

“He’s always there when I need him”:
Exploring the perceived positive impact of the
Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA)
programme.

Tara Hill

Daniel O’Hare

&

Fiona Weidberg



‘Our emotions are complex and often perplexing. It is not a trivial matter to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express them’

Sharp (2001).

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Executive Summary

This research was commissioned by North Somerset and Wiltshire Local Authorities to evaluate the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme (Burton, 2004). Both local authorities, (LAs) have recently begun to use ELSAs and the purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact of the programme as perceived by the people it affects first hand: the young people and staff in schools.

The ELSA programme is designed to help children develop their social and emotional skills, using teaching assistants (TAs) to deliver the programme. ELSA programmes are usually deployed at LA level and as such methods of delivery can vary. To date there appears to be very little research evaluating the impact of these programmes, although what has been conducted has indicated positive responses from schools (Burton, 2004; Murray, 2010 & Bravery & Harris, 2009). This study therefore aims to evaluate impact of the ELSA programme, with specific reference to how pupils and staff working with ELSA view the programme, as this appears to be a gap in current research.

Methodology

An appreciative framework that utilised semi-structured single interviews with two children and joint interviews with the ELSAs and Headteacher's from two case study schools, followed by a thematic analysis led to the creation of several distinct yet interrelated themes.

Findings & Discussion

Three over-arching themes were found from the analysis:

- 'Organisational Factors' (how the school provided the ELSA programme),
- 'Practical Experience of Children' (what children were experiencing within the ELSA programme) and
- 'Creating Positive Change' (complex interaction of factors discussed by adults and children).

These themes are discussed in relation to embedded school ethos, relationships, developing a sense of self and resilience.

Limitations and Benefits:

Limitations: Due to the constraints of this research, it is only possible to look at one school in each local authority, thus making it difficult to make wider generalisations. In light of this a case study approach will be taken, focusing on what each school identifies as ELSA's key benefits.

Who will benefit: It is hoped this inquiry will gain children's and school staff's views and understand what they deem to be the benefits of using ELSA in order to make the programme more effective for future schools wishing to use the programme.

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Literature review

Emotional literacy/intelligence

Goleman (1995) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to recognise and express one's own emotions (personal competence) and that of others (social competence) which can be learnt and developed like any other skill. In his work on multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983) argued that education had become overly concerned with the notion of abstract intelligence, undermining the importance of other forms of intelligence. For example, being emotionally intelligent could be a greater indicator than conventional intelligence of children's future success (Humphrey et al, 2007).

'Emotional literacy' is the term more commonly used within the UK (Burton et al, 2009), defined as 'the ability to recognise, understand, handle, and appropriately express emotions' (Sharp, 2000). Social and emotional well-being¹ has received interest in educational thinking because of the impact it may have on children's wider physical health, their achievement in school and protective factors for 'risky' behaviours, i.e. drugs and alcohol abuse etc. (Cefai, 2007; NICE, 2008). The Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2002) commissioned a study into how children's emotional well-being could most effectively be developed, finding benefits in taking a holistic approach, which promoted early intervention (Weare & Gray, 2003; Weare, 2004).

This focus on well-being contributed to the introduction of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme (Burton et al, 2009). 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). SEAL is delivered in three "waves of intervention" (Humphrey et al, 2008; Bravery & Harris, 2009). Wave 1 focuses on whole-school development, Wave 2 involves small group interventions for children, and Wave 3 involves individualised interventions. An example of individualised intervention is training Teaching Assistants, (TAs) to become Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs).

Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) Programme

The ELSA programme (Burton, 2004) was originally developed within Southampton Educational Psychology Service. It was designed to build schools' capacity to support the emotional needs of their pupils (ELSA network, 2013), through individual or group interventions (Bravery & Harris, 2009; Murray, 2010). ELSA support develops a respectful relationship, enabling individuals to think about their situation, without feeling judged or criticised, creating a reflective space to develop new skills or coping strategies (ELSA Network, 2013). Schools have different needs and priorities and thus an ELSA's work will develop within individual schools to

¹ NICE Public Health Guidance (2012) descriptively defines emotional well-being as being happy and confident, not anxious or depressed. The guidance defines social well-being descriptively also, as having good relationships with others and not being disruptive or violent.

meet local need, but generally supports pupils in recognising, understanding and managing their emotions appropriately (Bravery & Harris, 2009). The intervention is purposefully short term but the frequency and duration of sessions are dependent upon the individual's level of need (Murray, 2010). Typically, training for ELSAs is conducted in five one-day sessions, delivered over the course of one-two terms (Burton et al, 2009). The programme includes psychological theory and practical guidance about working within a school context (Burton et al, 2009).

ELSA research

To date there appears to be little research evaluating the impact of these programmes although what has been conducted has indicated positive responses from schools (Burton, 2004; Bravery & Harris, 2009; Murray, 2010; ELSA Network, 2013). Perceived benefits included having a positive impact on behaviour, emotional well-being, relationships and academic achievement, measured by improvements in attendance, social skills and a reduction in exclusions (Bravery & Harris 2009). In a study by Burton et al (2009) pupils were asked to indicate whether they felt happy, OK or sad about working with the ELSA. Of primary pupils, 85% indicated they felt happy (60% of secondary pupils), with the remainder saying, they felt OK. Of primary pupils, 83% felt they were improving in relation to the things they were working on with the ELSA (50% of secondary pupils).

Voice of children

It is vital to gain the voice of children when researching, advocating their agency in decision making and recognising their individual diversity (Connors & Stalker, 2007; Mortimer et al, 2011; Hammond, 2013). This is central to national and international policy and legislation (e.g. UNICEF, 1989; Education Act 2002; DfES, 2004) and is a key principle for EPs (DfES, 2001; Harding & Atkinson, 2009). Professionals should listen and reflect upon what students contribute with regard to their own learning processes, as they are can communicate unique insights as to the support they need (van Swet et al, 2011). Furthermore, it challenges assumptions, can raise expectations, and relieves practitioners from the position of having all the answers (Barret, 2006; Clarke, 2011). A genuine involvement of young people in matters that affect them is likely to bring them personal and social benefits (Hartas, 2011). Commonly listed benefits include self-respect, competence, self-confidence, trust in adults, increased responsibility for taking control over one's own life, and self-directed learning (Hartas, 2011). This would therefore seem to have direct benefits for children on the ELSA programme.

Rationale for the current study:

In light of the above, this research will attempt to identify the benefits of the ELSA programme through an Appreciative Inquiry framework, with specific focus on the perceptions of the children and the ELSAs. To gain

a holistic and systematic view of each program, Headteacher's will be asked to for their views. Interviews will be conducted in two schools, one in Wiltshire LA and one in North Somerset LA.

Research Aim

To explore the perceived positive impact of ELSA programme deployment from the perspective of Headteacher's, ELSAs and children in two schools.

Research questions

- What is the appeal of ELSA?
- What impact does ELSA have on children, school and staff?
- What has worked well for the school/individual in deploying ELSA?
- What advice can be given to other schools and authorities considering deploying ELSA?

