

**The Impact of ELSA Interventions on Children and Young People**  
written by  
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The impact of ELSA work in Dorset was independently evaluated by a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Exeter between September 2010 and January 2011.

In September 2010, at the beginning of the study, 72 ELSAs had been trained and were working with children in Dorset schools. The number of children receiving support through ELSA grew from about 160 during the academic year 2009-10 to over 500 by December 2010. We asked the ELSAs to use the Emotional Literacy – Assessment and Intervention materials to both inform their interventions and to provide baseline data for evaluation purposes. In January 2011 we asked them for their data. We received responses from 30 ELSAs on 170 children representing 18 different settings.

### **Summary**

- Teachers were able to identify a measurable and significant improvement in the students' emotional literacy within the school after students had received ELSA support.
- The self rating scale produced by pupils was found to be a less reliable device for measuring impact than the teacher checklist.
- The combined scores for all the students in the 'end of case review' and 'interim' groups have shown some improvement in their overall emotional literacy.
- The qualitative analysis indicates that the majority of students have found working with ELSAs a positive experience.
- Five themes were identified from the qualitative analysis:
  - social behaviour and friendships
  - self-esteem and feelings
  - social and emotional confidence
  - behaviour
  - learning and concentration.
- It is encouraging that behaviour was the least identified theme whereas self-esteem and feelings were the most often identified theme.

### **Design**

This research follows an investigative methodology with mixed methods including survey methods produced from the 'emotional literacy assessment' in the form of a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative ELSA reflections. A 'methodological triangulation' (Robson, 2002) of both qualitative and quantitative data has been conducted in order to strengthen the analysis and the findings. This research is a flexible real world enquiry where the researchers aim to assess the change in children and young people's emotional literacy as a result of ELSA support.

### **Quantitative analysis**

All of the quantifiable information from the 'ELSA student record' forms was entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis. However, the emotional literacy checklist data was

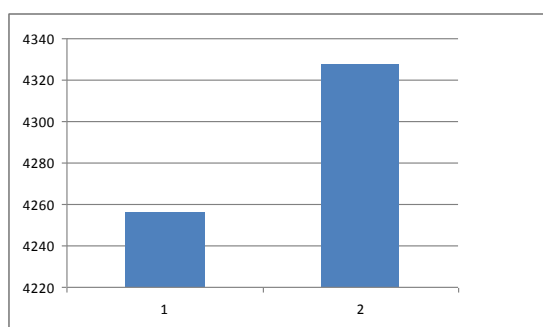
only entered into the spreadsheet when there was both baseline and closing data (before and after). This was to allow before and after analysis of the groups of data and prevent any discrepancies between the pre and post intervention data. There were 97 data sets in the 'end of case review' data; from these data sets there was one student record form that did not indicate any 'before' data and therefore did not contribute to the overall analysis. As a result, 96 data sets were included in the 'end of case review' group.

A number of the ELSAs were concerned that they were in the middle of a series of sessions that they had planned for the students they were working with. It was agreed that under these circumstances the 'ELSA student record form' would be filled in but would state that it was interim data. From the 62 interim student record forms there were 27 that did not contain both before and after data and were therefore not used in the analysis, leaving 35 data sets in the interim group.

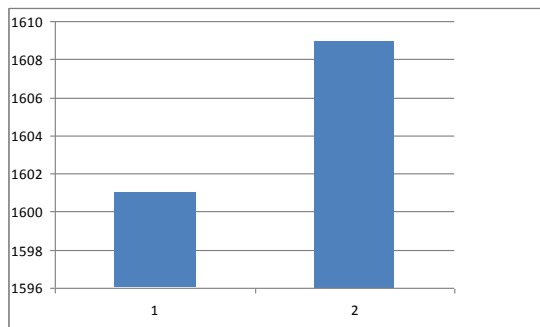
- 1) End of case review data, a total of 97.
  - a) 8 x fully completed forms with student, teacher and parent scores recorded.
  - b) 44 x completed forms with student and teacher score recorded.
  - c) 36 x completed forms with teachers only scores recorded.
  - d) 8 x completed forms with student only scores recorded.
  - e) 1 x incomplete form with no before and after scores recorded.
- 2) Interim data, a total of 62.
  - a) 1 x fully completed form with student, teacher and parent scores recorded.
  - b) 8 x completed forms with student and teacher score recorded.
  - c) 10 x completed forms with teacher only scores recorded.
  - d) 16 x completed forms with student only scores recorded.
  - e) 27 x incomplete forms with no before and after scores recorded.

