

Case Study 1: An Evidence-Based Practice Review Report

Theme: School/Setting Based Interventions for Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

What aspects of social or emotional development and wellbeing do pupils and parents feel that the ELSA intervention has improved?

Summary

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme was established to upskill existing school support staffs' capacity to address the emotional wellbeing and social development of pupils, through strategies to develop emotional resilience (Burton, 2008). The programme of training is delivered by educational psychologists (EPs) and EPs continue to provide regular supervision to practicing ELSAs. This systematic literature review aims to consider the experiences of pupils and views of the parents of pupils who have received targeted intervention from an ELSA, to explore what, if any, aspects of social or emotional development and wellbeing the intervention improves. Five identified studies have been appraised using Gough's (2007) weight of evidence (WoE) framework and Thomas and Harden's (2008) process of thematic synthesis has been applied to the extracted findings. This resulted in a total of nine descriptive themes being identified and three over-arching analytical themes of *Emotions & Feelings*, *New Beginnings* and *Relationships* being developed. These themes inform the conclusions in support of the ELSA programme improving aspects of social and emotional development and wellbeing. Implications for practice and future research are discussed, with direct relevance to the practice of EPs in training ELSAs and promoting the sustainability of the outcomes of the intervention. Limitations to the review and findings are also considered.

Introduction

Children and young people's mental health has been spotlighted by the UK Government in recent years and the role educational settings can play in addressing needs is recognised as making a vital contribution (Department of Health and Department for Education, 2017). It is likely that in the context of the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic there will be an increase in children and young people requiring mental health and emotional wellbeing support (Cortina et al., 2020). Schools need to provide a robust response to this, in addition to addressing the attainment differentiation and deficits that will have resulted from the significant disruption to learning that has arisen from school closures.

Emotional and mental health support for children and young people within schools is organised into universal (whole-school, curriculum-based), targeted and specialist approaches (Dunsmuir & Cobbald, 2017). The Government's 2017 Green Paper *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision (DoH & DoE, 2017)*, highlighted that early intervention and targeted support, provided within the school setting, might be less stigmatising than being referred to external services/agencies and therefore more accepted by children, young people and their families (DoH & DoE, 2017).

The ELSA programme

Developed by the EP Sheila Burton, within local authority practice in the South of England, the programme aims to develop existing school resources (support staff) to offer individualised support from ELSAs (Burton, 2008). The

programme is co-ordinated to deliver targeted, short-term, intervention to pupils experiencing challenges to their emotional wellbeing, it aims to provide a safe-space within school for these to be addressed (Burton, 2008). The training and supervision of ELSAs is provided by EP practitioners. Initial training (usually 5-6 days) covers the psychological underpinnings of the programme and strategies to develop time-limited, task-based, interventions to address individualised targets that are established for the pupil at the outset (The ELSA Network, 2018). Ongoing, EP-led, supervision across groups of ELSAs is provided on a half-termly basis.

Psychological basis

There is not the scope to provide in-depth discussion of the psychological underpinnings to the programme here; however, it is relevant to consider them in brief. The programme aims to respond to the 'needs' identified in Maslow's motivational hierarchy (1970, cited in Burton, 2008), which suggests, in the context of enhancing school-based learning, that to attend to the apex of the hierarchy - self-actualisation, and be most receptive to meet learning potential, physiological, safety, belongingness and esteem needs must be attended to, in turn, satisfactorily.

Other psychological theories influencing the training of ELSAs and the delivery of the programme include, Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, cited in Burton, 2008) and Goleman's contributions on emotional intelligence (EI) and self-awareness, including the suggestion that EI is more important than IQ in determining success in life (Goleman, 2004). The influence of social learning theory relates to ELSAs becoming positive

'models', working with individuals to develop effective ways to recognise and manage emotions and understand links with behaviour. This is a key aim of the programme, promoting the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Burton, 2008).

A central concept is that of emotional literacy (Steiner & Parry, 1997, cited in Weare, 2003), encompassing the skills of 'self-understanding; understanding and managing emotions and understanding social situations and making relationships' (Weare, 2003, online p. 3-4). The ELSA programme looks to address skills of emotional literacy in response to the individual's unique situation. Effective emotional regulation, an aspect of emotional literacy, is linked to 'social and academic achievement' (Snow, 2020, p.4).

Rationale and Relevance

Table 1, provides an overview of research published since 2010, by area of investigation, contributing to an evidence-base for the ELSA programme. Full references can be found in the reference section. Much of the earlier research was completed by the original founder and published by the ELSA Network (www.elsanetwork.org.) and therefore the potential for bias in reporting needs to be carefully considered. More recently, there has been an increase in peer reviewed publications considering different aspects of the ELSA programme, it's impact and effectiveness. In addition, there is a growing body of grey literature, such as thesis studies that further contribute to the evidence-base.

Table 1
 Overview of published research since 2010

Author/s	Research area						
	Training	Supervision	Parental views	Staff views	ELSA focussed	Pupil focussed	Pupil views
Grahamslaw (2010)					+	+	
Hill et al. (2013)				+			+
Mann (2014)				+		+	+
Osbourne & Burton (2014)		+					
Dodds et al. (2015)				+			
Leighton (2015)	+						
Miles (2015)					+	+	
Hills (2016)						+	+
Rees (2016)					+		
Wilding & Claridge (2016)			+			+	
Barker (2017)			+				+
Ridley (2017)		+					
Bland et al. (2018)	+						
Atkin (2019)		+					
Balampanidou (2019)						+	+
McEwan (2019)				+		+	+
France et al. (2020)		+					
Harris (2020)					+		
Krause et al. (2020)						+	+
Peters (2020)						+	+
Wong et al. (2020)						+	+

The research evidence-base is of importance to school leadership, EPs and Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), in decision making. The EPS is required to invest in the programme in order to provide quality training to local ELSAs and maintain the fidelity of the programme through regular EP-led supervision. EPs, as ‘scientist-practitioners’ (Birch et al., 2015), will seek robust evidence for the efficacy of the programme and will need to respond to address any less-positive outcomes of new research generated.

