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# **Primary School Children's Perspectives and Experiences of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) Support**

This study explores primary school aged children's perspectives and experiences of their Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) support. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 12 Key Stage 2 participants, who had had a minimum of one month's ongoing ELSA support. Four core themes were identified: positive relationships, unique qualities, facilitates skill development, and positive impact. The findings suggest the importance of a positive therapeutic relationship with an ELSA, and that children value ELSAs teaching specific individualised coping strategies in particular. The findings may also be pertinent to practitioners outside of ELSA related work, highlighting the importance of listening to children of all ages and employing alternative methods, such as drawing, to support them in sharing their views. Since the evidence base for ELSA support is limited, this study contributes children's views to this area, and should be used to inform future research.

Keywords: ELSA, emotional literacy support assistant, emotional literacy, children's views, social, emotional and mental health

This study aimed to develop an understanding of primary school aged children's perspectives and experiences of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) support. It was conducted in response to a request from a local authority Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to gather children's views of their experiences of ELSA provision.

Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) were originally introduced by Southampton Educational Psychology Service in 2001 to meet a growing psychological need amongst children and young people (CYP) for social and emotional support (Woodcock, 2007). Specifically, ELSAs were trained to deliver support for CYP in helping them express, understand, and manage their emotions. The different roles and responsibilities of ELSA have been suggested as including the creation of a secure and therapeutic space in which children may learn about and express their feelings, for the teaching of social and emotional skills, advocating on behalf of the child, and promoting emotional literacy across the wider school or setting (Woodcock, 2007). Burton et al. (2009) describe the initial training to become an ELSA, which is generally delivered by educational psychologists (EPs), as consisting of five full-day sessions covering six core areas of competence: 1) emotional awareness, 2) self-esteem, 3) anger management, 4) social and communication skills, 5) friendship zones, and 6) therapeutic stories. This training is most typically undertaken by school teaching assistants. Originally, most ELSAs worked in primary schools, but the role has since expanded to encompass both primary and secondary education (Burton et al., 2009).

'Emotional Literacy' has been defined by Southampton Educational Psychology Service as, "the ability to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions" (Sharp, 2000, p.8). An ability to regulate emotional states has potentially far-reaching implications for CYP in relation to their academic outcomes and mental well-being. Good emotional regulation skills are closely associated with good attentional

deployment skills (Gross, 2015), and the successful regulation of emotional responses has been suggested to be predictive of academic outcomes, even after accounting for IQ (Graziano et al.,2007).

In England, the national curriculum for schools has traditionally focused on academic attainment; however in recent years there has been a growing appreciation of the potential for schools to promote other types of outcomes, such as the emotional wellbeing of children (Burton, 2008). Meanwhile, concern over the mental health of CYP has increased considerably, with the 2017 Green Paper identifying the need for a transformed CYP's mental health provision (Department of Health/Department for Education, 2017). There is a growing recognition of the influence that social-emotional development plays in learning, behaviour and mental health (Brooks, 2014). The high referral criteria and waiting times for CYP to access child and adolescent mental health services (Department of Health, 2009) suggest schools might be well-placed to provide additional social-emotional support. Indeed, statutory guidance on health education due to come into force in English schools from September 2020 includes the requirement for primary schools to promote mental wellbeing (Long, 2019) and the recently published draft Education Inspection Framework for English schools (Ofsted, 2019) includes a new requirement for schools to help learners to “know how to keep physically and mentally healthy.” The work of ELSAs is of increasing relevance.

### *Evidence*

Despite a wide implementation of ELSA, there is limited peer-reviewed research evaluating the effectiveness of ELSAs on children's social emotional skills to inform the programme's development (Burton, 2008; Hills, 2016; Osborne & Burton, 2014; Wilding & Claridge, 2016). Burton (2008) evaluated the perceived effectiveness of

ELSAs using a quantitative survey, which gathered multiple viewpoints from ELSAs, teachers, CYP and senior leadership. School staff were very positive about the ELSA programme. ELSAs themselves rated the programme as helpful and identified that they felt empowered to support children. Teachers rated a positive change for children's difficulties in response to ELSA support and CYP felt ELSA was helpful and having a positive impact. These survey findings were supported by a limited amount of qualitative data. For example, CYP described that they found it helpful having someone to talk to in confidence. Building upon Burton's (2008) study, Osborne and Burton (2014) also gathered views from ELSAs in a quantitative survey, this time focusing on their experience of supervision. ELSAs reported that supervision increased their knowledge of social-emotional development and provided emotional support for themselves. Overall, they reported a positive impact from supervision, though a lack of qualitative data limits the depth of understanding that might be drawn from this.

