ME7023 Part 001 and 002 Assessment Research Project & Impact Statement

Part 001: Research Project

To What Extent do Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) Perceive they are Successful in Achieving Increased Pupil Wellbeing and what are the Barriers that Prevent Effective Practice?

1. Introduction

1.1 The Enquiry Focus

The Children Act (2004), recognised the role of schools in developing the 'whole' child. This includes the consideration of each child's Emotional Wellbeing (EWB). This Act, coupled with the alarming statistics regarding the number of children who suffer mental health issues (5.8% of 5-15 year olds experience an emotional health disorder and one in 8 children - 5-19years - has a diagnosable mental health condition (Young Minds, 2017)) has determined the consideration of EWB a priority for schools.

Emotional wellbeing can be referred to as: 'a state of positive mental health and wellness. It involves a sense of optimism, confidence, happiness, clarity, vitality, self-worth, achievement, having a meaning and purpose, engagement, having supportive and satisfying relationships with others and understanding oneself, and responding effectively to one's own emotions.'

Weare (2015) p.3

This small-scale research study assumes the value of pupil EWB and recognises that some pupils need support to understand how to be 'emotionally well'. It looks to consider whether those who deliver interventions designed to support pupils emotionally, believe that they are able to meet this aim.

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1.2 Professional Context

One approach to addressing the needs of pupils who require assistance with understanding emotions, is through the use of an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA). ELSAs are teaching assistants who are trained by educational psychologists, to meet the emotional needs of pupils through individualised support programmes (ELSA Network, 2017).

The measurement of wellbeing is problematic (Watson, 2012), but for schools, it is important to know whether the time and resources going into an intervention are purposeful in ensuring improved pupil outcomes. The research question – *to what extent do ELSAs perceive they are successful in achieving increased pupil wellbeing and what are the barriers that prevent effective practice?* - was derived from a desire to ensure that the author's setting are meeting the emotional needs of pupils as best they can.

After presenting the wider context and rationale of this study, the literature surrounding the areas of EWB and the use of ELSAs is reviewed. Following that, the research design is introduced and the presenting data considered. Finally, the research question is re-visited and conclusions drawn from the data, whilst implications for future practice in the author's setting are reflected upon.

1.3 Wider Context and Rationale

The author believes that ensuring pupil wellbeing will have a positive effect on their self-belief, attitudes towards life and learning, and therefore their life chances beyond education. This belief is fuelled through family experiences and a drive to facilitate positive childhood experiences for pupils, where relationships are built and strategies are taught to support EWB.

The author's school has two trained ELSAs, who have been practicing for one year. Although generally content with the settings' approach to ELSA, the author was keen to explore how effective the ELSAs considered the programme to be, coupled with a desire to learn about potential barriers and strategies to overcome these, both in their own setting and others'.

This small scale research study provides the platform to investigate this and consider implications for future practice.

The experiences of pupils, due to the current pandemic (Covid-19), may mean that pupils returning to school will need their emotional needs met to a greater degree than usual. The background research, conducting and impact of this study is therefore of greater relevance to practice at this time.

2. The Literature review

This literature review aims to explore the existing research and perspectives regarding EWB in schools. The review begins with the over-arching topic of emotional wellbeing and the role of schools in addressing this, before narrowing to explore why schools should consider emotional literacy an important aspect of wellbeing. Finally, the literature exploring the notion and value of ELSAs as a means of addressing emotional literacy, will be reviewed. All three areas are pertinent to this study in respect of the reasons why the ELSA role was created and how ELSAs can work best to meet the emotional needs of pupils.

2.1 Emotional Wellbeing – the role of schools

There are two main terms used in relation to this area: 'mental health' and 'wellbeing'. It may be considered that emotional wellbeing is one aspect of mental health, but both terms are used within the literature as highlighted in Kirkcaldy (2015). When researching, both terms were therefore used in the literature search.

Many authors concur, that it is within a schools remit to consider the EWB of their pupils (Hornby & Atkinson, 2003; O'Connor *et al*, 2018; O'Brien & Roberts, 2019; Dix *et al,* 2012; Wyn *et al*, 2000; Paulus, Ohmann, & Popow, 2016) and this is confirmed in legislation, in England, by the Children Act (2004), driven by the Every Child Matters green paper (2003). Wyn *et al* (2000) deem that schools are expected to carry the biggest responsibility in terms of children's EWB and Hornby & Atkinson (2003) pertain this responsibility to _teachers_ in identifying, preventing and 'treating' mental health problems. However, many interventions

are delivered by teaching assistants (TAs) in primary schools and there appears to be a gap in the literature, as to whether it matters who delivers the EWB intervention. Alternatively, it could be that in referring to 'teachers' the authors were using the term more widely and in fact meant 'school staff'.