Only in this way, can they reliably promote the programme to the schools, children and families that they serve. This review aims to ‘take stock’ of what the evidence-base for the ELSA programme currently suggests in view of pupil and parent experiences, specifically, what aspects of social and emotional development and wellbeing ELSA intervention has improved.

Review Question

What aspects of social or emotional development and wellbeing do pupils and parents feel that the ELSA intervention has improved?

Critical Review of the Evidence Base

Literature Search

The systematic literature searches were completed on 12 January 2021, using the databases PsycINFO, the Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), Web of Science, the British Education Index (BEI) and Google Scholar. The search terms used are detailed in Figure 1 - Flowchart of Searching and Screening Procedures, which represents the searching and screening process. The criteria implemented for the inclusion and exclusion of identified studies, at full text screening stage, are presented in Table 2. Details of excluded studies, including the rationale for exclusion, can be

found in Appendix A. Table 3, provides the full references of studies that were included in the critical review.

Figure 1 – Flowchart of Searching and Screening Procedures

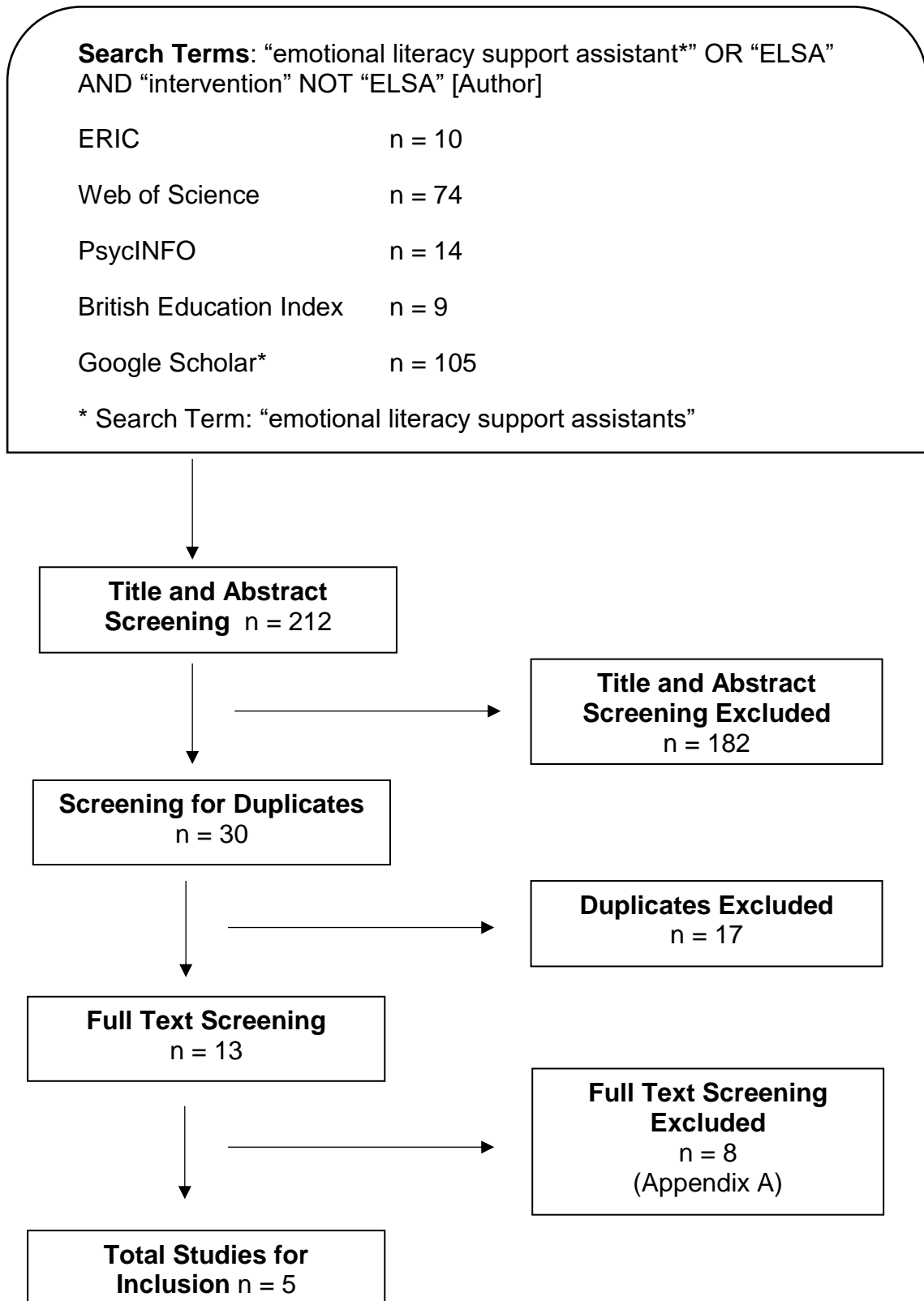


Table 2
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
1. Participants	Participants have received ELSA intervention, or have a child that has received ELSA intervention	Exclusively the views of ELSAs or other school staff. Participants have not received ELSA intervention, or do not have a child that has received ELSA intervention.	Looking at childrens' and parents' perspectives
2. Location	Schools in the UK	Schools outside of the UK	Looking at evidence in a UK context
3. Methodology	Qualitative methodology or mixed-methods where qualitative data can be extracted	Exclusively quantitative methodology, or mixed-methods where qualitative data cannot be extracted	Qualitative method best for collating opinions and feelings
4. Publication type	Peer reviewed journal	Non-peer reviewed publications	Included studies have been reviewed prior to publication, suggesting a good degree of credibility

Table 3
Included Studies

Full Reference
Hills, R. (2016). An evaluation of the emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) project from the perspectives of primary school children. <i>Educational and Child Psychology</i> , 33(4), 50-65. Retrieved from: https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/3579627/mod_page/content/3/Vol_33_%284%29.pdf
Krause, N., Blackwell, L., & Claridge, S. (2020). An exploration of the

impact of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme on wellbeing from the perspective of pupils. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 36(1), 17-31. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1657801>

