sessions</li> <li>• More training to help with range of change issues e.g. domestic abuse, substance misuse</li> <li>• Need for more resources and a budget</li> <li>• More support in school</li> </ul>

				<p>with others and academic achievement improved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELSAs perceptions more positive than head teachers.</li> <li>• Change greater for specific individuals than a perceived whole school level</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	
Lynne Harris (2010) Bournemouth	<p>Evaluation how newly trained ELSAs are using their skills</p> <p>ELSA's perceptions of the value of the ELSA programme</p>	<p>18 ELSAs from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primary schools (n=9)</li> <li>- Secondary schools (n=5)</li> <li>- Specialist schools (n=4)</li> </ul> <p>One ELSA was developing the emotional literacy skills of all pupils within a specialist school. This could inflate range of hours and number of pupils</p>	Ad-hoc questionnaire designed by EPS	<p>Descriptive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELSAs work at individual, group, whole school level</li> <li>• Time spent per week on ELSA work varies from 1-15 hours</li> <li>• Number of children each ELSA works with varies from 1-18</li> <li>• 14 ELSAs have a specialist room</li> <li>• 12 ELSAs less than one hour to prepare for sessions</li> <li>• 4 ELSA felt school was</li> </ul>	<p>Comments but no analysis ELSA's perceptions of the value of ELSA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know children</li> <li>• 'Nipping issues in the bud'</li> <li>• Opportunity for children to explore their feelings with others</li> <li>• Takes the pressure off the class teacher as they don't always have time to speak at length with children</li> <li>• Essential for a child's development to adulthood</li> </ul>

		worked with.		<p>'not well resourced'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 67 students working 'formally' with ELSA in sessions</li> <li>• 160 children had informal contact with an ELSA</li> <li>• 11 ELSAs rated the school as a '6' or above for culture of Emotional of literacy in school (on a scale with 10 being the strongest).</li> </ul>	
Harris, L.(2010) Bournemouth	<p>Evaluation of how newly trained ELSAs are using their skills</p> <p>ELSA's perceptions of the value of the ELSA programme</p>	<p>17 ELSAs from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primary (n=12)</li> <li>- Secondary (n=4)</li> <li>- Pupil referral centre (n=1)</li> </ul>	Ad-hoc questionnaire	<p>Descriptive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELSAs work at an individual, group and whole school level</li> <li>• Time spent per week in session varies from 1-10 hours</li> <li>• Number of children ELSAs work with vary from 2-14</li> <li>• 10 ELSAs have a specialist room</li> <li>• 6 ELSAs less than one hour to prepare for</li> </ul>	<p>Comments but no analysis ELSA's perceptions of the value of the ELSA programme e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Valuable'</li> <li>• 'Worthwhile'</li> <li>• 'Seeing change in behaviours'</li> <li>• 'Meeting emotional needs of children'</li> </ul>

				<p>sessions/ 2 ELSAs had no time to prepare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 ELSA felt school was 'not well resourced'</li> <li>• 57 students working 'formally' with ELSA in sessions</li> <li>• 170 children had informal contact with an ELSA</li> <li>• 6 ELSAs rated the school as a '6' or above for culture of Emotional of literacy in school (on a scale with 10 being the strongest).</li> </ul>	
Russell (2011) Dorset	<p>How well does the training course meet personal learning needs</p> <p>Evaluation of ELSA training</p> <p>The impact of ELSA training on the workplace as a whole</p>	<p>ELSAs</p> <p>Number of participants who completed the scaling questions unclear from report</p> <p>107 ELSAs provided qualitative comments</p>	Ad hoc evaluation sheet	<p>Descriptive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority of ELSAs rated their satisfaction as 6 or above out of ten with 10 being the most satisfied they could be with training</li> <li>• Majority of ELSAs found the skills they developed in training, the practical activities</li> </ul>	<p>Comments grouped into four themes – no information on analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better understanding of the child's emotional needs</li> <li>• More reflective practice</li> <li>• Improved range of interventions provided</li> <li>• Improved confidence in capabilities</li> </ul>

				<p>and discussions and the materials and handouts useful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average improvement in confidence in ability to meet children's emotional needs before and after training was 2.9 on a 10 point likert scale</li> </ul>	
Butcher, Cook and Holder-Spriggs (2013) Southampton	<p>Exploring the impact of the ELSA programme on the emotional literacy of primary school children</p> <p>Research question: does ELSA reduce the child's behaviours that are of concern and does it support the child to achieve their emotional literacy targets?</p>	<p>Three children N= 2 males yr3 N-1 female yr5 One female excluded so in total results based on two children</p> <p>Targets were for internalising behaviours and suitable overt behaviour could not be identified</p>	Structured observation	<p>Frequency and momentary time sampling</p> <p>Child A</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On task behaviour increased from 50% to 81%</li> <li>• Active member of the peer group 35% to 63%</li> <li>• No change in frequency asking for help</li> </ul> <p>Child B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On task behaviour 38% to 66%</li> <li>• Reduction in number of aggressive behaviours</li> </ul>	None

				– very low towards the end of the 6 week intervention	
Cardiff Local Authority (2012)	Training evaluation	57 ELSAs approached from 35 primary Schools 10 secondary schools 2 specialist resource provisions  58% response rate n=33	Ad hoc survey	Descriptive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 97% training prepared me well for the role</li> <li>• 97% training was relevant to my role</li> <li>• 100% stated the course folder (resources) was useful</li> <li>• 100% reported that training increased my confidence in supporting pupils with emotional literacy</li> </ul>	Comments no analysis
Grahamslaw, (2010)	A pre-post control group investigation to investigate the impact of the ELSA project on support assistants' self-efficacy for working with children.  Both quantitative and	ELSAs completed rating scales for themselves and children in experimental and control groups	Self Efficacy measures	Statistical analysis	Unavailable

	qualitative results supported the hypothesis and the ELSA project was found to have a positive impact on support assistants and children's self-efficacy beliefs.				
Mann and Russell (2011) Dorset	To assess the change in children and young people's emotional literacy as a results of ELSA support.	Responses from 30 ELSAs reporting on 170 children from 18 different settings  Total n=unsure End of case review data (pre and post) total n=96 N=8 teachers, students and parents N=44 students and teacher N=36 teachers only N=8 students only  Interim data total n=34 N=1 teachers, students and parents	Emotional Literacy Checklist pre and post	Statistical analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No statistical changes to parents or students ratings</li> <li>• Statistically significant positive changes in the teachers ratings of children's emotional literacy.</li> <li>• Teachers and parents pre and post scores were more aligned with each other than with students</li> <li>• Visual representation of the students raw scores indicate that under half of students</li> </ul>	Qualitative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils may have tried to present a positive impression in the beginning hence inflated their scores on the pre measure</li> <li>• Some pupils lacked self-awareness of their difficulties in the beginning, hence reported less difficulties in the pre measures</li> </ul> <p>ELSA reports benefits in the following areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social behaviour</li> <li>• Self esteem and self awareness</li> <li>• Social and emotional</li> </ul>

		N=8 students and teacher N=10 teachers only N=16 students only		reported greater emotional literacy post sessions and 16 reported lower emotional well-being	confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour</li> <li>• Learning and concentration</li> </ul>
Burton, Osborne and Norgate (2010) Bridgend	Comparison of emotional literacy outcomes for students who complete ELSA sessions with children who have similar needs but are not involved in ELSA.	Teachers rated SDQ (n=199) Teachers rated Emotional Literacy Checklist (n=198) Pupils rated Emotional Literacy Checklist (n=178) Experimental and control group matched on perception of need So total for analysis were as follows: Experimental group 18 primary teacher ratings 12 secondary teacher ratings	Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) Teacher rated emotional literacy checklist Pupil rated emotional literacy checklist	Pupils who received ELSA support displayed significant improvements in more areas than those pupils who did not receive ELSA support. Teacher ratings of the ELSA children post sessions were more positive in the following areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conduct problems</li> <li>• hyperactivity</li> <li>• empathy</li> <li>• self awareness</li> <li>• self regulation</li> <li>• social skills</li> </ul> Teacher's ratings of the ELSA children AND the control group improved in the following areas	None

		<p>Total n=30</p> <p>Control group 18 primary teacher ratings 12 secondary teacher ratings Total n=30</p> <p>Students experimental group 18 primary 6 secondary Total n=24</p> <p>Students control group 18 primary 6 secondary Total n=24</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• peer problems</li> <li>• motivation</li> </ul> <p>Students ratings of emotional literacy did not change pre and post ELSA sessions</p>	
Burton, Traill and Norgate (2009) Hampshire	Evaluation of the ELSA programme – pre and post data	<p>1. Questionnaire data 13 ELSAs 48 primary school students 10 secondary students 14 line managers (e.g. SENCOs) Teacher</p>	<p>1. Ad hoc evaluation questionnaire</p> <p>2. Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ)</p>	<p>1. Evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 83% of students perceive that they are improving in relation to things they are working on</li> <li>• 44 or 47 primary school teachers claimed that</li> </ul>	Qualitative data examples to back up quantitative findings