Methodology

Study Design:

In order to appreciate the perceived benefits of the ELSA programmes in both schools, we utilised a qualitative design. The epistemological orientation of the study then, drew upon constructionism and interpretivism allowing the authors scope to derive meaning and interpret the views gained from participants. A loose appreciative inquiry framework was utilised in order to aid in the “...discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social–organizational arrangements and processes.” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to collect the views and thoughts of staff and children. This allowed opportunity to explore other avenues of interest as and when they arose (Greig et al, 2010). The execution of these interviews differed slightly for staff and children. School staff (Headteacher’s and ELSAs) agreed to take part in joint interviews, following individual consultation. Joint interviews were chosen as they were considered to allow for a more dynamic, conversational interview providing differing professional reflections on the same point, therefore increasing the richness of their input.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was gained from the Norah Fry Ethics Board, (see Appendix B). All ethical factors below (based on The BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct, 2009) were considered before finalising the study:

- Power relations between Headteacher and ELSA in the joint interview may have limited the input of the ELSA and we therefore gave the ELSAs the choice between joint and separate interviews.
- To ensure children understood the concept of consent, we gave them a child-friendly version of the information pack several weeks before they had to decide if they wanted to take part and checked they understood the nature of the research and their right to withdraw before starting the interviews.
- Considering the risk with anonymity with only two schools taking part, participants were assigned pseudonyms at the time of transcription and all recordings were secured on a password protected file.
- To protect children from harm we made the interviews enjoyable through a flexible structure and resources such as drawing and games.

Participants

The participants were two Headteacher's and three ELSA's (School A had two ELSA staff). The staff were recruited using a purposeful sampling method whereby participants were chosen due to their known expertise/job role (Coolican, 2004).

Four children in total agreed to take part in interviews, two from each school. These children were asked to participate on the basis that the school were confident they would not experience distress in a one-one interview setting, they were in Key Stage 2, parental consent had been obtained, the children were aware of the purpose of the study, and had given written and verbal consent.

Procedure

Pre Study: Headteacher's initially received an information pack explaining the aims, purposes and methods of the study. Further information and consent sheets were contained for the schools ELSA staff, parents and young people (See Appendix A). It was felt that it would be more ethically sound if parents received the information sheets about the study from the familiar faces of the ELSAs.

First Phase: Time was initially spent before the interview getting to know the Headteacher and ELSA in order to build rapport, with the actual interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Second Phase: The researchers asked the four children whether their parents had discussed the research with them, and whether they would like to take part. Researchers spent a considerable amount of time building rapport with the young people, playing games, drawing, and talking about hobbies etc. Children were required to sign an age appropriate consent form and to consent verbally during the interview. Interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes and utilised a range of resources to encourage the young people to talk about their time in ELSA sessions including; models, drawings, paintings, work books and photographs. Such a range of approaches were used with the children as "approaches that draw on a wealth of methodological techniques from a range of cognate disciplines are well placed to facilitate the child's right of expression." (Gray & Winter, 2011).

Analysis:

Interviews were transcribed verbatim removing any names or potentially identifying information in line with ethical assurances. Thematic Analysis was chosen as the tool with which to analyse the data, as it “provides a flexible and useful tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Initially, researchers simultaneously worked through one transcript, identifying/clarifying codes in order to promote inter-coder reliability. Each researcher then coded two transcripts. This was achieved by going through the transcripts line by line, assigning codes (words or phrases) which aimed to represent the description, meaning, phenomenology or implications of what was being said. Codes were continually referenced to the data context within which they were generated. A second layer of interpretation occurred on initial codes to encourage a deeper interpretation of meaning.

Initial themes were being considered as a natural part of increasing intimacy with the data and as such, codes were grouped together for distinct meaning. Reference to data was made continuously to ensure the validity of sub/themes to the data set. I.e. making sure that the researchers’ interpretation and assignment of titles to each sub/theme was justified with reference to what was actually being said by the participants. Doing this several times allowed the researchers to recognise, agree and challenge each other regarding the similarity of codes and the names of the themes that had been generated. This iterative process led to the generation of the initial thematic maps for both children (figure 1) and adults (figure 2).

These initial thematic maps were then analysed further with reference to their respective generative codes and the original data set to ensure that themes were relevant, true to what the staff and children had said and orthogonal in nature. At this point, clear interpretative links were being developed between the adults and child themes. Therefore, rather than consider the themes between the adults and the children separately; reference to generated codes and original data was made to establish clear links between the generated themes. This allowed the researchers to interpret the data in terms of inter-relatedness, thus offering a richer interpretative thematic analysis.