It is noteworthy that opinions regarding approach and delivery do differ. Most literature read, agreed on the importance of a whole-school approach (Weare, 2015; Kahan, 2016 cited in O-Connor *et al*, 2018; Wynn *et al*, 2000; Perry, Lennie and Humphrey, 2008; Park, 1999; Kay, 2018) and Dix *et al* (2012) purely referred to a whole-school approach, suggesting this was enough to meet pupils' needs, rather than discussing the requirement for any intervention. Moreover, Wynn *et al* (2000) warn that it is not possible to 'do' emotional wellbeing through interventions, but that an approach must be driven by a whole-school ethos in order for it to impact pupil's lives. On the other hand, Hornby & Atkinson (2003) do not discuss whole-school approaches, but state that EWB issues can be 'treated' by in-house counselling techniques and referred on to outside agencies if necessary. However, this research is dated, which is evident in the use of terminology (such as 'treated') and the area of mental health being conveyed as an issue to be 'dealt' with.

O'Brien and Roberts (2019) advocate a 'graduated approach' to meeting EWB needs. Thus considering how to address needs based on whole-school, small group *and* individualised needs. O'Conner et al (2018) agree on this approach. Additionally, Wells *et al* (2003), cited in O'Conner, concur that use of an intervention method, alongside a whole-school approach was most effective in terms of improving pupil wellbeing, and this is where the ELSA programme fits. However, Connor *et al* recognise that Wells *et al*'s conclusions were drawn from a small and dated study. Further research is therefore required to investigate these findings.

This small-scale research project will add to the evidence, as ELSAs are able to work in ways that address individual and group needs (ELSA Network, 2017).

2.2 Emotional Literacy

Having considered the literature regarding how to approach EWB (something schools are expected to address), the author was led to consider how being emotionally literate is of benefit to pupils. Emotional literacy (EL) and emotional intelligence (EI), made widely known by Goleman in 1995 (Matthews, Zeidner and Roberts, 2002) are both terms used to describe:

'...the competence to identify and express emotions, understand emotions, assimilate emotions in thought, and regulate both positive and negative emotions in the self and in others.'

Matthews, Zeidner and Roberts (2002) p.3

Although specialists in this field will discriminate the differences between EL and EI, both are used, sometimes indistinguishably, in literature. Both terms were therefore considered when researching and are referred to as emotional literacy henceforth.

Mainstone-Cotton (2017) claims that EL is essential for pupil wellbeing and Fleischer (2010) goes further to affirm that positive EL is needed to maintain a healthy life beyond the school years. Much of the literature suggests benefits of ensuring positive EL in pupils, to not only provide better chances educationally, but also to give pupils the grounding to operate as high-functioning members of society (Sharp, 2000; Liau *et al,* 2003; Carnwell & Baker, 2007; Kay, 2018). Schools should therefore be concerned with EL, not only to improve standards educationally, but also (and essentially) to provide pupils with the best life chances.

However, Greenberg and Kusche's (2003) study cited in Perry, Lennie and Humphrey (2008) found no academic difference in those who had received EL support, compared to those who had not. Contradictory to this, Perry, Lenny and Humphrey's study found positive links between EL interventions and academic performance and behaviour. However, the study was only carried out in one school where staff had previously received EL training. Cause and effect of the EL intervention is therefore difficult to ascertain.

The literature reviewed generally shows positive links between EL promotion and improved life chances, with improvement in academic performance also suggested. However, each

study also had its limitations and more studies in this area are needed to strengthen the case.

2.3 The ELSA Programme

The ELSA programme is an intervention designed to meet pupils EL needs, with an aim to help pupils be happier and learn better (ELSA Network, 2017). Osborne and Burton (2014) expect most ELSA interventions to provide pupils with skills and strategies towards improving their EL. The skills learnt are perceived to be transferrable from the classroom to the pupil's general life (Wilding & Claridge, 2016).

Mann's study (2014) was unable to ascertain a link between the ELSA intervention and increased pupil wellbeing. Improvements were recorded through the data, but not enough to be statistically viable. On the other hand, Kay's (2018) study, although small and not named as specific to the ELSA programme, researched the outcomes of an EL programme on pupils. The one-to-one and small group EL interventions showed overall improvements in the pupils' emotional literacy and self-management, although it was recognised that further work was needed on this. Kay concludes that an EL programme is not enough on its own – strategies are learned, but not embedded – and this needs to be reinforced across the curriculum, therefore affirming the importance of a whole-school approach. Kay also advocates adapting interventions to suit the specific needs of each individual. It is not clear in the literature regarding ELSAs whether it is advised practice for ELSAs to adapt in this way.

The only study found to specifically consider the impact of the ELSA programme, carried out by Wilding & Claridge (2016), focuses on parental opinion, which although valid, does not give a rounded view of the influence of the intervention. The study focussed on general impact, rather than impact specific to improvements in EL. There is a need for further research into the use of the ELSA programme to support EL, especially as much of the research is conducted by Burton *et al*, who founded the programme, which may suggest the possibility of bias.

In conclusion: The literature overwhelmingly suggests that EWB, including EL, should remain a priority area for education providers (O'Conner *et al*, 2018). However, there is little research to guide schools in what this should actually look like in practice. Unfortunately, the one comprehensive approach to 'teaching' wellbeing – the SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) scheme has lost integrity in having a positive impact on mental health or emotional well-being (O'Conner, 2018). There is a gap in research and literature here, which schools would really benefit from, in order to guide effective practice.

