

Investigation into the Effectiveness of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) in Schools

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ELSA room at Woodfield Primary School

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Introduction

Recent developments within the education system have been primarily focused on academic achievement rather than the development of the child as a whole. Research showed the importance of taking a more holistic view in children's education (Liau, Liau, Liau & Teoh, 2003). It was found that low levels of emotional literacy lead to high levels of internalising behaviours such as stress and depression, as well as externalising behaviours such as aggression and delinquency. Problem behaviours such as these would take away from academic achievement and the ability for the child to succeed in future life. It has been found that programmes that focus on enhancing emotional literacy improve academic performance and behaviour (Carnwell & Baker, 2007). Programmes such as these have been found to reduce problem behaviours such as drug and tobacco use and delinquency and violence (Catalano et al., 2002). Furthermore, research by Sandbrook, (2003) suggests that pupil learning progress can increase as the research identifies a correlation between positive emotional literacy and progress in literacy, numeracy and indeed all aspects of learning.

Liau et al.'s (2003) research took into account the government's introduction of measures ensuring a more holistic approach to education. The Every Child Matters program was introduced in 2005, which focuses on the importance of training Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to support and address pupils' emotional needs, rather than just academic achievement. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2009) emphasized the importance of good mental health, stating it protects children and young people from social, emotional and behavioural problems as well as supporting their academic achievement. As a result of this, NICE developed guidance for those who have a direct or indirect role in the child's academic or emotional wellbeing.

In 2007 the government decided to prioritize young people's health and wellbeing with the *Public Service Agreement 12: Improve the health and wellbeing of young people*. A number of interventions came from this agreement, one of which being Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS), established in 2008. This programme aimed to test how to deliver effective and integrated models in schools (Weare, 2014). It was found this programme helped pupils' understanding of mental health and their emotional well-being improved (Palmer & Shotter, 2011). Another strength of the TaMHS project was that it helped support the development of the ELSA course (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant).

Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) was developed by The Development for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), to promote the social and emotional skills thought to be vital for learning. There are three waves in which SEAL is delivered, wave one focuses on whole school development, wave two looks into small group intervention and the third looks at individualized intervention. Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) are an example of the third wave of intervention, helping individual children to express their emotions effectively. Both TaMHS and SEAL looked into what worked when running a programme in schools and this helped in the development of the ELSA course.

The ELSA course focuses on supporting emotional needs of children in schools, looking at the holistic development of the child. Psychological theory is used to help provide practical support to help Teaching Assistants (TAs) meet the emotional needs of the children in a school setting. Nationally the ELSA training consisted of 5 whole day sessions, covering six key areas of competence, designed to equip the ELSAs to support young people/children receiving support 'to be better equipped to make the most of life's opportunities' (Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009). The 6 key areas are: emotional awareness, self-esteem, anger management, social and communication skills, friendship zones, and therapeutic stories.

In Plymouth an Educational Psychologist and a Primary Mental Health Worker lead the ELSA training sessions. The Plymouth course differs from the original ELSA course as it is delivered one afternoon a week for 12 weeks, each week focusing on a different theme, shown in Appendix A. This allows the ELSAs to evolve and put their training into practice throughout the course. Supervision is a vital part of the ELSA course and is embedded within the structure of the course to ensure ELSAs are successfully implementing their new skills. So far the ELSA course has been delivered to 8 cohorts, totalling 211 ELSAs in Plymouth primary and special schools. Palmer et al. (2011) completed research into the success of ELSA training, highlighting the value staff place in supporting children in emotional literacy in schools. This was the first cohort completed in Plymouth, a further 7 cohorts have also been completed, showing similar positive results of the training. This shows the ELSA training course has been successful over time.

The ELSA training takes into account the importance of emotional literacy in schools, using a background of psychological theory and guidance, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970). This theory explains the importance of children feeling safe and giving them a sense of belonging, which are both essential for children to develop a positive self-recognition, which contributes to their capacity to achieve and enjoy doing so. Teaching

TAs about theories such as this explains the psychology behind children's behaviour, which will help them learn to identify tools to support them. It has been found that the ELSA training itself has successfully allowed pupils to share their feelings safely and confidentially (Kelly, Slade, & Grienenberger, 2005), showing the effectiveness of theory on practice.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT) is another psychological theory on which the ELSA training is based. This theory highlights the importance of social relationships, suggesting emotional literacy is more modelled than it is taught. Emotional Intelligence is also an important factor to consider when looking at children's emotional literacy; Salovey and Mayer (1990) highlighted this. They suggested children might find it hard to identify and label their own emotions, causing them to have reduced resilience when managing emotions. An important aspect of the ELSA training focuses on TAs helping children build their self-worth. Borba (1989) took the building block approach, focusing on security, selfhood and affiliation. This is just some of the psychological theory on which the ELSA course is based, leading to a course, which has been found to be successful in most aspects (Burton, 2008).

Burton (2008) found a sharp growth in the number of schools participating in ELSA training which shows the positive impact the training is having. Burton's (2008) research also identified how all trained ELSAs found that being part of the training had helped them support vulnerable pupils. Although only a small number of schools were looked at, this still provides hope for a successful programme. This research looks at 47 schools whereas Burton's sample contains only 12.

Mann (2014) also found that ELSA training had a positive impact on TA's personal and professional development, and an increase in support they received. The role of teaching assistants is vital in schools, especially when working with children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD). Groom and Rose (2005) found that TAs role in supporting SEBD pupils in mainstream schools is challenging, due to the training and support required. The ELSA training provides TAs with knowledge about the children they will be working with, and emphasizes the importance of supervision. Osborne and Burton (2014) found that ELSAs who are supported with supervision felt better able to support pupils.

In the research completed here (using the Plymouth 12 week model), there were four key areas of interest in the pre and post questionnaires: the ability to understand the concept of emotional literacy, impact of emotional literacy on pupils, confidence to plan and deliver programs and their experience of

supervision. This research hypothesized that ELSAs would rate themselves as better at each of these key areas; pre and post questionnaires were used to measure this. Online surveys were also sent out to schools that have an ELSA which investigated their view of how effective ELSAs were in a school setting. Previous research is lacking in the views of other members of staff in the school have on ELSAs (Mann, 2014). This research will provide us with that view, helping explain the importance of ELSAs in a school setting. A final method of gathering data to assess the effectiveness of the ELSA program was to interview some schools and get primary data as to how ELSAs were being used in schools from the view of SENCOs and Head teachers.

Method

The local delivery of ELSA training involved twelve half day sessions which covered a range of topics to reflect the areas relevant to the work of the ELSA trainee. This research only contains cohorts 4-8, as the ones previous to that used different measurements so would not be consistent with the methods used here (Palmer et al, 2011).

The ELSAs were given a questionnaire on their first training session and on their final session. This questionnaire can be found in appendix B.

Once cohort 8 had completed the training, an online survey was sent to all head teachers and SENCOs asking how their ELSAs were being used. This survey was live for 6 weeks and can be found in appendix C. The qualitative questions have had a thematic approach used to pull out data used in the results section. The data was selected from the results and is a representative sample of the majority.

Interviews were completed with head teachers and SENCOs once the online survey had been completed and schools agreed to be interviewed, this can be seen in appendix D.

Results

General ELSA Statistics

- 47 of the 66 primary schools in Plymouth or 71%, have at least one trained ELSA.
- There are 202 trained ELSAs in Plymouth primary schools altogether.
- 5 out of the 7 special schools in Plymouth have at least one trained ELSA.
- There are 9 trained ELSAs in Plymouth special schools altogether.

Part 1: Pre and Post Questionnaire completed by ELSAs

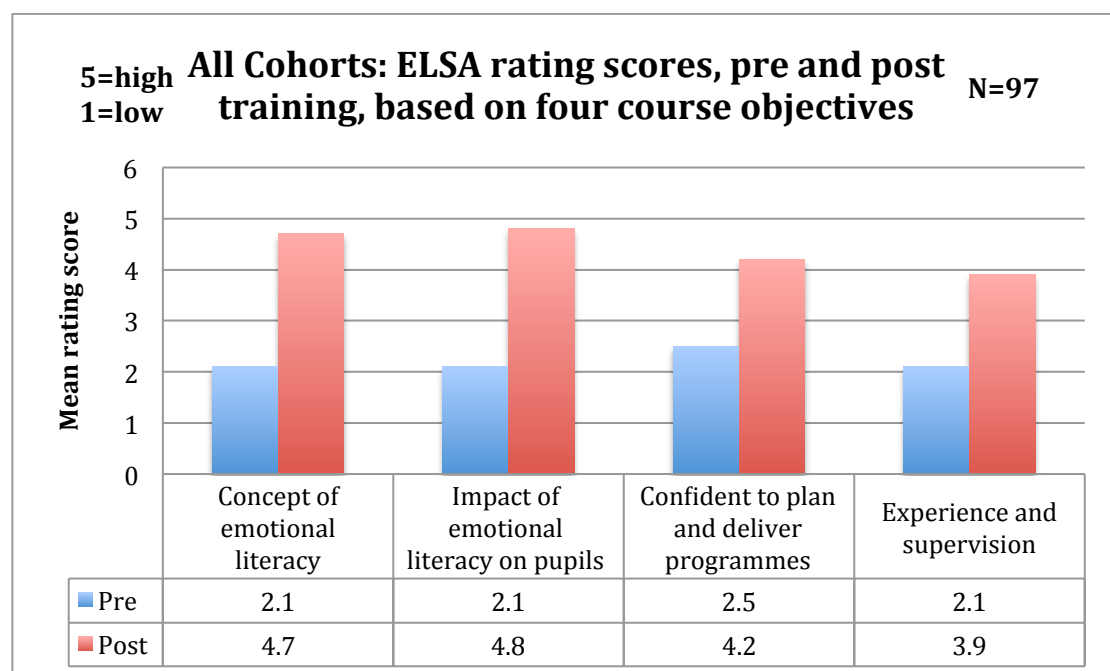
What difference does ELSA training make?