Please refer to Appendix E for greater detail regarding the Procedure & Analysis

Figure 1: Initial Thematic Map: CHILDREN

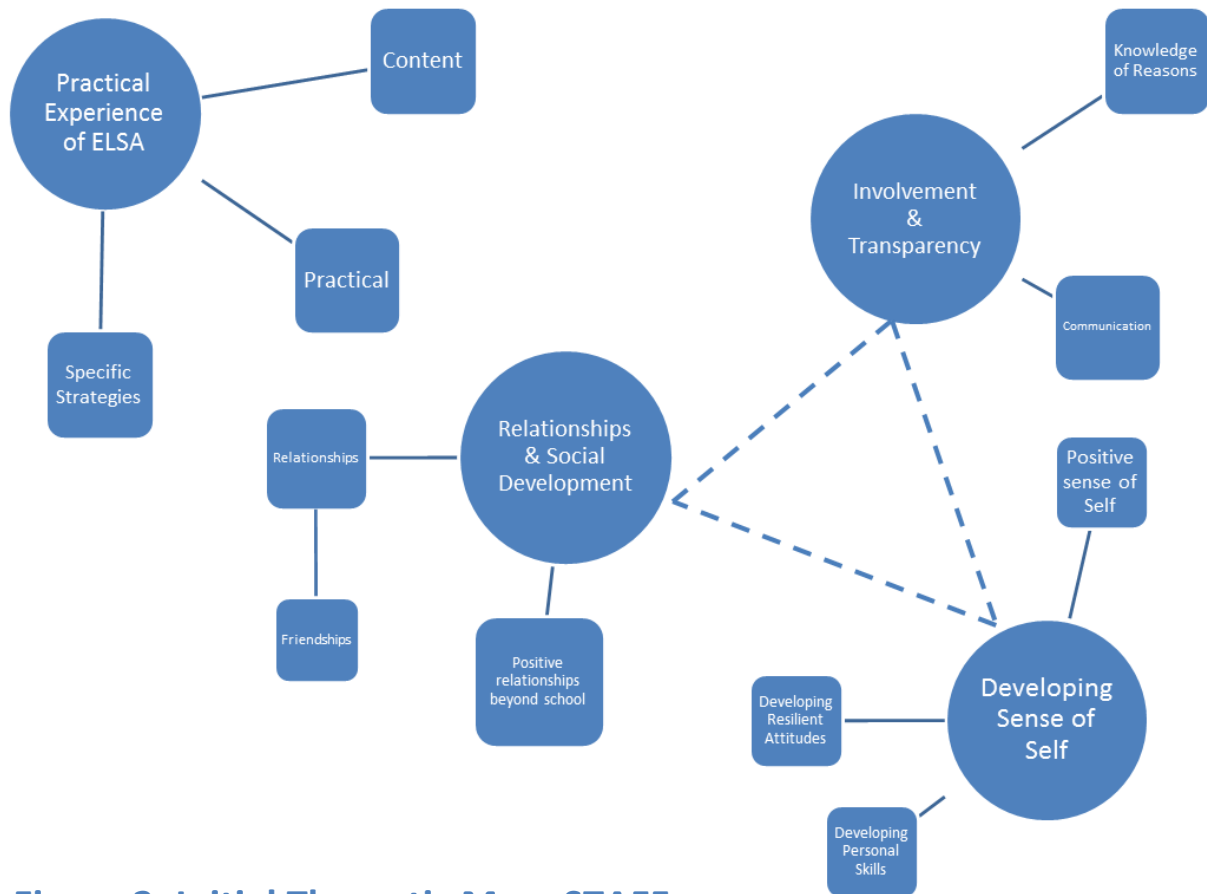
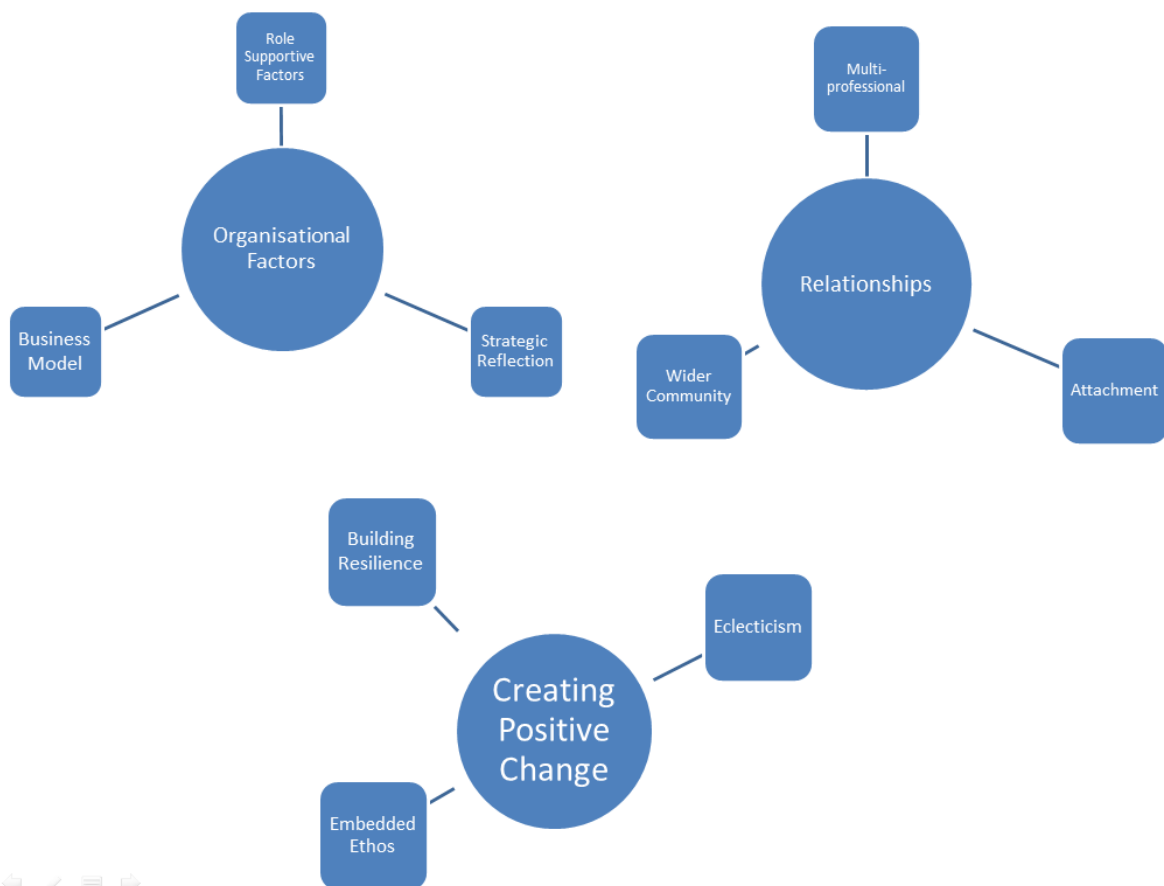


