

# The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant Intervention: An Exploration from the Perspectives of Pupils and Parents

Hannah Barker

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology  
School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Newcastle University September 2017

**Disclaimer:** I certify that the work in this thesis is my own and has not been  
submitted as part of any other work.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my research supervisor, Billy Peters, for your guidance, patience and kind words. I will miss our coffee shop supervision sessions.

A big thank you to the children and parents who took part in this research and shared their experiences with me.

To my friends and family, old and new, thank you for your support over the three years. Each and every one of you has helped me so much.

Most of all, I would like to thank my parents. I attribute all of my achievements to you. For as long as I can remember you have inspired and motivated me to become the person I am today. Thank you for your support, patience and kindness each and every day. I could not have done this without you. Thank you for always believing in me.

## **Overarching Abstract**

Emotional literacy is a process concerned with developing pupils' skills in recognising, understanding, expressing and managing their own and others' emotions. This is considered to be essential for pupils' academic achievement, mental health and relationships.

The first part of this thesis is a systematic literature review. The findings of the review indicate that adult facilitated small group and one-to-one emotional literacy interventions have some significant effects on improving pupils' emotional literacy skills, for example, improvements in pupils' social skills, well-being, self-esteem and coping mechanisms and reductions in anxiety and bullying behaviours. The studies in the review adopted quantitative methodologies in which researchers measured emotional literacy skills using questionnaires. It is argued that this approach may not capture the complexity of emotional literacy development or give insight into the process of how emotional literacy skills are developed. In addition, the studies did not take account of the perspectives of the pupils involved with the interventions.

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention is a type of emotional literacy intervention employed within UK schools. The second part of this thesis is an empirical study that aimed to understand the experiences of individuals directly involved with the ELSA intervention as well as enquiring into aspects of the intervention process. To do this, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and semi-structured interviews were used to explore two primary school pupils' and their parents' experiences and views of participating in the ELSA intervention.

The findings of the empirical research suggest the participants felt the intervention impacted positively on aspects of pupils' emotional literacy development including, improved confidence, coping strategies and skills in managing and expressing their emotions. Important elements of the intervention process included: a need for informed consent, sessions being fun, making the child feel special, space to talk problem-solve and the therapeutic nature of the ELSA-child relationship. The findings contribute to the small evidence-base that promotes the use of the ELSA intervention within schools to develop pupils' emotional literacy skills. It also highlights a need for an increased awareness of the factors and practices that promote emotional literacy at the individual and at a whole-school level.

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## Chapter 1: Systematic Literature Review

### A Systematic Literature Review of Emotional Literacy Intervention Studies Aimed at Improving Outcomes for Pupils

## **1. Abstract**

The importance of supporting pupils' social and emotional development within schools is prominent throughout educational policy and practice. This systematic literature review aimed to identify targeted interventions to improve emotional literacy outcomes for pupils, discuss the characteristics of these interventions and evaluate their effectiveness. The process of carrying out this literature review was guided by the seven stage systematic method by Petticrew and Roberts (2008).

Six studies were selected using inclusion and exclusion criteria. Each study employed an adult-facilitated emotional literacy intervention within schools (primary and secondary). The findings of the review indicate that emotional literacy interventions had some significant effects on improving pupils' emotional literacy skills, for example, improvements in pupils' social skills, well-being, self-esteem and coping mechanisms and reductions in anxiety and bullying behaviours. Comparison of findings across and between studies was difficult as each study measured different constructs of emotional literacy and employed different methods to do so.

Across most of the studies there was a lack of consultation with the pupils participating in the interventions. Future research should explore in more depth the experiences and personal views of pupils involved with emotional literacy interventions. Furthermore, whilst the studies indicated that emotional literacy interventions can improve pupils' emotional literacy skills, there was little insight into how these skills were developed. Further research into the contextual and relational aspects of emotional literacy interventions may help to develop understanding about the psychological process of emotional literacy development.



## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1 Emotional Literacy in an Educational Context**

In recent years, successive governments have recognised that education is more than a knowledge-based curriculum and that school staff should be concerned with the holistic development of children and young people (Burton, 2008). UK government policies and national strategies such as the primary (Department for Education, 2005) and secondary school (Department for Education, 2007) 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' and 'Targeted Mental Health in Schools' (Department for Children, 2008-2011) have emphasised schools' responsibility to promote and teach the skills and values that are essential for supporting the social and emotional development of all their pupils. More recently, Ofsted (Department for Education, 2014) have required schools to provide evidence as to how they support social and emotional development. A key concept running throughout the above policies and strategies is emotional literacy. The following sections will give a brief overview of the literature and debates in the field of emotional literacy in order to provide a rationale for the present review's definition of emotional literacy.

### **2.2 Emotional Intelligence**

Current thinking about emotional literacy has developed from a history of overlapping work. Emotional literacy as a concept has evolved from early theories of intelligence. Thorndike (1937) hypothesised about the links between social and emotional behaviour and intelligence. His theory of intelligence was one of the first to suggest that there may be more than just one aspect of intelligence. Thorndike suggested intelligence could be split into three facets; abstract intelligence, mechanical intelligence and social intelligence. Following this, Gardner (1999) proposed a broader theory of cognitive functioning. Gardner suggested that humans have multiple intelligences: logical-mathematical, spatial, linguistic, musical, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. The latter are the most relevant to emotional literacy, which Gardner termed *The Personal Intelligences*. They are concerned with individuals' innate ability to notice, access, label and discriminate between their own (inter) and other peoples' (intra) moods, intentions, feelings, motivations and emotions and to use this to guide their decision-making and behaviour.

Closely related to Gardner's theory of personal intelligence is Salovey and Mayer's (1990, p. 189) concept termed *emotional intelligence*; defined as, 'the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions'. For Mayer and Salovey (1993, p. 440) emotional intelligence is an innate ability which can essentially be reduced to neural mechanisms alone and 'people can be more or less emotionally intelligent'.

Goleman (1995) adopts a similar definition of emotional intelligence to Salovey and Mayer. However, Goleman emphasises an individual's capacity to *learn* emotional competencies. Goleman (1998, p. 7) states that emotional intelligence can be 'learned and it continues to develop as we go through life and learn from our experiences'. He suggests emotional intelligence is made up of five competencies; self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Whilst Goleman highlights the process of learning in relation to social and emotional skills, he suggests that learning ultimately depends on an individual's *underlying potential* of emotional intelligence. For these theorists, emotional intelligence seems to be largely genetic and fixed. The implications of these assumptions will be considered in the following sections.