At the beginning of all Cohorts (4-8) all participants were required to complete a likert-type rating scale (Likert, 1932) relating to prior knowledge of training objectives. At the end of the training participants were asked to complete the rating scale again, based on their knowledge of the objectives as a consequence of the training. The rating scales ask the participants to rate themselves between 1 (low) to 5 (high). The rating scale asked the participants to rate themselves on the following statements:

- I understand what is meant by the concept of emotional literacy
- I understand the impact of emotional literacy on pupil success in schools
- I feel confident to plan and deliver programmes of support to children identified within my school as likely to benefit from additional help to increase emotional literacy
- I have experience of peer supervision, using problem solving approaches to build supportive relationships, share ideas and resources.

Quantative Results for Cohorts 4-8

Figure 1 Mean rating scores for ELSA course objectives for cohorts 4-8.



The results, from response rate of 97 participants, demonstrate on the pre training questionnaire the participants rated themselves towards the low-middle of the likert scale, results ranging from 2-3 across all dimensions. However, in comparison, the post training questionnaires showed an improvement; they all scored highly, from 4- 5, across all dimensions. The most significant movement occurred with objective 1 'I understand the concept of emotional literacy' with 74.2% scoring 5 on the post questionnaire

For a breakdown of results for the individual cohorts see Appendix E.

We used paired samples t-tests to test whether there were significant changes in the key four areas from the pre and post questionnaires over the course of the training. We found significant increases in all four domains. For the concept of EL we found a 2.61 point increase (95% Confidence Interval (CI) = 2.39 to 2.94). For impact of EL on pupils there was a 2.23 point increase (95% CI = 1.97 to 2.5). For the confidence to plan and deliver programmes there was a 2.14 point increase (95% CI = 1.90 to 2.38). For impact of experience and supervision there was a 1.74 point increase (95% CI = 1.48 to 2.01).

All of these results show statistical significance, there was a significant difference between pre and post questionnaire in all of the four key areas.

Qualitative Results for Cohorts 4-8

The qualitative data from the questionnaire focused on the hopes and expectations of the ELSA trainee for themselves, the pupils and their school.

Question 1: What are your hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for yourself?

Pre- to increase my knowledge and understanding of emotional literacy in myself and others. To increase my confidence as a teaching assistant. To help me improve my effectiveness and ability whilst dealing with behavioural difficulties that arise due to emotional problems.

Post- I have increased knowledge of emotional literacy in myself and others which has helped to increase my confidence personally and as a teaching assistant. I feel that I have the resources to help me improve my effectiveness to deal with difficulties due to emotional problems.

Special School. TA

Question 2: What are your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for pupils?

Pre- to help with their self-esteem and confidence and to help find coping strategies and manage in school.

Post- I feel confident to plan and deliver a program using the resources and handouts I have been given to help any child with a problem.

Primary School. TA

Question 3: What are your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for the school?

Pre- to help other staff and explain ELSA to them in a good manner. To be an ELSA trainer, express my views to others.

Post- I can explain and help other members of staff; I can assist teachers if they need support or assistance. I can fully understand and comply with the topics.

Primary School. Playleader (TA) Playworker

Additional comments:

Many of the professionals on the course found the facilitators to be very supportive and informative, as shown in the post training questionnaires additional comments. Here are some examples:

Post- Thank you so much for this fantastic course I have learnt so much. The program of the course has been so valuable and thank you Debbie and Val for being such interesting and personal trainers.

Primary School. Pupil Support Advisor (P.S.A)

Post- A really enjoyable course that has taught me a lot, the support given by the facilitators throughout the course was excellent.

Primary School. Teaching assistant

Part 2: Online Survey completed by Head teachers and SENCOs

The second part to this report is the online survey (see Appendix C) sent out to all head teachers and SENCO's that had ELSA's trained from their school. We sent out this online questionnaire via survey methods, and it was live for 5 weeks. 30 schools responded and the response rate to the survey was 64%

Qualitative and quantitative results of online survey

For the raw data of the online survey see Appendix F.

1. How many ELSAs do you have in your school?

Range from 1 – 14

2. How accessible is the ELSA training course?

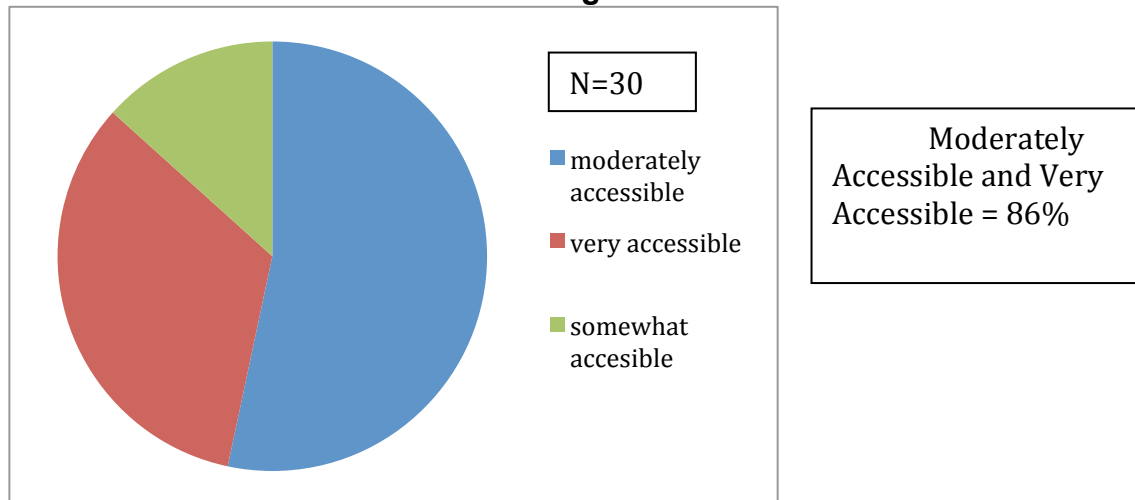


Figure 2: the percentage of those rating how accessible the ELSA course is.

3. Please rate the quality of the training provided to the ELSAs to prepare for their work in schools.

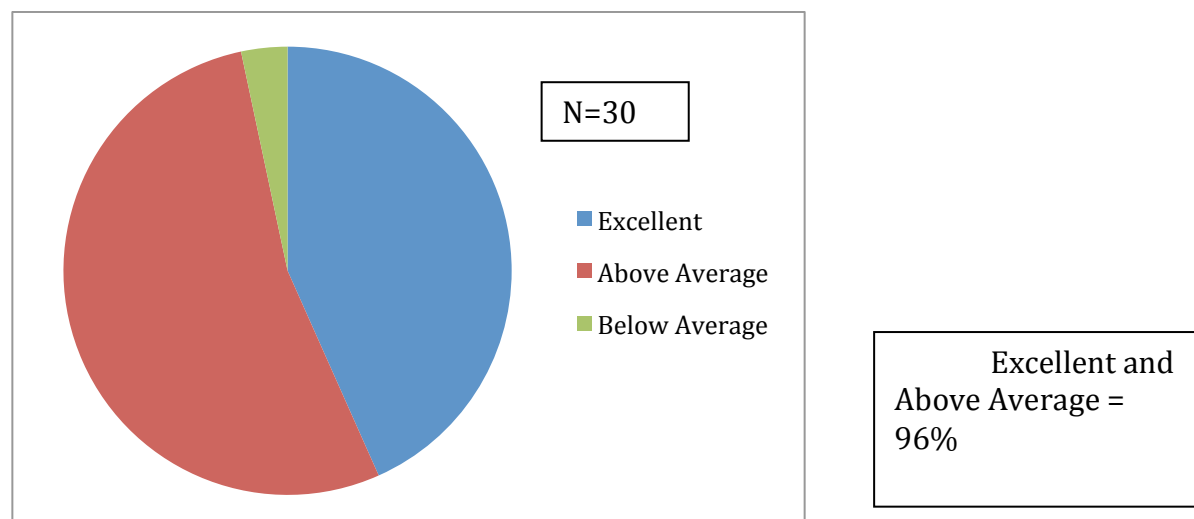


Figure 3: the percentage of those rating the quality of training to prepare the ELSAs.