The data is analysed using Microsoft Excel to indicate the overall difference between the before and after data for the students, teachers and parents. There was very little data collected from the parents on the 'ELSA student record form'. This data was included in the analysis although it must be acknowledged that there are only 9 completed parent data sets in the 'end of case review' group. The results of the difference between the students', teachers' and parents' before and after emotional literacy checklist scores are displayed in the figures below. In each graph, '1' represents 'before' and '2' is 'after'.

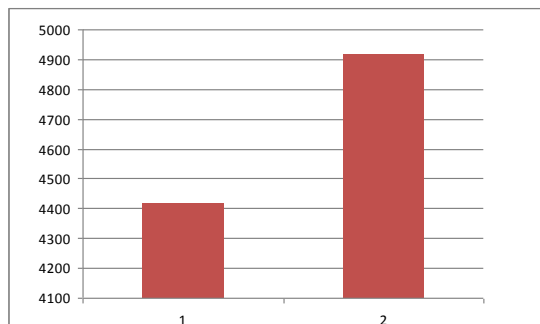
**Figure 11a. Student EL checklist data before and after ELSA (end of case review)**



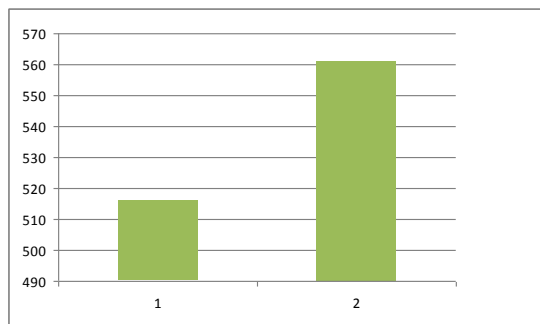
**Figure 11b. Student EL checklist data before and after ELSA (interim data)**



**Figure 11c. Teacher EL checklist data before and after ELSA**



**Figure 11d. Parent EL checklist data before and after EL:SA**



Whilst these graphs show that the combined scores for all students were better after intervention than before using any of the three checklists it was also clear that the difference between 'before' and 'after' was quite small on the pupil checklist. (The combined emotional literacy scores for students have increased by only 72 from 4256 to 4328.)

The data was then entered into SPSS which indicated that this was not a statistically significant increase,  $P = 0.372$ . The parents' view on the students' emotional literacy also fell below the level for statistical significance. The parents' view increased by 16 from 526 to 561 with an associated  $P = 0.184$

The teachers' view of the students' emotional literacy however indicated a marked improvement of 503 from 4417 to 4920. These scores were highly statistically significant

and  $P < 0.001$  (see tables below). These scores indicate that teachers were able to identify a measurable improvement in the students' emotional literacy within the school.

### Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Student-pre	70.9333	60	14.20297	1.83360
	Student-post	72.1333	60	15.44643	1.99413
Pair 2	Teacher-pre	50.7701	87	8.54904	.91655
	Teacher-post	56.5517	87	9.44354	1.01245
Pair 3	Parent-pre	57.3333	9	22.27106	7.42369
	Parent-post	62.3333	9	24.63230	8.21077
Pair 4	Student-post	72.4615	52	15.97727	2.21565
	Teacher-post	56.0192	52	10.22011	1.41727