### **2.3 Moving from Emotional Intelligence to Emotional Literacy**

The psychologist who pioneered the concept of emotional literacy is Claude Steiner (2003). In Steiner's view, emotional literacy and emotional intelligence are different concepts. Steiner gives the example that emotionally intelligent people could use their social and emotional skills to interpret and manage emotions to influence and even manipulate others for personal or professional gain (he gives the example of convincing people to vote). Emotionally literate people, however, use their social and emotional skills to help improve their own and others' lives. Tew (2007, p. 9) shares this view, arguing that there is little difference between emotional intelligence and emotional literacy but the distinction relates to the application of emotions. He contends that emotional intelligence is about developing 'effective emotional functioning' whereas emotional literacy involves the acquisition of skills, attributes, experience and interactions that together make an individual more emotionally competent. Emotional literacy is concerned with values, morals, love and enhancing the quality of life for ourselves and for others (Steiner, 2003).

In Steiner’s view, emotional literacy is about developing individuals’ social and emotional skills as well as creating contexts in which the interactions and environments promote understanding and collective learning about emotions. Steiner highlights the following components of emotional literacy:

- People working together co-operatively, using emotions to bind people together and enhance the collective quality of life.
- Knowing, managing and expressing your own feelings.
- Recognising, reacting and interacting with other peoples’ emotions.
- Being able to repair emotional damage.

Building on this, Weare (2003) has developed two definitions for emotional literacy, at an individual level and at an organisational level.

*Table 1: Weare’s levels of emotional literacy*

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Individual level     | The ability to understand ourselves and other people, and in particular to be aware of, understand and use information about the emotional states of ourselves and others with competence. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions and respond to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others (Weare, 2003, p. 2). |
| Organisational level | The extent to which the organisation takes into account the role of emotion in dealing with the people who are its members, and in planning, making and implementing decisions and takes positive steps to promote the emotional and social well-being of its members (Weare, 2003, p. 3).   |

Park (1999) suggests that the approach people adopt when thinking about emotional intelligence and emotional literacy may reflect their philosophical perspectives on education and the role of emotions. Much of the research and debate in this field centres on the psychometric assessment of social and emotional skills in order to give a ‘true’ and ‘scientific’ measure of an individual’s competencies. The question of how, or if, emotional literacy can be measured remains one of the most contentious in the field (Gillum, 2010; Humphrey, Curran, Morris, Farrell, & Woods, 2007). Steiner

(2003, p.13) states that emotional skills cannot be measured but psychometrics can offer a 'rough idea'. Park (1999, p.9) argues that, in education, viewing an individual in terms of an assessment of his/her social and emotional skills places the learning 'problem' onto the individual. Park advocates for a wider concept which includes thinking about social and emotional skills in terms of an individual's characteristics, experiences and environment. This is the approach emotional literacy invites (Steiner, 2003) and one widely adopted in current educational psychology practice (Fox, 2009).

## **2.4 The Importance of a Definition**

In addition to the terms 'emotional literacy' and 'emotional intelligence' a number of other terms are used within research to describe similar concepts. These include 'emotional competence', (Carnwell & Baker, 2007) 'well-being' and 'mental health' (Weare & Gray, 2003). Throughout her publications, Weare adopts the term 'emotional literacy'. She argues that this is important in educational contexts as the term 'literacy' emphasises that social and emotional competencies can be broken down, taught and encouraged in the same way that written literacy can, rather than being a fixed set of abilities (Weare, 2003). Rietti (2008) supports this and suggests that when language centres on 'teaching' of emotional skills then it should be termed emotional literacy not emotional intelligence because emotional intelligence theorists claim it is a fixed ability.

There is evidently a degree of overlap between the definitions of emotional literacy and emotional intelligence. A key distinction, however, appears to be that whilst emotional intelligence focusses on individuals' internal processes (Bar-On, 2006; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) emotional literacy is concerned with both the internal and external processes and the links between the two (Adams, 2011; Haddon, Goodman, Park, & Crick, 2005; Park, 1999; Sharp, 2000; Steiner, 2003; Tew, 2007). This is not, however, a unanimous view. Perry, Lennie, and Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2007) argue that there is not enough clear evidence that the terms describe qualitatively different ideas but support the need for a common language in the field. Wigelsworth, Humphrey, Kalambouka, and Lendrum (2010, p. 173) reviewed the current terminology in the field and state 'a situation has been created whereby the definition, measurement and utility of social and emotional skills is fraught with controversy and inconsistency'. Coppock (2007) advocates for a common language

within the field and across agencies to promote a more joined-up response to service delivery in schools. She found that a wide-ranging use of terminology can cause confusion for service users, duplication of work and a fragmented approach to practice. Berg and Lune (2014, p. 41) remind researchers that different definitions of concepts may coexist but the 'important thing is to let your readers know what you mean when you refer to the concept'.

In light of the above, I take the stance in this review that emotional intelligence and emotional literacy are different concepts and I adopt the definition of emotional literacy by Weare (2003). My stance fits with those who view social and emotional skills as ones that can be developed and learned over time, taking into consideration an individual's personal characteristics, the environment and interactions between people, rather than viewing social and emotional skills as fixed, innate qualities.

## **2.5 Emotional Literacy in Policy and Practice**

A number of writers indicate the need for a critical debate within the field of emotional literacy and they raise some important questions to consider, including: does the introduction of a social and emotional curriculum add too many dimensions to a teacher's role and detract from what is already a crowded academic curriculum? Does an increased school responsibility for social and emotional development undermine the role of parents? Is emotional literacy a form of social manipulation and a way of teaching pupils to behave in a way that society would like? Could exposure to an emotions-based curriculum make pupils' well-being worse, not better? (Coleman, 2009; Craig, 2007; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Rietti, 2008).

Whilst the above are important considerations, the claims made in reviews and by field experts about the efficacy of being emotionally literate remain strong and present in current educational policy and practice. Supporting pupils to develop their emotional literacy skills can: improve friendships and relationships and support pupils to lead more enriched and successful lives (Coppock, 2007; Steiner, 2003); help pupils to negotiate the challenges of growing up, make transitions and act preventively for the development of mental health problems and risky behaviours (Weare, 2015); support pupils' learning, their academic engagement, work ethic, commitment and school success (Brooks, 2014).