McEwen, S. (2019) The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme: ELSAs' and children's experiences, *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 35(3), 289-306. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2019.1585332>

Wilding, L. & Claridge, S. (2016). The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme: parental perceptions of its impact in school and at home, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 32(2), 180-196. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2016.1146573>

Wong, B., Cripps, D., White, H., Young, L., Kovshoff, H., Pinkard, H. & Woodcock, C. (2020). Primary school children's perspectives and experiences of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) support. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 36(3), 313-327. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2020.1781064>

Weight of Evidence (WoE)

Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WoE) framework was implemented to evaluate the papers identified for the review:

WoE A – compares studies on methodological quality using the *Standards for reporting qualitative research: a synthesis of recommendations* (O'Brien et al., 2014) criteria (Appendix B)

WoE B – criteria for appraising methodological relevance to the review question (Appendix C, Table 1)

WoE C – criteria for appraising topic relevance to the review question (Appendix C, Table 2).

A summary of WoE B & C ratings, by study, is detailed in Appendix C, Table 3.

The average of these three domains of the framework provided an overall

WoE D score which has been rated into the categories of strong (2.5 and above), medium (1.5 - 2.4) and weak (0 – 1.4). A summary of WoE scores and ratings is presented in Table 4.

Although it is acknowledged that there exists some concern within the qualitative review literature that coding protocols and scoring schedules should not be applied to qualitative data (Noyes et al., 2018), it is a requirement of the current review process and the tools have been selected (WoE A) and developed (WoE B & C) with consideration of the limitations to applying protocol criteria to qualitative studies. No studies have been excluded on the basis of quality score ‘cut-offs’, Noyes et al. (2018) comment this is not appropriate for qualitative reviews.

Table 4

Summary of WoE A, B, C and D

Study	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	Overall WoE D
Hills, 2016	2 (Medium)	2 (Medium)	1.7 (Medium)	1.9 (Medium)
Krause et al., 2020	3 (Strong)	1.3 (Weak)	2.7 (Strong)	2.3 (Medium)
McEwan, 2019	2 (Medium)	1.7 (Medium)	1.3 (Weak)	1.7 (Medium)
Wilding & Claridge, 2016	3 (Strong)	1.3 (Weak)	2 (Medium)	2.1 (Medium)
Wong et al., 2020	3 (Strong)	2 (Medium)	1.7 (Medium)	2.2 (Medium)

Where: Weak – 0-1.4, Medium – 1.5-2.4, Strong – 2.5-3

Comparison of Included Studies

Characteristics of each of the studies included within the review are detailed in Table 5 - Mapping the Field.

Table 5 - Mapping the Field

Study	Aims	Methods/ Analysis	Study Location	ELSA Intervention	Sample Size	Sample characteristics				WoE D
						Gender	Ages	SES	Ethnicity	
<p>Author: Hills (2016) Title: An evaluation of the emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) project from the perspectives of primary school children.</p>	<p>Evaluation of an ELSA project in one Local Authority from the perspectives of primary school children.</p>	<p>Two-phase sequential mixed- methods (Qualitative phase – principle method) Semi- structured interviews – full schedule included. Analysis followed Braun & Clark’s (2006) Thematic Analysis</p>	<p>One outer London Borough</p>	<p>All participants involved with ELSA in the preceding six months. Length of involvement not explicitly stated (WoE C medium given as a precaution)</p>	<p>9 pupils – selection criteria (from first phase n = 53) unclear</p>	<p>5 female 4 male</p>	<p>7 -10 years</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Authors: Krause, Blackwell, & Claridge (2020)</p>	<p>To investigate the impact of the ELSA programme</p>	<p>Semi- structured interviews. No schedule available.</p>	<p>One local authority in Wales – two primary</p>	<p>Participants had attended a minimum of six ELSA sessions</p>	<p>13 pupils</p>	<p>8 female 5 male</p>	<p>5-16 years</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>2.3</p>

Study	Aims	Methods/ Analysis	Study Location	ELSA Intervention	Sample Size	Sample characteristics				WoE D
						Gender	Ages	SES	Ethnicity	
<p>Title: An exploration of the impact of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme on wellbeing from the perspective of pupils.</p>	<p>on wellbeing (as described by the New Economics Foundation and Seligman’s “PERMA model”) from the perspective of pupils.</p>	<p>Analysis followed Braun & Clark’s (2006) Thematic Analysis</p>	<p>and two secondary schools</p>							
<p>Author: McEwan (2019) Title: The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme: ELSAs’ and children’s experiences.</p>	<p>Explore an understanding of ELSAs’ and children’s experiences of the ELSA programme.</p>	<p>Pupils: Semi-structured interviews, “comic strip conversation technique. ELSA’s: Semi-structured interviews and Q-sort activity.</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>Does not state duration of ELSA involvement for Pupils or ELSAs.</p>	<p>7 pupils 8 ELSAs</p>	<p>3 female 4 male</p>	<p>5 – 11 years</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>1.7</p>

Study	Aims	Methods/ Analysis	Study Location	ELSA Intervention	Sample Size	Sample characteristics				WoE D
						Gender	Ages	SES	Ethnicity	
		Analysis followed Braun & Clark's (2006) Thematic Analysis								
Authors: Wilding & Claridge (2016) Title: The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme: parental perceptions of its impact in school and at home.	Exploring parental perceptions of ELSA programme.	Semi-structured interviews. Full schedule included. Analysis followed Braun & Clark's (2013) Thematic Analysis for identifying themes and patterns	4 UK primary schools, within 2 local authorities	ELSA implemented for at least one year. Parents' children must have attended at least six ELSA sessions.	8 parents	7 female 1 male	NS	2 Schools selected with higher than average eligibility for free school meals. 2 schools selected with lower than average eligibility for free	NS	2.1