		<p>questionnaires for 54 students</p> <p>2. 107 Matched pre and post teaching SDQ 52 matched parent SDQ</p>	<p>pre and post teacher and parent ratings</p>	<p>progress had been made in relation o ELSA targets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 53 teachers stated that ELSA had been of benefit (1 said it was too soon to judge)</li> <li>• Line managers 'overwhelmingly positive both with regards to professional development of ELSAs and the positive impact of the ELSA programme'</li> </ul> <p>2. SDQ data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statistical significant improvements in teachers' ratings of pupils' emotional problems, peer problems, conduct disorder and pro social behaviours. Reported decrease in hyperactivity but not statistically significant.</li> </ul>	
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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant positive change in parents total SDQ scores for their child pre and post as well as a significant decrease in hyperactivity</li> </ul>	
Bradley (2010) Hampshire – UK wide	The aim was to determine how many children had received support during the academic year and the scope of ELSAs work and, issues relating to other work of the ELSAs	525 ELSAs surveyed 243 returned questionnaire 46.3% response rate	Ad hoc	<p>Descriptive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELSA sessions vary considerably – most common topics were self-esteem, social skills and anger management</li> <li>• Length of sessions vary (20-53 minutes)</li> <li>• Number of sessions varied (1-200)</li> <li>• In some schools as many as 70 pupil receive ongoing support (nurture classes included in this)</li> <li>• Time allocation for the ELSA role varies from</li> </ul>	<p>Yes – elaborates on questionnaire data e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Rewarding’ and ‘Enjoyable’</li> <li>• Some felt their school did not provide enough time to complete the work</li> <li>• Some felt they were not supported by their school</li> <li>• Some ELSAs would welcome more training</li> </ul>

				<p>30 minutes to 37.5 hours per week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approximately 50% of the sample had other roles within the school</li> <li>• 54% of ELSAs would welcome further training</li> <li>• 78% of ELSAs had contact with parents</li> </ul>	
Murray (2010) Hampshire	Impact ELSAs have had upon pupils emotional literacy skills over a six week period.	Information not provided	Emotional Literacy Checklist completed by ELSAs for each child they worked with and children with similar needs but not in ELSA.	<p>Descriptive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% of ELSAs felt pupils had improved on targets set</li> <li>• 57% of class teachers felt ELSA sessions had been helpful or very helpful with the remainder of teachers rating them as a bit helpful</li> </ul> <p>No analysis reported – unsure if ‘significant’ is ‘statistically significant’</p>	<p>Yes – unsure of process/ inter-rater reliability etc</p> <p>SENCOs responses coded into themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confidence</li> <li>○ Competency</li> <li>○ Supervision</li> <li>○ Training</li> </ul> </li> <li>• ELSA skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Resources</li> <li>○ Planning</li> <li>○ Evaluating</li> <li>○ Strategies and approaches</li> <li>○ Language</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant increase in emotional literacy score post group – 77% of ELSAs reported that pupils emotional literacy had increased</li> <li>• No significant difference in emotional literacy scores of children with similar needs but not in ELSA (control group).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communicating information</li> <li>○ Skills across context</li> <li>○ Modelling</li> <li>○ Time</li> </ul> </li> <li>• ELSA qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fun</li> <li>○ Motivation</li> <li>○ Trust</li> <li>○ Calm</li> <li>○ Engaging pupils</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Value of ELSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Parent feedback</li> <li>○ Recognition</li> <li>○ Employment</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Community partnership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Transitions</li> <li>○ partnerships</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Hill, O'Hare and Weidberg (2013) Wiltshire and North Somerset	Purpose of research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme as perceived by the people it affects first hand: the young people and staff in schools	Two children – interviewed separately Joint interviews with ELSA and SENCo from two schools	na		<p>Thematic analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisational factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ strategic reflections</li> <li>○ supportive factors</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Practical experiences of children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ specific strategies</li> <li>○ generalised content</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Creating positive change</li> </ul>

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ embedded ethos</li><li>○ eclecticism</li><li>○ involvement and transparency</li><li>○ relationships</li><li>○ developing a sense of self</li></ul>
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## Appendix 2: Letter to head teachers

Date 07<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Dear xxx

I am a post graduate student in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my degree I am conducting a study exploring children's and emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) experiences of ELSA sessions. I am writing to enquire if your school would be willing to participate in this research.

I would like to conduct two interviews on the school premises lasting approximately 30 minutes each.

- I would like to ask the ELSAs to approach the child they are or have been working with and ask them to send an information leaflet and consent form home to the child's guardians.
- Once the consent forms have been returned to the school. I would like conduct interviews with the child and the ELSA on the school premises.

It is anticipated that the results from this research will inform future training and support given to ELSAs with a view to enhancing the implementation of the programme and the experiences of ELSAs and young people.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you require further information.

Regards,

Sharon McEwen

Dr. Sharon McEwen

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*Supervised by,*  
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Professional Director  
Cardiff University  
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Email: GriffeySJ@cardiff.ac.uk

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of this research, please contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

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### **Appendix 3: ELSA information sheet**

I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year trainee educational psychologist from Cardiff University. As part of my studies I am exploring ELSAs' experiences of supporting children in ELSA sessions. I will also be exploring children perceptions of the support they receive.

To do this, I am conducting a series interviews with ELSAs and young people and would like you to take part. The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes.

There are four inclusion criteria.

- ELSAs should have worked with the child at some point over the last two terms.
- ELSAs should have identified a change issue (e.g. friendships, anger, bereavement) to address in sessions and state where they are in the change process/outcome.
- ELSAs should not be trained in other interventions where they may have built a relationship with the child they are working with (e.g. Nurture groups, breakfast groups, assigned LSA, key worker)
- ELSAs should not have brought prior training in therapeutic skills to the role of ELSA (e.g. past training in nurture groups, incredible years, counselling).

Participation is voluntary. The interview will be recorded using a digital recorder. The data will be transcribed within seven days and the recording will be deleted. The transcript will be held confidentiality on a password protected encrypted USA stick for 5 years. Only the researcher will have access to the transcription. The data will form the basis of the researcher's research project which will be submitted to Cardiff University for assessment.

Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without reason. Participants can have access to their data or ask for it to be deleted at any time. We do not anticipate any risks or harm as a result of participating but all participants will be debriefed and information on pastoral support will be supplied verbally after the interview.

This project has been reviewed by the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committees (SREC) and will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). The researcher has a enhance disclosure and the project will be supervised my Dr. Simon Griffey, Professional Director for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University.

If you have any further queries or would like to discuss the project, please contact:

Dr. Sharon McEwen  
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Haverfordwest  
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#### **Appendix 4: Parent information sheet**

I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year trainee educational psychologist from Cardiff University. As part of my studies I am exploring children's perceptions of the support they receive in ELSA sessions and ELSA perceptions of the support they provide. The ELSA who was working with your child, has agreed to take part in the research and I have asked them to send this letter to you to seek your consent for me to interview your child.

I am conducting a series interviews with ELSAs and young people across the authority and would like your child to take part. The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes. I am purely interested in your child experience of the ELSA sessions not the content of sessions.

There are two inclusion criteria. Firstly, your child must be able to communicate their thoughts and feelings in English and secondly, as a guardian you must consent to his or her participation.

Participation is voluntary. Your child will be asked to complete a consent form too. The interview will be recorded using a digital recorder. The data will be held confidentiality until it is transcribed within seven days of the interview. The recordings will be deleted. The transcriptions will be stored on a password protected encrypted USA stick for 5 years. Only the researcher will have access to your child's transcription. The data will form the basis of my research project which will be submitted to Cardiff University for assessment.

Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without reason up. Participants can have access to their transcription at any time and/or ask for it to be deleted.

I do not anticipate any risks or harm to your child as a result of his or her participation but all participants will be debriefed and information on pastoral support will be supplied verbally after the interview.

This project has been reviewed by the Cardiff University School Research Ethics Committees (SREC) and will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). The researcher has a enhance disclosure and the project will be supervised by Dr. Simon Griffey, Professional Director for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology at Cardiff University.

If you would consent to your child's participation, please complete the attached consent form and return it to the **School ELSA**.

If you have any further queries or would like to discuss the project, please contact:

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## Appendix 5: Student information sheet

I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year trainee educational psychologist from Cardiff University. As part of my course I'd like to learn more ELSA and how it works. I'd like to learn more about the support you received.

To do this, I am hoping to talk to lots of ELSAs and the young people they work with. I'd like to spend some time talking to you. This isn't a test and everything you say is confidential (unless you tell me that you or someone else is in danger or at risk of harm). I won't ask you to tell me about the things you talked to your ELSA about but I will ask you about what you thought about sessions and how they helped you. Our discussion will take approximately 30-40 minutes.

Our discussion will be recorded using a digital recorder. After seven days I will write what you say down and delete the recording. This is called a transcription and will be stored on a password protected encrypted USA stick for 5 years. I am the only person who will have access to your transcription. The data will form the basis of my research project.

Participation is voluntary. That means you do not need to take part if you don't want to. You can stop the discussion at anytime by telling me that you want to go back to class. You do not have to give me a reason for stopping and you will not get into trouble for stopping the discussion. I will take you back to class and will speak to your teacher, just to make sure that you are happy in class. You can have access to your transcription at any time and/or ask for it to be deleted.

I hope you enjoy talking to me, but I will remind you of whom you can talk to in school about your feelings should you feel upset about anything we have talked about.

If you would like to ask any questions about the study you can contact me, Sharon McEwen, or my supervisor. I have written our contact details below.

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Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of this research, please contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

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## Appendix 6: ELSA consent sheet

I understand that my participation in this project will involve participating in an interview to discuss my experiences of supporting children in ELSA sessions. This will require approximately 30-40 minutes of my time.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the interview at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr. Sharon McEwen, Trainee Educational Psychologist or Dr Simon Griffey, Research Supervisor.

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Should I wish to make a complaint, I will contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

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CF10 3AT  
Tel: 029 208 76497  
Email: [ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk)

I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially, such that only the experimenter can trace this information back to me. The data will be transcribed within 7 days and the recording will be destroyed. The transcription will be retained for up to five years on a password protected encrypted USB stick after which time it will be deleted. Only the researcher will have access to my transcription. I understand that I can ask

for the information to be deleted/destroyed at any time and I can have access to the information at any time.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Dr. Sharon McEwen, Trainee Educational Psychologist, School of Psychology, Cardiff University under the supervision of Simon Griffey, Professional Director.