4. Please rate the overall relevance of the ELSA training to work in schools.

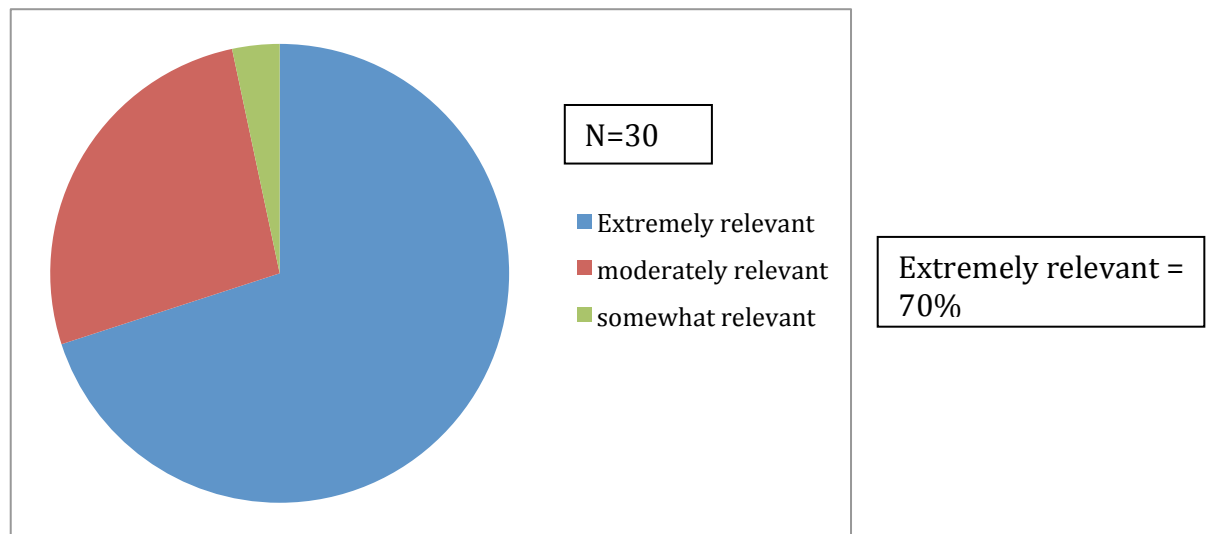


Figure 4: the percentage of those rating the relevance of ELSA training to work in schools

5. ELSAs were well equipped for working in the school environment. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

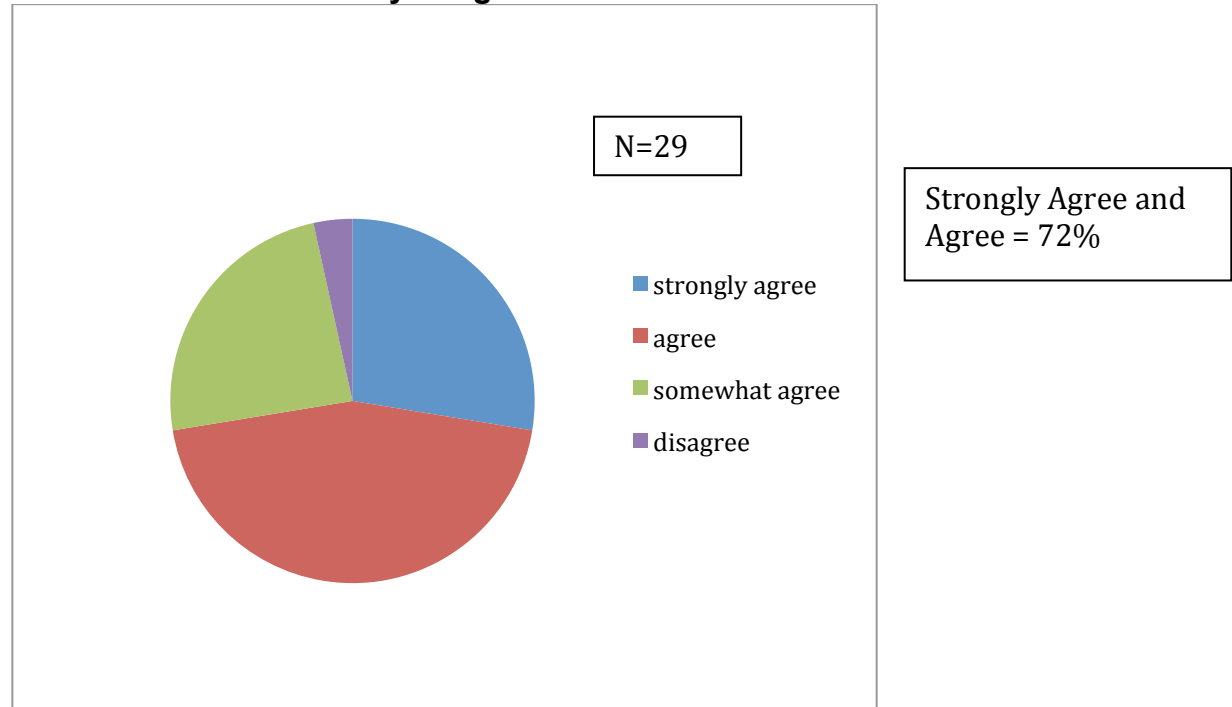


Figure 5: the percentage of those rating the extent to which ELSAs feel equipped for working in the school environment.

6. Please make a comment on your overall thoughts about the ELSA training

- *More staff to be trained – 2*
The desire to have more TA's trained as ELSA's because the course is valued so much.
- *Staff trained are enthusiastic – 2*
Once trained the ELSA's are so keen to put their new learnt skills into practice and help as many children as they can.
- *Benefit to school (e.g. effective, new tools) – 10*
New tools and schemes to use with pupils and seeing an effect in improving behavior, attendance and attainment,
- *Time concerns (once trained) – 2*
Having the ability to give ELSA's time to provide their skills to pupils. Staff are stretched in all aspects and the budget a school has is stretched too.

7. The ELSAs have had a positive impact on the school environment in general. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

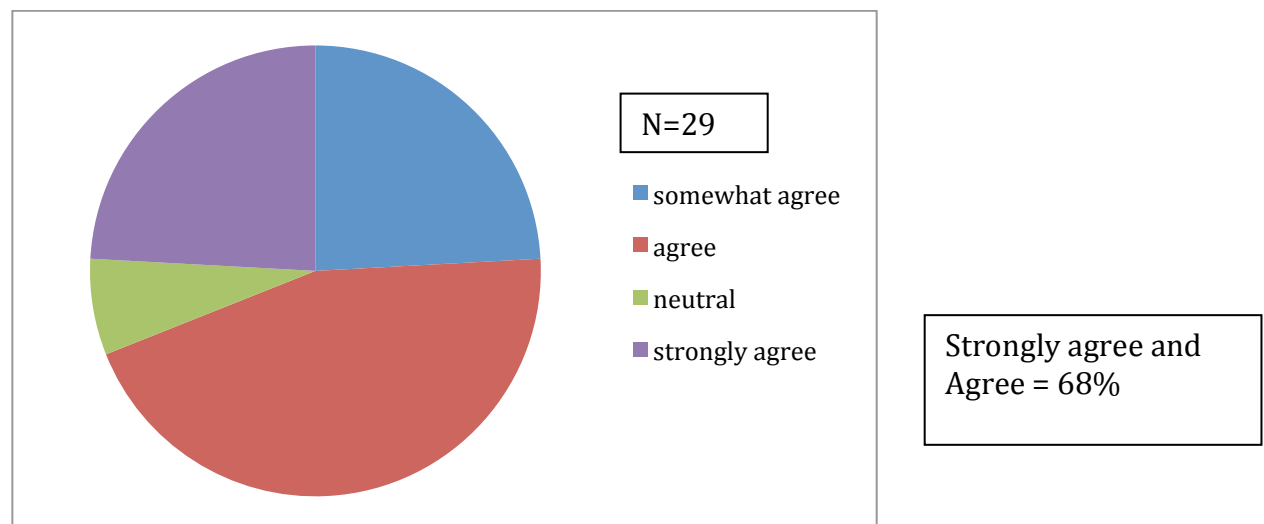


Figure 6: the percentage of those rating the extent to which ELSAs have had a positive impact on the school environment in general.