The most effective approach to developing emotional literacy at a whole school level

is as follows: a supportive school and classroom climate, ethos and policies which build a sense of connectedness, focus and purpose; the acceptance of emotion, respect, warm relationships and communication and the celebration of difference for both pupils, staff and parents. Also, to incorporate the teaching of social and emotional skills within the curriculum and implement targeted programmes and interventions for pupils' experiencing difficulty (Banerjee, Weare, & Farr, 2014; Faupel & Sharp, 2003; Weare, 2015; Weare & Gray, 2003).

In current policy and practice, schools may be seen as well placed to support emotional literacy at both an individual and whole-school level and educational psychologists are increasingly likely to be involved in supporting schools in this domain (Rait, Monsen, & Squires, 2010; Roffey, 2008; Wigelsworth et al., 2010; Wigelsworth, Humphrey, & Lendrum, 2012). As Weare (2003) and Roffey (2008) suggest, emotional literacy can be developed at an individual level and at a whole school level, through both targeted interventions and whole-school practices. I maintain the stance that emotional literacy at the individual and the whole-school level are likely to be interactive and dynamic processes. There are a range of reviews looking at emotional literacy at an organisational level (Kidger, Araya, Donovan, & Gunnell, 2012; Sharp, 2000; Weare, 2015). Therefore, this review focuses on the development of emotional literacy at the individual level, through targeted, school-based interventions specifically for children thought to be at risk of developing (or already experiencing) social and emotional difficulties. The aims of the present review are as follows:

- Identify targeted emotional literacy interventions that have been implemented to improve outcomes for pupils.
- Discuss the characteristics of these interventions.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions.

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1 Review Methods**

The process of carrying out this literature review was guided by the systematic method outlined by Petticrew and Roberts below:

Table 2: Systematic review stages (Petticrew and Roberts, 2008)

|  |
|--|
| <b>Stage 1.</b> Clearly define the review question in consultation with anticipated users                                |
| <b>Stage 2.</b> Determine the types of study needed to answer the question   |
| <b>Stage 3.</b> Carry out a comprehensive literature search to locate the studies  |
| <b>Stage 4.</b> Screen the studies found using inclusion criteria to identify studies for an in-depth review             |
| <b>Stage 5.</b> Describe the included studies to 'map' the field, and critically appraise them for quality and relevance |
| <b>Stage 6.</b> Synthesise the studies' findings   |
| <b>Stage 7.</b> Communicate outcomes of the review   |

### 3.2 Stages of Review

#### Stage 1: Defining the review question

My initial interest in this area arose from my placement experiences of being involved with the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention. My initial searching found that the field of literature into ELSA is very limited. To my knowledge, at the time of writing this review, there were only two peer-reviewed articles available. Therefore, I decided to broaden my review question and focus on a wider range of emotional literacy interventions. The review question to be considered is: *what is the impact of emotional literacy interventions aimed at improving outcomes for pupils?*

#### Stage 2: Determine the types of study needed

Initial broad searches of the literature helped to focus the review question and allowed an estimate of the size of the literature field. A preliminary review of the literature identified a wide range of terms used to describe emotional literacy and the attributes of associated interventions. In order to identify studies relevant to the review question, it was necessary to search electronic databases using combinations of specific search terms.

### Stage 3: Literature search to locate studies

Based on an in-depth consideration of terminology in the field of emotional literacy (as discussed in the introduction), the terms listed in Table 3 were deemed the most appropriate to locate studies specific to answering the review question.

*Table 3: Terms used in the literature search*

|   |
|---|
| <i>Target population terms</i><br>Pupil* / child* / youth / teen*   |
| <i>Outcome terms</i><br>Emotional literacy / emotional intelligence / emotional competence / emotional well-being / achieve* / attain* / attend* /social* / emotion* /behaviour |
| <i>Intervention terms</i><br>Intervention / programme / program / treatment / support / therapy / promote / teach   |

(\*including suffix variations of the word)

### Stage 4: Screening of studies

Searching using combinations of the above terms generated a wide number of studies. Therefore, a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria was used (Table 4) to initially screen studies identified from the search.

*Table 4: Inclusion and exclusion screening criteria*

| <b>Inclusion criteria</b>   | <b>Exclusion criteria</b>  |
|---|--|
| Studies involving interventions carried out in the school environment.  | Studies involving interventions based in clinics, hospitals etc. |
| School aged pupils; age 5 – 16 included   | Pre-school, early years, college, higher education               |
| Interventions facilitated by adults (e.g. educational psychologists, teachers, teaching assistants, independent services/agencies). | Child-led, peer-mentoring interventions.                         |



|  |   |
|--|---|
| Studies carried out in the UK due to the difference in school systems and the evidence base for UK emotional literacy interventions is 'tiny' compared to in other western countries; (Humphrey et al., 2010, p. 517). | Studies outside the UK.   |
| Peer-reviewed, full text articles.   | Pilot studies.  |
| Studies carried out from the year 2005 onwards (the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning initiative was introduced in 2005).   |   |
| Intervention outcomes: children and young people's social, emotional and behavioural skills, friendships and relationships, self-esteem, well-being, attainment and attendance.  | Studies looking at aspects of physical health e.g. body mass index.                                       |
| One-to-one and small group interventions.  | Whole school and class interventions, as there is a number of existing systematic reviews in those areas. |

The following databases were searched: British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescent Studies, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAL), Education Abstracts, Education Administration Abstracts, Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), MEDLINE, Teacher References, Medline, PsychInfo, EMBASE. Searching was conducted between October 2015 and December 2015.

#### Stage 5: Describing and appraising the studies

Six studies met the above inclusion criteria. A summary is provided in Table 4.