### Paired Samples Test

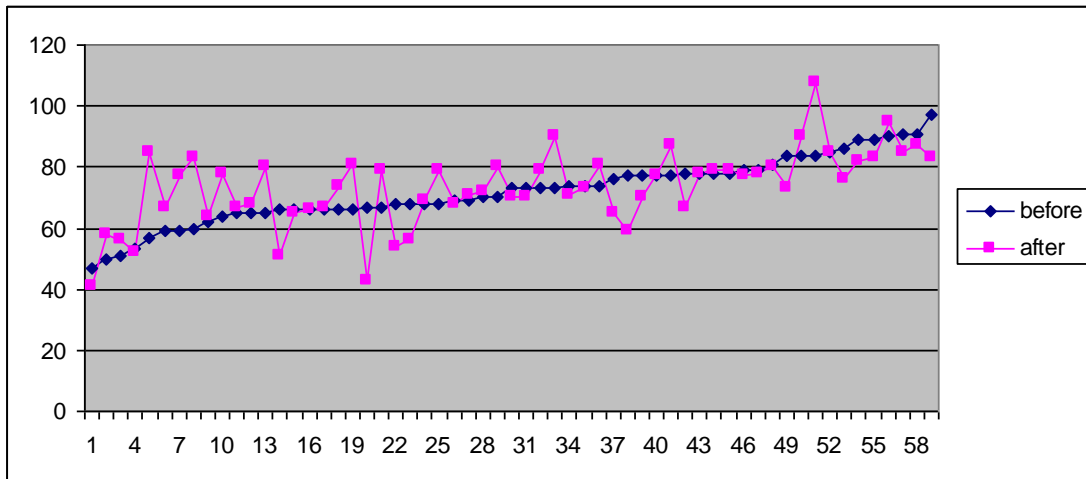
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Student-pre – student-post	-1.200	10.334	1.334	-3.869	1.469	-.899	59	.372
Pair 2	Teacher-pre – teacher-post	-5.781	7.895	.846	-7.464	-4.098	-6.830	86	<.001
Pair 3	Parent-pre – parent-post	-5.000	10.319	3.439	-12.932	2.932	-1.454	8	.184

Many ELSAs expressed concern that the pupils' self reporting checklists scores did not show the level of improvement that they were observing. Many commented on this in their feedback to us. There appeared to be different factors at work.

- Some pupils were trying to create a positive impression at the beginning of the relationship with the ELSA and therefore rated themselves highly on things they perceived as positive.
- Some lacked insight and self awareness at the beginning but as a result of the intervention they were more realistic about their difficulties.
- Some were more confident in their relationships with the ELSA and could be more open about their negative feelings.

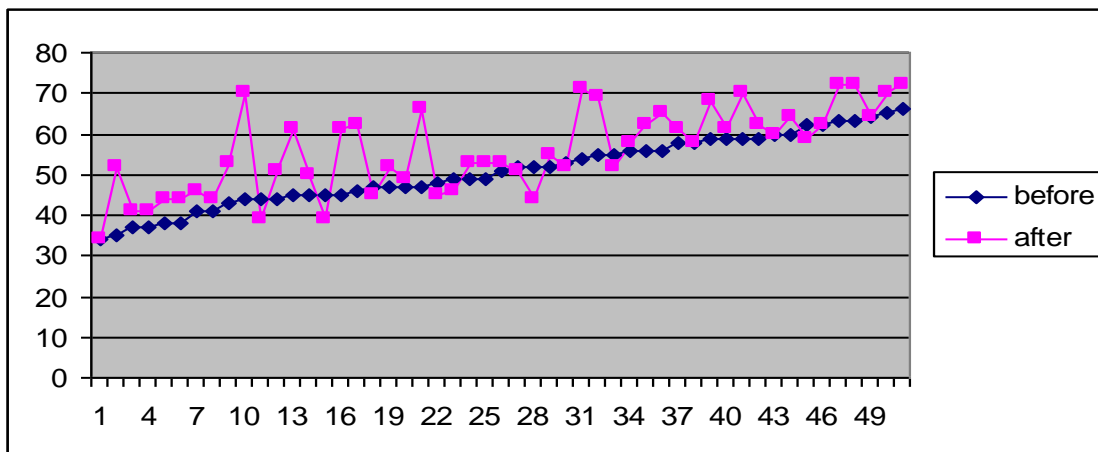
If we look at the range of before and after scores rated by the pupil questionnaire we see that almost as many children rated themselves lower after the intervention as higher.

**Figure 12. Individual EL scores before and after ELSA intervention, ranked in order of original Student Self-rating score (N = 60)**



In comparison the data produced by teachers shows a much clearer measure of improvement as a result of this intervention. See Figure 13 below.