As noted, current peer-reviewed, published research into the role and impact of ELSAs in England is limited. ELSA work is adaptive and specific interventions can vary a great deal from child to child, making it hard to compare the work of one ELSA to another (Pickering et al., 2019). Nonetheless, a number of attempts have been made within local authorities to evaluate the impact of ELSA work quantitatively. Burton et al., (2009) found a significant reduction in both teacher rated and parent rated total scores for the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) post ELSA involvement, though no control group was used in this study. A wait list control group was used by Burton et al., (2010), who also found a significant reduction in teacher rated total SDQ scores post ELSA intervention, but no corresponding improvement in the control group. Additionally, this study used the teacher rated and pupil rated versions of the Southampton Emotional Literacy Checklist (Faupel, 2003),

finding significant improvement for the teacher rated measure post ELSA intervention, but not in the control group. No similar improvement was found in the pupil rated version of the measure.

More recent research has employed qualitative methods to better understand the processes underlying the effectiveness of ELSA work. Wilding and Claridge (2016) explored parents' views of the ELSA programme using semi-structured interviews and found that parents viewed the work to have had a positive impact on their children's social and emotional development. They also talked about the benefits of forming a trusting and non-judgemental ELSA-child relationship. The value of the talking process was acknowledged as a means of promoting positive change and benefitting children as a means of feeling heard and, as a result, valued.

Hills (2016) gathered views from 53 CYP using qualitative questionnaires and then followed these questionnaires with more detailed semi-structured interviews (with nine children). Content analysis of the questionnaires suggested CYP consider ELSA support improves social relationships and raises confidence through discussion and activities. Over one third of the CYP were very positive about ELSA support, indicating there was nothing they would like to change about it. Analysis of subsequent interviews identified three key processes underlying ELSA support: a supportive relationship (a trusted confidant), managing feelings and developing resilience (reframing situations). A strength of this study was the emphasis placed on capturing the child's voice; a child-centred approach was taken, which places the child as an active participant in the research process reflected in the epistemological viewpoint that children are experts in their own lives (Moss & Pence, 1994).

In general, while the evaluations from the ELSA programme appear to show positive results, the evidence base remains limited, as discussed above. The data

gathered from these evaluations employed mainly quantitative methods. Where qualitative data were collected, they were usually elaboration on their quantitative responses (McEwen, 2015), limiting ELSAs' responses to predetermined questions. Previous studies illuminate various factors that were perceived by the teachers and families to contribute to the effectiveness of the ELSA programme (Burton, 2008; Wilding & Claridge, 2016). However, the researchers are only aware of one published study, conducted by Hills (2016), that specifically evaluated the ELSA programme from the participating children's perspectives.

In the current study, in order to address some of these limitations, qualitative methods were employed to capture a more holistic experience of the ELSA programme. This research therefore aims to address the restricted evidence base of ELSA programmes, and the lack of children's views and perspectives in previous studies. The triangulation of the data from all of the stakeholders provides a more comprehensive view of the contributing factors of the effectiveness of the ELSA programme. The main research question is: what are primary aged children's perspectives and experiences of their ELSA support? The aim is to collate children's views on their ELSA's role, their relationship with the ELSA, and the impact and limitations of their ELSA support.

## **Method**

### ***Design***

This study was based on a social constructionist epistemology, with an exploratory and qualitative methodology, which aimed to gather richer data of the children's lived experience to add greater depth to the current evidence base. It was designed so that each child would construct their own reality of the ELSA programme,

therefore ‘multiple realities’ can exist that are associated with different perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 168). The interviews were framed to the participants as informal discussions, and drawing activities were encouraged to facilitate discussions by making the children at ease.