Study	Aims	Methods/ Analysis	Study Location	ELSA Intervention	Sample Size	Sample characteristics				WoE D
						Gender	Ages	SES	Ethnicity	
<p>Authors: Wong, Cripps, White, Young, Kovshoff, Pinkard & Woodcock, (2020). Title: Primary school children’s perspectives and experiences of Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) support.</p>	<p>To gather children’s views on their ELSA’s role, their relationship with the ELSA and the impact and limitations of their ELSA support.</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews. Schedule designed by 6 authors & pilot interview conducted. Analysis followed Braun & Clark’s (2006), Thematic Analysis, completed by research group.</p>	<p>One local authority in England</p>	<p>Participants had worked with an ELSA for at least one month.</p>	<p>12 pupils</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>7-11 years</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>NS</p>	<p>2.2</p>
<p>NS – Not stated</p>										

Participants

The combined sum of participants across the five studies totalled 41 pupils, ranging in age from 5 – 16 years, and 8 parents. One study did not provide details of the gender of participants (Wong et al., 2020), otherwise details of the gender split are given in Table 5. With the missing data it is not possible to comment on the balance of representativeness between male and female pupils across the 41 pupil participants. Only one of the eight parents were male.

None of the studies reported on the ethnicity of participants. All pupil experiences of ELSA were within mainstream primary or secondary settings. Cautious interpretation is thus required, as results are not explicitly representative of the wider population with regards to ethnicity or across school placement settings (i.e. specialist provision). All studies were rated medium for WoE C's 'population' criteria, as they considered either the parents' or pupils' views, no study covered both perspectives, which would have been given a rating of 3 (strong) and could be used to compare the perspectives of parents and children for the same course of intervention.

Sampling

All five studies provide some detail of how participant samples were derived. Hills (2016) explicitly refers to a "sequential purposive sampling strategy", but gives no criteria for how the nine participants within the qualitative phase of the research were selected. Four of the studies considered the length of time pupils had received intervention from an ELSA, within their sampling strategy (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; Wilding & Claridge, 2016; Wong et al., 2020). The 'context' criteria for WoE C rated the studies according to this

information. One study had, additionally, considered the length of time the ELSA programme had been established within the setting (Wilding & Claridge, 2016). Hills (2016) was given a medium rating for 'context' criteria in WoE C due to reporting that participants received involvement with "the ELSA project in the last six months" (Hills, 2016, p.53), therefore there could have been some who had received less than six sessions. The McEwan (2019) study scored weak for WoE C, in part, due to not reporting any data under the 'context' criteria. This study also reported that pupils were put forward by the ELSAs taking part in the study, which could result in some bias in sampling and potentially producing data that inflates the positive outcomes of the programme.

Two of the studies explicitly excluded pupils and families who were experiencing current trauma/issues, so as not to burden them (Wilding & Claridge, 2016; Wong et al., 2020). Wilding and Claridge (2016), made attempts to diversify their sample by identifying schools using criteria based upon the percentage of pupils receiving free school meals (as a measure associated with socio-economic status). This was considered in allocating the WoE B 'Qualitative Hierarchy' criteria (Daly et al., 2007, Appendix C). Despite this attempt to provide more diversity to the sample, other criteria for a medium or strong rating were not met and all five studies were rated as weak applying the 'Qualitative Hierarchy at Level III – descriptive studies'.

Methods

The chosen method for each of the studies was semi-structured interview, to gather the thoughts and experiences of their sampled population, in light of the research questions posed. Although three studies scored the highest

WoE A rating, Wong et al (2020) had the highest individual score, with a contributing factor to this being the implementation of a pilot interview, which was appraised by the research team before proceeding with it.

WoE B criteria rated the studies for methodological relevance to the current review. Wilding and Claridge (2016) collected data from parents and therefore only recorded verbal responses (rated weak). The 'participant response' criteria rated studies higher for allowing responses via alternative mediums, in recognition that children can be found to express themselves more, or be more comfortable, through varied means (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). Krause et al. (2020) received a weak rating as there was no access provided/offered to the full semi-structured interview schedule for the study. This resulted in a lack of transparency in the interview schedule measuring the research questions they set out to. Nonetheless, because the authors designed their study around two models of child wellbeing the study was rated strong for WoE C criteria 'outcome focus' despite not having full access to the interview schedule. In respect of this criteria all other studies (Hills, 2016; McEwen, 2019; Wilding & Claridge, 2016; Wong et al., 2020) were rated weak for 'outcome focus' as their methods considered broad perspectives and experiences of the ELSA programme, rather than social or emotional development or wellbeing outcomes, explicitly.

Analysis of Data

All five studies utilised Thematic Analysis (TA) in analysing their data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Clarke and Braun (2017) promote the flexibility of the TA approach, in the exploration and interpretation of many types of qualitative data collection. For example, the method can be

used to manage data from very small (even single- case studies) participant numbers to large group data collection, such as multiple focus groups (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Within WoE A criteria, Wong et al. (2020) were the only authors to report ‘techniques to enhance trustworthiness’ (O’Brien et al., 2014, p.1247), as the research team jointly analysed the data.

Findings

All of the studies were appraised to an overall WoE D rating of Medium and thus contributed equally to the findings.

Thomas and Harden’s (2008) stages of thematic synthesis (TS) have been adopted for data analysis. Findings were extracted from the results or findings sections of the included studies (see Appendix D). This method takes a ‘realist’ approach, staying close to the primary study findings, rather than the authors’ interpretations and conclusions (Thomas et al., 2017). This was more difficult in the case of Wilding and Claridge (2016) and Krause et al. (2020), as they reported the results/findings in conjunction with their discussion. Attention was required to ensure that the findings extraction focused on direct reference (e.g. quotes) to the data collected.