8. The ELSAs have had a positive impact on the children and general practice within the school. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

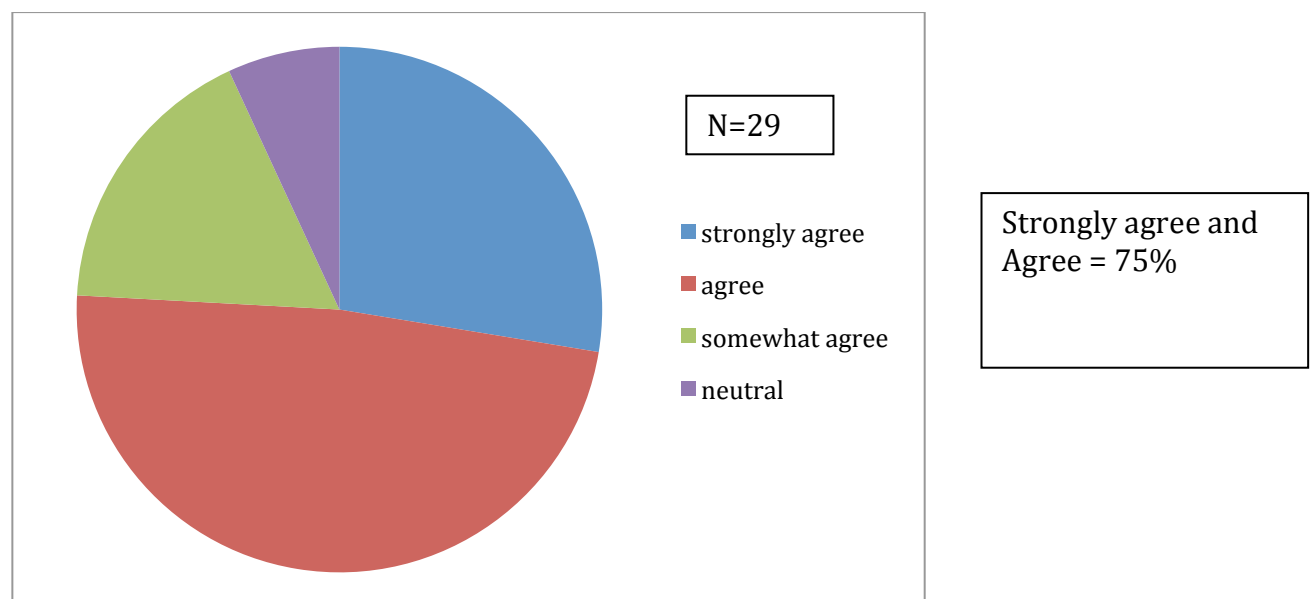


Figure 7: the percentage of those rating the extent to which ELSAs have had a positive impact on children and general practice within the schools.

9. Please provide specific examples which show the impact ELSAs have with the children in your school?

The group work allows children to explore and express their feelings, emotions, life experiences and helps with strategies to cope with all of these.

They learn to vocalise and share what can be complex and challenging issues. Individuals are supported to cope with aspects of their lives that can be a barrier to their learning and general welfare.

The pupils within our school have become more confident about talking about their feelings and have been given strategies to use when experiencing difficulties in and out of the school environment.

ELSAs support pupils to develop social skills, within the classroom and out in the playground. They also support pupils as they go through various experiences, such as dealing with loss and bereavement.

The ELSA in my school helps to reduce barriers to learning and support colleagues in school to support particular children. As a result, pupils are less likely to be excluded and pupils make more progress in their learning.

10. Are goal-based outcomes used to measure the impact ELSA training has on the children?

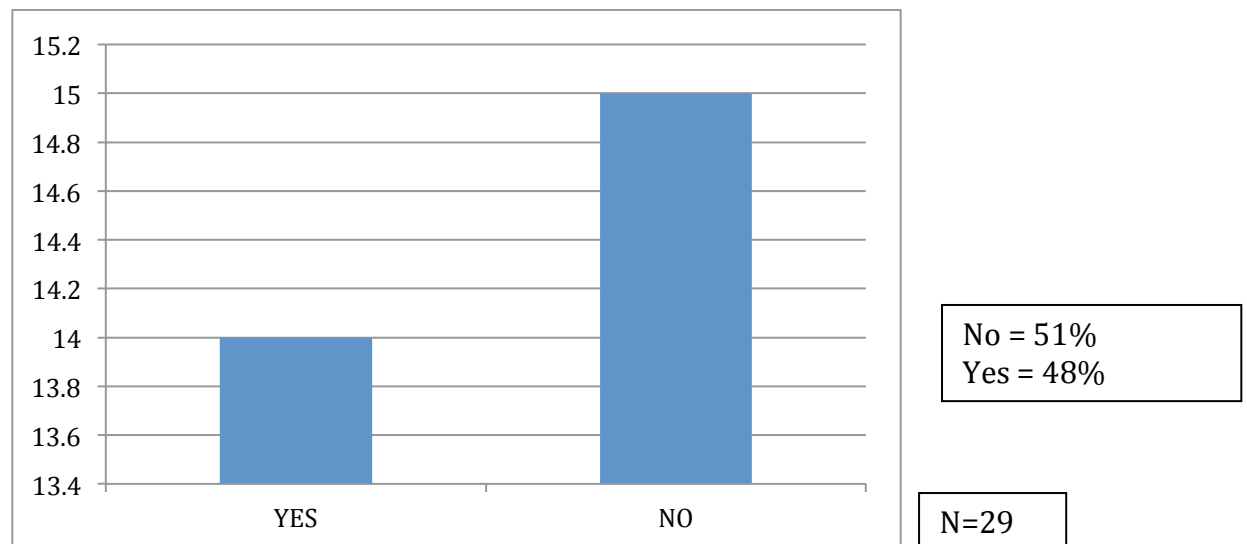


Figure 8: the percentage of those claiming that goal based outcomes are used to measure the impact ELSA training has had on children.

11. If yes to question 10, have goal based outcomes helped measure effectiveness of the ELSAs?

*By setting goal-based outcomes it not only measures the effectiveness but also helps support the pupils and the staff working with the pupils.
If goals are clear then everyone can work together to achieve the same outcomes and to be consistent.
Yes it is a good way to see the impact of the sessions*

12. What other measures have been used to measure the impact of ELSA training?

*IEP Target monitoring observed
review meetings
questionnaire feelings scales
speaking to students - 4
boxall profile trackers - 2
school based feedback form (6 weeks)
evaluation of CPD questionnaires
performance management outcomes
number of children entering and exiting the assistance – 3*

13. Do the ELSAs in your school receive regular supervision?

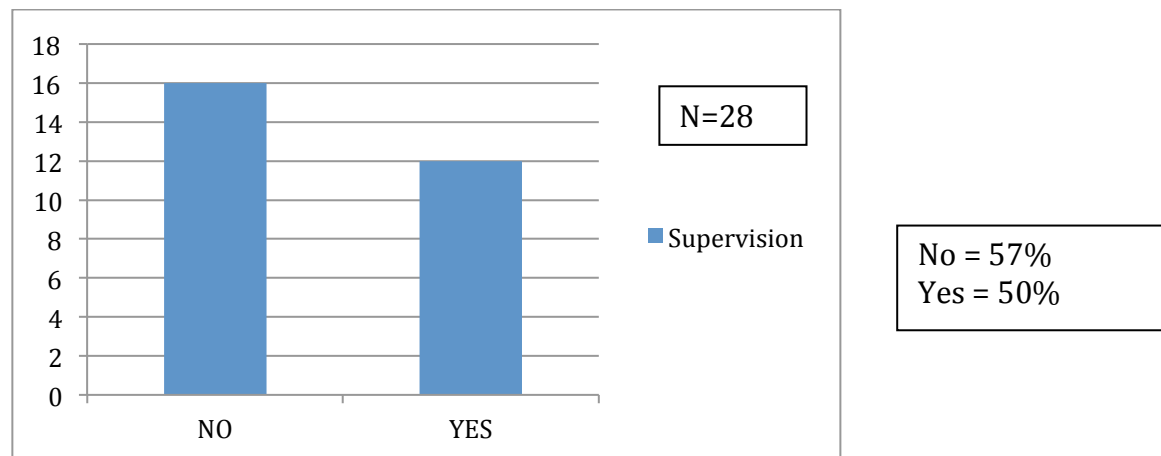


Figure 9: the percentage of those claiming that their ELSAs receive regular supervision.

Additional Comments:

One afternoon a week and sometimes additional time if the pupil is needing additional support.

Full time ELSA mentor

Half a day per week

One of our ELSAs is not class based and sees groups, individuals and supports staff full time. Other ELSAs have designated time to work with individuals and groups. This ranges from 1:1 weekly sessions for 30 mins. To daily 10-15 minute session.

