



Emotional Literacy Support Assistants in Bournemouth: Impact and Outcomes



"Our Feelings" - ELSA display to extend emotional vocabulary

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September 2009

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Executive Summary

21 ELSAs were interviewed, from 14 of the 16 schools that sent TAs on the 5-day ELSA training course 2007-2008. Two schools did not respond.

17 HTs replied to an on-line questionnaire, from the 26 schools that had sent TAs on the ELSA training courses in 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and in-school training in 2007 at the BESD specialist school.

- Nearly all ELSAs trained in 2007-2008 are currently doing ELSA-type work in their school. Time allocated to ELSA work varies widely.
- A year after training, a majority of ELSAs rate their school's general EL as very good or excellent.
- A majority of HTs feel that ELSA provision is at the "establishing" or "enhancing" stage.
- A majority of HTs and ELSAs consider ELSA work is having a positive impact on individuals in terms of behaviour, emotional well-being, and improving relationships. Just under half of the HTs also reported positive impact on attendance, reducing bullying and academic achievement for individual children.
- It is harder to show the impact of ELSA work across the whole school because it forms part of the total provision mapping in a school for SEAL and PSHE. However, a majority of HTs report that ELSA work is having a positive impact on relationships across the school.
- Children also provide insightful comments of their views of ELSA and how it is helping them to cope in school.
- Key features have been identified indicating how to optimise ELSA work in schools including good communication, recognition and understanding of ELSA work, in-school and other support, a specific quiet space to work, adequate time for planning and delivery, resources and, importantly, a sense of identity.
- Most ELSAs feel their work is valued or highly valued.
- Most ELSAs rate their in-school support as very good or excellent. However, 2 ELSAs (out of 21) rate their support as poor.
- All ELSAs rate their training as very good or excellent. This view was mirrored by HTs.

- Nearly all ELSAs rate the support through Network meetings as very good or excellent and all note how helpful it is to meet up with other ELSAs on a regular basis.
- Further research is needed to look at if, and how, schools use EL data to inform planning and provision.

Abbreviations

BESD	Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
EL	Emotional Literacy
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
EP	Educational Psychologist
HTs	Head Teachers
LA	Local Authority
TAs	Teaching Assistants
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

1. Background

- 1.1. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) recognises that education is more than a knowledge based curriculum (Burton, 2008). The DCSF invested in the development of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) initiatives, introduced initially into primary schools (2005), and secondary schools in 2007.
- 1.2. SEAL is a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that are thought to underpin effective learning, positive behaviour and emotional well-being (DCSF, 2005).
- 1.3. SEAL is delivered in three “waves of intervention”. Wave 1 focuses on whole-school development. Wave 2 involves small group interventions for children who are thought to require additional support to develop their social and emotional skills. Wave 3 involves individualised intervention for the small number of children who require support beyond whole school and small group provision.
- 1.4. Wave 3 may include working with children at risk of, or experiencing, mental health issues or emotional problems. An example of a Wave 3 targeted intervention is training Teaching Assistants to become Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs). ELSAs help children to understand and express their emotions effectively. As Burton (2008) notes, “Staff in schools need to be concerned with the all round development of children and young people” and she emphasises the need for teacher training courses to reflect this increased awareness of the role of emotion in education.

Photograph 2:
ELSA display “If you had a
magic wand what would
you change?”



2. Introduction to ELSA

- 2.1. ELSA intervention is an individualised (or sometimes group) programme for children with significant social and emotional difficulties. The work is planned around the needs of the individual child. Centrally-run ELSA training has been offered to all primary schools in Bournemouth since 2007, and to all secondary schools since 2008.
- 2.2. Schools have different needs and priorities and ELSA work will develop within individual schools to meet local need. Trained ELSAs support pupils in recognising, understanding and managing their emotions appropriately.
- 2.3. The intention is that ELSAs will work in schools which already have Wave 1 and Wave 2 strategies in place, i.e. there is a whole school ethos supporting the concept of emotional literacy.
- 2.4. Steiner and Perry (1997) state that emotional literacy is made up of three key abilities:
 - the ability to understand your emotions
 - the ability to listen to others and empathise with their emotions, and
 - the ability to express emotions productively.

3. Key Research Aims

- 3.1. This report aims to address a number of research questions exploring how the first cohort of ELSAs is establishing their role one year after their initial training. In addition, Head Teachers were interviewed to seek their views of ELSA work, specifically the impact and outcomes that emotional literacy has in their school.
- 3.2. Focussing on ELSA work one year on should provide insight into how ELSA work has embedded within a school culture over time, and the successes and problems that may have been encountered along the way.
- 3.3. Specifically, this report addresses the following research questions:
 1. To what extent is ELSA work valued in schools?
 2. Is on-going support for ELSAs sufficient and appropriate?
 3. Does the initial training equip ELSAs to do their job of supporting vulnerable children?
 4. What difference is ELSA work having? Is it helping to increase emotional well-being, improve relationships, raise standards and/or increase attendance?
 5. What additional support would enable ELSAs to do their job even better?
 6. Can we identify conditions in schools which optimise effective ELSA work?