**Figure 13. Individual EL scores before and after ELSA intervention, ranked in order of original Teacher score (N = 51)**

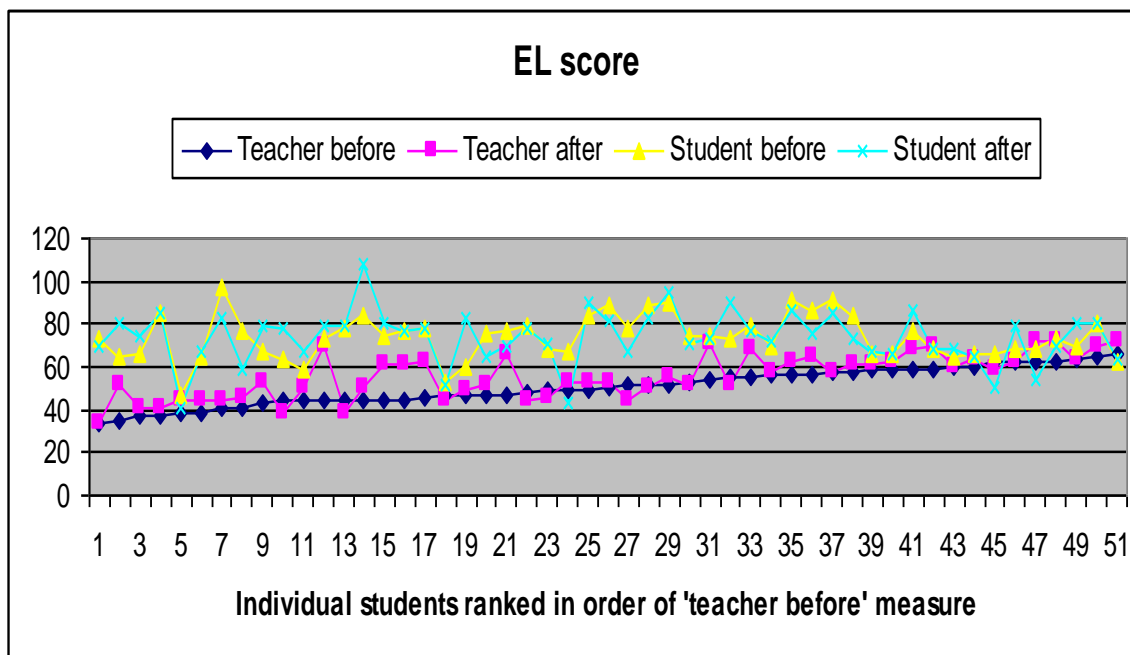


The teacher questionnaire therefore seems to provide a much more useful measure for assessing impact. In addition, the questions on the teacher questionnaire are specifically linked to the five domains of SEAL, enabling the ELSA to target the intervention more specifically.

It should be noted that the teacher score is out of a possible maximum score of 80 (20 questions on a 4 point scale) whereas the student score is out of a possible 100 (25 questions on a 4 point scale). We would therefore anticipate students' scores being on average 20% higher than teachers'.

If we look at the students for whom both teacher and student questionnaires are available, an interesting pattern emerges.

**Figure 14. Individual EL (Student and Teacher Assessment) scores before and after ELSA intervention, ranked in order of original Teacher score (N =51)**



The teacher and student views were much more in accord for the pupils whom teachers rated higher on the questionnaire. However it is notable that these young people's scores do not reflect the 20% difference in the two scales. More of them gave lower scores in the 'after' measure. It may be that they are more self critical. In contrast, those young people who were seen by teachers as least emotionally strong had much more varied views of themselves.

### Qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis has taken a selection of the comments written on the 'ELSA student record form' and identified key themes from within the comments. It should be acknowledged that this analysis is subjective and has been carried out by one researcher. A sample of records were analysed (55 of the 170 records presented). The key themes drawn from the comments are as follows:

- Social behaviour and friendships
- Self esteem and self awareness
- Social and emotional confidence
- Behaviour
- Learning and concentration

Examples of comments from ELSAs:

#### Social behaviour and relationships

- *Now enjoys playtimes and says that everyone in her class is her friend, whereas at the beginning of the sessions she had few friends and didn't like boys at all.*
- *.... Playtimes have improved. At the beginning he was often on his own now always has friends to play with.*
- *.... Is beginning to stop and think about how the other person might feel when upset.*

### Self esteem and self awareness

- *.... He is much more open and feels he doesn't worry as much*
- *a lot more open to talking about how he feels*
- *S is becoming more self-aware and is recognising her feelings*
- *Self-esteem improved*
- *likes himself and gave reason why*

### Social and emotional confidence

- *....definite confidence improved over the weeks*
- *Not shy and also initiates conversations now.*
- *Class teacher and TA have commented on the change in her. Has no worries.*
- *...he opened up quite well in the group and discussed issues that he hadn't raised in the past.*