Both ELSA's have one afternoon a week designated to their role. They also receive additional time to prepare resources for their sessions

We have a full time dedicated ELSA in school and others are timetabled sessions each week.

14. Who delivers the supervision?

SENCo – 6

Teachers

Line manager/head teacher/deputy head

EP

MAST

Excellence Cluster

15. Do the ELSAs have specific time put aside to fulfill their role as an ELSA?

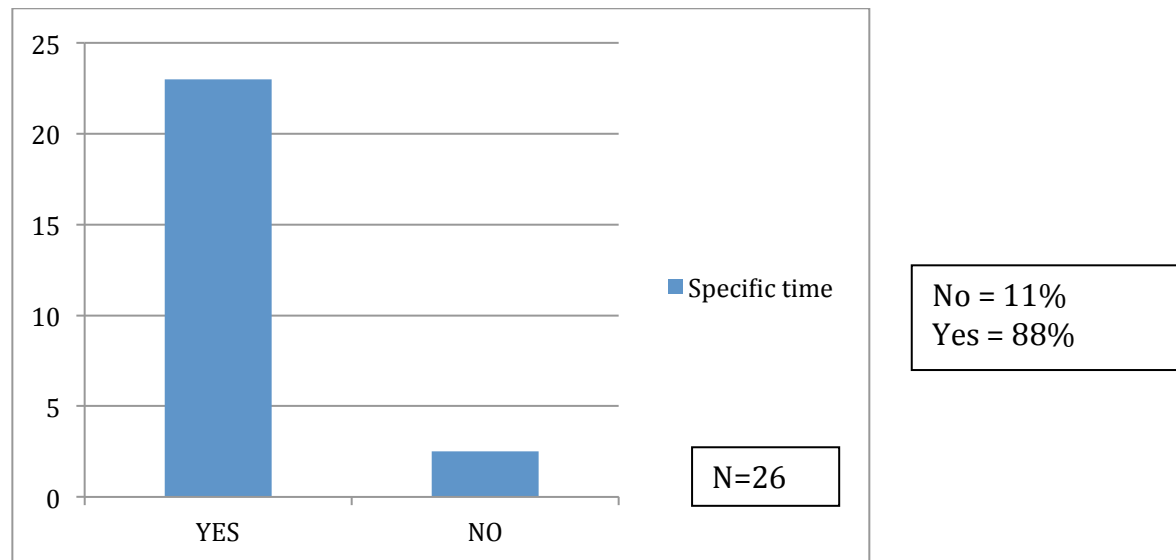


Figure 10: the percentage of those claiming ELSAs have specific time aside to fulfil their role.

16. Have there been any time restraints in school due to time taken up with ELSA training and adapting to the new ELSA roles?

- *Difficult to timetable having the time to allow ELSAs to use their skills to help pupils. There is not much time spare to allow TA's out of class however some schools have achieved this either via an hour spare a day or a whole afternoon.*
- *having backlog of students so many students being identified a needing support that the ELSA's have a long list to work through.*
- *class based ELSAs not having enough time for all students – 2 some of the students in class being too much for the ELSA's to work with, suggest for more ELSAs being trained.*

17. Do you have any final comments about ELSAs and their role in your school?

- *Want more – 4 the course is so valued that more ELSAs are wanted and needed within many schools,*

- *Good training – 10
the training received was of a high quality*
- *Helped pupils – 5
the ELSA course has helped TAs to help pupils and there has been an improvement seen in attendance, behavior and attainment.*

Part 3: Interviews from Head Teachers and SENCOs

Section three of the results gathered were interviews of head teachers and SENCOs in some schools. The interview used can be seen in appendix D. The themes that were highlighted from these interviews were drawn from a thematic analysis approach.

Interview Questions and themes drawn:

Why did you choose to send members of staff on the ELSA course?

- TAs short of time. This referred to the level of needs shown by a high volume of pupils in class that the TA could not address alone in the confined time restrictions of a lesson. By having an ELSA then dedicated time can be put aside for the complex needs and very sensitive cases, freeing up some of the TA's time to address lower level needs.
"recognizing .. that was taking up a lot of our TA's time, but we were not really timetabling it."
- Limited knowledge. As mentioned, some of the complex cases need one to one attention and cannot be sorted out within the classroom and often specialist advice is needed.
"TA's felt a little out of their depth when it came to some of our more complex cases"
- Increasing emotional difficulties/ Mental Health issues needing addressing.
"TaMHS being involved and giving taster sessions"
"something we've noticed an increasing need in social and emotional difficulties and we felt there were a lot of children coming into school.. where they were not ready to access learning"

Who were they?

- Teaching Assistants
- Parent Support Advisor
- SENCO
- PE coach

What difference did you see in the knowledge, skills and confidence of the people who attended the ELSA course?

- Resources used to help individual pupils as vast and ELSAs were able to adapt what they use for each child. Range of knowledge used to support each child and individual needs.
(about full time ELSA) “knowledge, resources she has available from attending the training and just has so many different ways now she can approach with children”
“the range of the ELSA training, because it covers not just social and emotional but all the specific areas”
- Less direction needed, after support has been given by the ELSA, student are able to manage themselves, via emotions or anger etc.

How do you use ELSAs in your school?

- Full- time ELSAs
- Class based ELSAs
- Lunchtime work
- Take a nurture group

Do the trained ELSAs have dedicated ELSA time?

- Mostly yes for planning time
- Yes for working with children themselves

Do your ELSAs work with small groups of children or one to one?

- Both
- Mostly one to one
- Group work- nurture group, circle of friends

How was it decided which ELSAs were to work with which children?

- Play to ELSAs strengths
- Depends on the level of need of child
“depends on the level of need of the child, in terms of, does this need to be a one to one, if we think that child is coming with any baggage (then go to full time ELSA)”
- Complex cases were tended to be given to the ELSA that were full time, whereas classroom based ELSA’s worked with the less complex cases.
“wouldn’t give a case that we knew was going to last a long time to a class based TA.. give it to (full time ELSA) because we know she has the capacity to see them over a long period of time”

What difference has having ELSAs in school made to the children?

- Positive impact on whole class, as behavior has improved there are less distractions in class so less barriers to learning.
- Not having to fight for attention, as there is a figure who is always there for them, students can excuse themselves from class to find an ELSA if they are feeling anything, so not to distract the class and demand the teachers attention.

“having that dedicated person and time to listen to them”

- Helps child to have a ‘base’, as mentioned previously, they have someone they can always go to throughout the day. It also helps if the ELSA ‘check’ in on certain pupils as they feel secure.
- Self esteem, confidence improved in many pupils, due to the work done by the ELSAs

How has this difference been measured?

- Scaling pre and post ELSA help
- Support assessment
- Weekly evaluations
- Boxall profile

What links can you make between ELSAs in school and the impact they have on the children’s learning?

- Behavior improved
- Attendance increased
- Fewer exclusions

What has been the impact on the whole school on having ELSAs?

- Pass on information between staff, keep updated on regulation’s and school policy.
“having that person to fly the flag for EL, wellbeing and mental health”
- Shows that even very challenging children can be helped, due to the skills and resources learnt in ELSA course

What supervision do your ELSAs receive?

- Talk to head or line manager
- Support from other trained ELSAs in school
- MAST supervision

If they don't receive any, what can be put into place to provide the support they require?

Do you have any further comments about the role of ELSAs in your school?

- More ELSAs needed and wanted
- Positive scheme and valued.
- A follow up once trained would be very beneficial
- Liked how in depth training was and ability to take away so many resources and skills
- Hope to sustain funding to allow for future training of ELSAs

Discussion

The research completed indicates ELSA training was effective in helping teaching assistants work with children to develop their emotional literacy, according to both the ELSAs themselves and in the view of SENCOs and Head teachers. Part 1 of the results show the training benefitted the trainees in all four key areas of interest. The post training questionnaires showing a better ability to understand the concept of emotional literacy, a better understanding of the impact of emotional literacy on pupils, increased confidence to plan and deliver programs and an increase in experience of supervision. The results showed there was a significant difference between the pre and post questionnaires, in all four of the key areas. This supports previous research, which has suggested ELSA training has had a positive impact on TA's personal and professional development as well as an increase in support they have received (Mann, 2014). The additional comments section of the post questionnaires highlighted the importance of the support given by the facilitators, one trainee stating how 'interesting and personal' both the facilitators had been.