Signed:

Date:

## **Appendix 7: Parental consent sheet**

I understand that my child's participation in this project will involve him or her participating in an interview to discuss his or her experiences of ELSA sessions within school. This will require approximately 30-40 minutes of his or her time.

I understand that my child's participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that he or she can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Dr. Sharon McEwen, Trainee Educational Psychologist or Dr Simon Griffey/ Research Supervisor.

Dr. Sharon McEwen  
Trainee Educational Psychologist  
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Haverfordwest  
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SA61 1TP  
Telephone: 01437 775014  
Email:  
[Sharon.McEwen@Pembrokeshire.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon.McEwen@Pembrokeshire.gov.uk)

Dr Simon Griffey  
Professional Director  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3AT  
Telephone: 02920870366  
Email: [GriffeySJ@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:GriffeySJ@cardiff.ac.uk)

Should I wish to make a complaint, I will contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

Dr Simon Claridge  
Research Director  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3AT  
Tel: 029 208 76497  
Email: [ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk)

I understand that the information provided by my child will be held confidentially, such that only the experimenter can trace this information back to him or her individually. The data will be transcribed within 7 days and the recording will be destroyed. The transcription will be retained for up

to five years on a password protected encrypted USB stick after which time it will be deleted. I understand that I can ask for the information my child provides to be deleted/destroyed at any time and I can have access to the information at any time.

I also understand that at the end of the study my child will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.

I, \_\_\_\_\_(NAME OF CHILD) consent to participate in the study conducted by Dr. Sharon McEwen, Trainee Educational Psychologist, School of Psychology, Cardiff University under the supervision of Dr. Simon Griffey, Professional Director.

Signed:

Date:

## Appendix 8: Child consent sheet

I agree to talk to Dr. Sharon McEwen, Trainee Educational Psychologist, about my experiences of ELSA sessions. This will take about 30-40 minutes of my time.

Taking part is voluntary. This means I don't have to take part if I don't want to. I can leave at anytime without giving a reason. If I want to leave I will ask to go back to class.

I am free to ask any questions at any time.

The discussion will be recorded on a digital recorder. Sharon showed me how this works. Sharon will listen to the recording and write down what I have said. This is called a written transcript. The recording will then be deleted and the transcript will be stored on a password protected encrypted USB stick. Only Sharon will have access to my transcript and it will be used to form part of her research project which will be submitted to the University as part of her studies.

Sharon will delete my transcript in 5 years time. Up until this time, I can have access to my transcript at any time or ask for it to be deleted/destroyed.

If I want to talk to someone about what I talked about or my recording I will contact:

Dr. Sharon McEwen

Trainee Educational Psychologist  
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2nd Floor, North Wing  
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*Supervised by,*  
Dr Simon Griffey  
Professional Director  
Cardiff University  
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CF10 3AT  
Telephone: 02920870366  
Email: GriffeySJ@cardiff.ac.uk

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of this research, please contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

Dr Simon Claridge  
Research Director  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3AT  
Tel: 029 208 76497  
Email: ClaridgeS@cardiff.ac.uk

I, \_\_\_\_\_(name) would like to take part in this study with Dr. Sharon McEwen, Trainee Educational Psychologist, School of Psychology, Cardiff University under the supervision of Dr. Simon Griffey, Professional Director.  
Signed:

## Appendix 9: ELSA debrief sheet

### *An exploration of ELSAs' experiences of supporting children*

Thank you for taking part in this study. The aim of the interview was to gain a greater understanding of your experience supporting children during ELSA sessions. I am also asking children about their experiences. I hope to gain an understanding of ELSA sessions from the perspectives of ELSAs' and children. The information you provided will form part of my research project. This will be submitted to Cardiff University in February 2015.

The interview will be transcribed within seven days and the recording will be deleted. The transcript will be held confidentiality on a password protected encrypted USA stick for 5 years. I am the only person who will have access to your transcription. You can access your data or ask for it to be deleted at any time.

If you would like to discuss the interview or the research further please contact:

Dr. Sharon McEwen

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Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of this research, please contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

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## Appendix 10: Student debrief sheet

### What I think about ELSA!

Thank you for taking part in this study. I hope you enjoyed talking to me. It was lovely to hear about your experiences of ELSA. I am also asking ELSAs about their experiences too. This will help me gain a better understanding of both ELSAs and children's experiences of ELSA sessions. The information you provided will form part of my research project that will be submitted to Cardiff University.

As you know, I recorded what you said on a digital recorder. Over the next seven days I will listen to the recording and write down what you said. The recording will be deleted.

The transcriptions will be stored on a password protected USA stick and will be destroyed within 5 years. I am the only person who will have access to your transcription. You can have access to the transcription at any time and/or ask for it to be destroyed.

If you would like to talk to someone about what we talked about or about your recording please tell your teacher and/or guardian and contact:

Dr. Sharon McEwen  
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Sharon.McEwen@Pembrokeshire.gov.uk

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Dr Simon Griffey  
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Email: [GriffeySJ@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:GriffeySJ@cardiff.ac.uk)

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of this research, please contact Dr. Simon Claridge, Research Director.

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School of Psychology  
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## Appendix 11: ELSA & child pilot interview

1. Gender
2. Year group
3. Are you at the beginning, middle or end of the ELSA sessions? (all should have finished)
4. Can you tell me the following.
  - a. How many ELSA sessions did you have?
  - b. What was the frequency of the ELSA sessions? (e.g. once a week)
  - c. How long did the ELSA sessions last?
  - d. What did you do in ELSA sessions? (handicrafts or talking – record prompted or unprompted)
    - i. Where did you source/get the materials you used?
    - ii. What made you choose those materials?
    - iii. Where you working to a prescribed text e.g. following a manual or book with set things to say and/or do?
  - e. Did you set goals?
    - i. How did you set or review goals?
    - ii. How often did you set goals?
    - iii. Did you write your goals down or were they in your head?
    - iv. How did you measure each goal? (observation, self-evaluation – note if prompted or not promoted)
    - v. Did you meet your goals?
5. Thinking about your ELSA sessions, what do you think were the most important factors that helped you meet your goals?
  - a. Why do you think they were important?
6. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the most important) how important were the techniques, skills and resources you used/learnt in ELSA sessions (e.g. keep a feelings diary, relaxation techniques – note if prompts needed)
  - i. Why a [insert number]?
- 6.1 What would have to be different for you to give a higher rating?
  - i. Why is that important?
- 6.2 What would have to be different for you to give a lower rating?
  - i. Why is that important?

I understand that (your/the child's) thoughts, feelings and behaviours may have changed over the course of ELSA sessions. This may have been attributed to changes in how (he/she/you) approached learning, behaved in class or coped in different situations. In this section, I would like you to think specifically about your experiences of the ELSA sessions and not changes that may have occurred outside the sessions. You do not have to tell me what you talked about in ELSA session.

7. Thinking about the early sessions...
  - a. Pyramiding

- i. What where they like?
  - ii. Why do you think they were like that?
  - iii. How did you feel?
  - iv. What made you feel like that?
  - v. Why was that important
  - vi. How did the child/ELSA behave?
  - vii. What were you thinking about the child/ELSA behavior?
  - viii. Why was that important?
  
- 8. Thinking about the middle sessions (between the beginning and end sessions)...
  - i. Where there any changes? If so, what did it look like?
  - ii. Why do you think a change occurred or did not occur?
  - iii. How did you feel?
  - iv. What made you feel like that?
  - v. How did the child/ELSA behave?
  - vi. What were you thinking about the child/ELSA behavior?
  
- 9. Thinking about the end sessions...
  - i. Where there any changes? If so, what did it look like?
  - ii. Why do you think a change occurred or did not occur?
  - iii. How did you feel?
  - iv. What made you feel like that?
  - v. Why was that important
  - vi. How did the child/ELSA behave?
  - vii. What were you thinking about the child/ELSA behavior?
  - viii. Why was that important?
  
- 10. Has your relationship with the ELSA/child you were working with changed over time?
  - i. If yes, what did the change look like?
  - ii. Why do you think your relationship has changed or did not change over time?
  - iii. Why is that important?
  
- 11. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the most important) how important is/was the relationship between you and the ELSA/child you were working with?
  - Why do you think that?
  - 11.1 What would a higher number look like?
    - Why do you think that?
    - Why is that important?
  
  - 11.2 What would a lower number look like?
    - Why do you think that?
    - Why is that important?
  
- 12. Is there anything that is particularly important in building a relationship with your ELSA/Child?

- i. Why are [insert factors] important?
- ii. What would be the opposite?

13. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the most important) how important was the relationship in meeting your goals?

Why a [insert number]?

13.1 What would a higher number look like?

Why is that important?

13.2 What would a lower number look like?

Why is that important?

9 What would you say is/are the best thing(s) about ELSA sessions?

Why is that important?

10 What would you say is/are the worst thing(s) about ELSA sessions?

Why is that important?

11 What would make ELSA better?

Why is that important?