Figure 2: Initial Thematic Map: STAFF



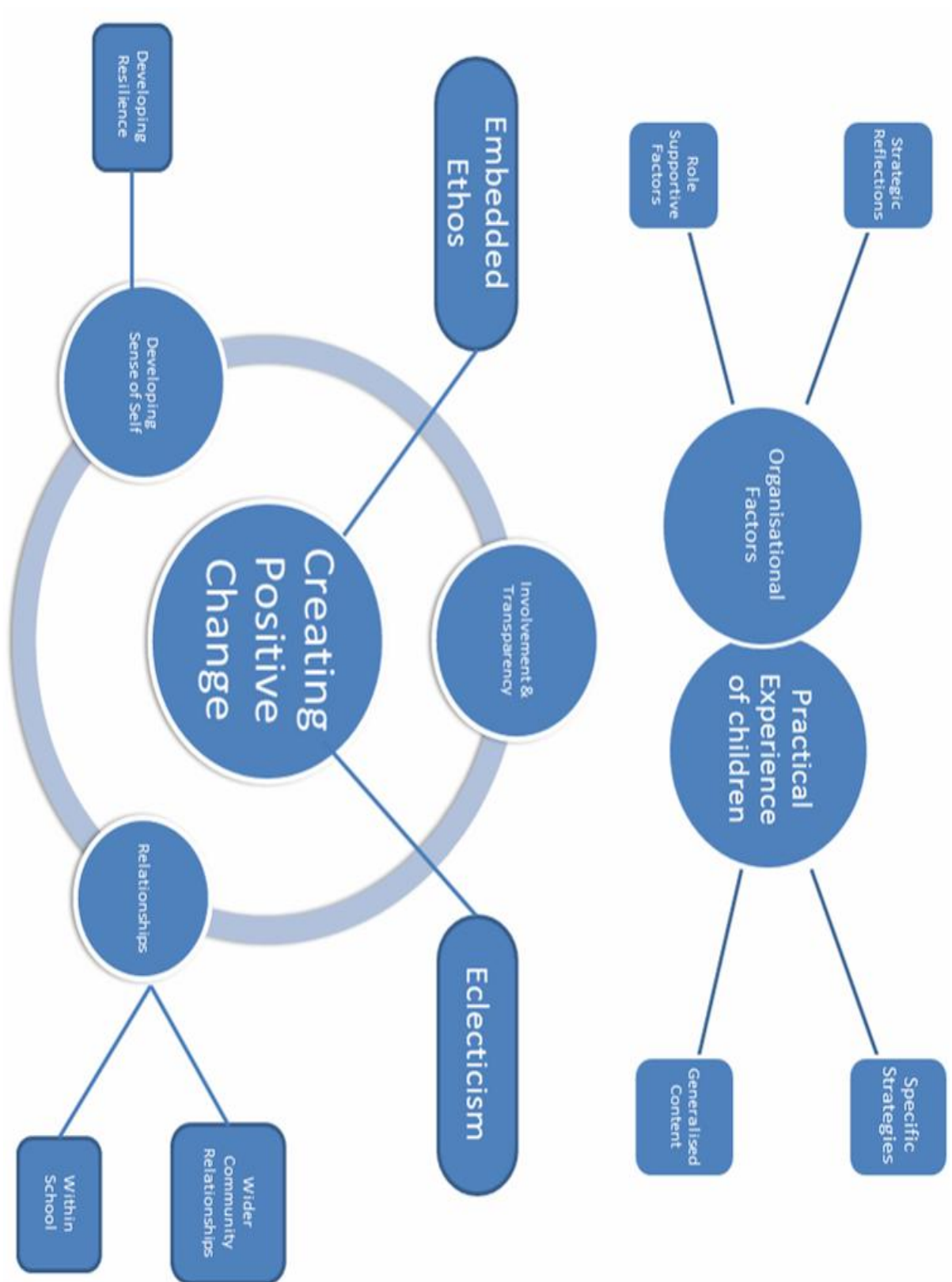


Figure 3: Findings - Final Thematic Map

Findings

“Organisational Factors” and “Practical Experience of Children”

The latter theme represented what the children were experiencing within the ELSA programme where as the former detailed what allowed the school staff to provide those experiences. These over-arching themes were thought to contain distinct sub themes:

Organisational Factors:

1. Strategic Reflections

Headteacher 1: *our accountability to the governors and that was you know “how are you using your time how do you know when the children...?” you know we talked about entry and exit criteria, how do we know which children come to you how do we know when they’ve had enough so we try to make sure it’s a finite amount of time*

Headteacher 2: *to reflect to staff about what was working well... I mean reflection is really important and it’s an easy thing to say but a very difficult thing to find the time to do actually*

2. Role Supportive Factors

ELSA 3: *I think having the space to do it, having somewhere physical to do it is pretty key. Erm I think timetabling needs to be thought about very carefully by schools, simply because it mushrooms...it takes up far more of my time than we thought it would do initially. Which isn’t a negative thing at all.*

ELSA 2: *the knowledge as well that when we go back to the next meeting that if we have any issues we can discuss that with EP*

Practical Experience of Children

1. Specific Strategies

Young people highlighted specific individualised strategies that they were part of as a result of ELSA work, as demonstrated by Joe:

Dan: So tell me about smart bear

Joe: It's my bear, smart bear makes you sit very goodly, like that, he puts his hand in his lap

Dan: So do you bring him to class with you?

Joe: Sometimes I don't really need him now, he is still my bear but I just don't have him cause now I can sit properly

2. Generalised Content

There were many aspects of the ELSA work that all young people commented on and seemed to be generalised across the two case study schools

Fiona: is there anything that you might do with [ELSA], that might help other children?

Cathy: Yeah

Fiona: What kind of things?

Cathy: Like we could draw like a picture thing and go to [ELSA] if you were worried

and

Dan: right, so what are the good things that you do here with [ELSA]?

Ross: noughts and crosses, Lego and once we played a board game

Creating Positive Change

With reference to Figure 3 it can be seen the theme of creating positive change was conceptualised as a complex interaction of factors and processes that were discussed by both adults and children. Some of these contributing themes were discussed by both participant groups yet others were individual to either the children or school staff.

From an adult perspective, two distinct themes aided in creating positive change:

1. Embedded Ethos

This idea of a whole school ethos or approach was especially clear with regards to the change in thinking about language and its use, opening up new understanding and potentials.

Headteacher 1: to say actually it's alright to inside feel really really like you're about to explode you know some of them just need that....to deal with it

ELSA 1: like you say giving them the language to express themselves.

Headteacher 2: we've got speaks around learning, we have a speak, a language, about learning... around values and our behaviour and err I suppose now there's a language around the emotion coaching

2. Eclecticism

ELSA staff made it clear that part of the success of the role was that they didn't just do ELSA work and drew on a range of experiences and knowledge.

Headteacher 1: we don't know when your ELSA job starts and your learning mentor stops and your SaLT begins and your ...it almost seamlessly led into the restorative justice thing

ELSA 3: I could imagine it not being anywhere near successful if you take into a school that is very rigid and is very directive

The children also had very clear ideas about what was creating positive change for them, with several of these ideas complimented by what staff thought was key.

3. Involvement & Transparency

What was of particular note was the finding that all of the young people interviewed were aware of the reasons for them being involved with the school ELSA.

Cathy: I say that I'm worried sometimes about my mum. Cos I'm scared that something might happen to her...why wouldn't we come to school, pretend to be sick...I always do that a lot...

Ross: I'm not sent up here for bad behaviour

4. Relationships

The theme of relationship was a strong one for all involved and the sheer number of codes that researchers generated is a testament to the importance of a strong trusting relationship between and ELSA and child. This theme was best understood as two further sub themes: within school and beyond school relationships:

Staff hinted towards more psychological understandings of attachment in line with Bomber (2007), concerning security and understanding a young person's history:

ELSA 1: yeah I think it's just the one to one attention

Headteacher 1: and the fact that somebody actually cares enough to ask her her opinion

ELSA 2: and that was what went all wrong when you were away because they were like "oh well she's not here for and I can't trust her to be here for me...."

ELSA 2: there's a photo frame and it says draw your family in the photo frame ...I can get to know them even more, what their family situation is like you know and if they're split who are they talking about

Alice highlighted how important these within school relationship were for her

Alice: like we do something and then we just start laughing. Once we said something at the same time and just started laughing. It was really cool!

School staff also highlighted how beyond school relationships were vitally important for the success of ELSA work.

ELSA 3: *and we are at the point where parents are coming into school and saying can you work with my son, or can you work with my daughter.*

ELSA 2: *they do talk to us if there are any issues you know ...a certain child, his mum has now actually started to come back to me and chat to me and what have you which is nice*

5. Developing a Sense of Self

This theme represented ideas such as developing personal skills, a positive sense of self and represented a heavy focus on building the resilience of the young people through utilising their strengths and celebrating achievements

Ross for example enjoyed playing with Lego and as such, this was incorporated in to his work.