4. Method

4.1. ELSA semi-structured interviews

- 4.1.1 All schools that sent TAs on the first ELSA training course (September 2007 - Feb 2008) were contacted and invited to take part in the current research project.
- 4.1.2 Out of the 16 schools, 14 agreed to take part. The trained ELSAs in these schools were interviewed for approximately 30 minutes (if there was just one ELSA), or 45 minutes to 1 hour if two ELSAs were interviewed together.
- 4.1.3 From these 14 schools, 21 ELSAs were interviewed.
- 4.1.4 A semi-structured interview was used (Appendix 1).



Photograph 3:

"Sometimes I feel..." - ELSA display helping children to express a range of emotions

4.2 Head Teachers questionnaires

- 4.2.1 In order to achieve sufficient number of responses, 26 HTs were contacted, ie all schools that had trained ELSAs (from the first and second cohorts, and from earlier in-school training in the BESD specialist school). HTs were invited to complete an on-line questionnaire (Appendix 2). Responses were received from 17 (13

primary schools, 3 secondary schools, and the specialist BESD school) (65% response rate).

- 4.2.2 The questionnaire asked HTs how ELSA work is establishing and impacting in their schools, outcomes, and their future plans for the ELSA role.

5. Results

5.1. What are ELSAs doing?

All ELSAs interviewed (21 in total) are doing some ELSA-type work in their school, a year after their training. These ELSAs work with children ranging from Reception to Year 6. It may well be that the 2 schools that did not respond are *not* using their trained ELSAs - further research would be needed to see if this is the case, and the reasons why.

5.2. Emotional Literacy in schools

5.2.1. ELSAs' perceptions of school's general emotional literacy (EL)

In terms of general emotional literacy (EL), ELSAs were asked to rate their school on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = *no awareness of EL*, 5 = *high awareness*). Three ELSAs (14%) rated their school at 3, eleven ELSAs (52%) rated their school's EL at 4 and six ELSAs (29%) rated their school at 5. This indicates fairly high, or high, awareness of EL in schools with trained ELSAs.

5.2.2. ELSAs were asked what would increase EL in their school:

- *"Would be better if everyone could understand what emotional literacy is, there is always a reason behind a behaviour and if everyone ...(understood this)... it would be better"*
- *"Our school's aim is to be an emotionally literate school. We do INSET training for other TAs. It would be better if we could get the message across to the wider school to encourage all teachers to use emotional literacy skills"*
- *"We have lots of assemblies and SEAL every week. Would be better if everyone had more training in emotional literacy, everyone would benefit from ELSA not just TAs"*
- *"Have more time and staff trained in ELSA"*
- *"More money for resources"*
- *"It's hard to always take children out of lessons, some staff don't understand ELSA"*
- *"Would like a drop-in session - we are both classroom based TAs as well"*
- *"Having more ELSAs and more ELSA time"*
- *"Having 2 full time ELSAs would help! It's emotionally draining"*
- *"Have some awareness but not enough. Having more time to raise ELSA profile more would be better. Would like an ELSA available all the time".*

5.2.3 HT's view of school's general emotional literacy (EL)

HTs were asked to rate how well developed ELSA work, and other support/provision for emotional well being, is in their school from *Focussing* (early stage), through *Developing*, and *Establishing*, to *Enhancing* (well developed):

Table 1 *Numbers of HTs responding to 'How well developed is ELSA work and other EL provision in your school?' (N=17)*

	Focussing (early stage)	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing (well developed)
SEAL	0	1	11	3
Silver Seal	0	3	4	2
Other small group work Eg Friendship skills, self esteem etc	1	1	8	6
Peer Support	2	6	4	5
Nurture Group	0	2	2	9
ELSA	0	3	8	6

(Darker shade = higher frequency)

The responses indicate that schools have a range of provision in place to support emotional well-being, with SEAL, small group work, Nurture Groups and ELSA being well-established in a majority of the schools taking part.

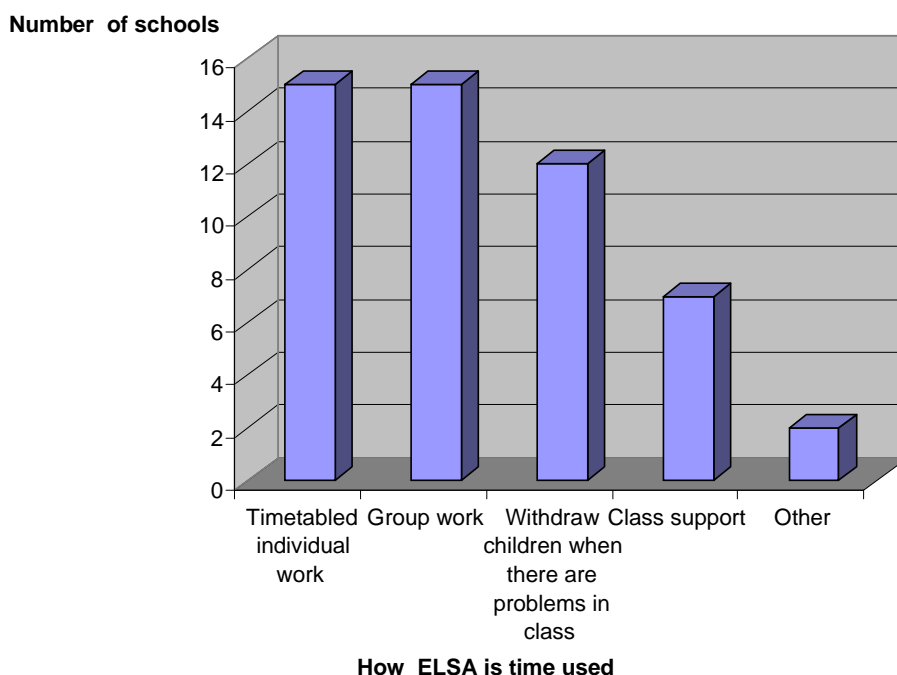
A majority of HTs felt that ELSA provision was either at the 'establishing' or 'enhancing' stage. As all the schools had committed to ELSA training it is perhaps not surprising that all felt they were beyond the 'focussing' stage in terms of ELSA provision.

