

Report of ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) training in Bournemouth 2009-2010

1. Introduction

1.1. ELSA intervention is a bespoke programme (regarded as a Wave 3 intervention by the National Strategies) for children with significant social and emotional difficulties who need intervention at a level beyond group work at Wave 2 (eg Silver SEAL or being part of a nurture group). All children receiving ELSA intervention should also have access to Wave 1 intervention eg SEAL. ELSA work is essentially individual, and time limited. It covers topics such as self esteem, feelings, and anger management, but may also include group work on topics such as social skills or friendship skills. The work is planned around the needs of the individual child.

1.2. 18 Teaching Assistants (TAs) attended the 5 day ELSA training this year, from September 2009 - February 2010:

- 9 TAs from Primary schools
- 5 from Secondary schools
- 4 Teaching Assistants (TAs) from Bicknell, our specialist BESD school

This brings the total number of trained ELSAs in Bournemouth to 91.

1.3. This report is based on 17 evaluation forms returned at the end of the 2009-10 course. It reflects how the newly-trained ELSAs are using their skills. For a broader evaluation of ELSA work in Bournemouth see Bravery and Harris 2009.

2. Outcomes

2.1. 16 out of the 17 ELSAs (94%) are currently teaching and using emotional literacy skills with children in their school.

2.2. 14 out of the 17 ELSAs (82%) are currently doing planned emotional literacy work with children in their school. 2 out of the 3 remaining ELSAs have less formal involvement, (for example, developing EL skills with 'all pupils in school' (BESD school)). One ELSA, in a secondary school that is shortly to become an academy, is unsure of plans for EL provision in the school

2.3. ELSA programmes are being delivered by the new cohort of ELSAs to children in Reception through to Year 11, and in Nurture Groups.

2.4. Time spent by per week working on individual ELSA programmes is as follows:

1-5 hours	12 ELSAs
5-10 hours	0 ELSA
10-15 hours	0 ELSAs

2.5. Time spent per week on small group work is:

1-5 hours	3 ELSAs
5-10 hours	4 ELSAs
10-15 hours	1 ELSAs

(NB Some ELSAs are working just with individuals, some just with small groups, and others with both.)

2.6. The number of children that ELSAs are timetabled to work with ranges from 1 to 18 each week. 9 ELSAs expect the number of children they work with to increase during the current academic year. 5 ELSAs expect the number of children they work with will stay about the same. One is uncertain whether ELSA work will be continue, because of significant changes in school organisation.

- 2.7. A 'snapshot' taken when these data were collected indicates that the 17 ELSAs are working directly with about 67 children. Across the borough, several hundred children have now received ELSA support since the project began.
- 2.8. Of the 14 TAs currently doing ELSA work, 9 have a special area or room for ELSA work. In some schools the room is also used for other purposes eg first aid; meetings; speech therapy; 1:1 tuition; group work; aromatherapy; TV; art; EAL; Nurture Group; work with child(ren) with hearing impairment; and SEAL - illustrating the pressure on space in many schools.
- 2.9. Time available for planning ELSA work each week is as follows:
- | | |
|------------------|---------|
| 1-2 hours | 1 ELSAs |
| Less than 1 hour | 8 ELSAs |
| None | 4 ELSAs |

One ELSA said she has 'no specific time' for planning - which may suggest no time, or that time is 'found' from other areas of work. ELSA work is not generally reactive and should be planned. Quality work needs planning. As the ELSA becomes more experienced so less time may be need than initially, but it is of some concern that some ELSAs get no time for planning. This is emphasised in pre-course information, but may need highlighting.

- 2.10. Opportunity to regularly discuss their work with their line manager is essential. The new ELSAs estimate opportunities to discuss work with their line manager as follows:
- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Once a week | 3 ELSAs |
| Half termly | 1 ELSA |
| Termly | 1 ELSA |
| Other (eg as needed) | 2 ELSAs |
| Frequency not specified | 4 ELSAs |
| None | 1 ELSA |

The time needed for professional 'supervision' will depend on the number of children seen - a full-time ELSA will clearly need more time than one who works with just 2 or 3 children a week. Further analysis of data would show whether the figures above do in fact reflect this.

- 2.11. In addition to children timetabled for ELSA work, many more benefit from informal contact with an ELSA. ELSAs were asked to give a rough estimate of number of these informal contacts. Many responded with 'whole school', 'all pupils in school', 'constantly doing this', 'all the time'. Others estimated numbers, which, as a 'snapshot' in time totalled about 160. ELSA skills are also being used in other planned interventions such as Nurture Groups.
- 2.12. Schools are encouraged to build up motivating resources for EL eg games, puppets, books, activities, which are interesting and fun not only for the children but also for the ELSAs. Of the 17 ELSAs, 6 felt their school was 'very well resourced' in terms of EL resources, 7 felt they were 'quite well resourced', and 4 felt their school was 'not very well resourced' as yet. 8 had been able to make requests for resources and 4 had not yet made requests. 2 did not respond. One commented 'Not yet, but I will. I want to choose the right things so am thinking carefully'. 2 specifically mentioned budget constraints.