Ross: *um well, when I when I built everything which is going to be a long time. Cos there still have to build a hospital bed, a workshop, a hospital...*

ELSA 2: *I said well hang on to it while I was taking photos and he is gonna build a little story using Lego and I should do a little book for him, so its building his, raising his self esteem.*

Personal skills included dealing with potential conflict

Alice: *when I get really angry I just walk off into my room*

Tara: *that's a really good thing.*

Further references to developing resilience were made which support Grotberg's (1999) notions of the 'building blocks of resilience'.

Headteacher 1: *I showed Dan the books, they are invaluable their little this is my special book*

ELSA 1: *oh yeah the 'I can' book*

Headteacher 1: *It celebrates what they can do*

ELSA 2: *when they say they can't do it we flick back and see all these things you can do you know*

In addition to this qualitative data, please refer to Appendix D for a summary of secondary data of one case study and quantitative referral data provided by one of the schools.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the perceived positive impact of ELSA programme deployment from the perspective of Headteacher's, ELSAs and children in two schools. An appreciative framework that utilised semi-structured interviews, followed by a thematic analysis, led to the creation of several distinct yet interrelated themes.

The themes of 'Organisational Factors' and 'Practical Experience of Children' were judged to be interactional in nature, in that the former represented those things that allowed staff to provide the experiences that the children highlighted in the latter theme. Organisational Factors included a range of strategic reflections and considerations that the staff saw as essential to the success of the programme, such as monitoring and tracking social and academic progress of the young people, in line with key features in the OFSTED framework for inspection (2013) and appropriate timetabling and resources. These organisational factors allowed the children to experience their ELSA sessions in a dedicated room and with a high level of frequency. One young person commented that in working with her ELSA, *"most of the time it's everyday"* (Alice).

The third over-arching theme was that of "Creating Positive Change" which was best represented by utilising the sub-themes discussed below. Although these themes were initially drawn from analysis of what the children had to say, much of what the school staff said supported the notions that these three things can create positive change for the young people involved in the ELSA programme.

Embedded Ethos was concerned with the commitment that both schools had to ensuring that the ELSA programme was adopted across all levels of the school. One Headteacher commented, *"You can't fit it in, while this teacher is doing register ill have that child" so it is an expense time wise*". One school went on to detail how *"we took a whole school approach...lunch time supervisors, everybody, so that even the office staff... because in schools what you need is consistency for things to have an impact"*. Humphrey et al (2007) commented that the lack of consistency in language between professionals could act to hinder the impact of emotional-directed interventions. Both schools have faced this challenge directly, given their focus on allowing children to express themselves (School 1) and developing "speaks" for a range of important values (School 2). Burton (2008) commented that the ability for children to express their emotional inner states adequately would reduce the need for problematic behaviours. There is a clear conceptual link here to the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis (Berkowitz, 1989).

Relationships, Developing a Sense of Self and Involvement & Transparency are interconnected not only through the original data but there seems an intuitive understanding that involving a young person in the delivery of an intervention would foster a closer relationship with the key adult involved, thus promoting a coherent sense of self (Similar to the ideas of Vygotsky, 1978).

The psychological concept of relationships/attachment was one that was clear in what both the staff and children were saying. Successful future relationships are based on early positive prototypical attachments to a primary care-giver (Bowlby, 1969). This is especially pertinent considering staff in school 1 made explicit reference to their intervention compensating for a lack of positive attachment experience i.e. *“there are a lot of family issues as well as a lot of parenting issues”* and *“I just feel that you know mummy still wants to carry on with her career and she needs quality time really”*. Similarly, Bomber (2007) stresses the importance of understanding a young person’s social and relational history, practice that was evidenced in the description of one ELSA using a photo-frame activity to attempt to understand the important relationships in the young people’s lives. This appears to draw on humanistic and Rogerian ideals concerning rapport and the importance of developing trusting relationships with ‘clients’ in order to effect better outcomes (Egan, 1990; Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1990 & Beaver 2011).

Both young people and school staff evidenced the theme of ‘Developing a Sense of Self’ in a variety of ways. One young person stated, *“I like painting it’s my favourite thing”* and then went on to describe how his artwork was displayed on the wall. A second young person detailed how in ELSA sessions she was challenged to consider aggressive behaviour and alternatives to physical confrontation; *“I just walk away”*. Linking the young people’s concepts of a developing sense of self to input from the school staff, we postulated that in fact here, young people were being scaffolded to develop resilience (Cefai, 2007). Gilligan (2003) asserted that:

Resilience in children and young people grows out of a strong sense of belonging...out of supportive relationships with parents, relatives, teachers or other adults (or sometimes peers) who offer in-depth commitment, encouragement and support. (p.2/3)

When considering the importance of relationships, the children’s awareness for their involvement in the ELSA programme, and strategies such as the “I can” books that were referenced in the findings section, developing resilience seems a key factor in what creates positive change for these young people. Referencing Gilligan’s description above also provides a rationale and theoretical support for the idea that Involvement & Transparency, Relationships, and Developing a Sense of Self are interdependent themes.

Considerations

Although the research has resulted in many interesting findings, it is not without limitations. Given the topic under consideration, the limited research time available, and the complexity of the environments, this research was not intended to generalise findings. Rather the intention was to provide insights and inform future use of the ELSA programme. This case study approach, however, increases the difficulty of maintaining the anonymity of staff, children and school. When researching with children, considerations should be given to their developmental age and ability to fully participate in the research. Joe, for example had speech and language difficulties, which were unknown to us before completing the research. This highlights the importance of using or having prepared additional mediums to support children in sharing their experiences, and something this research did not adequately prepare for.

ELSA was delivered differently in both schools, further reducing generalisability due to a lack of standardisation in methods (Weare & Gray, 2003). Similarly, with each school having an embedded ethos which supports emotional wellbeing, it is difficult to know if benefits to the children have resulted from the explicit delivery of ELSA or the internalisation of a whole school, values based approach.

Methodologically, although an Appreciative Inquiry was used as a framework for the research design, this was only loosely adhered to due to our limited experience in this area. Using Thematic Analysis was useful in providing a commonality of themes, but perhaps reduced the richness of the individual's unique experience.

Future Research

We would recommend further research to strengthen the findings found both in this and previous research. This could possibly include empowering the children as co-researchers by asking them to design a feedback questionnaire to monitor the benefits of the ELSA programme. If time had allowed, we would have ran a focus group to gain a different perspective of children's views of ELSA and is something we would recommend future research include. A larger scale research project would also be useful for generalising findings across the country. More specifically the current research was not intended to establish if or why ELSA is more effective than other emotion-oriented interventions such as PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies, Kelly et al, 2004) or SEAL (Social Emotional Aspects of Learning). Research designed to measure or gauge the impact of these different programmes could also overcome any potential attentional effects i.e. the benefits realised through the implementation of any intervention (Gingerich & Eisengart, 2000). Further, the current research was cross-sectional in nature in that it looked at the perspective of children and staff at one point of time. As such, future research could be focused on attempting to ascertain the long-term effects of ELSA work and its sustainability, especially at critical points in time for young people i.e. transition periods (Qualter et al, 2007).