The first stage of TS is to establish *codes* for the extracted findings, which are then used in the development of *descriptive themes* (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Across the five studies 24 codes were initially created. These codes were further analysed and grouped into the 9 descriptive themes generated. In the third stage of the TS process three *analytical themes* evolved from the findings which were developed by the reviewer to directly address the review question and seek to go ‘beyond’ the synthesised findings of the primary studies (Thomas et al., 2017; Thomas & Harden, 2008). Three analytical

themes have been developed (Emotions & Feelings, New Beginnings & Relationships), Table 6 illustrates where evidence for the descriptive and analytical themes has been derived from each study. Each analytical theme has between 2-4 descriptive themes contributing to it. Each descriptive theme has evidence from at least three studies.

Findings of themes were relative to WoE C criteria for topic relevance.

Krause et al. (2020), rated strong, provided evidence across all ten descriptive themes. Less were evident in medium rated studies (Wilding & Claridge, 2016; Hills, 2016; Wong et al., 2020). McEwan (2019), rated weak for WoE C and this is reflected in the number of themes identified.

Emotions & Feelings

Within the analytical theme of emotions and feelings four descriptive themes were identified: Opportunity to express; Less anger; More calm and Less worries/anxiety. Five out of eight parents reported their child to be calmer and four acknowledged a value of allowing children the opportunity to express their emotions and feelings to somebody in school (Wilding & Claridge, 2016). The former was expressed by children across all five studies, alongside children commenting on experiencing less anger, following the ELSA intervention (Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wong et al., 2020). Others reported feeling calmer (Krause et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2020) and across all pupil studies the descriptive themes of 'Opportunity to express' and 'Less worries/anxiety' were evidenced (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wong et al., 2020).

Table 6
 Thematic Synthesis Summary – Analytical and Descriptive Themes by Study

Study	WoE D	N	Emotions & Feelings				New Beginnings		Relationships		
			Opportunity to express	Less anger	More calm	Less worries/ anxiety	Personalised strategies	Positive change	Trust & advocacy	Friendships	Family
Hills (2016)	1.9 (medium)	9 pupils	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Krause et al. (2020)	2.3 (medium)	13 pupils	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
McEwan (2019)	1.7 (medium)	7 pupils	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
Wilding & Claridge (2016)	2.1 (medium)	8 parents	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Wong et al. (2020)	2.2 (medium)	12 pupils	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

New Beginnings

Contributing to the analytical theme of New Beginnings were the descriptive themes of 'Personalised strategies'; 'Positive change' and 'Identifying solutions'. This theme conceptualises feelings and experiences of aspects relating to social and emotional development and wellbeing that can 'live on' after the intervention formally ends. A pupil participant quote to illustrate the analytical conception was: "*I feel confident that I am going to have my happy ever after*" (Pupil 7, Krause et al., 2020, p.25)

Parents provided evidence for all three descriptive themes (Wilding & Claridge, 2016). Pupil participant studies all supported the 'personalised strategies' theme (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wong et al., 2020), which encapsulates the acquisition of skills and strategies to manage situations, behaviours and emotions as an individual, often with the outcome of being used in and out of the school context (i.e. also in the home and community settings). Importantly, one quote from Wong et al. (2020), suggested a less positive view of a personalised strategy "*I find it hard doing breathing exercises*" (p.326). This has been the only identified extracted finding (of relevance to the current review question) across the five studies not to promote a wholly positive view of the intervention.

'Positive change' was evidenced across the Hills (2016); Krause et al. (2020) and Wong et al. (2020) pupil participant studies. Some examples of codes which developed into the positive change theme were increased self-confidence; feeling happier; increased participation in activities, increased emotional regulation; increased self-awareness and skills in managing their own behaviour.

Relationships

Within the analytical theme of Relationships, three descriptive themes were developed from the extracted findings, 'Trust and advocacy'; 'Friendships'; and 'Family'. 'Trust and advocacy' refers to aspects within the ELSA-child relationship, which were identified across all four pupil participant studies (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wong et al., 2020). All five studies noted evidence of friendships, as an aspect of social or emotional development and wellbeing, being improved. Some evidence in this respect links to the 'personalised strategies' and 'positive change' evident in the analytical theme of New Beginnings, in that children develop a strategy to manage their relationships more positively, which impacts on their friendships and their confidence in relationships.

Similarly, parents and children across three studies (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; Wilding & Claridge, 2016) expressed views regarding improved family relationships, attributing this to an outcome of the ELSA intervention. The improved family relationships included the outcome of some children feeling better able to express their feelings in the home environment (Hills, 2016), providing a link to the descriptive theme of 'opportunity to express', which could continue to act as a supportive strategy after an ELSA intervention ends.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The findings of this review provide some encouraging evidence in support of the ELSA programme improving aspects of social and emotional development and wellbeing, in line with its aims. Such findings are not considered conclusive, due to the limitations of the review, to be discussed.

However, recommendations for future research and implications for practice are put forward.

The findings have captured evidence that a central part of the programme for pupils is the development of a trusting relationship with an adult in school and the opportunity to express themselves to that individual. As many of the primary studies and other researchers highlight, it is difficult to separate the benefits of the existence of the relationship to the application of the ELSA programme itself, without an experimental control group (Hills, 2016; Krause et al.; Pickering et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2020). Nevertheless, providing an opportunity to express themselves and pupils taking this opportunity is a consistent finding for an improved aspect of social or emotional development and wellbeing.

Improvements in friendships were enhanced for many pupils by their involvement in the ELSA programme and this was also highlighted by the parents (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wilding & Claridge, 2016; Wong et al., 2020). For some, relationships within the family were reported to have improved as well (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; Wilding & Claridge, 2016). Strategies were often found to support the pupil, in school, at home and across community contexts (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wilding & Claridge, 2016; Wong et al., 2020). The strategies not only applied to the relationship improvements but also to the pupils' control and management of anger, being calmer and having less worry or anxiety. This demonstrates that the descriptive themes interact and compliment one another in many ways.