### ***Participants***

Twelve Key Stage two (7-11 years) primary school children, who have worked with an ELSA, were recruited to take part in the interviews. The children attended primary schools within one local authority in England. There were no exclusion criteria, apart from the requirement that they had worked with an ELSA for at least one month. Additionally, school staff recruited the children on the basis that they would be able to access the interview questions and were not currently experiencing emotional trauma (staff had access to the interview questions in order to judge this). In total, 14 families were contacted; 13 parents gave consent but one child did not agree to take part. The final number of participants then was 12.

### ***Measures***

A semi-structured interview was used to gather children’s perspectives of ELSA. The interview schedule was designed by six of the authors (comprising four trainee EPs and two qualified EPs) to ensure all questions were appropriate for children. Three sections formed the schedule (which is available from the corresponding author upon request). The first section was comprised of general questions to build rapport (these data were not used in analysis). The second section employed questions that assessed children’s descriptions of ELSA and their evaluation of ELSA service. There were 14 open-ended questions in this section, for example ‘What would things be like if you

didn't have an ELSA?' If deemed appropriate, researchers also asked additional follow-up questions to gather further information about the child's perspective.

A pilot interview was conducted to determine the suitability of the interview schedule. All researchers listened to this interview and reached a consensus that the questions were suitable and appropriate. This interview was therefore included in the final analysis.

### ***Procedure***

Two schools in England were recruited and the first four authors of this paper were then each allocated to one primary school each. These researchers visited the schools and provided detailed information about the project to school staff, who then recruited children by contacting parents for written, opt-in consent. Following this, children with parental consent met with one researcher in a quiet, private room in school. Researchers first explained the study in detail, including ethical requirements (for example, confidentiality and their right to withdraw) and gained children's assent. Children were provided with a picture of a toy judge to explain that no judgements would be made and a stop sign was given to them to allow them to communicate when they wanted to stop (as used by Frisby, 2016). All interviews were audio-recorded and stored on a secure storage device. Children were also encouraged to draw their ideal ELSA during the interviews. After the interview, children were debriefed and any questions were answered. They were also given details of people they could contact if they had any concerns or would like to withdraw from the study. Lastly, the children had the opportunity to play a short card game with the researcher before they returned to class so that the ending of their involvement was a fun activity. In total, children were with researchers for 40 minutes, on average. Each researcher then transcribed their own three interviews. All names were removed from interviews to ensure anonymity, with

each child allocated a unique code. Transcripts were then analysed as a group and audio-recordings were destroyed when no longer required.