Part 2 of the results explored the opinions of SENCOs and Head teachers. In the results obtained from the online questionnaire there is evidence to suggest ELSAs have a positive effect on the school as a whole. The high response rate of 65.9% in itself shows the success of the course, as professionals think the course worthy of a response and praise. One aspect of the questionnaire looked into the impact of ELSAs on the school as a whole, 75.9% of SENCOs/Head teachers completing the questionnaire strongly agreed or agreed that the ELSAs had a positive impact on the children and general practices within the school. Another statistic which stood out was that 88% of professionals set aside specific time for ELSAs to prepare and work with children, showing the extent they value the role of ELSAs within the school. Within the results section of this part, there are a few responses by one school that are particularly negative, in questions 3, the quality of training to prepare ELSAs and question 5, the extent to which ELSA's feel equipped for working in the school environment. These results were the only negative results found, suggesting that the vast majority of those who responded valued the course and saw it as beneficial. This particular school rated all the other aspects of the questionnaire as positive, so there is the possibility that

the Likert scale was read wrongly or simply misunderstood. To add to this, the huge response rate that was received from the online questionnaire could reflect value that professionals place on the course and the vast impact of the training as they felt the need to share their positive experiences.

Part 3 results from the interviews have given rich, qualitative data. This shows the ELSAs had a positive effect on the individual child as well as the whole school. All of the responses were positive and head teachers and SENCOs were keen to pass on their appreciation of the ELSA course. The availability and readiness of head teachers and SENCOs to meet and be interviewed suggests they value the training and the impact ELSAs have.

The positive response from the head teachers and SENCOs can help explain why in Burton's (2008) research there was such a sharp growth in the number of schools wanting to participate in the ELSA training. This research is an extension of Burton's (2008) work, as our research took into account 211 ELSAs being trained in 47 schools, whereas Burton only completed research looking at 22 schools. As mentioned previously, this is not the only work done to assess the effectiveness of the ELSA scheme, as Palmer et al. (2011) (unpublished) found that earlier cohorts were deemed as positive, much like these findings. This can show the consistency of the ELSA course and the growing evidence to support the view that it is a very effective course and should be continued and expanded.

The importance of social and emotional skills in educational contexts has been highlighted recently. There have been policy advances, such as the Children's Plan, and the introduction of a national strategy (the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning program). The research completed here helps confirm the importance of understanding emotional literacy in schools. As Carnwell et al. (2007) had previously found how much of a positive impact training, such as ELSA training, can have on staff and the school as a whole. The recent report by Weare (2015) has found a wide range of interventions and programmes in the UK, finding that TaMHS and SEAL are just a few of those that 'work'. Both these initiatives focus on the social and emotional aspects of a child's development to allow for access to learning.

Overall, the results from this report have suggested that the ELSA training is very successful. Recommendations have been given to expand further the positive impact ELSAs are having on schools.

A way to further investigate the effectiveness of ELSAs on the emotional literacy of the children themselves an effective measurement must be used. There are a few difficulties with studying social and emotional skills, including inconsistent terminology. For example "social and emotional intelligence" (Salovey et al., 1990), "emotional literacy" (Park, Haddon and Goodman, 2003) and "social and emotional competence" (Elias et al, 1997) all call for debate over as they each imply qualitatively different ideas. This may result in difficulty when trying to measure the effectiveness of training such as the ELSA training, as without a clear definition on what is being affected, it is hard to see the affect itself.

Other issues to consider when studying social and emotional skills are the scope and specificity of available measures is extremely varied. For example, the TEIQue (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham & Frederickson 2006) has a single, unidimensional indicator of children social and emotional skills tend to be short and easy to administer but lack specificity. An example of multi-dimensional measure is the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Weare (2015) stated the Department of Education has advised the use of 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ). The SDQ is a behavioural screening questionnaire, which could be used as a standard implement to pinpoint the nature of difficulties in specific children, often those with risk of emerging mental health difficulties. This could be used before and after ELSA intervention to see the effect it is having. Future research could emerge from this by assessing how schools measure their pupils' emotional literacy. Academic performance is measured rigorously within schools but not social and emotional literacy (SEL). This is surprising as SEL impacts on a lot, including barriers to learning. There is no cohesive way of measuring SEL and many may argue that if a measurement was found then the authorities would be measuring children to the extreme.

The success of the ELSA course has resulted in ELSAs wanting further training. Evidence from the interviews completed by SENCOs and Head teachers, indicated that there was a high demand for this. Some mentioned a refresher training session, which could be a one off yearly event. A refresher course would also allow ELSAs to share resources and experiences among themselves. Others were keen to see the ELSA course develop and suggested further training for those who wanted more information or more in depth training in certain areas. This could be an ELSA PLUS course for those wanting to take their training further. It may also be useful to produce a list of training offered by outside agencies so that the ELSA training also becomes a source for future professional development in areas specific to the ELSAs individual interests and practice, for example SEAL.

With any training there is always going to be participants who have heard information previously and there is some overlap in the knowledge already known. This can be highlighted when finding out the individuals reasons for attending the course. When interviewing SENCOs, one mentioned that they went on the course to see what their ELSAs were learning and ways to better support them. Another idea for future ELSA courses may be specializing the training according to the role professionals' play in the school. Providing training sessions to SENCOs themselves will both allow SENCOs to know what to expect of their ELSAs, but also train them how to best supervise the ELSAs once the course has finished. Supervision is another important aspect of the ELSA training. This would help accomplish the whole school approach, which has been found to be more effective when attempting to promote emotional wellbeing (Catalano et al. 2002).

To improve even further the positive effect ELSAs are having in schools, additional supervision could be given. Both ELSAs and their within school supervisors have highlighted the importance of having supervision, especially

when supporting children on an emotional level. Over 80% of staff in schools have reported suffering from anxiety/ depression or high levels of stress (NUT, 2013). Providing ELSAs with support such as clinical supervision or counselling will help them reach their full potential of helping and supporting children (Jennings and Greenburg, 2009). A number of schools in Plymouth have found having the support of the Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST) has been beneficial. Another option for supervision is having a network of ELSAs within the school. This allows ELSAs to communicate and support each other, both sharing knowledge and resources, as well as helping to encourage a whole school approach.

One school reported having no need to use supervision with the ELSAs in their school because they were able to peer supervise each other. There are many different types of supervision. It is necessary for ELSAs to receive supervision due to the complexity of cases as they may need even more. Some applicants were hesitant to accepting the ELSA training because of concerns working with complex cases. However if robust supervision was rigidly in place to support staff, this may reduce that anxiety and appeal more. As shown via the online survey, it is vital that supervision is delivered to ensure that the ELSA training is being implemented and to offer support. Schools sometimes have an issue with supervision, possibility for lack of understanding. Peer supervision is a good way of providing support, if there is more than one ELSA per school, as a network of ELSAs can work together. This could propose a further recommendation, that all schools should have more than one ELSA trained to provide this support. It was also mentioned that teachers ask ELSAs for advice in schools and were actively seeking out knowledge from the trained ELSAs. This could show the importance of cascading information and how having trained ELSAs can help the school as a whole.

As mentioned, 88% of professionals set aside specific time for their ELSAs to prepare the ELSA sessions and work with the children. This gives evidence for the positive effect they are having. On the online survey, SENCOs and head teachers mentioned they would like to be able to give them more time in order to reach their full potential. Following on from this, the schools willingness to pay for the ELSAs to be supported shows the value the ELSAs have in the school.

The data collected has shown the effectiveness of the ELSA training and the positive impact; it may therefore be advantageous to make the ELSA training an accredited course, allowing for recognition of achievements and personal development. This would raise the profile of ELSAs, its benefit and availability to others.

To summarise, the ELSA training can be seen very successful when considering the relevance and quality of the training, to the degree that it is statistically significant. The data that has been collected is very positive and individual comments and interviews have also supported this. Previous research can support this, showing the consistent value the ELSA scheme has. From this report, it has highlighted the value staff place on the training

and ability to support the emotional literacy of children. The majority of ELSAs have reported a difference in their practice and seen improvements in the children they work with, as a result. This research, along with others can show just how valuable the ELSA scheme is, for both professionals and pupils, suggesting that it is vital that training continues.

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Appendix.

Appendix A: List of themes covered each week in the ELSA training.

An introduction to the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) program,
 Raising Emotional Awareness and Mental Health 5 A Day,
 The Building Blocks of Self-Esteem,
 Understanding Social Skills Active Listening and Communication,
 An Introduction to Solution Focused Techniques and An Introduction to Goal Based Outcomes Measures,
 Anxiety and Mood Regulation,
 How to Support Children with Attachment Difficulties in the Classroom,
 Exploring the Emotional Needs of Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder,
 Working with Puppets,
 Loss and Bereavement,
 Creating Therapeutic Stories,
 Looking Beyond the Mask of Behaviour and An Introduction to Selective Communication and Reflections on the ELSA scheme and Celebration Graduation.

Appendix B: Pre and Post questionnaire given to ELSAs during the training course

Pre Questionnaire:

ELSA Pre-training Questionnaire

Name of Course:	ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants)
Name of Participant:	
School:	
What is your profession:	

The TaMHS Team are keen to evaluate the impact of the training we do and value your feedback. Please rate your skills / knowledge / understanding / awareness of the ELSA course objectives at the start of the course with an 'x'.