Further subjective research is also required to investigate the use and impact of ELSAs in schools and this study will provide additional insight into this.

3. The Research Design

3.1 The Research Framework

The research question stemmed from a wish to understand the perceived impact of ELSA interventions upon pupil wellbeing. With the emphasis for the study on human perceptions, interactions and thoughts and feelings, an interpretative approach to the research was adopted. This is appropriate due to the focus on each individual's experiences, perceptions and perceived impact of their own actions. Due to the fact that this study is based entirely on opinions, it is not possible to control the variables and dismiss the human influence, in the manner a positivist approach would require (Thomas, 2013).

The chosen framework for this study, in the main, is that of an evaluation, as the aim is to assess the impact of the ELSA programme (Thomas, 2013) and explore whether the programme delivers what is expected of it (Newby, 2014). However, it is important to note that this study looks to explore the *perceived* impact.

Ideally, within the evaluation framework, the research would look to gather data before, during and after a programme. However, this study looks to find how practicing ELSAs feel about the impact whilst implementing the programme and looking back over all their experience: essentially, looking at practice to improve outcomes (Newby, 2014). However, rather than become too focussed upon which design frame to follow and feel restricted by

it, through reading, it became apparent that for this study, far more important was to keep the research question and how best to answer it in focus (Thomas, 2013).

3.2 Data Collection

As an interpretative approach suggests, qualitative data were collected for this study. To carry out the research, semi-structured interviews were used to gain the views of three ELSAs. The sample is small and therefore not suggestive of 'the whole', but in line with the interpretative paradigm, chosen to give insights into practice, rather than to make generalisations (Thomas, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen with a view to enabling the interviewees to express their views in depth, whilst keeping to the structure and purpose of the interview. Questions were carefully written (appendix A) to initially focus the interviewee on the content of the question, with further prompts used to encourage them to expand on and give depth to their answers e.g. 'Can you describe/explain/tell me more?' The number of questions was limited to allow scope and time for 'digging deeper'.

Questionnaires could have been used to collect the data, which would have enabled participants greater thinking and reflection time when answering the questions. However, the ability to probe further and establish more detail through an interview, as well as the significance of building a relationship; encouraging openness and honesty, determined the choice of interviews for this study.

3.3 Ethics

The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2020) were referred and adhered to when conducting the research for this study. As such, it was important to share clear and honest reasons as to why I wanted to carry out the research. Alongside this, transparency that the purpose of the study was to impact the setting's practice was shared, to mitigate participant uncertainty about taking part and build mutual understanding and trust.

Informed consent was gathered from participants and they were given a right to withdraw from the study within a given time period (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). It was communicated that they had the right to the recording of the interview and receive a copy of this paper, should they wish (Participation Consent Letter - appendix B). Transcripts were shared with and agreed by participants, in order to safeguard against thoughts and opinions being misrepresented; a vital part of ethical consideration (Sharp, 2009).

The data collected are stored anonymously on a password-protected device and anonymity is secured through the change of participant names throughout this paper. All evidence will be destroyed within an appropriate time period (Thomas, 2013).

It was important to be sensitive towards the participant during each interview. Due to the nature of the questions, they could have felt their practice was being judged. My manner needed to be friendly and approachable, in order to encourage the participants to feel that there was no judgement and to be comfortable sharing information.

3.4 Validity

The biggest deliberation in terms of validity, was the impact of interviewer on interviewee (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). A particular consideration were the two ELSAs working at my setting. I did not want them to answer questions with caution, or as they would expect I would want them to answer. Confidentiality was assured in order to mitigate this and I ensured my tone and gestures were in no way leading.

In order to mitigate against a 'convenience sample' (e.g. only interviewing ELSAs known to me) (Thomas, 2013), I explored avenues of reaching out to other ELSAs. I sent an explanation of my study and the research question to the educational psychologists who run the ELSA course, who forwarded my message to every ELSA they had trained (over 40). Despite reaching out to this many people, I only had two ELSAs respond and one of those withdrew.

Newby (2014) warns that data collected that relies upon views and opinions may be considered unstable, as they are very changeable depending upon experience. This does not mitigate the validity of my data, but is a consideration when drawing conclusions.

3.5 Data Analysis Strategy

The data gathered for this study was qualitative and the semi-structured interviews provided words as data. The purpose of the analysis was to use these words to gain insight into the ELSAs perceptions of their practice. Therefore, a constant comparative method was adopted (Thomas, 2013). In line with this method, I used the transcripts from the interviews to systematically and repeatedly look through the data to compare and find common themes. I chose to use the 'network analysis' method (appendix C) (Bliss *et al.*, 1983, cited in Thomas, 2013) as the most appropriate way to summarise the data, which enabled me to identify themes and make observations (appendix D). I did have pre-conceived Ideas of the main themes, but as Bell and Waters (2018) suggest, observed caution in permitting this to form bias and allowed the process to present emerging themes.