## Appendix 12: ELSA final interview profroma

	<b>Questions</b>
1	Introduce myself and the study Outline confidentiality and consent
2	Now you know a little bit about me, I was wondering if you could give me a brief overview of your experiences of the ELSA programme?
3	Imagine we were designing an interview to explore ELSAs' experiences of ELSA sessions. What do you think would be the essential things we should ask about?
4	Now we have a few suggestions are there any topics you would take away or anything you would like to add? Please can you choose what topics were the more relevant to your experience? Put these in order of importance?
5	Please could you talk about your experience of ELSA with the child I'll be meeting with covering the topics we've identified? You can talk about each separately or you can give an overview as the topics may interlink.
7	Closing – thank you and any other questions

## Appendix 13: Child final interview profroma

	<b>Questions</b>
1	<p>Introduce myself and the study            Outline confidentiality and consent            Give a brief summary of what to expect</p>
2	<p>I thought we could design a poster together which would tell a story about your experiences of ELSA sessions</p> <p>I thought we could split the poster into four sections:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. your first ELSA session</li> <li>2. the middle sessions</li> <li>3. the last session</li> </ol>
3	<p>I was thinking we could design a poster of the best ELSA session ever. This is what you would imagine the best ELSA session would look like. Think about how you would feel, how the ELSA would behave, how you would spend your time.</p> <p>Sometimes thinking about what we don't want can help us decide what we do want.</p> <p>I was thinking we could design another poster of the worse ELSA session ever. This can be make believe. This would give us an idea of what you <i>wouldn't want</i> an ELSA session to look like.</p> <p>Let's look at your best ELSA session ever – is there anything you would add now that you have completed the worst session poster?</p>
5	<p>Closing – thank you and any questions</p>

## Appendix 14: Phases of thematic analysis

**Table 2: Phases of thematic analysis**

<b>Phase of thematic analysis</b>	<b>Description of my process</b>
1. Familiarising self with the data	The data was transcribed verbatim and read and re-read noting down initial codes.
2. Generating initial codes	Recorded patterns of codes across the data by cross checking codes across each transcripts.
3. Searching for themes	Collated codes into potential themes  List of themes and codes sent to two inter-raters to cross check coding and themes
4. Reviewing themes	Checking themes work in relation to extracts and data set and generating thematic 'map' of the analysis  Discussion with two inter-raters to check initial refinement of themes agreed
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing refining of specific themes and maps  Maps, quotations and interpretation discussed again with two inter-raters. To check that there is a consensus that the themes represent ELSAs' and children's experiences of the ELSA programme  Generated clear name and definition of themes
6. Producing the report	Selected most vivid quotations for inclusion in report  Reflect back to the original research questions to ensure they are being answered

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) 'Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p37)

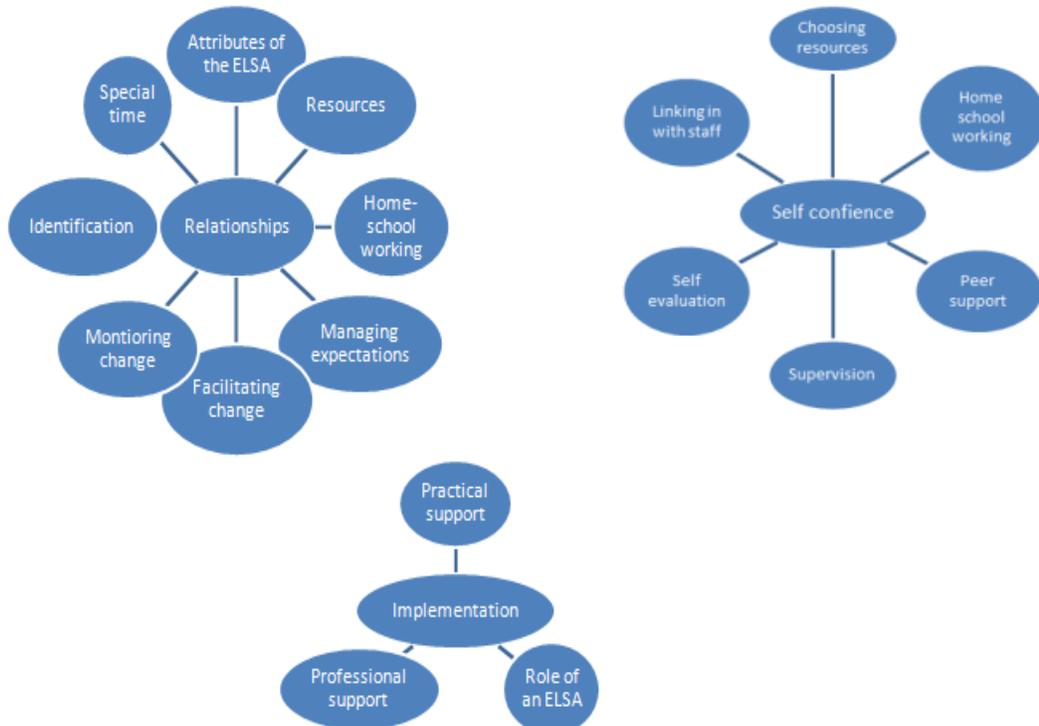
## Appendix 15: Thematic maps

### Thematic analysis of ELSA interviews

Level 1 Themes: The main overarching themes derived from the analysis of the data

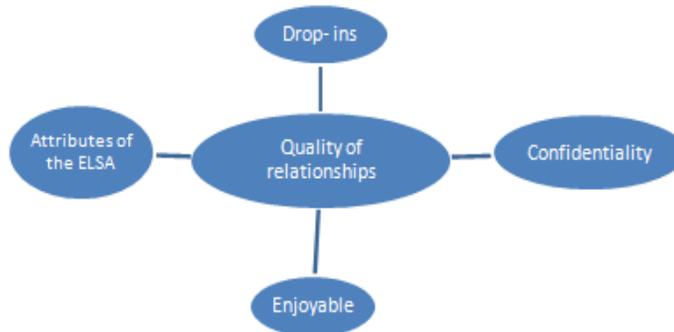


Level 2 Themes: Three subordinate themes and contributing sub-themes



## Thematic analysis of child interviews

Level 1 Themes: The main overarching themes derived from the analysis of the data



Level 2 Themes: Three subordinate themes and contributing sub-themes



## Appendix 16: Sub-theme codes and example quotations

*Table 3: ELSAs' sub-theme codes and example quotations*

Sub-themes	Quotations
ELSA attributes	<p data-bbox="453 636 1612 695">'I mean someone wouldn't go for the role if they are not a good listen and feel empathy.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 37)</p> <p data-bbox="453 734 1663 792">'That's what try to do. To see it, without an opinion, I just try to see it as they see it'. (ELSA, 5; Line, 160)</p> <p data-bbox="453 831 1612 935">'I do think the qualities of an ELSA are important because sometimes you've got to take yourself out of the challenging behaviour to be able to guide and coach them through whatever the issue is without having an opinion'. (ELSA, 5; Line, 204)</p> <p data-bbox="453 974 1671 1143">'It you haven't got a certain way about you, its not going to work. Because you have to be able to talk and be able to prise these things out of them, make them laugh, and make them comfortable and be willing to almost admit defeat on your part so that if they are not going to talk to you and not going to tell you anything or not going to be willing take part.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 267)</p> <p data-bbox="453 1182 1587 1240">'I think the relationship is very important, they have to feel happy coming out with you.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 65)</p>

	<p>'I think it is just being a person that they can talk to. I'm not going to question what they say, just listen.' (ELSA, 8; Line, 76)</p> <p>'I think I became more sympathetic and it helped me become more patient.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 11)</p> <p>'Sometimes at the beginning I would do all the work but then I realised that you've got to sit back and let them say what it is, their worries and what they want to say to you.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 130)</p> <p>'Because we already had a relationship with how we taught her, she knew me but as she went along, she felt safe, it was a safe place to come.' (ELSA, 1; Line, 131)</p>
Special time	<p>'It's there special time that they have that not a lot of other kids have' (ELSA, 4; Line, 37)</p> <p>'I don't even talk about how his week went because it has been horrendous and it's a little separate place where he can come.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 217)</p> <p>'Well a lot of it is about giving them attention.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 84)</p> <p>'I think the talk time is important to reinforce social rules and practicing things like turn taking considering someone else's views.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 161)</p> <p>'Well they have to trust you, the way we run ELSA is different from numeracy and literacy sessions. Its informal, its friendly, its relaxed. We've got biscuits. It just a different atmosphere altogether.' (ELSA 6; Line, 68)</p>

	<p>'I think it's important to establish a relationship with the pupil and I think it is good that at the same time you always follow the time and they get to know you well. They get into a routine.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 95)</p> <p>'Other schools have a space and a tent thing with lights and cushions. If we had something like that the younger children would get excited like 'we're doing ELSA!' (ELSA, 6; Line, 48)</p> <p>'It's what you put on the walls, its about atmosphere.' (ELSA, 7 &amp; Line, 156)</p>
Identification	<p>'Some parents come in and ask if there is any chance someone can sit and talk to them.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 8)</p> <p>'Teachers tends to come to speak to me and we decide from there who is a priority.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 134)</p> <p>'I think some teachers think that you can re-refer and its only when you are party to a conversation and that SENCo and I have such a good relationship that's he can say 'oh this has happened, can you see?' (ELSA, 5; Line 168)</p> <p>'Because I am in the corridor, a lot of people walk past, I can see quite a lot of things happening and can intercept things before things get blown up.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 21)</p> <p>'We use the PASS data and then discuss the children's needs with Head and SENCo obviously we talk to the teachers to get some kind of remit.' (ELSA, 7; Line 24)</p>
Monitoring change	<p>'I say to the teacher, this is what we've done, do you think its made a difference in class.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 44)</p>

	<p>'A lot of children, they come past here and they tell me all sorts of things now, so its quite useful and you...eh...are in a privilege position and well these snippets of information are sometimes worthwhile putting back into the classroom because they tell the teacher what she should do in the classroom.' (ELSA, 7; Line 96)</p>
Facilitating change	<p>'Well nothing will work unless you have a relationship with these children.' (ELSA, 4, Line 96)</p> <p>'It was something he disclosed and I had to take action. It was the most awful weekend of my life as he felt that I had betrayed him. It took a long time to get back on track.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 247)</p> <p>'I think it was quite a nice relationship for him. He was able to talk about his dog and the fact he liked Minecraft and from then we just talked about situations and then if the situation came up again he could manage the situation without bursting.' (ELSA, 5; Line 274)</p> <p>'I'm very much a fix it kinda person and I can't do that. I need to be there for them whilst they go through the process.' (ELSA, 8; Line, 86)</p> <p>'It's hard for them to get the bonds with other people. It's just about giving them advice.' (ELSA, 6; Line 10)</p> <p>'Maybe it was just because it was informal and we already started to build a bond between us.' (ELSA, 6; Line 116)</p>