Course objectives	Low - High				
	1	2	3	4	5
I understand what is meant by the concept of emotional literacy					
I understand the impact of emotional literacy on pupil success in school					
I feel confident to plan and deliver programmes of support to children identified within my school as likely to benefit from additional help to increase their emotional literacy					
I have experience of peer supervision, using problem-solving approaches, to build supportive relationships, share ideas and resources					

What are your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for yourself?

-
-
-

What are your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for pupils?

-
-
-

What are your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for the school?

-
-
-

Any other comments?

Thank you for completing the ELSA pre-training questionnaire

Investigation into the Effectiveness of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) in Schools (May 2015)

Jessica Dodds and Rachel Blake

Post Questionnaire:

ELSA Post-training Questionnaire ■

Name of Course:	ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants)
Name of Participant:	
School:	
What is your profession:	

The TaMHS Team are keen to evaluate the impact of the training we do and value your feedback. Please rate your skills / knowledge / understanding / awareness of the ELSA course objectives now we are at the end of the course with an 'x'.

Course objectives	Low - High				
	1	2	3	4	5
I understand what is meant by the concept of emotional literacy					
I understand the impact of emotional literacy on pupil success in school					
I feel confident to plan and deliver programmes of support to children identified within my school as likely to benefit from additional help to increase their emotional literacy					
I have experience of peer supervision, using problem-solving approaches, to build supportive relationships, share ideas and resources					

Reflect on your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for yourself. How have these been achieved?

-
-
-

Reflect on your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for pupils. How have these been achieved?

-
-
-

Reflect on your best hopes and expectations from attending the ELSA training for the school. How have these been achieved?

-
-
-

PTO

Any other comments?

Thank you for completing the ELSA post-training questionnaire

Appendix C: Online Survey sent out to Head teachers

How many ELSAs do you have in your school?

How accessible is the ELSA training course?

Please rate the quality of the training provided to the ELSAs to prepare for their work in schools.

Please rate the overall relevance of the ELSA training to work in schools.

The ELSA's were well equipped for working in the school environment. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Please make a comment on your overall thoughts about the ELSA training

The ELSA's have had a positive impact on the school environment in general.

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

The ELSA's have had a positive impact on the children and general practice within the school. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Please provide specific examples which show the impact ELSA's have with the children in your school?

Are goal-based outcomes used to measure the impact ELSA training has on the children?

If yes to question 10, have goal based outcomes helped measure effectiveness of the ELSAs?

What other measures have been used to measure the impact of ELSA training?

Do the ELSA's in your school receive regular supervision?

If you answered yes to Q13: Do the ELSA's have specific time put aside to fulfill their role as an ELSA?

Have there been any time restraints in school due to time taken up with ELSA training and adapting to the new ELSA roles?

Would you be willing to be interviewed to provide us with further information about the role of ELSAs in your school?

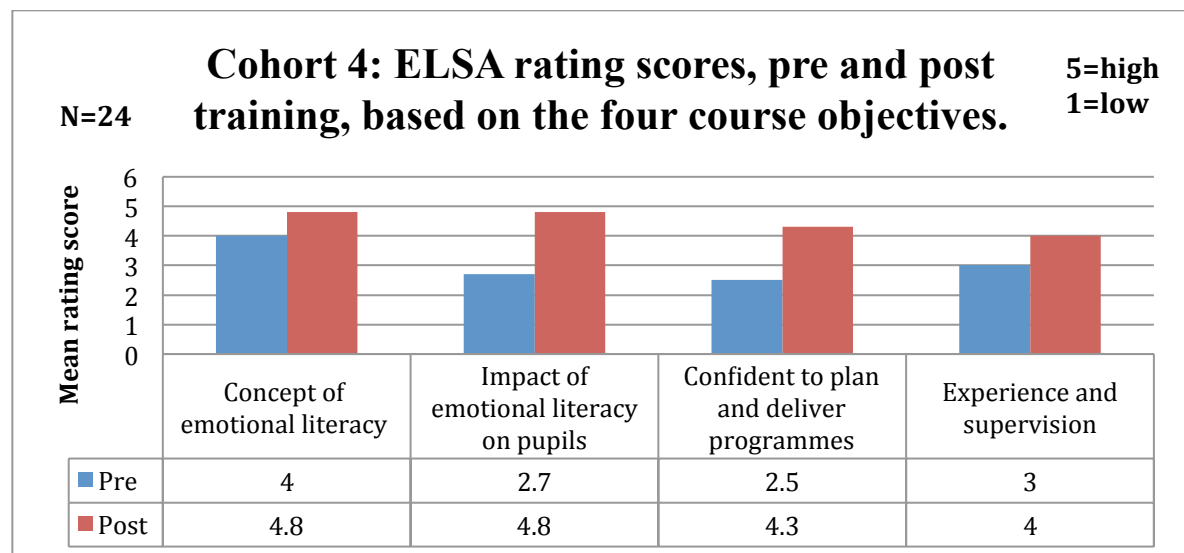
Do you have any final comments about ELSA's and their role in your school?

Appendix D:

1. Why did you choose to send members of staff on the ELSA course?
- Who were they?
2. What difference did you see in the knowledge, skills and confidence of the people who attended the ELSA course?
3. How do you use ELSA's in your school?
- Do the trained ELSA's have dedicated ELSA time?
- Do your ELSA's work with small groups of children or one to one?
- How was it decided which ELSA's would work with which children?
4. What difference has having ELSA's in school made to the children?
- How has this difference been measured?
5. What links can you make between ELSA's in schools and they impact they have on the children's learning?
6. What has been the impact on the whole school on having ELSA's?
7. What supervision do your ELSA's receive?
- If they don't receive any, what can be put into place to provide the support they require?
8. Do you have any further comments about the role of ELSA's in your school?

Appendix E

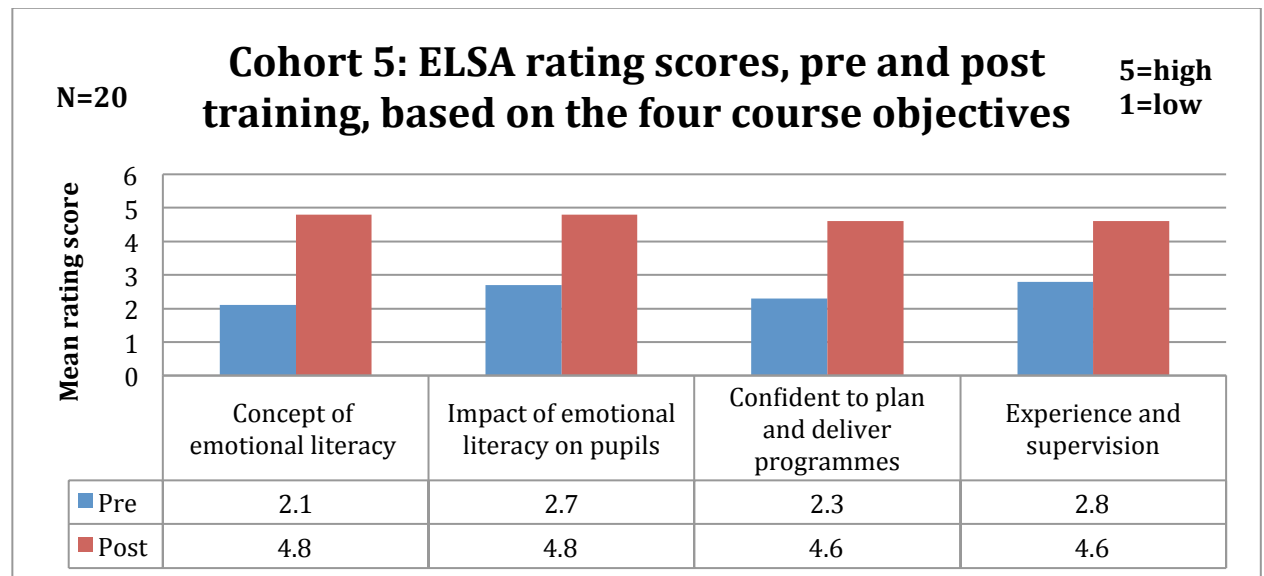
Figure 1 Mean rating scores for ELSA course objectives for cohort 4.



The results, from response rate of 23 participants, demonstrate on the pre training questionnaire the participants rated themselves towards the middle of the likert scale (2-4) across all dimensions. However, in comparison, the post training questionnaires showed an improvement, they all scored highly (4-5) across all dimensions.

The most significant movement occurred with objective 2 'I understand the impact of emotional literacy' with 87% of participants as scoring themselves as 5 (high).

