

A participatory exploration of hopes and needs for future ELSA research

Summary of Findings

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Following Purcell's (2021) initial exploratory study, this study aimed to further develop a conversation with the ELSA steering group about their research needs, to inform an ongoing and coherent programme of research supporting the future development of ELSA. The study gathered qualitative data through a focus group with four members of the ELSA steering group. Participatory data analysis was used to support the conceptualisation of research priorities.

Findings

During the focus group, participants constructed six themes based on the discussion (see figure 1): fidelity to the model, training, supervision, ELSA context, outcomes, and government recognition. Fidelity to the model is presented as an overarching theme. The themes of ELSA context, outcomes, and government recognition share a subtheme.

After compiling findings from the thematic map and transcript data, I identified the following research priorities and hopes. Elements of all themes and subthemes were organised in response to the research aim and questions.

Research priorities highlighted from ELSA focus group

- Developing or identifying sensitive measures to evaluate the impact of ELSA on children and young people.
 - Continuing to strengthen ELSA's evidence base, particularly by gathering quantitative as well as qualitative data.
 - Overcoming the challenge of assessing the impact of ELSA amongst real world variables (Pickering et al., 2019).
 - Exploring measurement tools used in previous ELSA studies, or exploring methods such as gathering school-based data or information from referral forms.
- Comparing ELSA to other emotional literacy interventions.
 - Evidencing ELSA's specific and measurable impact, whilst recognising its adaptable nature within real-world context (Barkham & Mellor-Clark, 2003).
 - Promoting ELSA's unique contribution with sensitivity to the priorities, values and systems underlying schools' intervention choices.
- Developing sensitive measures to evaluate and inform ELSA training and supervision.
 - Gaining a more in-depth understanding of how training and supervision supports ELSAs in their role.
 - Understanding whether ELSAs receive from training and supervision what EPs intend.
 - Finding an appropriate balance between teaching psychological content and facilitating relational skills.
- Understanding the impact of ELSA's wider context at both school and service levels.
 - Exploring barriers to uptake and implementation.

- Understanding the quality of support that ELSAs receive in schools, for example from line managers and wider staff.
- Exploring how line managers, wider staff, and ELSAs understand the ELSA role and identity within the school community.
- Clarifying the EP's role in overcoming implementation barriers, for example by advocating for ELSAs at an organisational level.

Hopes for how research will impact practice

- Improving fidelity to the model.
 - Understanding that the model is introduced through training and upheld through supervision. The context surrounding ELSA implementation impacts fidelity to the model in practice, shaping the intervention's impact, which is measured through outcomes.
 - Identifying and disseminating impactful elements of ELSA training and supervision to improve quality and consistency.
- Promoting ELSA amongst schools and services.
 - Compiling and disseminating ELSA's evidence base in an accessible format.
 - Exploring barriers to awareness and uptake to inform targeted support.
- Promoting ELSA at a governmental level, given its relevance to national priorities.
 - Continuing to strengthen ELSA's evidence base and increase government awareness to support ELSA's potential to become a universal provision across UK schools.

References

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- Pickering, L., Lambeth, J. & Woodcock, C. (2019). The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) Programme: Can you develop an evidence base for an adaptive intervention? *DECP Debate*, 170, 17-22.
- Purcell, R. (2021). *An exploratory study into the research priorities of the ELSA Network Steering Group; focusing on the promotion and development of the ELSA intervention. An unpublished doctoral assignment submitted to The University of Manchester for the Degree of Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities.*

Figure 1: Thematic map outlining the ELSA steering group's views on current ELSA research gaps, research priorities, and hopes for how research will inform practice.