### ***Data analysis***

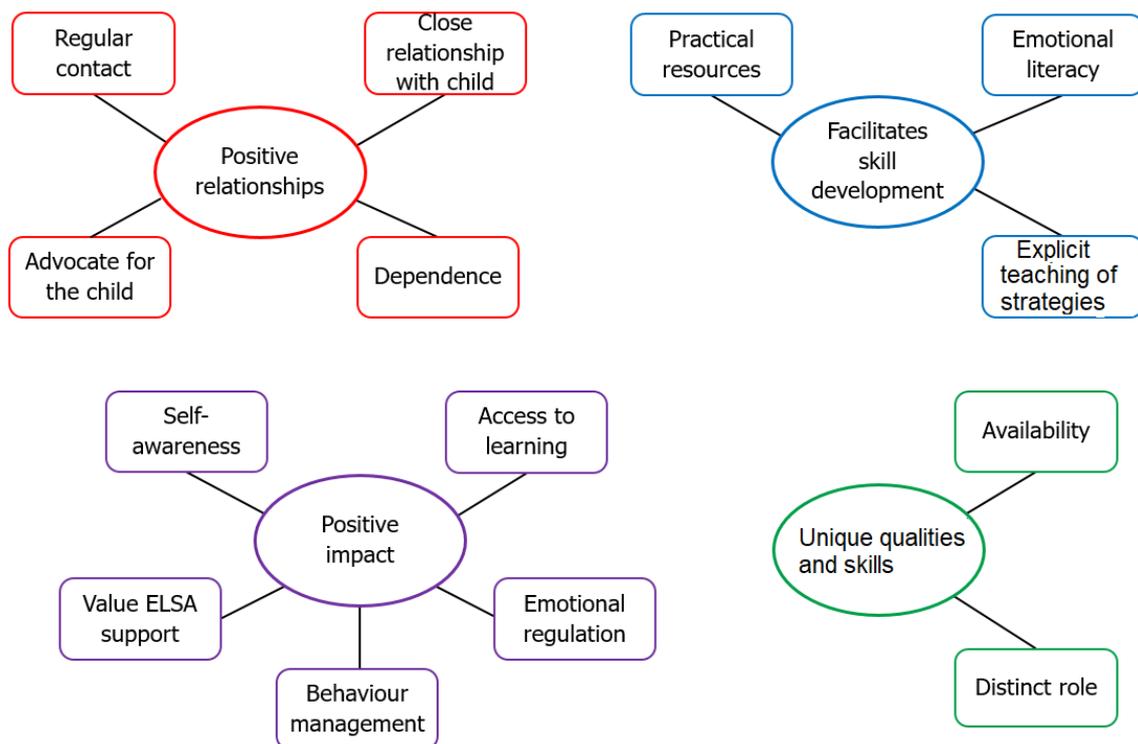
A thematic qualitative approach was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is an inductive analytical framework that was chosen to allow constructs to emerge inductively from the child's own perspective. The six stages of the approach were adapted to suit a group analysis, which was used to optimise resources and increase reliability. Following stage 1 (familiarising yourself with your data), each researcher first read and transcribed their own three interviews and formed some initial thoughts about the data. In stage 2 (generating initial codes), each researcher then read and re-read three transcripts (one from each of the other three interviewees). During this phase, each researcher became familiar with the interviews' content and formed some initial ideas, adhering to the first two stages. The researchers then discussed their initial themes and together created an initial coding manual in line with stage 3. Following this, the researchers collaboratively applied this coding manual to all 12 interviews and continually reviewed this coding in relation to the data. As a group, the researchers refined the themes into an initial thematic map and adapted both the map and coding manual as the analysis progressed (stages 4 and 5). Both semantic themes (surface themes across the entire data set) and latent themes (deeper interpretation of the underlying constructs) were analysed. Stage six (identifying and analysing extracts) was completed individually by each researcher. After 12 interviews the data were saturated and no new themes were found; the themes were defined and named and a final thematic map was formed (see figure 1).

## Findings

Through the thematic analysis process, four core themes were interpreted from the data. These were ‘positive relationships’, ‘unique qualities and skills,’ facilitates skill development’ and ‘positive impact’. Each core theme had several associated sub-themes which are shown in the final thematic map shown below in Figure 1.

Illustrative quotes for each sub-theme are displayed in Table 1. Illustrative quotes from the CYP for each sub- theme are given in this section; further structured examples of illustrative quotes are shown in Table 1 in the Appendix.

Insert Figure 1 Final Thematic Map



### *Positive Relationships*

Within the core theme of positive relationships, four sub-themes were also identified, including ‘regular contact,’ ‘dependence,’ ‘advocate for the child’ and ‘close

relationship with the child'. All of the children described having a good relationship with their ELSA, with several identifying that they established a close and trusting relationship with their ELSA over time. Good interpersonal skills on the part of the ELSA, such as being kind, caring, thoughtful and helpful were identified as key factors to developing this trusting ELSA-child relationship. Being a good listener was highlighted by children as being particularly important, as was having regular opportunities to share their worries and problems with their ELSA. For example, one child said "she's lets me speak and like she doesn't interrupt [me]," and another described how she was able to share her worries so that "they're not all trapped inside." One child explained how speaking to her ELSAs made her feel "a lot safer" and how she valued the space to share her confidences

"...when I don't know people I don't really talk to them but now I've got to know (ELSA name) I know that she's the person I need to talk to... I feel I can trust (ELSA name) cos I've been working with her for so long but she's like almost my best friend"