Conclusion

The results suggest that both children and staff perceive ELSA in a positive manner, supporting the findings of previous evaluations (Groom & Rose, 2005; Bravery & Harris, 2005; Burton et al, 2009; & Murray 2010). The original research question aimed to identify the perceived positive impact of the ELSA programme, which in summary would appear to be: enjoyment of the programme, the shaping of a coherent whole school approach to well-being and learning, the development of relationships, and the ability to create positive change for children and staff. It should be realised that change cannot necessarily be achieved rapidly and is dependent upon the context and complexity of the presenting issues (ELSA Network, 2013). For pupils with complex or long-term needs it is unrealistic to expect an ELSA intervention to resolve all their difficulties. ELSA is in essence about supporting and not fixing problems (ELSA Network, 2013). Adopting a holistic approach, which embraces wider community relationships, whilst respecting privacy and building trust appears key to its strength (ELSA Network, 2013). It would seem supportive, nurturing relationships are key protective and competence enhancing factors amongst children at risk and essential to resiliency building (Cefai, 2007). ELSA was described as an 'organic concept' which grew into the values of the school, which was in turn internalised in the children's and staff thinking. The research has highlighted the need to see ELSA as an embedded part of school delivery, integral to the structure of school development and planning.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Headteacher information pack

Appendix B: Ethics approval

Appendix C: Questions for interview

Appendix D: Qualitative data and case study

Appendix E: Analysis and procedure



Headteacher Information Sheet

Dear ,

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Our names are Dan, Fiona and Tara and we are currently trainee educational psychologists studying our Doctorate qualification at the University of Bristol.

As you are aware from contact with your link EP, David Jenkins, North Somerset and Wiltshire council have commissioned the University of Bristol to explore the work of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programmes that your school is currently deploying. This joint piece of work across the two local authorities will aim to explore the perceived positive impact of ELSA programme deployment from the perspective of the Headteacher, ELSAs and children in a school from each county.

We would very much like your permission for your school to be involved. If you agree, this would mean that as researchers we would like to interview yourself, the school ELSA and two young people. The interviews with yourself and the school ELSA would focus on;

1. The appeal of the ELSA programme
2. Its impact on school, staff and children
3. The rationale behind choosing ELSA
4. What has worked for the school/yourself/the ELSA staff
5. Any practical advice for other schools/ELSA/Headteachers who may be thinking of starting an ELSA programme.

Out of these interviews and through discussions with your ELSA staff member, we would then be able to develop some questions to ask the young people that currently take part in ELSA work. Each interview is expected to last half an hour and will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. The interviews will then be transcribed which will allow us to analyse it better. Any identifying information will be removed.

Taking part in this research will give both local authorities the chance to understand what has worked for your school, staff and children when using ELSA. Hearing directly from the young people will also give you and your

ELSA staff some points of reflection about the strengths the programme has which can be built on in the future. Importantly, the young people engaging in the research will have the chance to have their say about an important part of their time at school.

To fulfil our ethical obligations we will of course seek fully informed consent from all parties involved; yourself, ELSA staff, parents of young people and the young people themselves. Enclosed in this pack is the “Headteacher consent form” which, if you are happy for your school to be involved and to be interviewed yourself, we would like you to please read and sign. (Please also find enclosed a copy of the “ELSA Staff Consent Form”, “Young person Consent Forms” and “Parents Consent Form”).

We would like to reiterate that participation in this research project for yourself, the school ELSA and any young people is **entirely voluntary**. There is no obligation to participate whatsoever. All data collected will be **confidential and anonymised**. It maybe that the young people we talk to will see their involvement as a platform from which to discuss certain aspects of their work further, and we will endeavour to handle this in a sensitive, respectful way. All young people involved will be explicitly aware of the aims of this research and the **confidential nature of what they say unless the information they share indicates they are at risk of harm**. School procedures for disclosure of sensitive information will then be followed. All those involved in the research also have the **right to withdraw** at any point without explanation and such a decision will be respected by all researchers.

We look forward to working with you and will be in contact soon regarding the logistical details of returning consent forms etc.

Kindest Regards,

Dan O’Hare, Fiona Weidberg & Tara Hill

Trainee Educational Psychologists

University of Bristol

Headteacher Consent Form

By signing below, I give permission/ agree that:

1. My school can be involved in this research project which aims to explore the positive impacts of the ELSA programme that is currently used in school.
2. I have been given the information sheet telling me exactly what the interview I will participate in concerns.
3. I understand everything that the information sheet has told me.
4. I have been provided with contact details allowing me the opportunity to seek clarification on any matters of concern.
5. I understand that anything I say will be confidential and anonymised.
6. I fully understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time without reason.

If you agree to all of the above and would like to be interviewed regarding your views of the efficacy and impact of ELSA work in your school, please sign below.

Headteacher Name (printed) _____

Headteacher Signature _____

Date _____

ELSA Information Sheet

Dear [ELSA]

As you are aware, the local authorities (Wiltshire and North Somerset) want to find out the positive impact that ELSA projects are having in schools across the regions, by asking those involved to give their views on what makes for a successful ELSA programme. The University of Bristol has been asked to conduct a piece of research to collect these views, and we would very much like you to take part in this research.

The University of Bristol's role

We, the researchers, Tara Hill, Fiona Weidberg and Dan O'Hare are Trainee Educational Psychologists at the University of Bristol, and we have been asked to complete this research as part of our Doctorate training program. The research has been approved by the ethics committee of the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol.

Your involvement:

Should you agree to take part in the research we would like to interview you to gain your views on running a successful ELSA program. We believe that you are best placed to tell us about the work you do and give us an understanding of how ELSA programs are delivered. In light of this we would also like you to help us in preparing our interview questions for the children taking part in the research, and help us to identify the students involved on the programme.

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The questions will have been planned in advance but will have flexibility to discuss any issues that you think are necessary. The interviews will be recorded (using a Dictaphone) to ensure the information we gather is accurate. Taking part in the research is completely voluntary and you have the right to leave the research at any point without giving reason.

Data Storage:

Tara, Fiona and Dan will store the personal information gathered during the research in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Bristol. We will store the recording of the interview on a secure computer, and it will be

kept safe for ten years. We will ensure we work within the requirements of the Data Protection Act at all times.

Should you have any questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

fw12140@bristol.ac.uk

If you are interested in taking part in the research, please complete the attached consent form and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Thank you and best wishes

Dan O'Hare, Fiona Weidberg & Tara Hill

Trainee Educational Psychologists

University of Bristol

The positive impacts of the ELSA programme

ELSA Consent Form

Please place your initials in the yes and no boxes to indicate your responses to the questions below:

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions		
I have been provided with contact details allowing me the opportunity to ask questions at a later point		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason		
I agree to take part in the interview		
I understand that anything I say will be confidential and anonymised.		