Other EL provision reported by the HTs includes peer mediators, parent support, use of the Second Steps EL programme as an alternative to SEAL, a 'safe room' for vulnerable students, counselling and mediation, PSHE schemes of work, and assembly themes.

5.2.4 How is ELSA time used? HTs responses

HTs reported using ELSA time primarily for timetabled individual work (15 schools out of 17), group work (15 schools) and to withdraw children when there are problems in the class (12 schools). In some schools the ELSA's skills are used to support children in class (7 schools).

Figure 1. Bar chart showing how ELSA time is used



Trained ELSAs often, but not always, continue to work as a class TA for part of the time, or have another role in school eg Pastoral Support Worker, running the Nurture Group, or parent support.

HTs were asked how many more TAs they would like to send on ELSA training over the next 2 years. HTs from the 17 schools hope to send a total of 33 more TAs the training. One HT commented that they would *“like to send all new TAs on ELSA training”*.

Most HTs (16 out of the 17) report they would recommend ELSA provision to colleagues in other schools (one Head Teacher reports that they would *“maybe”* recommend ELSA because it was *“too early to assess impact”*).

5.3 Research question 1: To what extent is ELSA work valued in schools?

ELSAs were asked, using a 5 point Likert scale (1 = *not at all valued* to 5 = *highly valued*), to what extent ELSA work is valued in their school:

- 5 ELSAs responded 3 (*quite valued*)
- 11 ELSAs responded 4 (*very valued*)
- 5 ELSAs responded 5 (*highly valued*)

ELSAs were then asked what would make them feel even more valued in their role:

- *"Not all staff understand it yet, senior management team and children understand all about ELSA. Would be better if we could get the message across to wider school and encourage all teachers to use emotional literacy skills"*
- *"The whole school have realised children need to be emotionally healthy before they can learn"*
- *"Some teachers feel that children just come here to play a game but it is much more than that"*
- *"Feel I am being valued more and more, having my own allocated ELSA room would make it better. If I was more verbal and promoted my work more, but it is hard due to time constraints"*
- *"Head and SENCO value ELSA highly. Good communication through senior management team to teaching staff"*
- *"Most teachers value it, they never say they can't come out of lessons, some parents are sceptical though. More parents could value ELSA work"*
- *"Reception teachers have noticed a difference; I'm left to do my own planning, supported brilliantly by SENCO. Would like ELSAs work to be included with notes and profiles"*
- *"Its been noted that a lot of children would have gone into Nurture (Group) if it hadn't been for ELSA"*
- *"Would like more time to feedback to teachers"*
- *"A lot of teachers are very supportive. Some teachers come for feedback"*
- *"Lots of teaching staff don't know what ELSAs are. Senior management team don't know who/what ELSAs are. Feel that ELSA time is used as a last resort for difficult children"*
- *"Teachers who are aware of us are teachers who have ELSA children. Would like to feel more recognised, we are a "well kept secret"*
- *"Getting more children referred and asked to see more, so feeling more valued".*

5.3.1 ELSA data collection

ELSAs were asked if they collect data regarding ELSA work in their school, for example, the number of children they have worked with, types of issue they have dealt with, and outcomes. Responses ranged from no data, to using detailed recommended checklists and analyse of the data. Checklists used to collect baseline/formative/summative data are:

Checklist used	Number of ELSAs who use this checklist (N=21)
Emotional Literacy Teacher Checklist Faupel (2003)	8
Emotional Literacy Checklist from ELSA training file	8
Boxall Profiles (Bennathan and Boxall 1998)	2
Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) - Teacher Report http://www.sdqinfo.com/questionnaires/english/c1.pdf	1

Further research is needed to look at how schools use EL data to inform planning.