Children also described feeling that they could depend upon their ELSA for support in a variety of ways, such as providing emotional support, boosting their self-esteem and confidence, and helping them to learn new knowledge and skills. For some children, the ELSA also played a role as an advocate in which they were able to assist with communicating the child's views, wishes and needs with parents and/or with relevant professionals. For example, one child described how he had had found it helpful when his ELSA was able to explain to his teachers how best to support him to manage his anger in the classroom. Another child talked about how his ELSA provided resources for his parents to better enable them to understand the grief he was experiencing following the death of his grandfather, and the impact this was having on his emotions.

### *Unique Qualities and Skills*

This theme relates to the uniqueness of the ELSA role, particularly in terms of the type of support that the ELSA was able to offer and how available the ELSA was for children. Within this core theme, two sub-themes, 'distinct role' and 'availability' were interpreted from the data.

The majority of children described the ELSA role as distinctly different from other members of school staff. Several children described how the role of their teacher was to support their learning, whereas the role of the ELSA was to support their emotional wellbeing and development. One child explained, "my normal teacher helps me with all learning and that, they [ELSAs] have like a separate job by helping people with situations, like bad situations and that". Another child said:

"she helps me by doing different things cos if you're like feeling down about something, teachers can't really do anything about that; they can only mostly do [something] about learning"

Many children described how their ELSA was available to provide both proactive and responsive support for their needs. For some children the ELSA was the 'first port of call' to provide responsive support in a 'crisis situation.' One child reported:

"...sometimes I go and I have a problem in class, and she comes and gets me in and I go into, um the science room and speak about it, and then, I do my ELSA [strategies] and then I go back up and then I'm fine".

Other children also described how the ELSA was able to respond to their needs and support them to use emotional literacy strategies to effectively manage their behaviour and emotions within the classroom:

“[when I’m feeling down] she takes me out from class and then speaks to me about what we were doing and then she would talk to me about it, and then I would write my feeling in the box if it’s a sad one and put it in Clive (a ‘worry bird’)”

“Sometimes I just forget and forget because sometimes I’m so angry that I can’t even think what two add two is, so I just explode and sometimes (ELSA name) just finds me and she’s like calm down, remember what we said and then I calm down and then I remember”

### ***Facilitates Skill Development***

This theme refers specifically to the proactive, ongoing support provided by the ELSA to enable children to develop their emotional literacy skills. The sub-themes within this core theme were identified as ‘practical resources,’ ‘emotional literacy’ and ‘explicit teaching of strategies’. ELSAs used a range of practical resources to engage children and scaffold their emotional literacy skills, which included playing games, cooking, gardening, and craft activities such as making worry dolls and memory boxes. The children described how the practical activities supported their learning of new emotional literacy knowledge, skills and strategies. One child said, “we love making like these booklets and, last week we made these little worry dolls.” Another described how using Bear Cards helped her to identify and understand her emotions as she was able to see a range of emotions depicted by the bears on the cards. Other children described strategies that helped them to regulate their emotions and manage their behaviour which had a positive impact on their learning. One child reported that using calming strategies to help him to regulate his emotions meant that he was now able to remain within lessons. All children reported that ELSA support had helped them to learn new skills or had made a meaningful difference in their lives.

Children also talked about how their ELSA enabled and empowered them to regulate their emotions and thus manage better their own behaviour. One child said “she makes me calm down a little bit and then we play a game and then that makes me more calm down...then she makes jokes and that.” One boy explained how making a model volcano with his ELSA helped him to better understand his feelings of anger.

“To help me with anger... we’re making a volcano...when it bubbles that’s like me getting angry and when it explodes, it’s like me angry...we’re going to decorate it with paint and gonna get some stuff that explodes in it”

### ***Positive Impact***

Several interview questions were aimed at exploring children’s perspectives of the most valued aspects of ELSA support, including exploring whether ELSA support had made a meaningful difference for them. Several sub-themes were also interpreted from the data; these included ‘value ELSA,’ ‘access to learning,’ and three additional themes relating to the skills the children had learned as a result of ongoing ELSA support. These were identified as ‘self-awareness,’ ‘behaviour management’ and ‘emotional regulation’.