- 2.13. On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is 'no awareness of EL', and 10 is 'strong culture of EL', ELSAs rated their schools as follows:

	strong culture of EL									
No awareness of EL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of responses	0	0	0	2	4	0	4	4	0	3

There were no ratings of 3 or below. Most ratings were between 5 and 8. Seven TAs rated their school as 8 or above, indicating a strong culture of EL. Four of the six lowest ratings were from secondary schools. The highest ratings were from ELSAs at the specialist BESD school. Most

primary ELSAs rated their school at 7 or 8, which may indicate a secure culture of EL. Over time trends can be mapped to see whether there is perception, and evidence, of improving EL.

2.14. ELSAs were asked what they would say was the value of ELSA work:

- 'Building a child's self esteem and emotional skills are as important as the academic curriculum.'
- 'Our students have made good progress after their ELSA sessions and feedback from students has been very rewarding.'
- 'ELSA work is a way of making contact with pupils, spending time understanding and getting to know them and hopefully nipping issues in the bud before they escalate - everyone benefits!'
- 'When a child is emotionally stable they have a clear mind which enables them to learn.'
- 'Children are able to explore their own and others' feelings more confidentially either 1:1 or in a small group with the ELSA....the ELSA will use tried and trusted strategies.'
- 'It's a valuable tool to help your children, and address their needs better.'
- 'ELSAs....take a lot of the work load off the teacher. With more and more children coming into school with broken families and social issues, children need a refuge and someone they can talk to within the school.'
- 'ELSA provides children (with) the opportunity to express feelings and emotions in a safe, secure environment. Children are encouraged to consider different strategies to cope with situations in and out of school. Children with ELSA support have a better opportunity to progress with their learning in spite of difficult issues they face.'
- 'Teachers cannot always be available to speak when the child needs it, whereas an ELSA can be there.'
- 'Gives children the opportunity to share any worries or concerns that they may have. Can raise self esteem.'
- 'As important as maths/English. Essential for a child's development into adulthood.'
- 'It's a positive tool ...which will benefit your (own) personal development and understanding, will help your school, and definitely help all children develop skills to be able to control their emotions in a positive way.'

2.15. Examples of successful ELSA work this year include:

- 'J in Year 7 has difficulties with anger management. We have worked on 'lengthening the fuse' and different strategies to use. There has been a change for the better in his behaviour.'
- 'A Year 5 child was 'out of sorts' and the teacher was worried because it continued over a couple of days. I was able to talk 1:1 to her and give her some time - just letting her offload worries was enough to help her.'
- 'I'm currently working with a girl who, due to severe ill health as a baby/toddler is missing key social skills. She is part of a small group and over a few weeks is taking an active role....rather than a passive one.'
- 'A boy in Year 5 told his mother he felt suicidal - she was going to take him to the GP. I was called to do an ELSA session. We discussed his problems - that evening his mum said he really opened up and he was much happier.'
- 'Allowing a child a cooling off period; getting them to establish a safe base to talk through the problem; breaking a problem down into more manageable sections; learning to always come into the safe room when upset; 'Walk and Talk' time; breathing slowly; counting to 100 etc.'

2.16. Other comments made by ELSAs about the course:

- I enjoyed spending time discussing and gaining new ideas to try out in my school.
-ELSA work is very important. All schools need to be made aware of how useful it can be.
- I found this a very interesting course.

- Thank you for giving me this opportunity to train as an ELSA.
- Further training?

3. Next steps

3.1. ELSAs indicated that they would like to know more about:

- Self esteem
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- ADHD
- Social Stories
- Understanding anger
- More scenarios with secondary school children
- Depression
- Self esteem
- Attachment

Some of these are topics covered in the initial training, others are new. This re-enforces the need for on-going support to revisit topics covered, and to introduce new ones.

3.2. Locality-based ELSA Networks are now well-established and held half-termly, led by the Educational Psychology Service, and now often attended by the Primary Mental Health Worker. The Networks give ELSAs the opportunity to get together to share successes, problem solve, and continue to learn. ELSAs should continue to get in-school support from their line-manager. Most do, but of concern is a small number who do not. It is important to emphasis to schools the need for this, prior to TAs being sent on ELSA training.

3.3. Feedback from the new cohort of ELSAs suggests that awareness of EL continues to grow in our schools. The indication from this limited sample is that there is greater awareness of EL in primary schools than secondary. This is perhaps not surprising as whole-school SEAL was introduced to primary schools first and so has had more time to embed and become part of their culture. Structures and relationships in primary schools, and their smaller size, are also likely to facilitate EL. Informal feedback from the ELSAs suggests they value training with mixed-phase colleagues. This is particularly valuable when doing transition work (eg with children moving from Y2-3 and Y6-7).

3.4. As with previous cohorts, the ELSAs want to further develop their skills. ELSA training is an introduction to EL and many ELSAs go on to do further training and skill-development in the field of EL. This year a number of previously-trained ELSAs attended the ELSA Conference in Southampton on 17.11.09.

3.5. The ELSA project will work closely with the TAMHS (Targeted Mental Health in Schools) project in Bournemouth 2010-2011.

References

Bravery, K. & Harris, L. *Emotional Literacy Support Assistants in Bournemouth: Impact and Outcomes*. July 2009.

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