‘Sometimes it’s just about resetting them and saying well, what about so and so and have you thought about this or that?’ (ELSA, 7; Line 91)

‘It’s difficult to extract what that child feels they have learnt because for them its just fun, they don’t always appreciate they have done any work.’ (ELSA, 7; Line, 118)

‘You form a very close relationship and I must say genuinely it has only happened once where a child was shuttered down and I had to say sorry - she did not want to engage with me.’ (ELSA, 7; Line, 197)

‘Her confidence grew, she stopped the blinking, she stopped the nervousness, getting a bit of eye contact with me, I felt like she could trust me and we had quite a good relationship, she seemed a lot better a lot more open.’ (ELSA, 2; Line, 41)

‘It was emotionally draining and the sense of .... and I just wanted to help this person and just wanted them to feel better and you just don’t have a magic wand just to make it all feel better.’ (ELSA, 1; Line, 157)

‘Because you need to have a good relationship and to build up a relationship they need to be able to feel safe in that space with you. So if it’s awkward, no one is going to progress if it’s going to be awkward.’ (ELSA, 1; Line, 188)

‘I told mum that we had worked through most of his worries but that there was one that belonged to dad. We had written it down and his goal was to give it to dad and talk about it. Over the next week mum told me that he confided in her and they had talked to dad about his worry and dad was able to put his mind at ease.’ (ELSA, 4; Line, 320)

Resources	<p>'If it was bereavement, I would definitely want more resources too....you try to unlock whatever sadness you know and maybe relate to them.' (ELSA, 3; Line 32)</p> <p>'We've done craft activities but its about talking to the children and often the activity is a distraction from what we are actually talking about.' (ELSA, 6; Line 42)</p> <p>'You need a relationship with the child but you need to be able to plan a session to meet their needs.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 191)</p> <p>'I've bought a book and put something on the front and made it special to them or we have gone and got pictures off the internet ...its about finding out what they want or they need to be able to get them to start talking to you, to trust you.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 29)</p> <p>'We start with a warmer they love the feelings jenga and the tumbling monkeys – no matter how big or small they are. The red on is a happy feeling, the green one is a sad feeling and then I say "tell me a time when..." They are very clever, if they don't want to tell me something, they won't pick that colour. It's an opener.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 29)</p> <p>'It was more about just being there and making him feel special and being there if he wanted to talk things through.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 125)</p> <p>'Resources... we make things constantly try to make it fun for him...and ...I mean that's when you chat, when you are not even...a spider or a whatever...we have made every animal.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 125)</p>

	<p>‘That he is special and willing to give them the time...he tells me what he wants to make and I collect the materials over the week and his face lights up.’ (ELSA, 3; Line, 131)</p> <p>‘The resources weren’t really that important, because it was really just being there.’ (ELSA, 8; Line, 95)</p> <p>‘Just getting her to smile at the end of it and sometimes just doing an activity and just focusing on that activity and forgetting everything else that’s happening in her life.’ (ELSA, 2; Line 28)</p>
Home school working	<p>‘There was one meeting with the dad and I didn’t know it was going to be emotional for the dad, so I was a bit taken a back and she said that she (the head) would be in there with me.’ (ELSA, 3; Line, 89)</p> <p>‘A lot of problems stem from the interaction between the parent and child so it is important to have them on board.’ (ELSA, 8; Line, 69)</p> <p>‘What he needed was a friend, I spoke to mum and she was happy to have a friend from school over for tea.’ (ELSA 4; Line 116)</p> <p>‘I mean parents, I have had them in and we had a tea party, so the relationship is not breaking down.’ (ELSA, 4; Line 259)</p> <p>‘One asked me to meet with her and her little girl every Friday. I found it tricky at first but now I feel confident to do that.’ (ELSA, 5; Line, 100)</p> <p>‘[mum] was very vulnerable also so it was important gaining her trust so that she would be happy with me working with him.’ (ELSA, 3, Line 122)</p>

<p>Managing expectations</p>	<p>‘When a teacher feels that this child needs ELSA, we have a checklist for the teacher of what their perception of the child is.’ (ELSA, 3; Line 56)</p> <p>‘It could just be maturity as they grow up but I do know they act differently to me than to other members of staff. I can see differences.’ (ELSA, 6; Line, 75)</p> <p>‘Perhaps he thought I knew him better, he wouldn’t be disruptive for me. I didn’t see the disruptive behaviour. But his other teachers were reporting disruptive behaviours. Perhaps he feels more appreciated? It’s a self fulfilling prophecy thing. The teacher thinks I’m going to be bad so I’m going to be bad.’ (ELSA 6; Line, 79)</p> <p>‘Getting the teachers to understand what it is. Because every time there is a problem with a child in the class, whether they are on ELSA or not, they fetch me. That’s not my role. This isn’t an ELSA role. I’m not here to tell the children off if they are playing up in class.’ (ELSA, 6; Line, 52)</p> <p>‘If there is any sort of support...they are almost over-protective about it. It’s that fine line and I think that if you just involve them a little....the role of the parent is really vital.’ (ELSA, 3; Line 103)</p> <p>‘Because people give me children and ask me to see the children that they think is a problem. She’s a in a bubble. Her world is fine. It’s not my place to come along and make her aware of everything.’ (ELSA, 4; Line, 99)</p> <p>‘Sometimes parents come to me with their problems at home. That’s the bit I find tricky because as an ELSA we only work with children if the problem is at school.’ (ELSA, 5; Line,</p>
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	<p>120)</p> <p>'If there is an argument in the field, they need to go and see the ELSA, they don't grasp that there has to be a change of some sort for you to work on....what he needed was a bit of PES not ELSA.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 108)</p> <p>'This one was a referral from a teacher; I did four sessions and wasn't getting anywhere. It was pointless.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 58)</p> <p>'I did have a 6 year old child and his father was terminally ill and it was becoming very apparent that it was coming very close and his teacher was very concerned that he was so quiet and didn't seem to want to talk and she wondered if he would benefit from ELSA and so I took him out for a chat and I said to him that I was there if he ever needed to talk and he said he liked to keep it private and he left it like that.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 132)</p> <p>'Sometime they think you are going to fix it. I get very excited about the little things and you can see that teachers face like 'you know they were swinging from the rafters yesterday.'</p> <p>(ELSA, 4; Line, 132)</p> <p>'I try to help them play by the rules, I try to make them see it like other rules they may know about like football and how you have to play by rules.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 160)</p>
Resources	<p>'It's the resources, our role as a TA and we don't do a lot of planning so within the ELSA capacity to know whether we are doing it right you know are we going in the right direction.'</p> <p>(ELSA, 5; Line 85)</p> <p>'I mean the thing is when a teacher does a session, it's evaluated, no one reads over my</p>

	<p>work. I verbalise it because I need the security that I am doing the right thing.’ (ELSA, 5; Line, 181)</p> <p>‘You know it’s the planning thing. You have to make sure you are doing the right thing...I think it’s more about experience and the more you do on certain subjects the more you change.’ (ELSA, 5; Line, 208)</p> <p>‘They are pretty much home-made. I mean I think the difficult thing about ELSA is that you need to think about it and the more I think about it the better the session. I mean sometimes I am stuck for ideas. It takes me a couple of days to work things out.’ (ELSA, 7; Line, 54)</p>
Self-evaluation	<p>‘I do find that goals change. It start here and end up over there. Perhaps I’m doing it wrong.’ (ELSA, 4; Line, 111)</p> <p>‘I think from my point of view it’s that you never know if you are doing it right.’ (ELSA, 5; Line, 70)</p> <p>‘The other thing is Inspection. I assume we are part of the inspection but who checks our work?’ (ELSA, 5; Line, 173)</p>
Peer support	<p>‘On Tuesday we took out resources to share with the cluster and I made a list of the resources I want.’ (ELSA, 4; Line, 203)</p> <p>‘It’s supportive, just having someone to talk to.’ (ELSA, 6; Line, 59)</p> <p>‘I have a colleague in a lower key stage and I can’t tap into her resources because they are not age appropriate fro my children. I am finding that difficult.’ (ELSA, 7; Line, 75)</p>

Supervision	<p>'I go to supervision groups and they are a wealth of information for us to share.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 31)</p> <p>'I do think supervision is really good to share ideas and resources.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 90)</p> <p>'It's the routine of supervision as well, you are part of the group and can go back and talk to people about resources.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 232)</p> <p>'In the beginning I felt that I was out of my depth and I felt like I was in a counsellor and I thought I'm not doing the right thing for her, I sought of advice from the EP and she said she [the child] would only get advice, the same as what your offering her but she knows you so you've built up a really good relationship and its really nice because I feel as if we've really bonded and I know she feels as if there's anything she wants to ask, she can come to me.' (ELSA, 1; Line, 51)</p> <p>'It's important that you look after yourself as well on the job such as going to supervision or talking to the member of staff. I think you need to because it can be really tough.' (ELSA, 8; Line, 80)</p>
Linking with the Staff	<p>'I'm very fortunate the Head is superb and if there is anything I am uncertain about, I can link in with her.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 87)</p> <p>'I've brilliant support, SENCo is incredible! Everything I say and do, I mostly touch base with her and talk about how we can take things forward.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 144)</p>
Practical support	<p>'I know with a lot of the ELSAs is the importance of space and where you do ELSA and the time.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 82)</p>