All of the children described how they had valued ELSA support and how they had benefitted from the close relationship they had developed with their ELSA. In particular, the ELSAs’ role in supporting children to develop a greater self-awareness emerged as a key factor that enabled children to have a deeper understanding of, and a greater sense of responsibility for, managing their feelings and behaviour. For example, one child reported how practical activities helped her understand how her emotions and behaviour were linked:

“We’ve done the tip of the iceberg [activity] which is what others don’t see and what people do see but there’s lots of things that happen at home and school that they don’t know about... that are under the iceberg... that people see, like they see that I react quickly”

Another child described feeling “more confident in learning” as a result of feeling able to talk to his ELSA about worries related to his learning. Another described how sharing his worries with his ELSA helped him to feel less anxious about situations at home: “I’ve stopped worrying so much when he [brother] runs away... I can get on with my education and won’t keep worrying about where he is.”

As a way of understanding their perceived value of ELSA support and whether it had made a meaningful difference, children were asked to imagine what things might have been like if they had not received ELSA support or were asked what things were like before they received ELSA support and how this contrasted with what things were like now. Interestingly, children reported a wide variety of valued aspects of ELSA support. For example, one child said:

“She taught me that I can be a lot more truthful and I don’t lie that much because it’s bad to lie...it helps me because then I wouldn’t get in trouble that much if all I do is tell the truth.”

Another child described how she felt things would be much worse for her if she had not received ELSA support - “no, I can’t imagine [what it would have been like without ELSA support] – really, really bad. I feel like I had arguments everyday before”.

Another child said:

“It would be really hard for me because I would just keep getting upset because I wouldn’t have someone to express my feelings with and it would just get bigger and bigger.”

Children were also asked to imagine a time within the future in which they would no longer need ELSA support and what this would be like. Some children associated the end of ELSA support with the end of primary school, even if they were several years away from their transition to secondary school. For others, no longer being supported by their ELSA was associated with a change, such as being able to cope differently in a particular situation or managing their feelings and behaviour in a more effective way. For example, one child described how she hoped she would be able to manage her feelings of anger more effectively and another child described being able to make more friends without the support of an adult. Several children, particularly those who had been working with their ELSA for a longer period of time (between a year and two years), described the prospect of ELSA support ending as upsetting and worrying, particularly as they were not sure what might happen next. These children seemed to have a greater sense of dependency on their relationship with their ELSA, and seemed less confident about being able to cope or manage without ELSA support in the future compared with children who had received support from their ELSA for a shorter amount of time.

## **Discussion**

The present study used thematic analysis of interviews with primary school aged children to understand their perspectives and experiences of their ELSA support. Four overarching themes emerged: positive relationships, unique qualities, facilitates skill development, and positive impact (Figure 1).

The findings suggest that primary school aged children view their relationships with their ELSAs as positive and that these positive relationships are also a fundamental component of ELSA work. This is in line with Hill et al., (2013) thematic analysis of ELSA and head teacher views, where “the importance of a strong trusting relationship”

(p.15) in ELSA work was also identified. Within this theme, children also constructed their relationship with their ELSA as separate and unique from other relationships with teaching staff and identified that they were able to express themselves in a secure environment. Drawing on attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991), this perception suggests that children formed a secure attachment with their ELSA, from which they were able to further develop their emotional literacy skills.

In relation to emotional and social development, many participants reported they felt 'calmer' since they started working with their ELSAs. Children spoke about developing coping strategies and increasing their self-efficacy. They also spoke about feeling more confident and that this had a positive impact on their behaviour, feelings and friendships. In particular, specific individualised strategies learned through ELSA support were articulated by children and it appears that these were an integral part of their coping mechanisms. These findings are important for two reasons. First, whilst previous qualitative peer-reviewed research into the ELSA programme is limited, the findings are consistent with previous studies carried out with adults involved in ELSA work which highlighted the direct impact of teaching individualised coping strategies on children's happiness and resilience (for example, Hill et al., 2013; Hills, 2016). Second, this may provide support for the notion that ELSAs teach social and emotional skills, which is in accordance with one of the four primary purposes identified by Woodcock (2007).