Table 5: Summary of final studies

| Study                                  | Participants (N, age) | Intervention Context and Aims  | Intervention Focus, Duration and Delivery                    | Design   | Data Collection Methods  | Improvements Made<br>*significant results  | Follow Up   | Effect Size   |
|--|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Liddle and Macmillan (2010)</b>     | 58: age 9-14          | Developing pupils' social and emotional skills through emotional literacy, cognitive behavioural and therapeutic principles.<br><br>Aims: decrease levels of anxiety and low mood and improve self-esteem and social skills. | Small group<br><br>10 weeks<br><br>Educational psychologists | Pre- and post-intervention. No comparison group. | Questionnaires and rating scales (Spence Children's Anxiety Scale; Social Skills Rating System; Children's Depression Inventory); completed by pupils and teachers.            | Lower anxiety*<br>Increased well-being and self-esteem*<br>Improvement in social skills* | 4-months post-intervention (for one group, not full sample) | <b>Small</b><br><br>Not reported but calculated using data given. |
| <b>Knowler and Frederickson (2013)</b> | 50: age 8-9           | Teaching emotional literacy skills.<br><br>Aims: reduce bullying behaviour, improve emotional intelligence and behavioural adjustment.   | Small group<br><br>12 weeks<br><br>Teaching assistants       | Pre- and post-intervention and comparison group. | Questionnaires (Emotional Literacy Assessment-Pupil Form; Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-Child and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire); completed by pupils. | Reductions in bullying behaviour*  | None  | <b>Large</b><br><br>Reported                                      |

|   |                      |  |   |  |   |   |   |  |
|---|----------------------|--|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Ohl, Fox, and Mitchell (2013)</b></p> | <p>385: age 7-8</p>  | <p>Activities to develop emotional literacy skills.</p> <p>Aims: strengthen friendship skills, build emotional resilience and social skills</p>                        | <p>Small group</p> <p>10 weeks (90-minute sessions)</p> <p>Outside agency</p>     | <p>Pre- and post-intervention with non-equivalent control group.</p> | <p>Questionnaire (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire); completed by teachers).</p>                    | <p>Reduction in *emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer relationship problems. Increase in pro-social behaviours*</p> | <p>12-weeks post-intervention: prosocial behaviour improved* and reduction in emotional symptoms*</p> | <p><b>Medium-large</b></p> <p>Reported.</p>  |
| <p><b>Humphrey et al. (2010)</b></p>        | <p>253: age 6-11</p> | <p>Developing social and emotional competencies.</p> <p>Aims: evaluate impact of intervention on social and emotional competencies and mental health difficulties.</p> | <p>Small group</p> <p>7 weeks (45 minute sessions)</p> <p>Teaching assistants</p> | <p>Pre- and post-intervention and comparison group</p>               | <p>Questionnaires, rating scales and standardized assessments (completed by pupil, parent and teacher).</p> | <p>Social and emotional competencies improved (child rating, not parent/teacher)*. No significant effect on mental health difficulties.</p> | <p>7-weeks post-intervention: no significant difference found.</p>                                    | <p>Small – medium</p> <p><b>Reported</b></p> |

|                      |   |   |  |   |  |   |      |   |
|----------------------|---|---|--|---|--|---|------|---|
| <b>Waters (2014)</b> | 12: age 6-11                                    | <p>Therapeutic story writing.</p> <p>Aims: evaluate impact on pupils' emotional and social well-being, pupils' behavioural difficulties and rates of exclusion, parental engagement with their child's learning; pupils' reading skills and engagement with learning.</p> | <p>Individual: pupils and parents.</p> <p>12 weeks: 1x30 minute, 2x20 minute sessions</p> <p>Intervention facilitator (not specified) and teaching assistants.</p> | Pre- and post-intervention. No comparison group.                | Questionnaires (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire and Neale Analysis of Reading Ability), semi-structured interviews and content analysis of stories (pupil, parents and teacher). | Reduction in stress, positive impact on pupils' relationships with parents and peers*, improvement in behaviour*, decrease in exclusion rates, reduction in hyperactivity and attentional difficulties in classroom*. | None | <b>Non reported;</b> not possible to calculate using data provided. |
| <b>Mann (2014)</b>   | 18: (primary/secondary: specific ages not give) | <p>Developing emotional literacy skills.</p> <p>Aims: evaluate impact on pupils' perceptions of their well-being</p>  | <p>Individual.</p> <p>Duration not specified</p> <p>Emotional literacy support assistant (teaching assistant with specialist training)</p>                         | Pre- and post-intervention and non-equivalent comparison group. | Questionnaire (Emotional Literacy Checklist and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire); completed by pupils and teaching assistants.  | Reductions in behavioural difficulties (non-significant result).  | None | <b>Small</b><br>Reported  |

## **4. Review Findings**

The following sections will critically appraise the studies' characteristics and findings with a view to synthesise the findings to establish the efficacy of sampled emotional literacy interventions. I will consider how these studies fit with the wider literature and discuss the trustworthiness of the findings.

### **4.1 Samples and Participants**

As specified in the inclusion criteria, all studies were conducted in England. All studies took place in schools; four of the interventions took place in primary schools and two of the studies took place in both primary and secondary schools. Sample sizes ranged from 7 to 385 with participants' ages ranging from 6 – 14 years. All studies had specific participant criteria; all included pupils that were perceived to have emotional literacy difficulties. Therefore, all studies used opportunity sampling as participants were not randomly selected but drawn from particular populations convenient to the researcher (Cole, 2008).

### **4.2 Study Aims and Intervention**

Six studies focused on the impact of the intervention on pupils' emotional literacy skills, one study also looked at reading skills alongside emotional literacy skills (Waters, 2014). Constructs measured across the studies included anxiety, exclusions from school, bullying behaviour, social skills, well-being, self-esteem, emotional intelligence and problem-solving skills.

Each intervention was carried out in a school environment. Four of the interventions were carried out by teaching assistants who had received training in the intervention (Humphrey et al., 2010; Knowler & Frederickson, 2013; Mann, 2014; Waters, 2014), one was carried out by educational psychologists (Liddle & Macmillan, 2010) and one intervention was carried out by an external agency which the researchers were a part of (Ohl et al., 2013). Four of the interventions were carried out with pupils in small groups and two were carried out on an individual basis, of these one intervention also involved pupils' parents (Waters, 2014).

All interventions adopted a structured, week-by-week session format and all were directly concerned with improving pupils' emotional literacy skills. In terms of the intervention type or approach, two studies described the intervention as 'therapeutic', one used 'cognitive behavioural' principles and four were described as 'teaching or facilitating pupils' emotional literacy skills'.