Data Protection Act

I understand that the data collected during my participation in this study will be stored on computer for ten years, and that any files containing information about me will be made anonymous. I agree to the University of Bristol recording and processing information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose of this study and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties under the Data Protection Act.

Please sign below to show your agreement with the above statement and to participate in the research

Name

Date

Signature

Parent Information Sheet

April 2013

Dear Parents,

As you are aware your child is currently involved in your school's ELSA programme, working with [ELSA]. North Somerset and Wiltshire want ask the teachers and children involved what the strengths of the work are, to build on them. The University of Bristol has been asked to conduct a piece of research to collect these views. As you know there are a number of pupils completing the ELSA program and for the purposes of this research we can only work with 2 children from each school. In the interests of fairness these children will be selected randomly from a group of children who, along with their parents, have agreed to take part. We would very much like your child to be included in this group that the 2 children will be selected from.

The University of Bristol's role

We, the researchers, Tara Hill, Fiona Weidberg and Dan O'Hare are Trainee Educational Psychologists at the University of Bristol. We are excited to be completing this research as part of our Doctorate training program. The research has been approved by the ethics committee at the University of Bristol, and all researchers have enhanced CRB checks.

Your child's involvement:

Should you agree to your child taking part in the research they will be asked to take part in an interview (an informal one to one discussion with one of the researchers) to talk about their views of the ELSA programme. Taking part in the research is completely voluntary and if you agree to us working with your child we will also gain their permission to take part in the research before working with them. We will aim to complete the research at a time which will have the least disruption on their learning.

What is involved in the research?

The Interview will

- last around 30 minutes
- ask child friendly questions
- get the view of your child about the work they do

- include questions that have been planned in advance but will be flexible enough to talk about anything your child thinks is important
- be recorded (using a Dictaphone) to help us remember what the children have said when we write it up later

Tara, Fiona and Dan will store the personal information gathered during the research in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Bristol. We will store the recording of the interview on a secure computer, and it will be kept safe for ten years. We will ensure we work within the requirements of the Data Protection Act at all times.

Should you have any questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

fw12140@bristol.ac.uk

or leave a message with the school and we will return your call as soon as possible. We would be very happy to discuss any questions or explain the project in more detail.

If you are interested in your child taking part in the research, please complete the attached 'agreement to take part' form and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Thank you and best wishes

Dan O'Hare, Fiona Weidberg & Tara Hill

Trainee Educational Psychologists

University of Bristol

Parent Consent Form

Once completed please return in the form in the stamped address envelope provided.

Please place you initials in the yes and no boxes to indicate your responses to the questions below

	Yes	No
I have read that information sheet and understand what the research is about		
I know who to contact if I have any questions		
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that they can change their mind at any time, without given reason		
I agree, if my child is asked, for them to take part in the interview		

Data Protection Act

I understand that the data collected about my child during their participation in this study will be stored on computer for ten years, and that any files containing information about my child will be made anonymous. I agree to the University of Bristol recording and processing information about my child. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose of this study and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties under the Data Protection Act.

Please sign below to show your agreement with the above statement and to agree to allow your child to take part in the research.

Name

Date

Signature

Pupil Information Sheet



We are Tara Hill, Dan O'Hare and Fiona Weidberg. We are student researchers. This means we find out things.



The local council have asked us to find out what you think about doing ELSA programmes.



We would like to have a chat with you about your ELSA work.



If you agree we would record what you say, just to help us remember.



We will keep what you tell us very safe.



We will use what you tell us to write a report. We will not tell your school who said what. We will not put your names in the report.



If you would like to take part, please fill in the (Initial interest form), put it in the envelope and then in the box.

Pupil Initial interest Sheet



Please
tick
the box
you
think is
right:

	Yes	No
My ELSA has explained the research with Dan, Fiona and Tara		
I would like to have a chat with either Dan, Fiona or Tara		
I understand that if more than two children want to talk, Dan, Fiona and Tara will pick two names out of a hat. It won't be because I have done anything wrong.		

An appreciative enquiry into the positive impact of the ELSA training program Information sheet

Information sheet for ELSA

Feb 2013

Dear

As you are aware, the local authorities (Wiltshire and North Somerset) want to find out the positive impact that ELSA projects are having in schools across the regions, by asking those involved to give their views on what makes for a successful ELSA programme. The University of Bristol has been asked to conduct a piece of research to collect these views, and we would very much like you to take part in this research.

The University of Bristol's role

We, the researchers, Tara Hill, Fiona Weidberg and Dan O'Hare are Trainee Educational Psychologists at the University of Bristol, and we have been asked to complete this research as part of our Doctorate training program. The research has been approved by the ethics committee of the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol.

Your involvement:

Should you agree to take part in the research we would like to interview you to gain your views on running a successful ELSA program. We believe that you are best placed to tell us about the work you do and give us an understanding of how ELSA programs are delivered. In light of this we would also like you to help us in preparing our interview questions for the children taking part in the research, and help us to identify the students involved on the programme.

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The questions will have been planned in advance but will have flexibility to discuss any issues that you think are necessary. The interviews will be recorded (using a Dictaphone) to ensure the information we gather is accurate. Taking part in the research is completely voluntary and you have the right to leave the research at any point without giving reason.

Data Storage:

Tara, Fiona and Dan will store the personal information gathered during the research in a locked filing cabinet at the University of Bristol. We will store the recording of the interview on a secure computer, and it will be kept safe for ten years. We will ensure we work within the requirements of the Data Protection Act at all times.

Should you have any questions regarding the research, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

fw12140@bristol.ac.uk

or leave a message on [EPS number] and we will return your call as soon as possible.

If you are interested in taking part in the research, please complete the attached consent form and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Thank you and best wishes

Tara, Fiona and Dan

An appreciative enquiry into the positive impact of the ELSA training program Information sheet

Consent form for ELSA

Once completed please return the form in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

Please place you initials in the yes and no boxes to indicate your responses to the questions below:

	Yes	No
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions		
I have been provided with contact details allowing me the opportunity to ask questions at a later point		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason		
I agree to take part in the interview		
I understand that anything I say will be confidential and anonymised.		

Data Protection Act

I understand that the data collected during my participation in this study will be stored on computer for ten years, and that any files containing information about me will be made anonymous. I agree to the University of Bristol recording and processing information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose of this study and my consent is conditional upon the University complying with its duties under the Data Protection Act.

Please sign in the box to show your agreement with the statement .

Contact Address:

Telephone number:

Email address:

Name

Date

Signature

Norah Fry Research Centre

Ethics Committee

8 Priory Road

Bristol, BS8 1TX

12 June 2013

Dear Dan, Tara and Fiona

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the emotional literacy support programme (ELSA).

The above ethics application has been approved by the Norah Fry Research Centre research ethics committee.

If during your research you plan to amend your methods or materials, please submit a letter detailing your planned changes to Beth.Tarleton@bris.ac.uk and they will be reviewed as soon as possible.

Best wishes with your research.