### **Strengths and Limitations of Current Study**

The current study addresses the limitation that children's perspectives were not explored (for example, Bravery & Harris, 2009; Garwood, 2010). Bradbury-Jones & Taylor (2015) suggested that children actively construct meanings to their own world (for example, ELSA involvement) and their views and perspectives are just as valid and

meaningful as the adults' perceptions. The current study explored children's views through listening to them and involving them as co-researchers, consistent with the view that researchers should work 'with' children instead of working 'on' them.

Another strength of this study was the child-centred approach adopted by the researchers in ensuring that children were able to access and understand the purpose and details of the research using child friendly materials and visual aids. The researchers also used a drawing approach to elicit children's views as a way of engaging them and aiding their communication (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). Some children chose not to engage with the drawing aspect, however, and might have preferred to use more tactile resources such as modelling clay (Frisby, 2016; Clarke, 2001) to aid their communication.

A limitation of the current study is that the work of ELSAs is varied: despite the positive findings, it remains unclear whether the outcomes reported were due to the ELSA-child relationships or the ELSA programme per se. The importance of the therapeutic alliance within the change process is well documented in literature (for example, Green, 2006; Hougaard, 1994). Future research should attempt to explore the mechanisms of the change process from children's perspectives.

Another limitation is that the relatively small sample size may not be representative of the views of all children receiving ELSA support. Since the schools worked with were identified by two of the authors, it could be argued that those schools that responded to the request were a self-selecting and potentially biased sample. Further, due to time constraints, the researchers were only able to interview three children at each school. That these children were identified by school staff and also (in all but one case) willing to take part in the research is suggestive of the possibility that the final sample comprised children who were most likely to speak positively about

their ELSA support. Therefore, future research should employ larger samples with wider age range to overcome these challenges.

### **Implications for Practice**

A key implication for practice arising from this study is the risk of children becoming over-reliant or dependent on their ELSA. A number of the children interviewed described feeling worried or upset about the prospect of ELSA sessions ending and appeared to be less confident in approaching new situations without ELSA support. In addition, other children reported feeling unsure about what would happen when their ELSA support finished. There is a need to clearly communicate to children the purpose of ELSA sessions, therefore, and what support will look like when these end. Some children may benefit from a phased approach to reducing support over time.

As evidence-informed practitioners, it is essential for EPs to use and recommend robust and evidence-based interventions (Birch et al., 2015). The evidence base for the ELSA programme is limited, particularly when eliciting and exploring children's views. As such, this research offers a distinctive contribution to this area and could be used to inform future research. Children's perspectives of the ELSA programme should be considered by EPs when training and supervising ELSAs. However, as it was not possible to determine the extent to which any positive impact was specifically due to the ELSA programme, future research should explore and compare between the ELSA programme and other similar programmes.

Future research should also aim to find ways of disentangling the impact of the teaching element of ELSA work from the therapeutic value of the ELSA-child relationship. A different research paradigm might be employed to see if similar themes are found to the present study: for example, using focus groups instead of individual

interviews might generate more vibrant ideas and opinions when children are able to discuss together their ideas and opinions.

## Appendix

Table 1. Themes and associated sub-themes

Theme and sub-theme	Additional Example response
<u>Theme 1: Positive Relationships</u>	
1a. Regular Contact	<p>“Yeah, cos I feel I can trust (ELSA name) cos I've been working with her for so long but she's like almost my best friend.”</p> <p>“She's allowed to work with me whenever she would like.”</p>
1b. Dependence	<p>“Sometimes I just forget and forget because sometimes I'm so angry that I can't even think what two add two is (laughs), so I just explode and sometime (ELSA name) just finds me and she's like (child name) calm down, remember what we said and then I calm down and then I remember. If she wasn't there for me, I'd be like, really, really sad”</p>
1c. Advocate for the Child	<p>Interviewer: okay, so why was it important to tell her everything that you needed to tell her.</p> <p>Child: otherwise she could get the wrong description and start telling my mum that I have done the wrong thing</p> <p>Interviewer: I see so by telling her, she can then tell your mum the right things.</p> <p>Child: yeah and all I have got to do it be truthful.</p> <p>“The book that she [ELSA] gave to me we wrapped it in red paper and then umm like, in the book we put and it shows and explains [my] grief and then like my parents can read about it and until it gets smaller.”</p>
1d. Close Relationship with the Child	<p>“Erm...I will be scared all the time, cause I had no one, I have no one to talk to.”</p>