4. Data Presentation and Findings

The research question sought to find ELSA perceptions of the impact of their work and to identify any barriers in working effectively. The interview questions were carefully selected to explore these areas and the interviewees were able to discuss these subjects in depth: providing rich data from which to draw findings.

Through the network analysis (appendix C), I was able to identify four key themes within each interview: impact (of practice); barriers (to practice); overcoming barriers; and flexibility (of ELSA interventions). These themes and the findings associated with them are presented and explored in the following section.

It should be noted that reference to literature is limited throughout the discussion of the findings. This is due to the fact that this is an area currently lacking in literature, especially regarding the effectiveness of the ELSA programme.

4.1 Impact

Within the area of 'impact' arose three sub-sections: each ELSA's hopes and uncertainty around impact; the measurement of impact; and understanding of the purpose of the role of ELSA.

Two of the ELSAs were outwardly positive in what they considered the perceived impact upon pupil wellbeing to be. They both felt that their time spent with pupils has a positive effect and is beneficial to the child. On the other hand, in initial response to the question, Erica was far more uncertain and explained that it was difficult to know the impact. However, at future points in the interview she did refer to the need for children to feel listened to in a way that ELSAs can provide (appendix E1). This fits with Wells *et al*'s (2003) view that an intervention (such as ELSA) will improve pupil wellbeing. All three ELSAs spoke about children benefitting from being listened to, heard and understood.

4.1a Hopes and uncertainty

References were made by each ELSA regarding what they hoped for the effectiveness of the intervention. Felicity expressed that she would like to think that the time spent with pupils made a difference to them, whilst Erica talked about having to have faith in what she was doing (appendix E2). Harriet referred to hoping that the pupils could communicate more effectively and express their emotions – the very purpose of the ELSA intervention. It is possible that the ELSAs were cautious about expressing their perception of the impact of the intervention because they were not able to base their thoughts on concrete evidence; choosing their language carefully and talking about what they *hoped* the impact was instead. The 'hopes' therefore could be considered as 'perceived impact' because the way in which they were spoken about gave kudos to the intervention.

There were however, differences in the thoughts regarding the timing of the impact. Felicity spoke about the intervention having an immediate impact on the pupils' lives. Whereas Harriet spoke about the amount of time varying (up to a year) to see an impact (appendix E3). However, in both cases it is clear that some impact was considered to have taken place.

Therefore, reinforcing the finding that, even if based on hopes and feelings, the ELSAs did consider their work to be making a difference to the pupils.

4.1b Measurement of impact

One of the interview questions focussed on the measurement of impact, so that the ELSAs would be able to explain *how* they know the effectiveness of the intervention. All three ELSAs referred to pre and post-intervention questionnaires (appendix E4). Harriet was very positive about these and spoke about using them to set targets. Felicity however, was less sure of the reliability of the questionnaires, as she felt that the younger pupils did not necessarily understand the statements, or the scale used to measure the answer (appendix E5). Both Felicity and Erica gave more weighting to organic feedback – from speaking to the teacher, teaching assistant, or pupil themselves. Felicity also referred to observing the pupil in the playground to see if they were implementing learned strategies (appendix E6). Erica spoke about seeing difference within the sessions, but not necessarily knowing if this was reflected in the 'outside world' as Sharp, 2000; Liau *et al,* 2003; Carnwell & Baker, 2007 and Kay, 2018 would expect to see.

The findings, in regards to measurement, suggests that there are improvements to be made overall in assessing the effectiveness of the intervention. Erica stated that the verbal feedback received, although positive in regard to effectiveness, doesn't always happen and needs to be formalised. These findings reinforce that for this study, the focus on the *perceived* effectiveness of the ELSA programme is key.

4.1c The purpose of the role

Erica and Felicity both mentioned the comparison between ELSA and counselling. Urging that there is a fine line between the two, and that their role is not that of a counsellor (appendix E7). This inferred a note needed in respect of 'impact', when considering the impact upon pupil wellbeing. There is a suggestion that expectations of the impact need to be in line with ELSA work and not that of a counsellor. There is however a cross-over

between the *role* of the counsellor and some *techniques* used by counsellors, which does fit in line with Hornby and Atkinson's (2003) view that wellbeing issues can be addressed with in-house counselling techniques.

Harriet's comments regarding expectations and the purpose of the role also link to perceived impact. She felt that staff perceptions could sometimes be that intervention from an ELSA would address issues in a short time period (appendix E8). It is therefore noteworthy that in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, everyone needs to have the same expectations to begin, otherwise the judgement of impact could differ widely.

4.2 Barriers and overcoming them

Although the barriers to effective practice and how to overcome these were identified as two separate themes within the transcripts, it makes sense here to discuss the findings together as most barriers tend to have an accompanying solution (whether in practice or suggested).