5.4 Research question 2: Is on-going support for ELSAs sufficient and appropriate?

5.4.1 In-school support

Using the 5 point Likert scale as before, ELSAs were asked to rate the quality overall of their in-school support (for example from their line manager or other members of staff):

- 2 ELSAs rated their in-school support as 0 (poor)
- 4 ELSAs rated their in-school support as 3 (OK)
- 3 ELSAs rated their in-school support as 4 (very good)
- 12 ELSAs rated their in-school support as 5 (excellent)

ELSAs were asked what would make the quality of the support they receive in school even better:

- *"I feel really well supported, (they've) let us develop and given us the freedom to be in control of how to spend our time"*
- *"There is always someone there if I need advice"*
- *"Brilliant SENCO, look through IEPs together. Supportive HT. We have half termly meetings with Nurture leader, SENCO and Head"*
- *"My in-school support is really enthusiastic, would like to get everyone trained in ELSA"*
- *"Really good, my time is the hardest part. ELSA is sometimes not done due to other commitments"*
- *"Reasonable amount of support, SENCO helps with planning. Would like more time to work with the children instead of planning"*
- *"SENCO is very busy would sometimes like more contact. Sometimes teachers understand, ideally would like the whole day on Friday to do ELSA work"*
- *"Don't have any time to plan, have to do it in our own time"*
- *"Brilliant support, would like slightly more communication, being more involved about new child's problems"*
- *"Don't get any regular support. Would ask the other ELSA for help. Out of school support is great, for example our link EP"*

- *"If we have a problem we talk to each other. Regular assessments on what we were doing, get fully briefed on a child's problem"*
- *"Don't get as much support as I need. As I'm not doing much ELSA work at the moment I'm not that confident, would like more support from school management"*
- *"Would give our link EP a 5 as she is fantastic and we know we can pick up the phone and get help. Head and teaching staff is bringing the number down to 3 as I would like more communication and time".*

5.4.2. Network meetings

Six ELSA Network meetings are held in Bournemouth each term and each ELSA can attend the 2 in his/her Locality (one per half term).

Using a 5 point Likert scale ELSAs were asked to rate the value of the on-going support they feel they receive through the Network meetings (1= *poor*, 5 = *excellent*):

- 1 ELSA rated the support through network meetings as 3 (OK)
- 9 ELSAs rated the support through network meetings as 4 (very good)
- 11 ELSAs rated the support through network meetings as 5 (excellent) (N=21)

ELSAs were asked what would make Network meetings even better:

- *"It's interesting to meet newly trained secondary ELSAs which is useful for transition work for year 6's"*
- *"Nothing! I get fantastic support through our school's link Educational Psychologists (EPs). Other ELSAs help with resources"*
- *"Really valuable, good to talk and share info and resources"*
- *"Nice to meet other ELSAs. Nothing would make it better"*
- *"Really valuable, would like some more ongoing and updated resources"*
- *"Like the network meeting being flexible"*
- *"Good to hear from the other ELSAs to confirm what you are doing is right"*
- *"Really nice to listen to the other ELSAs and find out what they are doing"*
- *"Brilliant support. Learn so much, really like the fact they are during school hours and in schools".*

5.5 Research question 3: Does the initial training equip ELSAs to do their job of supporting vulnerable children?

All ELSAs responded "yes" to the question of whether ELSA training has helped them to support vulnerable children.



Photograph 4:

Scaly Sam ELSA display- "Children are asked how they feel right now (10 is *very happy* and 1 is *very sad*) and we discuss what could be done to help them move further up Scaly Sam"

5.5.1 ELSA training

When asked to rate the quality of the initial training by the Educational Psychology Service on the 5 point scale (1 = *poor*, 5 = *excellent*):

- Four (19%) ELSAs rated the training as 4 (very good)
- Seventeen (71%) ELSAs rated the training as 5 (excellent) (N=21)

ELSAs were asked what would make the training even better:

- *"Nothing! Most interesting training I've ever done. Wonderful training, didn't feel dropped after training"*
- *"Very, very helpful. Brilliant ongoing support"*
- *"Would like more examples of how to run a session. More practical models how to get a group up and running"*
- *"Really good training, maybe make it more in depth and longer. Lots of listening, possibly would like to be more interactive and visit other ELSAs in school"*
- *"Fantastic training!"*
- *"Nothing! I loved the way it was staggered as it worked really well"*
- *"Very compact. Would like more time spent on each session, e.g. 2 more days"*
- *"Really enjoyed the training but it needs more focus on reception children"*
- *"Would like more strategies and support for younger children"*
- *"Best course I've been on, really relevant. Would be useful to go over Adrian Faupel book and see how useful it is"*
- *"Use ELSA file all the time, very hands on course"*
- *"Very good training, some resources are for older children. Need to adapt it for younger children"*
- *"Brilliant training. More interesting if there were ELSAs from secondary school so we could establish links with ELSAs in secondary schools".*

HTs were asked if they had any comments regarding ELSA training and provision in their school:

- *"We feel that the next stage is to pilot periods of timetabled withdrawal from lessons for a small group of particularly vulnerable students"*
- *"We have only fully implemented ELSA during this term so it would be difficult for us to give detailed responses on the impact of this work across the school at the early stage. However, the impact at an individual level has been very positive so far"*
- *"Our ELSA has natural talents for this work. With skills training via ELSA and initiatives taken - a very beneficial situation"*
- *"We are very pleased with the ELSA training, and the provision that it has given us the opportunity to provide, and (we) intend to train other members of staff"*
- *"Training was deemed very good or at least most of it. Some overlap with Nurture training and HLTA training"*
- *"When you work in this way it is essential that the senior management team are fully supportive of the role and understand the remit of the role. At times the ELSA will need support as it is an emotionally challenging role. Our ELSAs have had good support within school and from the LA"*
- *"TAs enjoyed the training and are keen to use their new skills".*

5.6 Research question 4: What difference is ELSA work having? Is it helping to increase emotional well-being, improve relationships, raise standards or increase attendance?