The 'New Beginnings' theme, encapsulates the process in which children developed their skills and self-efficacy in managing situations (Hills, 2016; Krause et al., 2020; McEwan, 2019; Wong et al., 2020) and parents seem to have recognised this too (Wilding & Claridge, 2016). These findings suggest that individuals acquire skills to enable them to take greater control and change, or manage, their behaviour. It is important to reflect, that The ELSA Network (2018) advise that there is no aim of 'fixing problems' in the programme, the focus is to support the pupil's experience and enable/encourage their own problem solving.

In view of future implications, if these developments are achieved, an important next step would be to support the sustainability of the skills after the ELSA programme ends. It is recommended that further research is conducted into what follow-up is most beneficial to the maintenance and mastery of the skills and strategies acquired throughout the programme. One such suggestion might be to utilise the expertise of 'graduates' of the programme to scaffold the support of others, for example in 'drop-in sessions', where those who have previously been involved in the programme can attend to maintain a supportive relationship and model to others the positive outcomes they experienced. The aim of this would be to promote both a sense of efficacy and of 'giving back' to the programme. In addition, this practice may serve as a reminder or reinforcement of the benefits of the programme for the previous participants. This approach may also add to the whole-school ethos of valuing pupil emotional wellbeing, known to be a significant factor in effective school-based support (see Dunsmuir & Cobbald, 2017).

Managing the end of the programme and future connection with pupils (without dependence) is an area of further research to inform the training and supervision of ELSAs. Also, no research identified for this review triangulated the experiences of pupils, parents and ELSAs, which would likely provide a valuable insight. Future research could seek to consider outcomes such as engagement or attainment measures, exploring whether improved emotional wellbeing impacts on these, as Maslow's hierarchy might suggest (Maslow, 1970, cited in Mann, 2014). In line with the view of Petticrew and Roberts (2006), this systematic review, conducted "in an immature field" (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p.35) has contributed knowledge on the areas where further data is required.

A limitation within the review is that the fidelity of the ELSA provision could not be appraised, making it hard to establish whether outcomes pupils and parents were attributing to the ELSA programme would be generalisable. Pickering et al. (2019) discuss the difficulties of trying to establish an evidence base for the ELSA programme, given its individualised context, making like-for-like comparisons very difficult to achieve.

Thus, overall the review provides a systematic consideration of peer-reviewed studies, in respect of the aspects of social and emotional development and wellbeing the ELSA intervention has improved. Readers are advised to take caution in interpreting the findings, given the restricted sample and other limitations highlighted and reflect on the following quote from Petticrew and Roberts (2006): "*Systematic reviews may contribute to the evidence-based decision making, but are not themselves decisions*"

(p.45). EPSs, EPs and Senior Leaders in schools will need to continue to monitor research to inform decision-making and practice development.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Excluded Studies

Appendix B – WoE A criteria, Protocol and summary overview

Appendix C – WoE B and WoE C Criteria and Summary

Appendix D – Findings Extraction Example from Hills (2016)

Appendix A – Excluded Studies

Full Reference	Reason
Bravery, K. & Harris, L. (2009). <i>Emotional Literacy Support Assistants in Bournemouth: Impact and Outcomes</i> . Bournemouth Educational Psychology Service. Retrieved from: https://www.elsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ELSA-in-Bournemouth-Impact-and-Outcomes.pdf	Criterion 1 Participants Criterion 4 Publication type
Mann, D. (2014). <i>A mixed methods evaluation of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA) project</i> [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham]. Retrieved from: http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/14245/4/Research_Thesis_Final_1.5%20%282%29.pdf	Criterion 4 Publication type
Dodds, J. & Blake, R. (2015). Investigation into the Effectiveness of Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) in Schools. ELSA Network. Retrieved from: https://www.elsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ELSA-Report-Investigation-into-the-Effectiveness-of-ELSA-in-Schools_Plymouth.pdf	Criterion 1 Participants Criterion 4 Publication type
Hill, T., O'Hare, D. & Weidberg, F. (2013). <i>"He's always there when I need him": Exploring the perceived positive impact of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme</i> . ELSA Network. Retrieved from: https://www.elsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/FinalElsaReport_North-Somerset.pdf	Criterion 4 Publication type
Grahamslaw, L. (2010). <i>An evaluation of the Emotional Literary Support Assistant (ELSA) project: what is the impact of an ELSA project on support assistants' and children's self-efficacy beliefs</i> [Doctoral dissertation, Newcastle University]. Retrieved from: https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/handle/10443/3117	Criterion 1 Participants Criterion 3 Methodology Criterion 4 Publication type
Barker, H. (2017). <i>The emotional literacy support assistant intervention: an exploration from the perspectives of pupils and parents</i> [Doctoral dissertation, Newcastle University]. Retrieved from: https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/handle/10443/3923	Criterion 4 Publication type
Peters, S. (2020) <i>Exploring the experience for young people of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention: case studies in secondary schools</i> [Doctoral dissertation, University College	Criterion 4 Publication type

London]. Retrieved from:
<https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10101254/>

Balampanidou, K. (2019). *Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) programme: Child-centred approach, building trust, listening and valuing children's voices: A grounded theory analysis* [Doctoral dissertation, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust in association with University of Essex]. Retrieved from:
<http://repository.tavistockandportman.ac.uk/2150/>

Criterion 4
Publication
type

Appendix B – WoE A

In applying Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence framework, WoE A is applied as an evaluation or judgement that is unrelated to the specific review question, applied uniformly to each included study. There are a large number of published appraisals for the evaluation of qualitative research studies. This review employed O'Brien et al.'s (2014) Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR), due to the recommendations published on The Equator Network website, hosted by the Centre for Statistics in Medicine at the University of Oxford (<https://www.equator-network.org>).

The peer-reviewed SRQR is recommended in the critical appraisal of qualitative research and contains 21 items for consideration (Figure 1). The SRQR was used to appraise the five included studies in the current review, allocating a score per item, giving a total out of 21 (Table 1). The scores were then converted into WoE A ratings, of 1 - Weak (scores of 0 - 7), 2 - Medium (8 - 14) and 3 - Strong (15-21), which were used in the calculation of the WoE D for each study.