Erica and Felicity both spoke about a number of barriers that impacted the effectiveness of their practice. Harriet only spoke of one, but the one that was prevalent to all – that of time. It may be considered that in order for a school to train and fund ELSA/s, that there is an implied belief in the importance of emotional literacy and therefore a sense that time would be given to implement the intervention. However, although both Harriet and Felicity referred to being timetabled and allocated time for ELSA sessions, Felicity and Erica spoke of the barrier in regards to lack of time for planning the sessions. For Felicity, the way to overcome this is to plan in her own time (appendix F1), but Erica felt more rushed by this; considering that the barrier would reduce as she becomes more experienced (appendix F2).

Although not stated as a barrier, a perceived barrier could be Erica's reference to the need to constantly change practice (appendix F3). However, as mentioned, this could also be seen as a positive because having to adapt brings experience and Erica felt that building experience would relieve her issue of lack of time.

Erica also referred to a significant barrier that she had encountered: when pupils are identified as needing the intervention, but do not want to feel different from their peers and therefore do not want to take part (appendix F4). However, she also spoke of ways to overcome this, such as involving other pupils to make it a group approach.

In line with Kay's (2018) observations, Felicity's biggest barrier to understanding the impact of the intervention, was lack of time to go back to past pupils and check they had embedded their learning (appendix F5). Although there was no current way of overcoming this barrier, Felicity was reflective that planning-in time to revisit these pupils would be a positive thing to do in terms of reminding and re-embedding the learning (appendix F6).

Erica believed that introducing more ELSAs to her setting would encourage a whole school culture (appendix F7). Although this was not perceived as a barrier, it could be that a whole-school approach to ELSA would remove invisible barriers and therefore promote emotional literacy further. This was reflected in Harriet's comments. Again, not whilst referring to a particular barrier, but talking about the fact that she had led a staff meeting to encourage understanding of the ELSA role (appendix F8). As previously mentioned, the benefits of a whole-school approach was championed by many of the authors in the literature review.

Many of the barriers were individual to the experience of each ELSA, which although does not make the data any less valid, does mean that fewer common barriers were identified in this area. A larger sample size may have been useful in identifying mutual themes between the barriers.

4.4 Flexibility

Kay's (2018) suggestion that in order for an EL intervention to be successful, there must be a flexible approach, was strongly reflected by all three ELSA's (appendix G1). This is pertinent to the research question because the ELSAs clearly needed to feel that they were able to adapt to the needs of the pupil, in order to practice effectively and therefore have a greater chance of improving pupil wellbeing.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out how effective ELSAs perceive the programme to be in improving pupil wellbeing, what they felt the barriers were to effective practice and any ways they had found to over-come these.

In terms of improving pupil wellbeing, the ELSA's answers gave the impression that they do feel the programme is effective. However, it seems that the tools are not currently in place to prove this or to *what extent* it is effective, which in itself is a barrier to answering the research question. It is not possible to conclude that the ELSAs **do** perceive improved wellbeing because most of the responses referred to what the ELSAs 'would like to think' and what they 'would hope'. However, the overall comments were positive in regarding the ELSA programme as being of benefit to pupils and their wellbeing, which gives value to the programme in supporting our young people.

Thoughts regarding barriers to practice came more readily, especially for two of the ELSAs. Upon conducting the network analysis, barriers were not only found in reference to being asked specifically about them, but were woven throughout the conversations. Many of the barriers were countered with a way to overcome them, but it was of use to hear the barriers, particularly from the ELSAs from my own setting. It will be possible to find appropriate ways to overcome the barriers and move forward to ensure practice is as effective as possible.

The findings of this study have proven useful because there are ways in which the practice at my setting will be adapted as a result of it. This aligns with the intended outcome. As previously noted, Watson (2012) recognises that measurement of wellbeing is problematic. Moving forward I will explore further ways to be consistent in measuring progress reliably and secure formal feedback. This should reinforce the ELSAs feelings and show that their work is making a difference. Through the interviews and the literature, revisiting pupils and checking that learning is embedded was highlighted as an important part of practice and I will ensure that this is planned into the way the ELSA programme is run in my setting.

I was surprised at the small amount of literature available regarding the ELSA intervention, especially given the importance of research based practice. This study will add to the

literature and although the findings are not particularly conclusive, they will provide food for thought for others when exploring the subject, or indeed planning their own study.

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Part 002: Impact Statement

The completion of the NASENCO course has profoundly impacted my practice and therefore improved outcomes for the pupils in my setting – which, for me, was the ultimate goal. It has led me to fully understand the strategic, leadership role of the SENCO and my practice has certainly adapted as a result of this. For example, I am far more assertive in ensuring that all teachers know and understand their responsibilities in relation to pupils with SEN in their class. This, I believe, has led to a better understanding of the pupils and their needs, which will undoubtedly improve outcomes.