Yours sincerely



Beth Tarleton

On behalf of the Committee

Appendix C: Questions for interview

The questions for the semi-structured interview for the Headteachers and ELSAs were regarding:

- The appeal of ELSA
- The impact of ELSA on children, school and staff
- The rationale for choosing ELSA
- What has worked for the school/individual
- Any practical advice for other schools/ELSAs/Headteachers

Appendix D: Qualitative data and case study

Quantitative data from one school:

54 children have been referred to ELSA in last two years (11 terms).

Categories for referral:

- School Behaviour issues 37%
- Family Issues 31%
- Anxiety 13%
- Child Protection 6%
- Autistic Spectrum Disorders 13%

Over the two years, on average 33% of the ELSA referred pupils have been on the SEN register (and 59% were service children). In the first year of implementing the ELSA programme, 29% were in reception/Key stage 1. In the second year of implementing the ELSA programme, on average pupils were seen by the ELSA for 7 weeks, with a range of 3-18 weeks and 63% of pupil were in reception/Key stage 1.

Case Study

<u>Pupil Name:</u>	Child F	<u>Class/group:</u>	
<u>Year:</u>	3		
<u>Baseline assessment on entry:- (Attainment etc)</u>			
English:	Autumn 2c	Maths:	Autumn 2c
	Spring 2b		Spring 2b
Reading:	Autumn 2c		
	Spring 2b		
Behaviour - emotional/social aspects: vulnerable for the reason listed below			
<u>Background information for pupil - (including any medical issues):</u>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrived Sept • Parent contacted school regarding circumstances regarding the child's loss of other parent. • Processes surrounding the death of the parent are ongoing and therefore there is no closure for the child The child is constantly reminded of the loss and incomplete picture surrounding the loss of her parent • The child is well supported emotionally by remaining parent- has put in place lots of strategies to support the child 			
<u>Provision being made in the school - (including any projected targets):</u>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong SEAL curriculum • Referral made by class teacher and parent to ELSA • Parent meeting with SENCo, C.T., and ELSA 			

- ELSA support package:
1:1 ELSA (20-40 minute) x2 per week for 6 weeks

Small group activity with ELSA and peer friends in order to build wider friendship base for 6 weeks

- Discussed at MAC which led to counsellor sessions 1xper week, 45minutes for 6 weeks
- ELSA informal check-ins 'Ad-hoc'

Any outside agency involvement:-

- Police involved in supporting the family.

Progress or impact of the provisions (outcomes):-

- Time-out ELSA cards were being used by the child when feeling emotionally vulnerable. Whilst 1:1 sessions were running the child used the cards on a daily basis.

Through discussion with the child the use of these was reduced to 2 per week.

During course of group work the child has independently reduced their use, until they were no longer used..

- The class teacher reports that the child's concentration during whole class teaching has vastly improved since arrival at Lyneham Primary School.
- Reduction of more challenging conversations with peers, facilitating better integration within peer groups.

Any proposed/future targets - provision or other:-

- Continue to check in with child, keep home/school communication open in case of further developments.

Appendix E: Analysis and procedure

Procedure

Pre Study: Headteachers initially received an information pack containing a letter detailing the aims and purposes of the study, along with the methods that we wished to use throughout the research. Further information sheets were contained for the schools ELSA staff, parents and young people. Relevant consent forms accompanied these information sheets for each party. Schools were contacted two weeks after these information packs were sent to ascertain agreement to participate. Dates were then arranged to visit the school in person.

First Phase: During the first stage of the study, time was initially spent before the interview getting to know the Headteacher and ELSA in order to build rapport. Joint staff interviews then took place in the Headteacher's office lasting approximately 45 minutes. At the end of this interview, the process for gaining parental consent and child interest was discussed with the ELSAs. It was felt that it would be more ethically sound if parents received the information sheets about the study from the familiar faces of the ELSAs. Each 'Parent Pack' contained a parent's information/consent form, and a young person information sheet to enable parents to talk over the project with their children. Stamped addressed envelopes were also provided to ensure parents could send consent forms directly back to the researchers. ELSA staff were also given a pupil information sheet to discuss with children that may participate.

Second Phase: Once parental consent had been received, researchers returned to the case study school to discuss participation with the young people. Four parents (two from each school) returned consent forms and therefore these four children were asked whether their parents had discussed the research with them, and whether they would like to take part. Researchers spent a considerable amount of time building rapport with the young people, playing games, drawing, and talking about hobbies etc. Children were required to sign an age appropriate consent form and to consent verbally during the interview. Interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes and utilised a range of resources to encourage the young people to talk about their time in ELSA sessions including; models, drawings, paintings, work books and photographs. Such a range of approaches were used with the children as "approaches that draw on a wealth of methodological techniques from a range of cognate disciplines are well placed to facilitate the child's right of expression." (Gray & Winter, 2011).

Analysis:

Interviews were transcribed verbatim removing any names or potentially identifying information in line with ethical assurances. Thematic Analysis was chosen as the tool with which to analyse the data, as it "provides a flexible and useful tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Initially, time was spent by all three researchers working through one transcript and

identifying codes/clarifying the means of codes in order to promote inter-coder reliability. Each researcher then coded two transcripts. This was achieved by going through the transcripts line by line, assigning codes (words or phrases) which aimed to represent the description, meaning, phenomenology or implications of what was being said. Codes were continually referenced to the data context within which they were generated. A second layer of interpretation occurred on initial codes to encourage a deeper interpretation of meaning.

Generated codes were then listed in an Excel spreadsheet for easy manipulation during thematic generation. Line numbers were placed next to each code to allow for continual reference and faithfulness to the original data. At this point, initial themes were being considered as a natural part of increasing intimacy with the data and as such, codes were grouped together to create columns of distinct meaning. Re-examination of each column showed distinct patterns and so each constructed 'quasi' theme underwent further code analysis in an attempt to identify any sub themes. Reference to data was made continuously to ensure the validity of sub/themes to the data set. i.e. making sure that the researcher's interpretation and assignment of titles to each sub/theme was justified with reference to what was actually being said by the participants.

Researchers then spent one day together collating all the themes from their respectively coded transcripts. Time was spent discussing the meaning of each theme from a subjective viewpoint with reference to codes and iterative reference to the original data. Doing this several times allowed the researchers to recognise, agree and challenge each other regarding the similarity of codes and the names of the themes that had been generated. This iterative process led to the generation of the initial thematic maps for both children (figure 1) and adults (figure 2).

These initial thematic maps were then analysed further with reference to their respective generative codes and the original data set to ensure that themes were relevant, true to what the staff and children had said and orthogonal in nature. Occasionally, certain themes were subsumed in to others where appropriate. At this point, clear interpretative links were being developed between the adults and child themes. In some instance, themes seemed to represent different perspective of the same thing. Therefore, rather than consider the themes between the adults and the children separately; reference to generated codes and original data was made to establish clear links between the generated themes. This allowed the researches to interpret the data in terms of inter-relatedness, thus offering a richer interpretative thematic analysis.