Figure 1 - Standards for reporting qualitative research, O'Brien et al. (2014)

No.	Topic	Item
Title and abstract		
S1	Title	Concise description of the nature and topic of the study Identifying the study as qualitative or indicating the approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory) or data collection methods (e.g., interview, focus group) is recommended
S2	Abstract	Summary of key elements of the study using the abstract format of the intended publication; typically includes background, purpose, methods, results, and conclusions
Introduction		
S3	Problem formulation	Description and significance of the problem/phenomenon studied; review of relevant theory and empirical work; problem statement
S4	Purpose or research question	Purpose of the study and specific objectives or questions
Methods		
S5	Qualitative approach and research paradigm	Qualitative approach (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, narrative research) and guiding theory if appropriate; identifying the research paradigm (e.g., postpositivist, constructivist/interpretivist) is also recommended; rationale ^b
S6	Researcher characteristics and reflexivity	Researchers' characteristics that may influence the research, including personal attributes, qualifications/experience, relationship with participants, assumptions, and/or presuppositions; potential or actual interaction between researchers' characteristics and the research questions, approach, methods, results, and/or transferability
S7	Context	Setting/site and salient contextual factors; rationale ^b
S8	Sampling strategy	How and why research participants, documents, or events were selected; criteria for deciding when no further sampling was necessary (e.g., sampling saturation); rationale ^b
S9	Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects	Documentation of approval by an appropriate ethics review board and participant consent, or explanation for lack thereof; other confidentiality and data security issues
S10	Data collection methods	Types of data collected; details of data collection procedures including (as appropriate) start and stop dates of data collection and analysis, iterative process, triangulation of sources/methods, and modification of procedures in response to evolving study findings; rationale ^b
S11	Data collection instruments and technologies	Description of instruments (e.g., interview guides, questionnaires) and devices (e.g., audio recorders) used for data collection; if/how the instrument(s) changed over the course of the study
S12	Units of study	Number and relevant characteristics of participants, documents, or events included in the study; level of participation (could be reported in results)
S13	Data processing	Methods for processing data prior to and during analysis, including transcription, data entry, data management and security, verification of data integrity, data coding, and anonymization/deidentification of excerpts
S14	Data analysis	Process by which inferences, themes, etc., were identified and developed, including the researchers involved in data analysis; usually references a specific paradigm or approach; rationale ^b
S15	Techniques to enhance trustworthiness	Techniques to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis (e.g., member checking, audit trail, triangulation); rationale ^b
Results/findings		
S16	Synthesis and interpretation	Main findings (e.g., interpretations, inferences, and themes); might include development of a theory or model, or integration with prior research or theory
S17	Links to empirical data	Evidence (e.g., quotes, field notes, text excerpts, photographs) to substantiate analytic findings
Discussion		
S18	Integration with prior work, implications, transferability, and contribution(s) to the field	Short summary of main findings; explanation of how findings and conclusions connect to, support, elaborate on, or challenge conclusions of earlier scholarship; discussion of scope of application/generalizability; identification of unique contribution(s) to scholarship in a discipline or field
S19	Limitations	Trustworthiness and limitations of findings
Other		
S20	Conflicts of interest	Potential sources of influence or perceived influence on study conduct and conclusions; how these were managed
S21	Funding	Sources of funding and other support; role of funders in data collection, interpretation, and reporting

^aThe authors created the SRQR by searching the literature to identify guidelines, reporting standards, and critical appraisal criteria for qualitative research; reviewing the reference lists of retrieved sources; and contacting experts to gain feedback. The SRQR aims to improve the transparency of all aspects of qualitative research by providing clear standards for reporting qualitative research.

^bThe rationale should briefly discuss the justification for choosing that theory, approach, method, or technique rather than other options available, the assumptions and limitations implicit in those choices, and how those choices influence study conclusions and transferability. As appropriate, the rationale for several items might be discussed together.

Table 1 – WoE A of each study

Study	Title & Abstract		Introduction				Methods							Results/ Findings			Discussion		Other		WoE A Total	WoE A Rating	
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20			S21
Hills, 2016	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	11	2 Medium
Krause et al., 2020	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	15	3 Strong
McEwan, 2019	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	12	2 Medium
Wilding & Claridge, 2016	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	15	3 Strong
Wong et al., 2020	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	16	3 Strong

Appendix C – WoE B and WoE C Criteria and Summary

WoE B was developed to evaluate the methodological relevance of the included studies (Table 1). The criteria considered the use of measures in each study and whether the measures were provided or available in full, to allow for identification of relevance to the review question. In addition, there was a criterion included around the method for collecting participant responses, in recognition that children may prefer, or feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts and feelings through alternative forms, in addition to verbally (New Economics Foundation, 2009). The final criterion for WoE B was consideration of the qualitative hierarchy of evidence-for-practice (Daly et al., 2007). This has been developed to assist in critical appraisals of qualitative studies and to help to determine what research should be given more weight in developing practice and policy. The hierarchy sets out four levels of studies, Level I, Generalisable studies in which sampling and methods are derived from the preceding literature; Level II, Conceptual studies, where sampling is driven by previous literature, but may not diversify to the extent of generalisability (may not reach '*saturation*'); Level III, Descriptive studies that provide data to illustrate themes generated with samples selected on the basis of practicality and Level IV, Single case studies, in which rich data is collected from a single participant (see Daly et al., 2007, p.46 – Table 1). It is acknowledged that as ELSA is arguably in its infancy as a programme and therefore the higher levels within this hierarchy were out of reach, given ELSA has a lack of published data to rely upon. Likewise, there were no single case study examples in the included studies for this review, so the criteria included the categories of Level 1, 2 or 3 only.