	<p>'I don't have time or space right now, my other roles need to take priority right now.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 136)</p> <p>'It would just be good if we had our own budget; it tends to come from the *** budget.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 90)</p> <p>'Lots of schools have story books and things like friendship games but there is no funding for it here.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 32)</p> <p>'The biggest issue is having a quite area to talk. If you and I haven't had a lot of issues with disclosures and once you get into disclosure territory that is the big issue so luckily I haven't had any disclosures.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 153)</p> <p>'It's not about having lots of resources, it's about talk time. Talk time is important. It practicing the rules of talking, taking turns, considering someone else's view so I think that is more to do with talk time than resources.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 161)</p> <p>'I think workload and time for planning is important.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 168)</p>
Professional support	<p>'I suppose how you promote it to staff' (ELSA, 4; Line, 83)</p> <p>'I can walk into any class and say I need to front load my timetable and can I have this child now and there is never a problem.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 174)</p> <p>'What I do in this school, I do myself and if I had to wait for her it would have taken years. Staff are not onboard she is the world's worst.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 170)</p>

	<p>'Yes our deputy is amazing she is on the same wavelength.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 209)</p> <p>'They have trained another teacher in ELSA who is supposed to be my mentor but he has never seen a child and I am still to see him yet. I can't quite grasp that it you don't do it, how can you be any help to me.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 174)</p> <p>'I feel like I am pushing all the time, that is were I need leadership in the school to come down and say "right, you can have a whole afternoon". I'll often do a session and then come back to class.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 143)</p>
<p>Changing role of ELSA</p>	<p>'I always make sure that the child knows that I'm always here if they need to have a word or come back. It's not cut dead but I do try to follow a programme.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 13)</p> <p>'Because the support is still there for children that have finished doing a 6-10 week course with me, they look forward to off loading to me once a week. That's all they want.' (ELSA, 8; Line, 22)</p> <p>'They never leave me....they are always here wherever I go. Some of them don't need a lot of aftercare, some go back into their little roles. They can put their names on the star board and I will find them by the end of the day to check in.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 231)</p> <p>'I could see that he just did not want it to end and so I said you know you can pop down to say hello every day or I'll just pop in to say hello and he felt happy just popping his head in and that's fine then a few weeks later he forgot to pop his head in.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 76)</p>

'The problem is it's so deep rooted I don't think it made enough impact. I need more time with him.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 15)

'It's just keeping the support there, they might not come every day but it's just keeping it there. With some it tapers off and they become more secure and what their problems are they seem to go back to normality. I think that they can still come back if something happens.' (ELSA, 8; Line, 31)

'Sometimes it takes an awful long time and they have to keep coming back.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 124)

'I finished seeing her now and I'm still there as a contact if she needs me, she can still check in and check out if she needs to.' (ELSA, 1; Line 10)

'I do try to wave their targets and sessions plans in front of them but they don't want it to end.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 122)

'It's hard when you are in a school and they are seeing you and you have had that kind of special relationship and you need to make sure that they know that its for 6 or 8 weeks and have something to work towards.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 81)

'Obviously at drop-ins you can't do anything in-depth but you can keep things ticking over.' (ELSA, 8; Line, 34)

'I've been working with her since the end of last year but she's got issues at home still so she comes to me every now and then.' (ELSA, 2; Line, 3)

**Table 4: Children’s sub-theme codes and example quotations**

Sub themes	Example quotations
Qualities of the ELSA	<p data-bbox="489 459 1633 524">‘She was calm and teachers are sometimes angry when bad things happen.’ (Child, 5; Line, 77)</p> <p data-bbox="489 561 1478 594">‘Miss makes time for everyone and cares for everyone.’ (Child, 2; Line, 70)</p> <p data-bbox="489 631 1188 664">‘She is helpful, patient and joyful.’ (Child, 5; Line, 83)</p> <p data-bbox="489 701 953 734">‘She is friendly.’ (Child, 8; Line, 95)</p> <p data-bbox="489 771 1335 803">‘She said everything was going to be alright.’ (Child, 8; Line, 39)</p> <p data-bbox="489 841 1010 873">‘Just really trusting.’ (Child, 2; Line, 44)</p> <p data-bbox="489 911 1178 943">‘She never says “right hurry up”’. (Child, 5; Line, 90)</p>
Relationships with other children	<p data-bbox="489 979 1465 1011">‘Now I know them a bit more I chat to them a bit more.’ (Child, 3; Line, 86)</p> <p data-bbox="489 1049 1129 1081">‘My friends are kinder to me.’ (Child, 6; Line, 64)</p> <p data-bbox="489 1118 1646 1151">‘It’s nice to bring a friend and hear them say nice things about you.’ (Child, 8; Line, 107)</p> <p data-bbox="489 1188 1415 1221">‘I was happy because I could take friends with me.’ (Child, 6; Line, 44)</p>

	<p>'I usually go to Miss all the time because it's really nice and I meet other friends from different classes and that's nice because we don't usually bond with other children from other classes in the class. So it's nice to be in ELSA because we make more friends and I have more friends that I used to have.' (Child, 8; Line, 120)</p>
Fun	<p>'Fun not to do any work.' (Child, 3; Line, 32)</p> <p>'I like playing games.' (Child, 7; Line, 47)</p> <p>'It was fun we made things out of toilet rolls, frogs and aeroplanes.' (Child, 3; Line, 40)</p> <p>'We played games and built a tower' (Child, 6; Lines, 157, 77)</p>
Drop ins	<p>'She has drop-in sessions and so if you are sad or upset you just go to Miss and she sorts it out and then you can go back outside and play with friends.' (Child, 8; Line, 6)</p> <p>'I used to go every Thursday now I go whenever I feel like it.' (Child, 1; Line, 14)</p> <p>'You can just write your name and pop it in that box and then Miss will come and find you.' (Child, 2; Line, 69)</p>
Helpful	<p>'She helps me when I fall.' (Child, 5; Line, 49)</p> <p>'It was helpful because I had a lot of problems at it helped to take my mind off it.' (Child, 8; Line, 114)</p>

	<p>'I am so much more confident than I was.' (Child, 2; Line, 49)</p> <p>'It helped me not to worry.' (Child, 8; Line, 22)</p> <p>It was like good to be able to express about what was going on at home because I felt that I couldn't talk to my mum so to have someone I could talk to at school was really good...If there was something going on at home I could just talk to Miss about it and she will say try this and then I acted on it and if it didn't work I would tell her and talk about it and then try something else.' (Child, 2; Line, 21)</p> <p>'She helped me learn how I could survive in the wilderness. And she help me talk about my life and how I should never get angry.' (Child, 5; Line, 72)</p> <p>'Normally...if I'm upset about something we talk about that and make things...you know like the Henna beads to get you mind of it.' (Child, 1; Line, 25)</p>
Happy	<p>'I felt sad at first but then happy.' (Child, 3; Line, 138)</p> <p>'I felt nervous at first but then I felt happy.' (Child, 5; Line, 68)</p> <p>'Just that it made everything better.' (Child, 1; Line, 34)</p>
Learned new things	<p>'I learnt how to cook.' (Child, 5; Line, 41)</p>
Uncertainty around	<p>'Because I had never done a session with her before and I never knew what I was going to</p>

attendance	<p>do. I was nervous. I thought I was in massive trouble.' (Child, 5; Line, 29)</p> <p>'I was really nervous to talk about how I felt because I thought that I would get into trouble for feeling that way but when I started talking, I couldn't stop talking. I just said everything.' (Child, 2; Line, 32)</p>
Talking about emotive events	<p>'I get tired when I get sad.' (Child, 3; Line, 21)</p> <p>'I cry when I get upset talking about things.' (Child, 8; Line, 76)</p> <p>'Well say we are talking about something and I would start crying.' (Child, 1; Line, 45)</p>
Not knowing other children around	'Because they were from different classes, it made me feel strange that they were there and not knowing them.' (Child, 3; Line, 83)
Difficult worksheets	'It was quite difficult to do stuff on the piece of paper.' (Child, 7; Line, 38)
Confidentiality	<p>'I was worried she would tell my mum, I didn't want her to call my mum.' (Child, 18; Line, 43)</p> <p>'It was really good to have someone I could trust that wouldn't worry about me.' (Child, 2; Line, 61)</p>

## Appendix 17: ELSA Q-sort Rankings

ELSAs were asked to identify what they thought were the key aspects of the ELSA programme and order them in terms of perceived importance with 1 being the most important. The results are shown in table 5 below. Tied ranks are indicated by the assignment of two or more aspects to a ranking and each are deemed equally important within the assigned ranking.

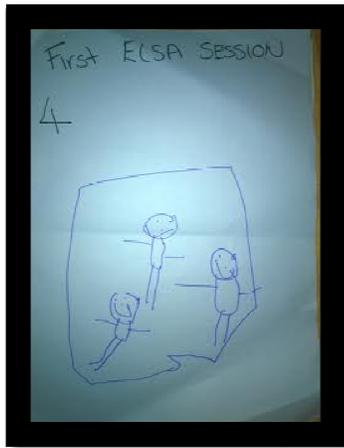
**Table 5: ELSAs Q-sort Rankings**

Ranking	ELSA 1	ELSA 2	ELSA 3	ELSA 4	ELSA 5
1 (most important)	Qualities of the ELSA	Appropriate referrals	ELSA – child relationship Qualities of an ELSA	ELSA- Child Relationship	ELSA-Child Relationship
2	Setting appropriate targets	ELSA- child relationship The qualities of the ELSA	Appropriate referrals Resources Aftercare Goals	Workload Protected time	Support for ELSA
3	Appropriate referrals	Goal setting Budget for resources	Outcomes Time Space Location	Talk time	Resources
4	Relationship between the child and ELSA	Session planning Choice of resources	Support for ELSA How you promote it to other staff Working with parents	Resources	Parent-Child Relationship
5	Working with parents	Support for ELSA in school e.g. Am I doing this right Time			Problem solving ability
6	Resources	Routine of ELSA session each week Supervision of ELSA Having a way of monitoring the child afterwards e.g. a ½ term review			
7	Aftercare	Aftercare			
8	Practical and emotional support for ELSA	Appropriate referrals			
9		Working with parents			
10		What happens if it escalates?			