Theme 2: Unique Qualities and Skills

2a. Accessible

“She takes me out from class and she will [...] and she will then speak to me about what we were doing and then when she would and then she would talk to me about it”

2b. Distinct Role

“(ELSA name) sees my family and that, obviously my mum and dad and like they’ve got time to talk about stuff”

Theme 3: Facilitates Skill Development

3a. Practical Resources

“we love making like these booklets and, last week we made these little worry dolls.”

“there are like different bears and she would say out a bear and I would have to say the emotion.”

“sometimes she gets her magical sand out, which is really calming and we do like worksheets”

3b. Emotional Literacy

“It makes me feel like, say if when I have an argument at lunch time, (ELSA name) calls me to come into this room and do our booklet or do something. Then it will always make me feel like calmer and like spending time with her makes me forget about what happened. (ELSA name) is like she is like cheers you up so much.”

“Now I have been working with (ELSA name), I had like not as many like arguments with people, because erm...we like like gone out, like if it's been an argument, I would come to (ELSA name), have a word and think of a way of how could help me, And if argument again did happen, what I can do to stop, to try to stop it from happening again.”

3c. Strategies and Explicit Teaching

“So it’s like. Say if you had a big rucksack and it was filled with loads of bad emotions and it was really heavy. You want to try and get all those emotions out so that’s what I do, so I put it in Clive and then all my and then that rucksack turns up and then pours them all out and then it goes.”

“I find it hard doing breathing exercises”

#### Theme 4: Positive Impact

##### 4a. Value ELSA

“Because of all my friendship issues, like I find it hard to be friends with people, and I think like when I have been working with (ELSA name), I got more confident with my friends and I got more friends.”

“Because when I was with her, it make me enjoy, but when I wasn’t I was like upset...cause when I was angry I couldn’t go in there and like cool down.”

“no, I can’t imagine [what it would have been like without ELSA support] – really, really bad. I feel like I had arguments everyday before”.

“It would be really hard for me because I would just keep getting upset because I wouldn’t have someone to express my feelings with and it would just get bigger and bigger.”

##### 4b. Behaviour Management

“Makes me calm down a little bit and then we play a game and then that makes me more calm down and then she makes me....and then she makes jokes and that.”

“think it would be worse than it was in Year 3, so I would be like, (long pause) bad and (pause) and I would hurt people and there would be lots of injuries and I don't want that to happen. And when I'm older I'd probably be like, I'll get in

trouble with by the police. That's what I thought before I met (ELSA name)"

#### 4c. Emotional Regulation

"Well...she helps you with like...issues, you just had an argument, you can ask a teacher to come up to (ELSA name)'s room and then you can like speak to ELSA1. And then she can, she would try and help in any way."

"yeah helped me not react, helped me to like calm down sometimes or like suggestions how to calm down and like I take deep breaths and will just walk away."

#### 4d. Self-awareness

"it's showing that you don't have to use the emotions all the time unless you are really frustrated"

"they're helpful because then I get to share my worries so they're not all trapped inside"

"Sometimes I go and I have a problem in class, and she comes and gets me in and I go into, um the science room and speak about it, and then, I do my ELSA and then I go back up and then I'm fine"

#### 4e. Access to Learning

Child: "because I can now, 'cause I can now do a lot more writing in lessons. And sometimes I do double of what other people do in the class"

Interviewer: "wow, and why can you do more writing?"

Child: "because of her (ELSA) I have had a lot more calm-down time."

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