5.6.1. Impact of ELSA work

ELSAs and HTs were asked about the impact that ELSA work is having on individuals and across the school on attendance, behaviour, emotional well being, reducing bullying, improving relationships and academic achievement:

Table 2 Percentages of ELSAs and HTs who report ELSA work has had a positive impact in their school for individuals and across the school

	Positive impact on individuals		Positive impact across the school	
	ELSA (N=21)	HT (N=17)	ELSA	HT
Attendance	67%	47%	10%	5%
Behaviour	100%	76%	43%	41%
Emotional well being	100%	88%	48%	35%
Reducing bullying	81%	41%	48%	29%
Improving relationships	100%	76%	57%	53%
Academic achievement	71%	47%	24%	18%
Other	10%	24%	5%	12%

5.6.2. Impact of ELSA work: Head Teachers' views

These results suggest that HTs are noticing an impact from ELSA work both for individual children and across the school, with the impact being most noticeable on individuals' emotional well being, behaviour and relationships. The indications are that changes at the individual level are impacting at the whole school level and this is something that can be monitored over time.

In terms of whole school impact, one HT notes a *"reduction in exclusions"*. Another comments, *"Children who had difficulties are better able to visualise and analyse situations before they get into difficulties"*. In one school *"The involvement of ELSAs has meant less punitive measures have been used for classroom issues and a restorative approach used instead, leading to a better understanding of the pupil's difficulties."*

Another school noted *"improved self esteem of vulnerable children, giving them skills and confidence to spend more time in class and engage with the curriculum"*. *"ELSA work has improved engagement in lessons for disaffected pupils"*. One HT said *"ELSA allows teaching staff to get on and teach"*

Furthermore, *"It has helped the development of speaking and listening skills and has a positive impact on those children on speech and language programmes. It is particularly potent for children with low self esteem or lacking in confidence"*.

Head Teacher's comment on the value of ELSA work

"The work of our ELSAs is exemplary. Students appreciate the role and will often seek them out when they have a problem, feel angry etc. In the first 12 months alone over 200 children benefited from their work directly. They are not only recognised by students as being able to help, but their work is very much appreciated by the whole school community. I really don't know how we managed before."

HTs gave examples of the positive effects of ELSA work for individuals:

- *"Individual students report feeling safer and more secure and confident in the wider school environment"*
- *"Children have time to reflect on feelings so they can concentrate on other areas of school life"*
- *"A pupil who was refusing to come into school in the mornings now comes in on his own. Early morning ELSA involvement has enabled a smoother transition into school for what was a violent and aggressive child"*
- *"The ELSA is currently supporting a child and helping prevent exclusion"*
- *"Improved self esteem of vulnerable children giving them skills and confidence to spend more time in class and engage with the curriculum"*
- *"Staff feel that they are proactively supporting emotional and behavioural development. Pupils feel valued in one to one sessions and feel they are getting the support they need"*
- *"Major piece of work last year working with bereaved children and families. Having an ELSA enables behaviour incidents to be investigated quickly and an appropriate measured response involving the correct personnel to be made"*
- *"Last year we had a child in Reception who would have benefited from attendance at our Nurture Group, as evidenced by the Boxall Profile. However, places were not available. She attended the ELSA group instead and made incredible progress. She no longer warrants inclusion in the Nurture Group and her social progress and positive image has been sustained throughout her transition to Year 1 and into term 3 of Year 1!"*

One HT quoted a parent, *"ELSA is a haven for my child"*.

5.6.3. Impact of ELSA work: ELSAs

ELSAs were asked for examples of work they have carried out which they feel has had a direct impact in their school in the areas noted above (attendance, behaviour, emotional well-being etc):

- *"ELSA has had a direct effect reducing exclusions. Since ELSA has been in place exclusions have decreased. ELSA has also had a direct impact improving relationships. We teach children how to tell people when they need help or are in trouble"*
- *"Friendship groups, anti-bullying campaigns, peer mediation. Children who are reluctant to come to school, we work with them to help them settle down"*
- *"Anger management then self esteem work with an individual. He has been accepted back into his group, asking for help from teacher, helping his grades. He's telling grown ups he needs help which is a massive achievement"*
- *"Child with low self esteem who said they were rubbish at everything, now they come and tell me what they have achieved and use their stars. Children understand their emotions more"*
- *"Social skills groups - teacher noticed their listening skills have improved"*
- *"Child wouldn't speak or give any eye contact. Now she chats openly and makes eye contact"*
- *"Used Silver Seal group. Focused on areas the children have worries about. Wrote worry poems, helped them with their emotional well being"*
- *"Had some girls who were off almost every Friday, but now they are there for every group on Friday"*
- *"Set the children goals and targets and praised them when they come into school and this affects attendance. Help children to understand emotions and know it is OK when they are angry - It's how we work with the anger - helped tremendously with bullying"*
- *"If they are happier they are more ready to learn and go into class. One to one work - a girl says more now about how she feels and has improved her emotional wellbeing"*
- *"Individuals we've worked with have disturbing behaviour in class and now they are better in class. Children feel safer and more in control of their emotions and have a better emotional language".*