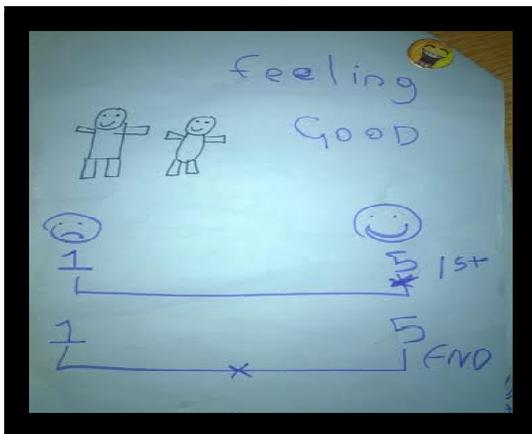
Child 3

First, middle and last session. The number refers to the number of children in the group.



Child 4

The child's drawing of a 'typical' session is in top left corner. The child opted to rate their enjoyment of the sessions at the beginning and at the end. The end rating is lower because the sessions involved more worksheets and the child preferred to play games.



Child 5

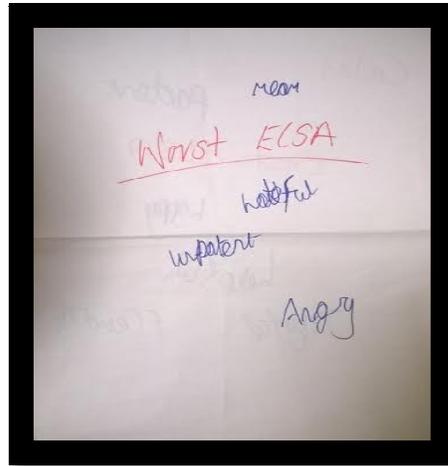
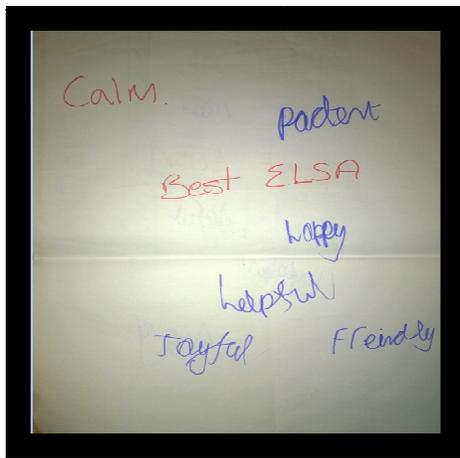
First, middle and end sessions all the same. Drop in also the same – just shorter and there are more people.



NB: Two children did not complete this task as they were in the pilot study. This task was introduced after the pilot

Best and worst ELSA sessions

Child 1



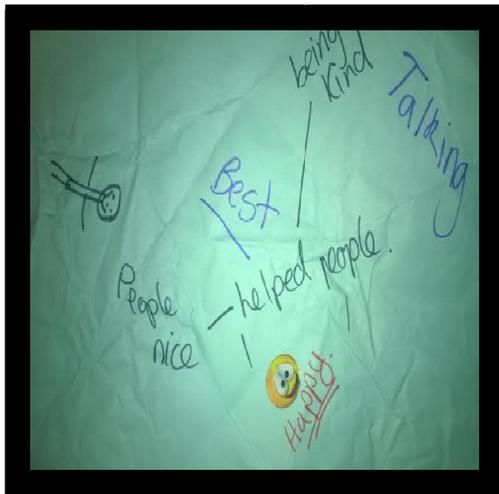
Child 2  
Best ELSA session



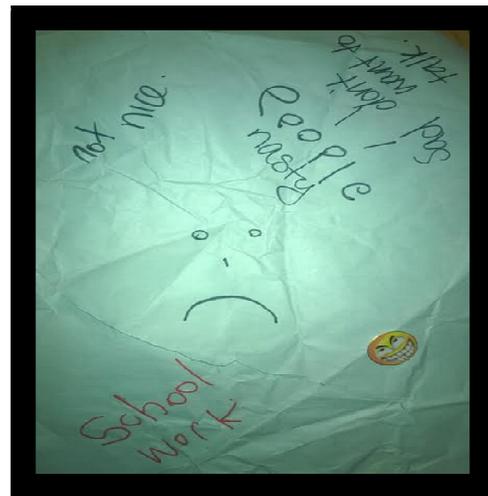
Worst ELSA session



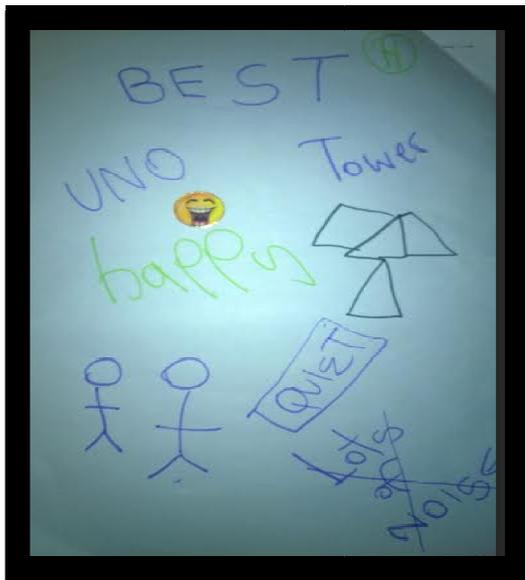
Child 3  
Best ELSA session



Worst ELSA session



Child 4  
Best ELSA session



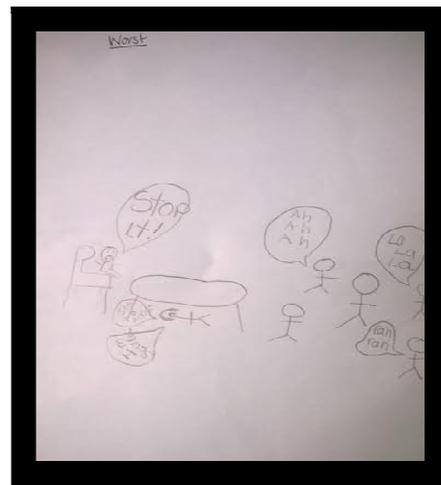
Worst ELSA session



Child 5  
Best ELSA session (Same as  
first ELSA session)



Worst ELSA session



NB: Two children did not complete the best and worst ELSA session poster. These children were part of the pilot. This task was introduced after the pilot.

## **Appendix 19: Quotations to accompany the results section**

Q1

'I mean someone wouldn't go for this role if they were not a good listener and didn't feel empathy.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 36)

'I think I became more sympathetic and it helped me become more patient.'  
(ELSA, 5; Line, 12)

Q2

'I think that talk time is important because they are learning social rules and practising things like turn talking, considering someone else's views.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 161)

'It's their special time that they have that not a lot of other kids have. You know it's important. It all depends on what it is they need. I've bought drawing books and put something on the front and made it special to them or we have gone and got pictures of the internet and done stuff with...its finding what they want or what they need to be able to get them to start to talk to you, to trust you.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 38)

'It's cartoons from America but it deals with a teenager in a family and for year 6 it's good because that is where they are going to be. It appears dysfunctional but it is brilliant because it appears to show a dysfunctional family but it's good to start talking about similar experiences and they don't think they are working very hard because it is cartoons. So if I see something like that, I take it.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 66)

Q3

'It makes him feel like he is special and I am willing to give him the time. He tells me what he wants to make and I collect the materials over the week and his face lights up.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 133)

'We've done craft activities but it's about talking to the children and often the activity is a distraction from what we are actually talking about.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 43)

'Well, they have to trust you, the way we run ELSA sessions it's informal, it's friendly and it's relaxed. We've got biscuits and it's just a different atmosphere.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 68)

'I think it was a nice relationship for him. He talked about his favourite things and how he could manage situations without bursting.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 74)

Q4

'What he needed was a friend and when I spoke to mum she was happy for him to have a friend over for tea.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 120)

'I told mum that we had worked through most of his worries but that there was one that belonged to dad. We had written it down and his goal was to give it to dad and talk about it. Over the next week mum told me that he confided in her and they had talked to dad about his worry and dad was able to put his mind at ease.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 323)

Q5

'I have a very good relationship with parents. I have worked here for [a number] years and I am from the community. I worked a long time in nursery and of course, they are handing their babies over to me ... If I am sending letters home to mum...[then]... I go out and chat to them 'eye to eye' and give them time to think about it...I say that they [the child] will have a lovely

time. They [the child] will come in and they will show you the things that they have made and they will have a little tea party and celebrate what they have done. I'll keep [parents] informed, in the loop.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 143)

'Mum was very vulnerable also so it was important to gain her trust so that she would be happy with me working with him.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 122)

'If there is any sort of support, they are almost overprotective about it. It's that fine line and I think that if you just involve them a little, the role of the parent is really vital.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 102)

'I mention it at parents evening. I don't send out consent forms or letters. [One] reason we don't do it is because of the ELSA leaflet is quite scary. It's not scary to you and I but to a parent it is because it says "psychology". "*My child is seeing a psychologist!*" I originally did use it but we haven't used it in the last year. (ELSA, 7; Line, 101)

#### Q6

'They also know and all the staff know that if there is a problem, whatever it may be, they know that it's an open house. They can say to whoever is on the door "I'd like to see the ELSA" and up they come. I have a cool down box in the corner there that they know they can come down and use when I am not here. Em...and again they can leave their name or a worry note in the worry box and we can go from there then.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 233)