Initially, I found the way seminars were delivered frustrating – I wanted to be told what I had to do, so that I could simply get on with it (no time for unanswered questions and philosophical statements to make me think, ponder and question!). However, it did not take me long to realise that this was very deliberate. The SENCO role is so complex, that it is not possible to simply 'tell' someone how and what to do. As a new SENCO, the teaching and learning during the seminars taught me not to take things at face-value, but that questioning and digging deeper is vital in securing the best outcomes for the pupils in our care. For example, one seminar focussed upon behaviour and SEN; although I have always understood the link, my learning enabled me to truly reflect upon the deep-rooted impact on pupils and to question whether this was understood by all staff in my setting. From then on, when I was approached with behaviour issues, I was able to encourage reflection and ask guided questions to coach staff to realise the 'whys' and the 'what-ifs'. This therefore did not only change my practice, but ultimately the practice of others and most importantly, the feeling of being understood by those pupils.

The reference to legislation, law and research during seminars, as well as the process of researching for assignments, has strengthened my understanding of the importance of research-based practice. Not only does it guide practice and give the confidence that you are doing 'the right thing', I now feel far more able to deliver CPD and make requests of staff, knowing that I can refer to an evidence base. I have found that the impact of this is that staff (for example, TAs delivering interventions) are more likely to do things correctly, because they understand *why* and the impact that these actions will have on pupil outcomes.

These are just a couple of examples of how the course has impacted my practice. I would need many more than 500 words to detail the impact to its full extent. I know that the learning undertaken has made me a better SENCO and enabled me the confidence in keeping the children and their welfare at the heart of what I do. As SENCO, I am their ambassador at school and, although there is always more to learn, I can now be certain that every decision made and action taken will always be with their best interest and improved outcomes in mind.

WORD COUNT: 523

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Appendix A

Questions for ELSAs

Assignment Title: <u>To What Extent do Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) Perceive</u> <u>they are Successful in Achieving Increased Pupil Wellbeing and what are the Barriers that</u> <u>Prevent Effective Practice?</u>

1. Please describe your role as an ELSA.
2. What impact do you feel your role has on the pupils?
3. Do you believe that pupils experience increased wellbeing as a result of ELSA interventions?
4. Do you have a way to measure this?
5. Do you feel that other staff appreciate/understand what you do?
6. Have you come across any barriers to your practice and how have you managed to over-come these?
7. What is the biggest challenge to your role?
8. Are there ways you feel the ELSA programme could be improved?
9. Do you feel able to adapt the intervention to the individualised needs of the pupil?

Further prompts: tell me more about… can you explain…? can you describe…?

Appendix B

Participant Consent Letter

To what extent do ELSAs perceive they are successful in achieving increased pupil wellbeing and what are the barriers that prevent effective practice?

• I…………………………………………. voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

• I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

• I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

• I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing.

• I understand that participation involves a semi-structured interview with the researcher.

• I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

• I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

• I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

• I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

• I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the 'data presentation and findings' or 'conclusion' section of the assignment.

• I understand that if I inform the researcher that I or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

• I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on the researcher's work laptop (accessible only to them via password protection) until the exam board confirms the results of their assignment.

• I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board.

• I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

•I understand that I, should I wish, I may request a copy of the completed assignment.

• I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information:

[Contact details removed]

Signature of research participant

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Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher   Date

Appendix C

Network Analysis

ELSA role

- Impact
  - Recognition
  - Uncertainty/hopes
- Barriers
  - Expectation
  - Time
  - Space
- Over-coming Barriers
  - Flexibility
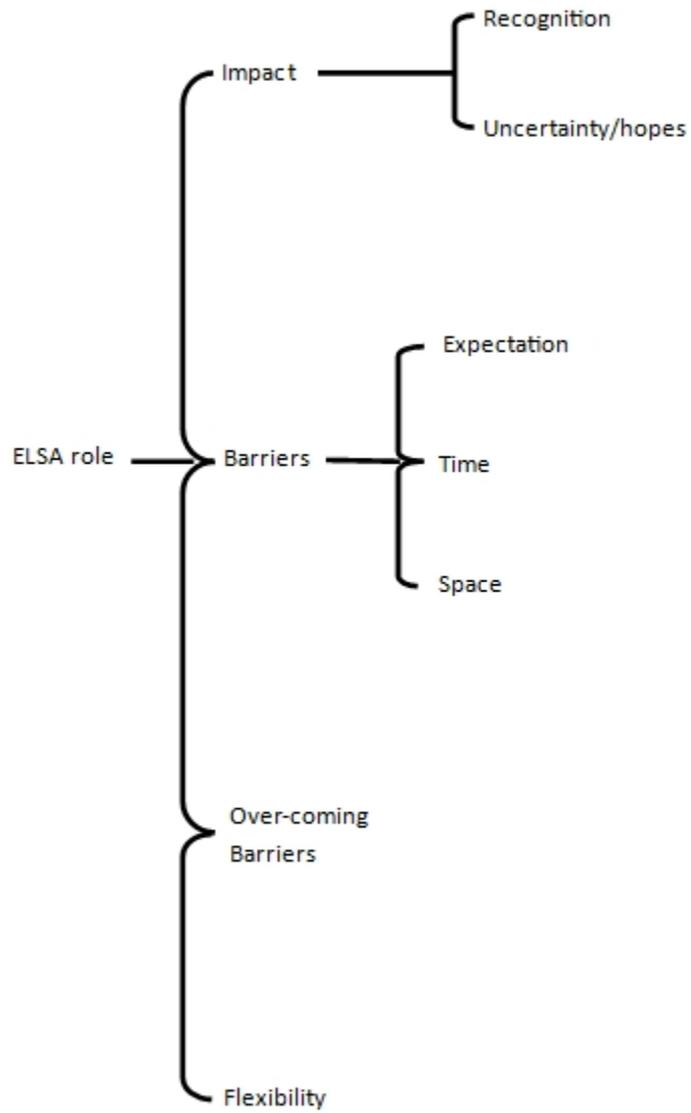
Appendix D