#### **4.4 Experimental Design**

Four studies used controlled trials with participants assigned randomly to either an intervention or a comparison group. Of these, three studies adopted quasi-experimental designs. Two studies used pre- and post-test measures with no comparison groups. Data was collected using a variety of measures, the majority assessing some area of emotional literacy and one assessing reading skills too. All of the studies employed questionnaires to measure pupils' emotional literacy skills. Waters (2014) also used semi-structured interviews. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) was used across five of the studies and the Emotional Literacy Checklist (Faupel, 2003) was used in two studies. A range of other questionnaires designed to assess various aspects of pupils' social and emotional skills were used across the studies (e.g. Children's Anxiety Scale; Children's Depression Inventory; Emotional Literacy Assessment Instrument).

#### **4.5 Outcomes and Effectiveness**

Generally, the studies reported interventions to have a positive impact on emotional literacy related outcomes for pupils. This included significant immediate post-intervention effects on outcomes including reductions on measures of bullying behaviour (Knowler & Frederickson, 2013), anxiety, low mood (Liddle & Macmillan, 2010) and exclusion rates (Waters, 2014) and improvements on measures of social and emotional competence (Humphrey et al., 2010), self-esteem, social skills (Liddle & Macmillan, 2010) and peer relationships (Waters, 2014). Mann's (2014) sample size was too small to determine any statistically significant differences on pupils' well-being. Waters also reported a positive impact of the intervention on pupils' confidence and engagement with reading. Ohi et al. (2013) measured the impact of the intervention after twelve weeks, they

reported a significant impact of the intervention on reducing pupils' emotional symptoms and increasing pro-social behaviours.

Making comparisons between studies is difficult due to a number of factors. There is no clear information about the pupils' emotional literacy skills pre-intervention. Each study stated that interventions were for pupils who were deemed to have, for example, low mood (Knowler & Frederickson, 2013), shyness (Ohl et al., 2013) and emotional difficulties (Waters, 2014). These terms could all be considered to fit within the broad umbrella term of emotional literacy but each study employed a different method of determining pupils' initial emotional literacy skills. Furthermore, to determine pupils' initial levels of emotional literacy, most studies used school staff perceptions and a few used checklists or criteria alongside this. Whilst there are strengths in both these methods, there was no comparable pre-intervention baseline of pupils' emotional literacy skills. In addition, each study differed considerably in their outcome variables and all studies used a variety of tools to measure emotional literacy. Finally, not all studies provided an effect size. An effect size is a measure of the difference between the intervention and comparison group. Cohen (1988) classifies effect sizes as small, medium and large. Only four out of the six studies reported effect sizes. Liddle and Macmillan (2010) and Waters (2014) did not report effect sizes and they employed pre- and post-intervention designs using the same group. It is possible to calculate effect sizes for this type of study design if the author provides sufficient data (Dunst, Hamby, & Trivette, 2004; Durlak, 2009; Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). Therefore, it was possible to calculate effect sizes for Liddle and Macmillan's study but not for Waters. Mann (2014) used a very small sample size so the claims made about the impact of the intervention in his study must be considered cautiously. Caution must also be taken when comparing the effect sizes across the studies as each of them differed in interventions employed, outcome measures and data collection methods (Coe, 2002).

In order to account for variations across studies, comparison was aided using the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Weight of Evidence tool (Gough, 2007). This tool assesses each study according to a number of criteria relating to trustworthiness, appropriateness of design and analysis and relevance

to the review question. It asks questions about, for example, ethics; validity and reliability of data collection methods and justification of research design. Appendix A provides further detail about how these judgements were made. Table 6 shows the synthesised, overall weight of evidence ratings for each study.

#### **4.6 Weight of Evidence and Effect Size**

As shown in Table 6, the study with the largest effect size and highest weight of evidence rating is that of Knowler and Frederickson (2013), suggesting a high trustworthiness of claims made and relevance to the review questions. Ohl et al. (2013) rated medium-high with methodological soundness and relevance to the review question with a medium effect size. Humphrey et al. (2010) was the next with a small effect size and a medium weight of evidence rating. Two studies had small effect sizes and a medium-low weight of evidence rating (Liddle & Macmillan, 2010; Mann, 2014). Finally, Waters (2014) had a medium weight of evidence rating but provided no effect size or sufficient raw data for effect sizes to be calculated.



|                                  |             | <u>Effect Size</u>                     |                                     |   |                      |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------|
|                                  |             | Large                                  | Medium                              | Small   | No Effect Size       |
| <u>Weight of Evidence Rating</u> | High        | <i>Knowler and Frederickson (2013)</i> |                                     |   |                      |
|                                  | Medium-High |  | <i>Ohl, Fox and Mitchell (2013)</i> |   |                      |
|                                  | Medium      |  |                                     | <i>Humphrey et al. (2010)</i><br><i>Mann (2010)</i> | <i>Waters (2014)</i> |
|                                  | Medium-Low  |  |                                     | <i>Liddle and Macmillan (2010)</i>                  |                      |
|                                  | Low         |  |                                     |   |                      |
|                                  |             |  |                                     |   |                      |

*Table 6: Studies weight of evidence verses effect size*

#### **4.7 Overview of Interventions and Impact**

Knowler and Frederickson (2013) evaluated the effectiveness of a 12-week small group intervention that involved adults teaching emotional literacy skills to pupils. The sessions included role-play, group discussions and practical activities with a focus on developing self-awareness, self-regulation, enhancing empathy and improving social skills. The authors are educational psychologists and they trained school staff to carry out the intervention. Pupils, their peers and class teachers were given different questionnaires to measure bullying behaviour and emotional literacy skills of the pupils in the intervention. The intervention was found to have a differential effect on pupils who bully, depending on their initial level of emotional literacy. Pupils with low emotional literacy scores at the start of the intervention only showed significant reductions in bullying behaviour if they received the intervention. Pupils with high emotional literacy scores at the start of the intervention showed an overall decrease in bullying behaviour, whether they were

in the intervention or comparison group. The authors acknowledge the studies limitations in detail.

Ohl et al. (2013) evaluated the 'Pyramid Project' intervention; a structured after-school club, facilitated by adults (from an external agency, not school staff) over ten weekly sessions. Sessions included team building games, adult-facilitated discussions and practical activities to develop social and emotional vocabulary and expression of feelings. The study only used the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) as an outcome measure of pupils' emotional literacy skills pre- intervention and 12-weeks post-intervention. Only teachers were asked to complete the SDQ. The study reported significant reductions in measures of emotional symptoms and increases in pro-social behaviour. No significant effects were found on the measures of peer and conduct problems and hyperactivity. Limitations of the study are acknowledged though the authors draw strong conclusions from their study's findings.