### Behaviour

- *His mother reports that he is less angry. In school we see him more relaxed.*
- *Very open, recognises he gets angry and finds it hard to control, is open to suggestions and strategies to help.*
- *Never shows any signs of anger or bad behaviour – was initial concern with him.*

### Learning and Concentration

- *Teacher has stated a marked improvement in class.*
- *a lot more focused*
- *able to go back to school full-time*
- *Has improved concentration in lessons.*

## Some Case Studies to Illustrate ELSA Support

The following case studies are examples of ELSA work in local schools. The names of the children have been changed to conceal their identities.

Leo is a 5 year old boy attending a First School in East Dorset. He was recently adopted. In school he was finding it difficult to make friends, got angry very easily and often wet himself.

The two ELSAs at his school included him in a Nurture Group for six children that meets twice a week. They have focused on developing his awareness of his emotions and enabling him to communicate these. They have looked for ways that help him to calm down when he feels upset and angry. The use of a stress-ball had proved helpful for other children in the group but did not seem to help Leo. However they regularly have music playing during the sessions and Leo has found this calming. He now has special times when he can play on the piano for other students. He has learned that having his back rubbed is calming for him.

In recent weeks there have been very few toileting accidents. His angry outbursts have decreased and he is learning to recognise his feelings and seek help when he feels unhappy. He has developed a close friendship with another boy. Both his new friend and his family are using the 'back rubbing' strategy to help him relax.

Daniel joined his school in year 3 after two previous school placements had been unsuccessful due to his aggressive and disruptive behaviour. Initially he seemed to be repeating this pattern. He started with 1-1 ELSA support but was very sullen and uncommunicative. The only thing that he talked about with any pleasure was helping his Dad in the garden.

The ELSA gave him responsibility for weeding and caring for a small allotment plot at school, at first just weeding and watering but then putting in new plants. He became more open and wanted to take more responsibility. In class his attitude improved and he made greater effort. He has told his ELSA that he feels he 'belongs' in this school and has never felt this before.



Anna has a diagnosis of an attachment disorder and shows a high level of separation anxiety. When she started at Middle School in September both she and her mother were frequently in tears at the beginning of the school day. She would cling to her mother and need help to separate and time in a quiet area to calm down before she could start the school day. With support the crying reduced but each day she would come to school with a note from her mother highlighting all the things that Anna was worried about. Her ELSA has helped Anna to find ways to communicate about her worries and take steps to deal with them. They produced a decorated envelope for keeping her letters in. Anna now writes her own letter explaining what is concerning her. She shares this with her ELSA, they work out ways forward and then put it away in her special envelope. She is now much happier in school and her mother is delighted as they can now enjoy their time together without Anna constantly referring to worries about school. Anna is now making Guatemalan Worry Dolls.

Joe's teacher was concerned that he did not want to speak. He was in the reception class. He watched other children but was reluctant to join in any activities. The ELSAs enrolled him in Buddy Club – a group of 10 children, aged between 5-11, with a wide range of needs. Initially Joe said nothing but after a few sessions in began to join in the games and was 'adopted' by an older boy, also called Joe, who was very lively and talkative. The boys were good for each other. The younger Joe benefited from an active, lively role model and the older boy from being able to mentor and care for his younger namesake. They became known as 'The Two Joes.'

The increased confidence that little Joe began to show in Buddy Club was reflected in the classroom. His ELSA was pleased to report that recently, when the children were telling jokes at Buddy Club – she had to ask Joe to stop talking for long enough to let someone else finish what they were saying.

Susie told her mother that she hated school, had no friends and wanted to move. Her teacher saw her as depressed and struggling in peer group relationships. Initially she was put into a friendship group, meeting for 45 minutes each week. Clearly this wasn't enough for her. She was moved into the nurture group of 13 Key-stage 2 children where she is a member for four 1 hour sessions each week. She has had access to a wide range of interventions, discussion groups, play and SEAL activities. Within the group her good manners and behaviour provided opportunities for praise and for her ELSAs to use her as a positive role model for other children. This improved her confidence and self esteem. Her mother has been working with the Parent Support Advisor.

Within class her teacher sees Susie as happier and more engaged. She is actively forming new friendships. Her mother reports that she is a changed child and no longer wants to change schools.