Network Analysis – Themes and Observations

Theme	Line numbers and notes
Impact	E - L.13 - very unsure L.16-17, 32, 33, 36. 85 & 86. L.220-221 – positive F - L.25-27, 30-31 appreciate time. 34-36 – understood. L.45 – transfer skills, L.49-50 immediate impact H – L.76 – positive. 81-82, 96 – confidence. 85-86 – nurture. 88-91 – understanding. 94, 98 - wellbeing
How impact is recognised	E – L.20 in sessions, 44 - questionnaires, 51 & 52, 61 - teacher feedback 71, 72 & 74 F - L.77-78, 79-83 teacher, child, playground H – L.48-49 pre-assessment. 102 – pre and post-assessment. 104-107
Uncertainty/hopes	E – L.25 & 27 – faith F – 39-40 – immediate impact. 152 – making a difference H – L.78-79 – communication
Understanding of role/expectation	E – L.202-204, 209-210 – ELSA vs. counselling F – L. 101-102 – realistic expectations. 102-104 – ELSA vs. counselling H – L.180-181, 183-184 – no quick fix
Barriers	E – L.93 & 94 – changing practice. L.104, 108-110, 112-113 – feeling different. L.120-121 timing of group F – L.45-47 time to embed. 87-89 – questionnaires. 99-101 – revisit. 106-107 – 2D resources. 125-127 – deeper psychological understanding. 139-143 – pupil understanding H -
Over-coming barriers	E – L.81-83 reducing sessions, 145, 175 – more experience. L.175-176, 178-179, 181-182 – more ELSAs F – L.40-41, 73-75 – revisit chdn. 89-91- initial assessment. 97 – timetabled. H – L.119-120, 122-123, 125-126 – staff meeting
Flexibility	E – L.86 & 87 – time of sessions. 89-91 – groups 96 & 97 – child led. L.199, 202 F – 136, 138, 142-145 H -112, 114 – very adaptable. 205-209, 211 – changing plans
Time	E – L.81. L.129-130, 132-133 time to prepare 164, 166-167 - supervision F – L.97, 113-117 H – L.175
Space	E - F – L.98 H - L.158, 168

Appendix E

E1.

Erica

32.　I do think it's really important for some children to just have some one-to-one time and have to be listened to.

35.　And that can be right across a range of children. So, whether it's ELSA or its just an adult that
36.　listens to them and is not in that wheel of achievement that's required all the time then I think that's really important.

E2.

Felicity

151　Well, I have just, I just really enjoy helping children really, but struggling, and I'd like to, I like
152　my my aim and my target is to make a difference and that's what I hope we're doing.

Erica

25　think you just have to have some faith that that little bit of time…
26　Yeah.

27　Is-is doing something.

Harriet

78　[laughs] Umm, yeah, it depends on what the child's need are, so umm I, I'd like to think it helps them communicate more effectively, express their emotions

E3.

Felicity

39　I would certainly hope so. I think, I personally feel that I probably, I would hope that it has an
40　immediate impact with their current situation.

Harriet

104　And, so, yeah, at the end of i.. It depends on the child, cos obviously, you might get a child
105　that might progress really quickly and then you might get a child that will take a year

E4.

Harriet

48   …the brilliant ELSA support website… um, yeah, so the first thing is, they will do a pre-
49   assessment, on on the child.

51   So, they will fill one of those in for me and then we'll discuss it and then set targets, see
52   where, they're, you know where the help is, is required.

Felicity

86   Umm, we have got questionnaires

Erica

44   Well we have a questionnaire that we do at the start and the end. Umm, which usually 45
they've gone up a little bit on.

E5.

Felicity

86   Umm, we have got questionnaires. However I don't always like to use those coz I find them
87   quite formal and the younger children.. I don't know whether they always grasp the meaning
88   of the questions or, or if it's a rating scale they quite often can't rate the - it doesn't always
89   work so I do do questionnaires if I don't know the child very well, possibly.

E6.

77   Only really teacher feedback an-and child feedback really. Umm, and maybe evidence in the
78   playground. You know if you've been talking about friendship issues or umm behaviour 79
issues it's quite nice to see it being displayed.

E7.

Felicity

102   child more but I searched I have to remind myself that this is just emotional. If you can see
103   there's deeper issues I've sometimes talked with our counsellor on site because I sometimes
104   feel there is a fine line between Elsa and deeper issues but obviously I would not tackle, coz
105   I'm not qualified and I…

Erica

202   I-and I think n sometimes people send people to you that need counselling and that is a very
203   different…

209   We can't be dealing with that, but that's for us to do. But that's maybe where there's a little
210   bit of lack of clarity…

E8.