Humphrey et al. (2010) evaluated the 'New Beginnings' intervention. This was also a targeted, small group intervention that involved adult-led activities to develop emotional literacy skills. The intervention was facilitated by teaching assistants in school time. The study used two questionnaires to measure emotional literacy outcomes, given to parents, participating pupils and teachers. Pupils' ratings immediately after the intervention showed a significant positive impact on their emotional literacy skills but parent and teacher ratings did not. Humphrey et al. measured the impact of the intervention after 7 weeks but scores were found to be non-significant. Humphrey et al. also acknowledges the studies' limitations in depth.

Humphrey et al. (2010) and Knowler and Frederickson (2013) employed targeted interventions that were designed and implemented to fit in with a national social and emotional learning initiative across schools in the UK (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning; Department for Education, 2005). This could mean that the pupils in these studies also had access to whole school emotional literacy initiatives as well as targeted interventions.

Liddle and Macmillan (2010) and Ohl et al. (2013) indicated that the impact of

their interventions was sustained on some of the outcome measures 3-4 months post-intervention (e.g. reductions in anxiety and low mood and improvements in self-esteem and pro-social behaviours). Humphrey et al. (2010) follow-up was found to be non-significant. This could suggest that emotional literacy interventions can have some lasting impact but I would suggest further research is needed in this area.

#### **4.8 Conclusions and Outcomes of Review**

The original aim of this review was to identify targeted emotional literacy interventions implemented to improve outcomes for pupils and to discuss the characteristics of these interventions. The majority of the six studies reviewed demonstrated significant effects on at least some of their outcome measures. Outcomes measured in each study were aspects of emotional literacy and one study also showed improvements in attendance and reading skills.

The studies were synthesised and appraised using their effect sizes to represent statistical strength and their weight of evidence (Gough, 2007) to represent their trustworthiness, appropriateness of research design and relevance to the review question.

The emotional literacy interventions in the studies sampled in this review highlighted a number of key aspects to consider in practice. This includes intervention sessions to be carried out once a week, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes over a duration of 6-12 weeks. Interventions to be delivered and facilitated by adults who have received training or who have specialist knowledge and experience in pupils' social and emotional development. The interventions reviewed also highlighted the effectiveness of using of role-play, group discussions, breaking down and modelling skills, practical activities and games focusing on a specific aspects of emotional literacy (e.g. learning about self-regulation, enhancing empathy, recognising emotions, developing emotional vocabulary).

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Limitations of Review**

It is acknowledged that this review has a number of limitations. Firstly, given the difficulties defining emotional literacy, it is likely a number of studies were missed during my searching. Secondly, the generalizability of the conclusions of this systematic literature review are limited. All studies were carried out in the UK and the large majority of participants were pupils of primary school age. The decision to only include UK studies was based on a previous lack of reviews carried out in the UK (Humphrey et al., 2007) and to try to encourage the comparison of the studies in the review, but it does limit the generalizability of the findings further. Furthermore, although strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were set in the present systematic literature review to try to encourage homogeneity, the final six studies differed considerably. Due to variations in their measures of emotional literacy, data analysis and the intervention used, comparisons across the studies is difficult.

Finally, this review was carried out by a single reviewer. Large-scale reviews typically involve multiple researchers and are peer-reviewed. Therefore, this review was unable to cover the literature in as much depth as larger reviews and it may lack in its level of rigor and criticality in terms of the reviewing and appraisal processes. In addition, whilst I adhered to the reviewing process outlined by Petticrew and Roberts (2008) and appraised studies aided by the weight of evidence tool to support transparency, it was still my own judgement and may have been subject to unintentional bias. For example, Willig (2012) highlights that very different interpretations can be generated of the same text and the type of interpretation we generate can be influenced by epistemological stance.

### **5.2 What do the Studies Mean by Emotional Literacy?**

I was guided by my working definition of emotional literacy though I was interested in exploring what each of the studies' authors understood to be emotional literacy as well as their ontological views about the construct. Knowler and Frederickson (2013, p. 864) state they use an 'emotional literacy intervention' throughout their

writing though they use emotional intelligence as an outcome measure. They provide a definition of emotional intelligence; 'emotion related self-perceptions and behavioural dispositions relating to the perception, processing, and utilisation of emotion-laden information'. This has some parallels to the definition of emotional literacy I am using. However, by using both emotional intelligence and emotional literacy interchangeably and by not stating what was meant by each of the terms, at times it was difficult to follow. For example, they discuss pupils having high and low emotional intelligence but hypothesise this will change after being involved with the intervention. This does not fit with the original definition of emotional intelligence which assumes it is a fixed ability (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Humphrey et al. (2010), Ohl et al. (2010) and Mann (2014) use similar definitions of emotional literacy to the one adopted in the present research. Waters (2014) uses the term emotional literacy but she does not provide an explanation or definition of the concept. However, she does indirectly suggest that emotional literacy is a dynamic process between individuals when outlining the theoretical underpinnings of the 'Story Links' intervention. Liddle and Macmillan (2010) use 'emotional well-being' as a broad term to encompass a number of other constructs (e.g. self-esteem, social skills) but do not give a clear definition of these.

Only one study (Mann, 2014) gives a philosophical stance, an explanation of their views on the theoretical underpinning of emotional literacy and a rationale for their methodology. The lack of clarity by researchers in the latter areas perpetuates the current situation within the field whereby the definition, measurement and utility of social and emotional skills is controversial and inconsistent (Wigelsworth et al., 2010). This also made it difficult to appraise the studies. All the studies made claims about improving emotional literacy but most did not clearly specify what emotional literacy was. Scott (2007) states that researchers must be clear about their philosophical assumptions as these are central to decisions made about the methods used and in particular, about how judgements can be made about the research as a whole. Similarly, Berg and Lune (2014, p. 39) suggest that researchers must declare what terms mean within research; the readers do not need to necessarily agree with what is meant by the concept but they must be able to understand it so they can 'understand and appraise how effectively the concept works' within the research.