Table 1 – *WoE B Criteria*

Category	Rating	WoE B Criteria
Measures	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full interview schedule not provided/made available • No evidence of schedule being piloted or developed from sequential research
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview schedule included/available on request • No evidence of schedule being piloted or developed from sequential research
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview schedule included/available on request • Schedule developed following pilot or sequential research
Participant responses	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal responses only requested
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils able to express views/responses verbally and through the medium of drawing
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils able to express views/responses verbally, through the medium of drawing and other creative forms (e.g. modelling clay)
Qualitative Hierarchy (Daly et al., 2007)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive Study
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual Study
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalisable Study

WoE C criteria were developed by the reviewer to consider the studies in relation to their relevance to the specific review question. This is not an evaluation of quality, more validity in collating evidence for use in the current synthesis. The criteria and allocated ratings are detailed in Table 2, below. This is followed by Table 3 which presents the ratings for each WoE B and C criterion, by study and the overall WoE B and C scores for each paper, used in the calculation for WoE D.

Table 2 – *WoE C Criteria*

Category	Rating	WoE B Criteria
Population	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considered only staff perspectives
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considered pupil OR parent perspectives only
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considered pupil and parent perspectives
Context	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Length of time pupil has attended ELSA programme not reported
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils had potentially attended less than six ELSA sessions
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pupils had attended at least six ELSA sessions
Outcome focus	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broad perspectives/experiences of ELSA explored
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open questions explored aspects of social and emotional development and wellbeing
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions directly explored social and emotional development and wellbeing

Table 3 – *WoE B & WoE C Summary*

Study	WoE B				WoE C			
	Measures	Participant Responses	Hierarchy	Overall	Population	Context	Outcome Focus	Overall
Hills, 2016	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	1.7
Krause et al., 2020	1	2	1	1.3	2	3	3	2.7
McEwan, 2019	2	2	1	1.7	2	1	1	1.3
Wilding & Claridge, 2016	2	1	1	1.3	2	3	1	2
Wong et al., 2020	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	1.7

Appendix D – Finding Extraction Example from Hills (2016)

Authors' findings	Descriptive Theme (Analytical Theme)	Evidence
Core Theme 1: <i>Therapeutic relationship</i>	Trust & Advocacy (<i>Relationships</i>)	<p>“children highlighted the importance of the ELSA teacher and how the relationship with this person was a key aspect relating to the effectiveness of the project.... The children also discussed the importance of being able to talk to their ELSA teacher, allowing the children to share their problems with a trusted adult.” (p. 55)</p> <p>“the children spoke about the importance of working together with their ELSA teacher to share the responsibility of a problem or a worry” (p. 55)</p> <p>“Developing a relationship with their ELSA teacher also helped the children to feel like they had an advocate within school.” (p. 55)</p>
	Opportunity to express (<i>Emotions & Feelings</i>)	<p>“The children also discussed the importance of being able to talk to their ELSA teacher, allowing the children to share their problems with a trusted adult.” (p. 55)</p> <p>Participant quote: “<i>I liked talking about problems, because then, usually when I just kept it all to myself I felt really unhappy about it, so yeah.</i>” (p. 55)</p>
	Core Theme 2: <i>Dealing with feelings</i>	Opportunity to express (<i>Emotions & Feelings</i>)

	<p>“Some of the children explained how exploring and being able to express their feelings had made them feel happier after the ELSA project.” (p. 55)</p> <p>Participant quote: <i>“I felt better emotionally and physically as well. Mmm like I said it like stopped me from bottling up my feelings and trouble and I could just like say what I felt really yeah...my body, I felt a lot better within myself and my, like expressions from myself were a little bit more happy instead of like (pulled a sad face).”</i> (p. 55-56)</p> <p>Participant quote: <i>“: I felt quite angry I did, well not angry but I felt quite up like grumpy with myself but after ELSA it had actually helped me.”</i> (p. 56)</p>
Positive change (<i>New Beginnings</i>)	“The children talked about ... as well as the importance of being able to talk as a way of managing their feelings.” (p. 55)
Personalised strategies – for use inside and outside of school (<i>New Beginnings</i>)	“Although the ELSA project was in school, for some of the children this extended to their home life....” (p. 55)
Less worries/Less anxiety (<i>Emotions & Feelings</i>)	“the children talked about being able to alter their feelings to help them to feel better.” (p. 55)
Family (<i>Relationships</i>)	<p>Pupil quote: <i>“I’m going to draw this as a head with all the troubles just flying out”</i> (p. 56)</p> <p>“... they explained how they were now able to share their feelings with their parents.” (p. 55)</p> <p>Participant quote: <i>“Because I weren’t really sure how to express my feelings in a kind of way to my parents and things...It made me feel quite grumpy because I wanted like I wanted to tell them how I feel, but I felt I can’t.”</i> (p. 56)</p>

<p>Core Theme 3: <i>Building Resilience</i></p>	<p>Positive change (<i>New Beginnings</i>)</p>	<p>“... the children spoke about being able to look at a situation differently, which had helped them to manage their feelings and behaviour.” (p. 56)</p>
		<p>“A number of children also said that they felt more confident after the ELSA project which had helped them to feel happier in school and feel like they could participate in activities.” (p. 56)</p>
		<p>Participant quote: “...I can just go in there and do it...” (p. 56)</p>
	<p>Less worries/Less anxiety (<i>Emotions & Feelings</i>)</p>	<p>Participant quote: “It helped me to get my confidence back cause I kept feeling worried about my confidence so I wrote down that the worry was about confidence and like and she kinda helped me like to boost it up a little bit.” (p. 56)</p>
	<p>Friendship (<i>Relationships</i>)</p>	<p>Participant quote: “Because I’ve got more friends now, I can do my work better, I’m not so scared about what is going happen...” (p. 56)</p>
	<p>Personalised strategies – for use inside and outside of school (<i>New Beginnings</i>)</p>	<p>Participant quote: “I don’t need to ask for help much, I can put up my hand and ask for help now, she also made me a help card so I can just turn it over so gets me used to putting up my hand.” (p. 56)</p>
		<p>Participant quote: “There’s like the firework, there’s the fuse... I thought about how to make my fuse longer (laughs). When I started ELSA it wasn’t very, it was quite short but now I see that it’s quite long.” (p. 56)</p>