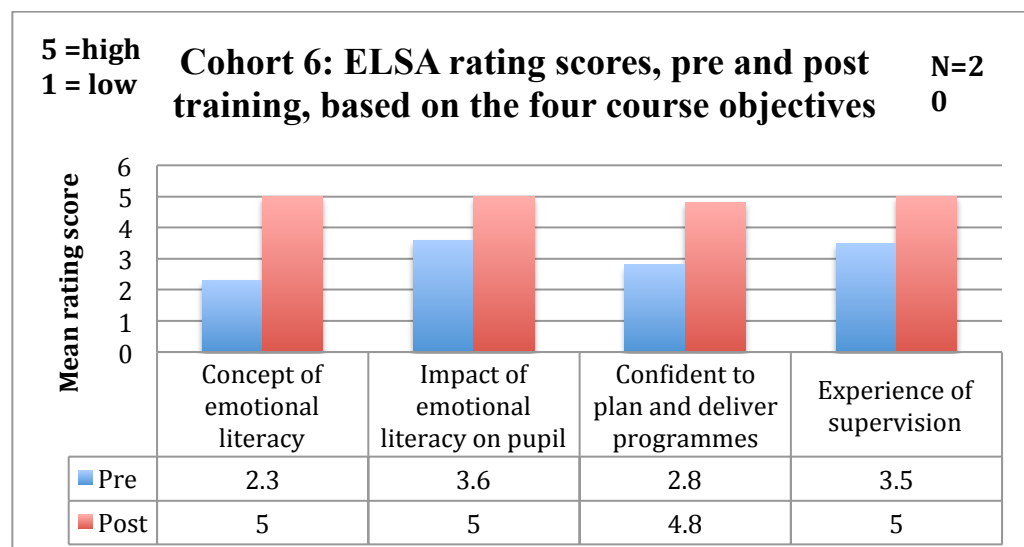
Figure 2 Mean rating scores for ELSA course objectives for cohort 5.



The results, from a response rate of 20 participants, demonstrate that on the pre training questionnaire the majority of professionals rated themselves to the middle of the scale 2/3. In comparison, after training they rated themselves very highly, either generally scoring either 4 or 5.

The movement was greatest for objective 1 'I understand what is meant by the concept of emotional literacy, with 80% of participants scoring themselves as high (5).

Figure 3 Mean rating scores for ELSA course objectives for cohort 6.

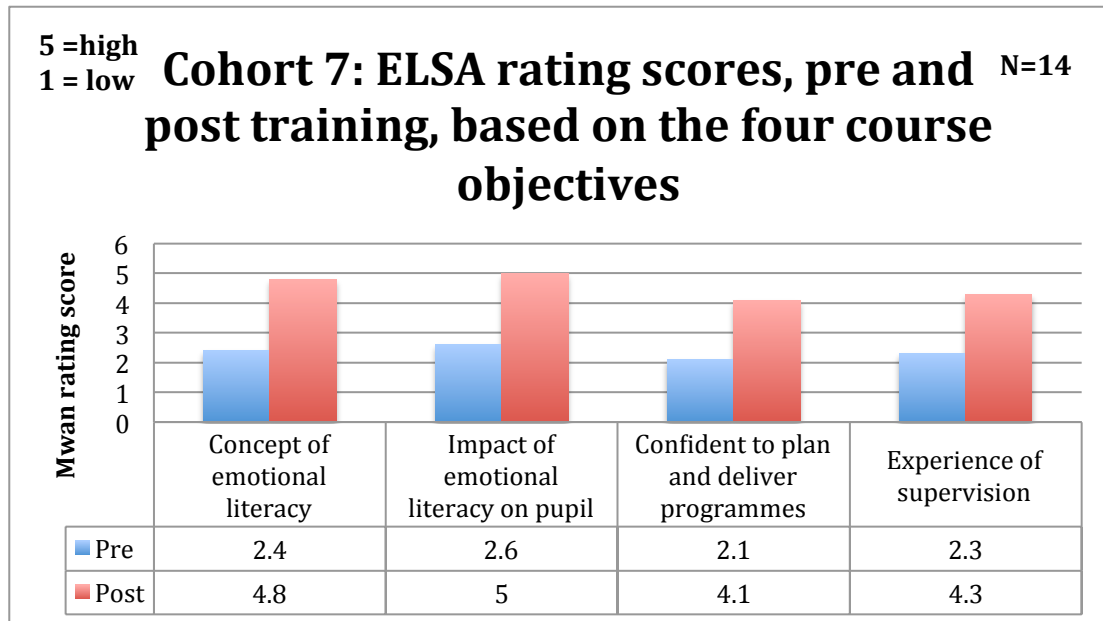


The results, from response rate of 20 participants, demonstrate on the pre training questionnaire the participants rated themselves towards the middle of the likert scale, ranging from 2-4, across all dimensions. However, in

comparison, the post training questionnaires showed an improvement, they all scored highly (4-5) across all dimensions.

The most significant movement occurred with objective 1 'I understand the concept of emotional literacy' with 95% of participants as scoring themselves as 5 (high).

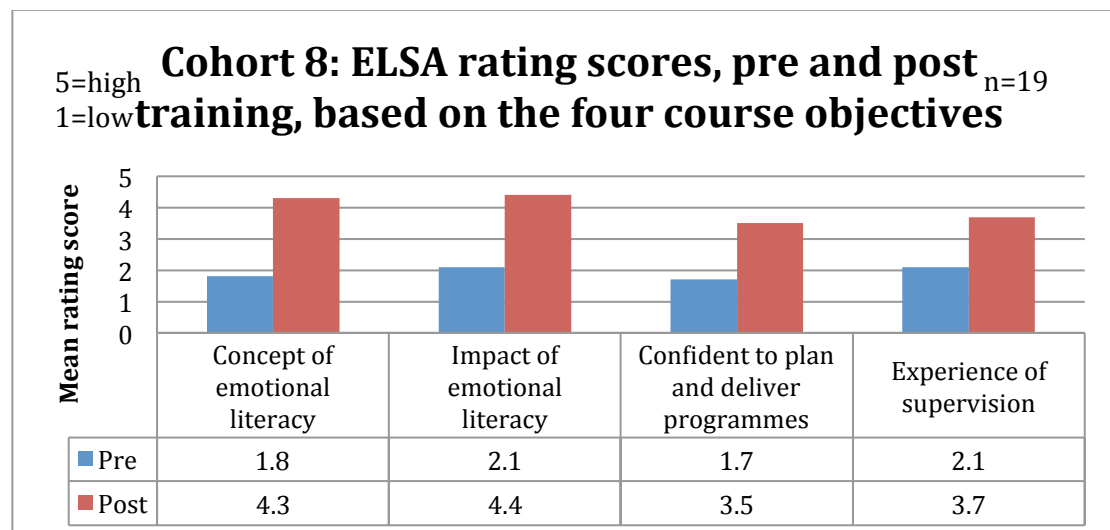
Figure 4 Mean rating scores for ELSA course objectives for cohort 7



The results, from response rate of 14 participants, demonstrate on the pre training questionnaire the participants rated themselves towards the middle of the likert scale, results ranging from 2-3 across all dimensions. However, in comparison, the post training questionnaires showed an improvement; they all scored highly, from 4- 5, across all dimensions.

The most significant movement occurred with objective 1 'I understand the concept of emotional literacy' with objective 2 'I understand the impact of emotional literacy' with 93% of participants as scoring themselves as 5 (high).

Figure 5 Mean rating scores for ELSA course objectives for cohort 8



The results, from response rate of 19 participants, demonstrate on the pre training questionnaire the participants rated themselves towards the lower end of the likert scale, ranging from 1.7-2.1, across all dimensions. However, in comparison, the post training questionnaires showed an improvement, they all scored highly (3.5-4.4) across all dimensions.

The most significant movement occurred with objective 1 'I understand the concept of emotional literacy' with 95% of participants as scoring themselves as 4.3 (high).

Appendix F: Raw data from the online survey sent out to head teachers

2. How accessible is the ELSA training course?

Moderately Accessible	Very Accessible	Somewhat Accessible
16	10	4

3. Please rate the quality of the training provided to the ELSA's to prepare for their work in schools.

Excellent	Above Average	Below Average
13	16	1

4. Please rate the overall relevance of the ELSA training to work in schools

extremely relevant	moderately relevant	somewhat relevant
21	8	1

5. The ELSA's were well equipped for working in the school environment. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

strongly agree	agree	somewhat agree	disagree
8	13	7	1

7. The ELSA's have had a positive impact on the school environment in general. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

somewhat agree	agree	neutral	strongly agree
7	13	2	7

8. The ELSA's have had a positive impact on the children and general practice within the school. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

strongly agree	agree	somewhat agree	neutral
8	14	5	2

10. Are goal-based outcomes used to measure the impact ELSA training has on the children?

yes	No
14	15

13. Do the ELSA's in your school receive regular supervision?

NO	YES
16	12

14. Do the ELSA's have specific time put aside to fulfill their role as an ELSA?

YES	NO
23	3