## **6. Conclusions**

A key finding from the initial searching stages of this review indicated that despite being used widely in schools, there is very little research into the ELSA intervention. At the time of writing this review, to my knowledge, there were only two peer-reviewed articles available on ELSA. This suggests that further research into this emotional literacy intervention is needed.

The findings from a range of interventions sampled in this review indicate that adult-facilitated, one-to-one and small group interventions can have an impact on improving aspects of pupils' emotional literacy development. For example, studies were found to show improvements in pupils' social skills, well-being, self-esteem and coping mechanisms and reductions in anxiety and bullying behaviours. Further research is needed to determine if interventions can have a lasting impact on pupils' emotional literacy development.

Most studies employed quantitative methodologies whereby researchers were interested in measuring pre-determined constructs of emotional literacy skills pre- and post-intervention using psychometrics. The question of how, or if, emotional literacy can be measured remains one of the most contentious in the field (Gillum, 2010; Humphrey et al., 2007). Across most of the studies, there was a lack of consultation with the pupils participating in the interventions. Future research could explore in more depth the experiences and personal views of pupils involved with these types of interventions. Furthermore, whilst the studies indicated that emotional literacy interventions can improve pupils' emotional literacy skills, less is known about how the skills were developed. Further research into the contextual and relational aspects of emotional literacy interventions may help to develop understanding about the psychological process of emotional literacy development.

## Chapter 2: Bridging Document

### Linking the Systematic Review to the Empirical Research

## **1. Moving from the Systematic Literature Review to the Empirical Research**

The systematic literature review highlighted the efficacy of emotional literacy interventions predominantly using quantitative frameworks. This gave scope for a qualitative methodology which could explore in more depth, the intervention process and the experiences of the individuals participating in the intervention. I wanted to carry out research that puts participants' views and experiences at the forefront and to employ a methodology that could capture the complexity of human experience and emotional literacy.

I have been involved with the ELSA intervention on a number of levels and different contexts. Therefore, I was aware that as a researcher, I would bring my own ideas, values and beliefs to the research which would inevitably shape the process and findings. It was important to engage with a research methodology that acknowledged and included me, as a researcher, throughout the process. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed as the methodology most closely fitting with my values, interests and epistemological assumptions and in my view, it could be used as a meaningful approach to explore pupils' and parents' experiences of participating in the ELSA intervention.

The following sections will explore in more depth, factors that have influenced my decision making as a researcher and critically consider aspects of my chosen research methodology.

### **2.1 Personal, Professional and Local Context of Research**

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention is a targeted emotional literacy intervention for pupils, facilitated by a school's teaching assistant (TA). To become an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant, TAs are required to take part in a training programme and subsequent supervision led by educational psychologists (EPs). The training programme combines psychological theory and practical strategies to support TAs to plan and run individual or small group interventions in their schools (Shotton & Burton, 2012). The ELSA training



course has been running in schools for over four years in my placement Local Authority and the educational psychology service has trained 3 cohorts of TAs. My interest in carrying out my research into the ELSA intervention developed from observing another EP's involvement with ELSA during my first practice placement. At the time, I had just become interested in the work by Blatchford and colleagues (Blatchford et al., 2009, 2011; Webster, Blatchford, & Russel, 2013) which explores the impact and deployment of TAs. This work promotes the role of TAs in schools but highlights a need for their roles to be more defined and for them to be supported by better training and monitoring (Russell, Webster, & Blatchford, 2012; Webster et al., 2011). I also worked as a TA prior to the doctorate programme so as a trainee educational psychologist I was keen to develop the ways I could work with TAs in my new role. Additionally, I am passionate about promoting children and young people's well-being. Seeing and hearing about the impact the ELSA training had for TAs and the difference they were making for pupils across schools led me to pursue more information and involvement with ELSA.

When I became aware of how small the research field into ELSA was I became keen to engage in research that could add to the evidence-base. I support the obligation that as educational psychologists, we should be accountable for our interventions and should be confident in the knowledge of what works (Coppock, 2007; The British Psychological Society, 2016). I also wanted to engage in research that could develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of pupils and parents involved with the ELSA programme, which could encourage EPs to reflect on and enhance the current training and supervision that is provided to ELSAs.

## **2.2 My Research Paradigm**

Research paradigms guide decisions about how to carry out research. They can be characterised through their ontology, epistemology and methodology (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and how we understand existence. Epistemology refers to how and what we can know; the theory of knowledge (Willig, 2013). Methodology describes the approach to research, what you do and how you do it; informed by epistemology and ontology.

As a researcher, I was interested in individuals' meaning-making and experiences of emotional literacy interventions, rather than exploring multiple constructions of emotional literacy (e.g. a constructionism paradigm) or attempting to prove facts or laws about the intervention (e.g. a positivist paradigm). Therefore, this study adopts a research paradigm which parallels with a critical realist paradigm (Bhaskar, 2013). A critical realist paradigm assumes that there is a reality that exists independently of our knowledge of it. The only way we can interpret this reality, however, is through our own subjective, conceptual schemas. Critical realism argues that what exists in the social world cannot be reduced to what we know about it (McLachlan & Garcia, 2015). The paradigm is 'realist' because it asserts that there are objects in the world (including social objects such as emotional literacy) whether or not researchers can know about them. It is 'critical' because attempts to describe or explain the real world are fallible and the ways of drawing conclusions between objects in the world cannot be justified in any absolute; they always open to critique and replacement (Scott, 2005). Furthermore, critical realism asserts that there can be multiple valid perspectives and accounts of understanding emotional literacy (Maxwell, 2012).

### **3. My Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Why a Qualitative Methodology?**

The majority of studies identified in the systematic review adopted quantitative methodologies whereby they measured and manipulated variables and aimed to specify relationships between interventions and emotional literacy skills. Whilst this approach can demonstrate validity and reliability, used alone it may not be an adequate means of fully evaluating an intervention as its focus is more on outcomes than processes (Weeks, Hill, & Owen, 2017). Across the studies, there was a lack of consultation with participants involved in the interventions to gain a richer understanding of, for example, their experiences of the intervention, their understanding of emotional literacy, the process of the intervention and the perceived impact they personally felt the intervention had on them. A number of researchers argue that quantitative measures cannot capture the complexity and essence of human experience, relationships, feelings, perceptions, attitudes and the many different backgrounds and contexts of interventions and individuals

taking part in them (Coppock, 2007; Haddon et al., 2005; Steiner, 2003; Weeks et al., 2017).