ELSA work. Example 1:

"I worked with a child in year 5 who was almost getting excluded from school because she had some very bad relationships. I set her boundaries, helped her understand her relationships. We dealt with self esteem issues, talked to her to help her understand facial expressions and how her actions affect others. Now she has made friends in her class and her home life has improved, she accepts boundaries and sanctions more and she has managed to be kept in school and not excluded".

ELSA work. Example 2:

"I did some individual ELSA work with a Year 3 girl who came for low self esteem and friendship issues. We worked together for 30 minutes once a week for 6 weeks, focused on friendship issues, and 6 weeks emotional self esteem work. She smiles a lot more now, she didn't speak a lot to grown ups in the past but now she's finding it easier. She's also shown an improvement in her self esteem and has better friendships".

ELSA work. Example 3:

"I did some ELSA group work with a child who had anger management problems and was having lots of temper tantrums in class. In our group we focused on recognising emotions, role play using feelings, friendship and social skills and talked about our feelings. Now the child needs no support as they control their temper. She is now a very happy child and is beginning to open up. Really pleased with her progress and she didn't need to go into our Nurture Group because of her improvements due to the ELSA group".

5.6.4. Comments from children about ELSA work

What children think about ELSA work (reported by ELSAs):

- *Year 6 child "Is the ELF room going to be here forever or just until I leave? ELSA helps us understand our feelings"*
- *"A boy who came to ELSA for anger management - mum said how much he had changed after the ELSA work. They could all see a big difference at home and school. Children come and talk and are not rushed"*
- *"All the children like coming to EL which allows issues to come naturally. All really love the relaxation script"*
- *"Children say they can trust me and can tell me anything. They say they understand their emotions and physical signs of anger etc."*
- *"They love their one to one work and their quiet ELSA time with no distractions"*
- *"Children are always excited to come to ELSA sessions, start with a game. No complaints yet, always pleased to come"*
- *"All the children love coming and playing the feelings games"*
- *"Mrs X, please can you use your magic touch because nothing else works"*
- *"Children really look forward to ELSA time. "Thursdays are my favourite day because I see the ELSA""*
- *"All children say their group helps them feel better and some children come to school because of their ELSA group. They are really upset if the group changes or cancels"*

- *"Children really look forward to the ELSA sessions. "I've got more confidence now" from one child who didn't want to come to ELSA, " I feel safe now when I come to school"."*



Photograph 5: *"We're all special!"* ELSA display

5.7 Research question 5: What additional support would enable ELSAs to do their job even better?

ELSAs were asked what would help them to do their job of supporting vulnerable children even better:

- *Would like more training on domestic abuse, mental health issues e.g. depression, alcohol, and drug abuse*
- *I would like to be given more time for ELSA work. In September will be given more time, and time for preparing, and own space*
- *I'd like ongoing ELSA training - new resources, space - need a specific quiet room for ELSA work*
- *I share a space, would like any extra training, top up ELSA training once a year perhaps*
- *Would like more resources. Already have lots of support. Signposting - would like to know who to contact for extra help with vulnerable children*
- *Want more time and resources*
- *Would like more training on attachment issues*
- *Would help if I had more planning time, more training for younger children ELSA work, more training to help with parental break ups and domestic issues*

- *Would like more training on self esteem or bereavement*
- *Would like better communication between ELSAs and teachers and SENCO. Bereavement and loss, info about links to outside agencies. Who and how to refer to and what their roles are etc.*
- *Would like more resources and budget. Nurture budget funds ELSA”.*



Photograph 6: *The Wave Room* - Specifically allocated room for ELSA group and individual work

6. Discussion

6.1. The impact of ELSA

Research question 6 asks “Can we identify conditions in schools which optimise effective ELSA work?” From the qualitative and quantitative data collected, themes can be identified which suggest conditions needed for successful outcomes from ELSA work.

Firstly, however, the overwhelming message from ELSAs and HTs is that ELSA work is having a positive impact in their schools and is making a significant difference. The majority of ELSAs feel valued and feel they have excellent in-school support. In addition, ELSAs feel they are well supported through the Network meetings. The majority of ELSAs spoke positively of the benefits of being able to meet up with other ELSAs on a regular basis, particularly if there is only one ELSA in a school.

In addition, all ELSAs feel that their training has helped them to support vulnerable children. The majority of HTs and ELSAs see ELSA work as having a positive impact on behaviour, emotional well-being, relationships and academic achievement.