Harriet

180   …Ummm, Probably….I'd say… people thinking that you have a magic wand and you can solve
181   every problem within five minutes {laughs]

183   And sort of having to explain, well yeah, its-it is a long term thing and you know, you can't
184   make changes within, sort of, a couple 'a minutes.

Appendix F

F1.

Felicity

113   What's my biggest challenge? Umm, sometimes don't feel that you've p'raps got enough
114   time to prepare for the se-I mean I do a lot of planning at home which, you know, um but I
115   think if I didn't do that planning at home then I would, you know, I would-I would come into
116   a session unprepared and I like to be prepared, but that's my choice, so I-that's fine, that's
117   not really a barrier. I mean maybe 'time' cos you want to do so much and you've got so 118
        many children who you know need you.

F2.

129   Th-the hardest thing is getting your head round it all in short spaces of time when you're
130   trying to do another job at the same time.

132   And thinking about what that child might need and being prepared for the session and when
133   you're just dashing basically.

135   If you are delayed then you've lost your two minute prep time.

145   difficult, but as you com-become more experienced then you've got more stuff at your
146   fingertips, but

F3.

Erica

93   …because every group dynamic is different. Every child is different… so something that
94   worked last year, won't work next year…

F4.

Erica

104   Yeah…. Um, so I said 'time'… I guess it's a bit of a barrier is being different and coming out.
106   Some children don't like that and some children just won't do it.

108   So, I and I'm not sure how we get around that. So I think we've done a few groups where
109   we've brought, it's been about one child, but we bought 5 out [of class] so that, so that's
110   more like a Circle of Friends isn't thing.

112   But that is a barrier for some children. They don't wanna-they're already different and they
113   don't want any more different and they don't want to miss any more.

F5.

Felicity

45   they can use what they've, hopefully, gained in all areas of their school life and home life B-
46   but, I don't think that there's always enough time for that in the sessions that we get. To
47   make sure that the impact is in-is deep embedded.
99   barriers. Umm, as I've said I would like to go back and revisit more, uh, sometimes there's
100 such a large waiting list that you find you're trying to get through the list rather than go back
101 and re-visit so I probably like to do that a bit more.

F6.

Felicity

40   immediate impact with their current situation. However, I think it would be really nice to
41   revisit children.

43   To make sure that it's ongoing and it wasn't just a one moment in time scenario and that
44   they can use what they've, hopefully, gained in all areas of their school life and home life. B-
45   but, I don't think that there's always enough time for that in the sessions that we get. To
46   make sure that the impact is em-is deep embedded.

73   a short conversation, but I was, yeah, it depends what the problem is but, yes some children
74   seemed to get, might get over a situation but others still might have maybe forgotten things
75   that we've talked about it so it would be nice just to revisit them and re embed them again

F7.

Erica

175 us to are really good, but I do think it's just experience. It would be nice to have more than
176 two ELSAs I guess.
178 Because the more people there are, then the more of a community you've got to talk about
179 stuff.

181 Yeah and then the culture is a bit different and so I think having a couple more would be
182 probably a good thing.

F8.

Harriet

117   Yes, definitely, yep. I think they do. Um, when I first started, I did um a quick bit in the staff

118   meeting, just to explain what the ELSA role was.

120   Umm, and how it works because it was new, it sort of, it was fairly new round here, when I

121   started.

123   So not many people know about it and so it helped to explain to the teachers and all the

124   other support staff, what-what the role entails and then that's really helped. So, I quite often

F8.

Harriet

Appendix G

G1.

Erica
86   doing as good a job in a 10-15 minute slot than 1/2 an hour, as a half an hour slot. So I think
87   being flexible around it, is good.
89   Umm, and we did some group interventions, which enabled us to get more children at a
90   time and sometimes those are good and sometimes they just don't work. So I think the thing
91   is if it's not working we just need to keep changing it all the time…

96   So I think it's about basically thinking on your feet a bit and doing it, like you know, it's child
97   led, basically isn't it?

Felicity
138   Yeah, I would say I do that definitely. Very personal to that child. A-and a barrier that I've
142   when really they haven't noticed it so that's the barrier but, but definitely tailored yeah. And
143   I-I will I will do each week. I won't plan six weeks ahead. I will base it on the, I'll have ideas
144   what I want to do the next session but depending had one session goes will depend how the
145   next session goes for that child.

Harriet
112   Yeah, yeah unless unless uhm, you know something speeds up and we need to change it…
114   Or something else crops up. It's very adaptable.

205   Absolutely. I mean I might have, I might have a session planned out and they walk through
206   the door and it totally changes as soon as it walks through the door because something
207   might have happened at lunch time or, you know, they might have something on their mind
208   that they want to discuss. So yeah, you can-you can plan and it-and it, don't get me wrong,
209   it's really good to plan, but…

211   Sometimes you need to waiver from those plans and deal with the here and now.