'I say to the teacher what I have done and ask if they think it has made a difference in class.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 44)

'Children come and tell me things in passing and well these snippets of information are sometimes worthwhile putting back into the classroom because they tell the teacher what she should do in the classroom.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 166)

Q7

'Sometimes teachers think you are going to fix it. I get excited about the little things and you can see the teacher's face like "you know he was swinging from the rafters yesterday".' (ELSA, 4; Line, 132)

'If there is an argument in the yard, they are sometimes sent to me. They don't always grasp that there needs to be a change issue. I'm not here to give the child into trouble or sort out friendship disputes. What he needed was some psychosocial education, not ELSA'. (ELSA, 4; Line, 105)

'Sometimes parents come to me with their problems at home. That's the bit I find tricky because as an ELSA we only work with children if the problem is at school.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 188)

'Getting the teachers to understand what it is. Because every time there is a problem with a child in a class, whether they are on ELSA or not, they fetch me. That's not my role. This isn't an ELSA role. I'm not here to tell the children off if they are playing up in class. That's not what it is and that was creeping up more and more by the end of the year. I mean in fairness, the teacher said she didn't know. And I had been taking children out of her class for anger and behavioural issues. So she was just bringing them all to me then.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 52)

Q8

'It was something he disclosed, I had to pass it on. It was the worst weekend of my life as I knew he felt like I had betrayed him.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 247)

'Not so much not working but that there were deeper problems and so they have been referred to Child and Adult Mental Health services.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 162)

Q9

'My biggest problem then would be resources. You are sat in front of me now and you have given me all these things to think about. What do I do with you?' (ELSA, 4; Line, 176)

'It's resources. Our role was as a teaching assistant. We don't know a lot about planning like teachers do. So within the capacity of ELSA it's difficult to know if you are doing it right or going in the right direction.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 85)

'I go to the supervision groups and they are a wealth of information for us to share. If we have got some tricky pupils to work with, we can confidentially share some information and get some ideas for that. Other than that, it's the ELSA network and the internet. Some of the stuff they use in the school bereavement group I have looked at and used.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 31)

Q10

'I go to supervision and they are wealth of information for us to share.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 31)

'Yeah, I was thinking I'm not a counsellor, I can't do this. I dunno if I'm making any difference to her whatsoever, you know, she needs a proper person who's trained in this properly, in that field. But then when [the Educational Psychologist (EP)] explained things to me...that support was important, that [the EP] was there, because I needed [the support]. Rather than just training you up in something and then leaving you and saying off you go. There's always support there.' (ELSA, 1; Line, 104)

'I think the one thing from my point of view is that you never know if you are doing it right. And there is not mark to say whether it has been successful or if it hasn't been successful, you just have to look at the individual child and see whether they seem to be, whatever the issues are, that they are happier

in themselves and relaxed in themselves and more confident whatever the situation is.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 70)

Q11

'I have been using the PASS for the last 3 years. Its pupils' attitudes of themselves in school and you get a grid that I then discuss with the SENCo and head teacher... Initially this is what we use but by October children come out the woodwork and this comes either from the head teacher when they haven't settled or they notice something in the new class with a new teacher. The child responds to the new way of teaching and things come out. So sometimes the teacher refers and sometimes the parents. I have one case at the moment where the parents have come in separately and then [the head teacher], will come in and say can you look at this child and I try to talk to the class teacher obviously and get some sort of description or remit.' (ELSA, 7; Line, 24)

'I am very fortunate. The Head is superb and certainly if there was anything at all that I felt uncertain about I would certainly go straight to her and she would ...she has made that quite clear...One meeting that wasn't planned, and I didn't know that it was going to be emotional for the dad, so I was a bit taken aback. At that time (the head) said that she would be there with me so that I didn't feel... I mean I didn't feel vulnerable, it was just for support.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 89)

'I have brilliant support, SENCo is incredible! Everything I say and do, I mostly touch base with her and talk about how we can take things forward. Yeah the support in school is absolutely brilliant.' (ELSA, 5; Line, 114)

Q12

'Just getting her to smile at the end of it and sometimes just doing an activity and just focusing on that activity and forgetting everything else that's happening in her life.' (ELSA, 2; Line, 28)

'I do think that resources have a strong placement. There are certain children that.... I have a little boy at the moment that just wants to talk and talk and he doesn't need any prompting you know, you don't have to support him. If it was bereavement, I would definitely want more resources from my point of view. You try to unlock whatever sadness and you know maybe relate to them.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 27)

'As for support, it's me in a very large school. I have asked for another ELSA to be popped on the books somewhere. I don't see my SENCO for any of it. What I do in this school I do myself and if I had waited for her I would have done it over two years ... staff are not on board, she [the SENCo] is the world's worst.' (ELSA, 4; Line, 169)

'Well there are lots of story books available and things like friendship games, things that are available that other schools have purchased. Even an area...like another school had a specific area, just for ELSA! We've gone down and just sat in the porta-cabin. But it's not suitable. There is no funding for it [the ELSA programme].' (ELSA, 6; Line, 32)

'I feel like I am pushing it all the time and I think that is where the leadership needs to come down and say 'right you can have the whole afternoon'. I'll often do a session and then come back to class.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 143)

Q13

'The problem is so deep rooted, I don't think it made enough impact. I need more time with him.' (ELSA, 6; Line, 14)

'I finished seeing her now and I'm still there as a contact if she needs me, she can still check in and check out if she needs to.' (ELSA, 1; Line, 10)

'I was doing one on one to start with. Maybe a couple of [friendships] groups, that sort of thing. I was doing it three afternoons a week. But from September this year I am doing the drop in sessions...it has worked much better than I thought it would...because the support is still there for children that had finished doing 6-10 week course with me because they looked forward to off loading once a week. I think its good that that person is still there for them that they can still offload their problems to, that's all they want. I just put out some games and activities, even colouring, and they are all interacting with each other and having a chat at the same time....It's just keeping the support there, they might not come every day but it's keeping it there. With some it tapers off and they become more secure and they seem to go back to normality but they can still come back if something happens...Obviously with drop-ins you can't do any in-depth work, but you can keep things ticking over.' (ELSA, 15; Line, 29)

'I mean it was self-esteem when I first started working with him before it turned into a "key worker role" and it was just to make him feel like he was special and that his opinion counted (ELSA, 3; Line, 135)...I still see him on a Friday afternoon and apparently he is always looking at the clock and that's fine. I would warn him if it had come to an end, if I had more children, but even then, I would make sure that I fitted in 15 minutes and if it was the end of the day, make sure we could have a little chat and give him some special time or some time if he wanted.' (ELSA, 3; Line, 150)

Q14

'She is a really nice person.' (Child, 2; Line, 73)

'She is always nice, helpful, happy and playful.'(Child, 5; Line, 106)

'She is very nice and helps a lot.' (Child, 8; Line, 95)

Q15

'She was always very calm and teachers are sometimes a bit angry when bad things happen.' (Child, 5; Line, 77)

'I can tell her things without worrying that she will worry about it. I never tell my mum anything because I know she will get stressed and start worrying.'  
(Child,2; Line, 45)

'Because in the class you are doing work and it's really frustrating because you don't want to miss bits of your work. So when Miss says that she will go and talk to your teacher so that she knows what's going on its better for Miss to do it. You don't want to interrupt your teacher. I don't think she would mind but you don't want to miss pieces of your work.' (Child, 8; Line, 41)

Q16

'I didn't use worksheets but I did do things to describe myself like 'pieces of me' [points to the wall]. It helped with my self-confidence'. (Child, 2; Line, 52)  
Interviewer: 'So what made you happy in the middle session?' Child:  
'Because then we got to like...make things. We made like frogs and things...aeroplanes.' (Child, 3; Line, 39)

'I felt happy because she did things with me that were fun and joyful.'(Child, 5; Line, 28)

Q17

'It was like good to be able to express what was going on at home because I felt that I couldn't talk to my mum so to have someone I could talk to at school was really good.' (Child, 2; Line, 21)

'It was helpful because I had a lot of problems and it helped me not to worry and took my mind off it.' (Child, 8; Line, 22)

'She helped me learn and talk about my life and how I should never get angry.' (Child, 5; Line, 77)

Q18

'Because I had never done a session before I felt nervous, I thought I was in massive trouble.' (Child, 5; Line, 19)

'I was really nervous to talk about how I felt because I thought that I would get into trouble for feeling that way but when I started talking, I couldn't stop talking. I just said everything.' (Child, 2; Line, 37)

Q19

Interviewer: 'How did you feel in the first session?' Child: 'Happy because I could take a friend with me.' (Child, 6; Line, 44)

Interviewer: 'And how do you feel about bringing a friend?' Child: 'Good because they talk about... Miss asks about what I've been like in class and it's nice to hear what they say, when they say nice things. (Child, 8; Line, 106)

'I meet other friends from different classes and that's nice because we don't usually bond with children in other classes. So it's nice to be in ELSA because I have more friends than I used to have.' (Child, 8; Line, 199)

Q20

Interviewer: 'What made the session difficult?' Child: 'Well agreeing things like ringing my mum up when I was sad. I'd say something and she was like, I need to ring your mum and I didn't want her to.' (Child, 1; Line, 40)

Interviewer: 'What was it that made you feel strange?' Child: Because they were from different classes and it made it feel strange that they were there and not knowing them. (Child, 3; Line, 83)

Q21

'You can just write your name and pop it in that box and then Miss will come and find you. It's successful because Miss makes time for everyone and cares for everyone.' (Child, 2; Line, 69)

'There are drop-in sessions you can go to when you are sad or upset. Miss just sorts it out and you can go back outside to be friends with everyone and play nicely.' (Child, 8; Line, 6)