HTs and ELSAs provided examples of ELSA work that has had a positive impact in their school, for example in reducing exclusions, managing anger problems, enhancing pupils' self-esteem, and helping pupils to understand their emotions and feel more in control of these emotions. In addition, ELSAs specifically noted the impact of their work in improving attendance and social skills.

6.2. Key features that increase the likelihood of effective ELSA work

Interviewing a number of ELSAs has provided a range of information about what makes ELSA work so successful in some schools and how ELSAs in other schools sometimes feel undervalued or unrecognised. Key themes can be identified which schools may find helpful to ensure that ELSAs within their school community are given the best opportunity to use their skills and training:

- **Good communication between teaching staff, senior management and ELSAs regarding emotional, behavioural and social issues**
- **Recognition and understanding of the work of ELSAs by staff, parents and children**
- **Support, both emotionally and practically (eg to plan sessions, to evaluate sessions, to find resources) from other members of staff**
- **Sense of being valued and appreciated by other members of teaching staff and senior management team**
- **Access to external support when needed (this could be the Behaviour Support Service Advisory Teacher, link EP, or Primary Mental Health Worker)**
- **Specific quiet space or room for ELSA work**
- **Having an identity - ELSAs who had their own room with a name felt valued and appreciated**
- **Time to plan and deliver ELSA work**
- **Resources: having involvement in what is bought (or made) and opportunity to build up motivating resources**
- **Opportunity to attend further relevant training**
- **Attending ELSA Network meetings**



Photograph 7: "Welcome to Hot Air" - ELSA asked children to name their ELSA room and one child thought it should be called "Hot Air" because they can release 'hot air' in the ELSA room

6.3. ELSA training

Both ELSAs and HTs gave insight into their view of the ELSA training provided by the Educational Psychology Service and Behaviour Support Service. All ELSAs rated the training as either very good or excellent and comments indicate they found it informative, interesting and enjoyable.

ELSAs would like the initial training to give:

- More resources, strategies and support for younger children
- More examples of how to run a session, and get a group started
- More in depth and longer training and possibly more time spent on each topic

HTs were also positive about the training their ELSAs had received and the way it has enhanced TAs skills for working with the most vulnerable children in their schools.

One 'problem' is that TAs who attend the ELSA training are usually very good at their TA job and greatly valued in the school - schools have to make difficult decisions about how to deploy TAs/ELSAs:

"We would like to extend the provision across the school, but this would mean "out of class" time for ELSAs. We have trained our YR TAs (as ELSAs) and they are vital to the smooth running of the Reception department."

6.4. The ELSA role one year after training

A key aim of this project was to gain understanding of how the ELSA role is establishing itself within schools one year after initial training. The majority of HTs felt that ELSA provision in their schools is at the “establishing” or “enhancing” stage which suggests they feel ELSA is becoming embedded into their school and is an important part of the growing culture of EL within their school.

ELSAs recognise the difference EL is having within their school and the effect it is having on the school’s general ethos.

From meeting ELSAs in their school setting, the researcher had the opportunity to see where they work and their displays. The ELSAs spoken to took different approaches to their work, tailored to their school’s specific needs. Time available for ELSA work varied greatly. Some ELSAs had just 30 minutes of ELSA time in a week, working around their in-class TA duties, whereas others were working as full time ELSAs from Breakfast Club in the morning through to After School Club.

The extent to which ELSA work is embedded into the school’s ethos depends largely on the time, resources, and space a school can provide for the role, and this will reflect the needs and priorities of the school. Full-time ELSAs did comment that they felt highly valued, understood and appreciated within their school. Perhaps these feelings develop over time, once a school has been able to experience the impact of ELSA work. Consequently, where ELSAs have more time to do specific ELSA work there seems to be a better understanding of the role - due to increased child, staff and parent contact with the ELSAs, and hence a heightened awareness of what their role entails.

Time did appear to be a major issue which impacted on the effectiveness of the ELSA role and in many of the schools there were plans to increase ELSA time from September 2009 - recognition by the senior management team of the positive impact ELSA work was having.

6.5. Further Research

This project involved ELSAs and HTs to gain an understanding of how ELSA work is establishing itself one year after training. However, to gain a broader view, the children who are receiving ELSA provision could be interviewed. It would also be helpful to get feedback from parents to see whether they have noticed changes in their children, and whether they are managing their child differently. Furthermore, the views of other staff and governors in the school could be sought to get an insight into their understanding of the ELSA role.

It could be argued that if a standard baseline checklist for EL was used then data could be collected across schools to assess impact across the LA. A simple checklist is given on the initial training, with examples of more detailed checklists. The latter have cost and time implications for schools. Feedback indicates that schools that do use baseline checklists and follow these up to show progress, generate helpful data that informs planning and allocation of resources.

Data could also be collected longitudinally to see if those children who have ELSA provision at primary school sustain improvement in emotional well-being in

secondary school. A range of other measures, including academic achievements, attendance, and exclusions could be used to see whether children in schools with a strong culture of EL show better than expected progress over time.



Photograph 8: *Blob Tree* - ELSA display

7. References

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8. Appendices

1. ELSA interview questionnaire
2. Head Teacher on-line questionnaire

Appendix 1

ELSA interview questionnaire

ELSA Research 2009 Semi-structured questionnaire for ELSAs

Researcher to introduce self.

In order to improve ELSA training we need to get a picture of how things are going across Bournemouth. We're particularly interested in ELSA work in schools one year after the first cohort of ELSAs completed their training (in February 2008). There are no right or wrong answers. If there are any questions you would prefer not to answer, just say. All responses will be treated confidentially. No names of TAs or schools will be disclosed. It should take about 30 minutes, or if there are 2 ELSAs then 45mins-1 hour. Any questions before we begin?

Name of TA/ELSA:

School:

1. Are you currently doing any ELSA-type work in your school? *Yes/No*
2. If *No*, then have you done any ELSA work in the past or are you hoping to do so in the future? (*If Yes, then ask questions below as relevant. If No, then go to Q4, 6, 9, 12, 14*)
3. Which year group(s) do you do ELSA-type work with?

4. In terms of **general emotional literacy (EL)**, where would you place your school at the moment? (think of SEAL work; general attitude, culture and ethos; displays; circle time etc) (*circle a number*)

1	2	3	4	5
No awareness of EL				strong culture of EL

What would make it even better?

5. To what extent is **ELSA work** valued in your school? (*circle a number*)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Highly valued

What would help to make it even more valued?

6. Has your ELSA training helped you to support vulnerable children? *Yes/not sure/no* (*circle*)

7. As far as you know, has ELSA work had an impact in your school on: (*answer yes/no/don't know*)

	For individuals	Across the school
Attendance		
Behaviour		
Emotional well being		

13. Finally, do you have any data regarding ELSA work in your school - eg number of children you've worked with, types of issue (eg anxiety, friendship, bereavement, anger etc), outcomes etc).

Do you have any comments from children regarding ELSA work that you could share (*keep anonymous*).

14. Is there anything else you would like to add, or any questions?

Thank you for answering these questions. I hope it's given you the opportunity to reflect on your work.

Lynne Harris Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist

Appendix 2

Head Teacher on-line questionnaire

ELSA Questionnaire for Head Teachers

To complete this questionnaire electronically you need to save this form, complete it and send it back to us. To do this please:

- Click 'File', then 'Save As' and give the form a file name of '*ELSA Questionnaire + (your school name)*'
- Then save to your computer.
- Complete the questionnaire by filling in the grey areas by left-clicking cursor in box.
- To move to the next grey box press the tab key or use mouse.
- Remember to save again once you've finished.
- Then email back to lynne.harris@bournemouth.gov.uk as an attachment. To do this simply press 'File', 'Send to', then from drop-down list select 'Mail Recipient (as attachment)', and press enter and wait until your email opens.
- Fill in the email as normal. Please put '*ELSA Questionnaire Return - Name of School*' in the subject line of your email and Send.

Alternatively, print off, complete by hand, and return by post or internal courier to:
 Lynne Harris, Senior Specialist Educational Psychologist, CBLT, 79 Lansdowne Rd, BH1 1RP.
 Tel: 01202 456255

Thank you very much for completing this. Please return by 12 March 2009.

Name of school:

1.	How well developed is ELSA work and other support/provision that you have in school for emotional well being?:	Rate on scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 is low and 4 is high)			
		- 1	2	3	4 +
		Focussing	Developing	Establishing	Enhancing
1.a	SEAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.b	Silver SEAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.c	Small groups e.g. friendship skills, self esteem etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.d	Peer support e.g. Playtime Buddies, peer mentors	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.e	Nurture group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.f	ELSA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.g	Other (<i>specify below</i>):				
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ELSAs in Bournemouth: Impact and Outcomes

2.	How do you use your trained ELSA(s)?	Put an X by your choice	
2.a	For timetabled individual work	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.b	For group work	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.c	For in class support	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.d	To withdraw children when there are problems in class	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.e	Other (<i>specify below</i>):	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.	What are your plans for ELSA work over the next 2 years?	Put an X by your choice	
3.a	Increase	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.b	Maintain at current level	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.c	Decrease	<input type="checkbox"/>	
4.	How many more members of staff might you want to send on ELSA training in the next 2 years?	Enter number below	
4.a			
5.	Has ELSA work had a positive impact in your school on (<i>click as many boxes as applicable</i>):		
		For individuals	Across the school
5.a	Attendance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.b	Behaviour	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.c	Emotional well being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.d	Reducing bullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.e	Improving relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.f	Academic achievement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.g	Other (<i>specify below</i>)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Can you give a brief example of the positive effects of ELSA work?		
7.	Finally, would you recommend ELSA provision to colleagues in other schools?	Put an X by your choice	
7.a	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7.b	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7.c	Maybe	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8.	Any other comments regarding ELSA training/provision in school?		
Thank you very much for completing this. Please return by 12 March 2009 (Return details overleaf).			

9. Acknowledgments

We would like to extend our thanks to all the ELSAs and Head Teachers who gave time to share their thoughts on ELSA work in their school.

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