Quantitative research is just one approach to understanding the world (Henwood, 2008). By adopting a qualitative research framework, it may be possible to explore in more depth, how individuals make sense of their experiences of the ELSA intervention. A qualitative methodology would look beyond questionnaire scores and provide a different perspective into understanding emotional literacy interventions. It is not concerned with establishing cause and effect relationships between the ELSA intervention and pre-defined variables but to understand what is going on for people and between people and to describe, to understand and to explain phenomenon (Willig, 2012).

### **3.2 Why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis?**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a type of qualitative methodology. Silverman (2006) suggests that methodology refers to a general approach to studying research topics, whereas the method refers to specific research techniques. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is considered to be a methodology rather than a method as there is no prescribed way of doing IPA. Rather, IPA is considered to be a set of principles or a stance that can be applied flexibly by researchers (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Smith, Larkin, & Flowers, 2009).

My epistemological stance influenced my choice of IPA as a methodology. IPA aims to explore phenomenon on its own terms (e.g. not according to any preconceived set of assumptions and expectations). IPA accepts that it is not possible to gain direct access to the participant's world but it aims to explore the participant's world from his/her own perspective. During the process of exploration, IPA recognises that a researcher will bring his/her own view of the world to the research and acknowledges the nature of the interaction between them and the participant (Willig, 2013). Therefore, IPA has an epistemic commitment to identify and involve the researcher as an inclusive part of the phenomenon they are researching (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 108; Willig, 2013). In this sense, IPA is described as having a double hermeneutic; each participant is

trying to make sense of their personal and social world, whilst the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense (Smith, 2004). As a result, the phenomenological analysis produced by the researcher is always an interpretation of the participant's experience (Willig, 2013). In my view, these assertions appear compatible with a critical realist ontology.

I was also interested in employing IPA within my research as it is considered to be participant-centred research (Smith, Flowers, & Osborn, 1997). It puts people's perspectives and experiences at the forefront of the study and reinforces that personal phenomena are of value within psychological research (Larkin et al., 2006). This is consistent with my values about how I practice as an educational psychologist. During consultations I strive to create a space to listen to others' views, perspectives and opinions and encourage them to explore and reflect on their experiences with me (Wagner, 2008).

I also considered other qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory and discourse analysis. Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) and Willig (2008) suggest that there are similarities across each of these methodologies and they can all explore questions of meaning and understanding. However, the aims of each methodology are different. Discourse analysis aims to explore how knowledge, meaning, identities and social phenomena are negotiated and constructed through language and conversation (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). As an approach, it would not be concerned with understanding an individual's experience. Instead, it would focus on how the language, words and terminology individuals use when talking about a social process or phenomenon like ELSA, can shed light on a particular area of interest. Grounded theory provides guidelines on how to identify, link and establish relationships between categories, with the aim of developing an explanatory theory of social processes (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007; Willig, 2008). The role of the researcher is also different in an IPA and a grounded theory methodology. Within a grounded theory methodology the researcher's identity, assumptions and standpoints must remain secondary and are not involved within the analysis (Willig, 2008). Within IPA however, the researcher is actively engaged and involved throughout the whole research process, including the analysis. IPA's philosophical underpinning asserts

that the researcher's knowledge and assumptions cannot be detached from the research process. Therefore, grounded theory did not fit with the philosophical assumptions underpinning this research. IPA is concerned with understanding individuals' perspectives and experiences rather than the social context, causes or consequences surrounding it, which a grounded theory methodology would offer (Willig, 2008). As my research question is concerned with exploring individuals' experiences of the ELSA intervention, IPA was chosen as the appropriate qualitative methodology.

## **4. My Research Methods**

### **4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

I took guidance from the literature on recommended IPA procedures which promote the use of semi-structured interviewing as a method of data collection (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2004). In line with IPA principles, semi-structured interviews appeared an appropriate choice as they can be used to encourage participants to tell their own stories, using their own words. An important feature of semi-structured interviews is that as well as exploring areas in relation to the research question, they allow the dialogue between the researcher and participant to be flexible and to flow. The researcher can guide the dialogue but the participant is free to explore other issues and themes which may have not occurred to the researcher (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2013). To support the semi-structured interview process, I used two different interview schedules (child and adult versions, Appendix B). These included a number of specific open-ended questions (Willig, 2013) which explored key themes about ELSA and emotional literacy. Pupils questions were designed to be less abstract and I had also prepared prompt questions to scaffold the dialogue if participants found some questions too general (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2004).

### **4.2 Visual Resources**

To support my discussions with pupils I used visual resources designed by Wilson and Long (2009) which include a range of characters; 'The Blob People' (Appendix C). The Blob People visually express a variety of feelings in different

situations and environments which can be interpreted a number of ways. I used them to facilitate conversations during the semi-structured interviews about thoughts, feelings and emotions with pupils. I hoped the use of visual resources would help to stimulate and focus the discussion and encourage detailed and varied accounts (Willig, 2013). Wall, Hall and Woolner (2012) promote the use of visual methods in research with children. They suggest that they can support two-way communication, facilitate partnership and reduce power dynamics. The Blob People approach is underpinned by personal construct psychology. This approach can highlight the unique perspectives of each child and emphasises that a child has a perspective we cannot know unless we find a way to ask (Hobbs, Todd, & Taylor, 2000; Wagner, 2008).

## **5. Ethical Considerations within My Research**

### **5.1 Informed Consent and Confidentiality**

Trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee are considered to be essential to the success of semi-structured interviewing (King, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2013). I therefore met pupils prior to the interviews and spent time introducing myself, explaining my role and the research and gave time for any questions. I used a visual information sheet to help with this (Appendix G). I asked pupils to think about their ELSA work and gave them some examples of questions I would be asking. I hoped that this initial meeting would reduce any worries about the research process and encourage pupils to feel confident and prepared to talk about their experiences. I gained verbal and signed consent from pupils after our initial meeting (Appendix G). I explained their right to withdraw from the research at any time, explained they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to and made them aware their information would be kept confidential and secure. We discussed the people they could talk to if they were unsure about their participation and I set a date with them for our next meeting so they knew when to expect me. On the day of the interviews, I checked pupils' consent again and re-explained the latter information. With the parents taking part in the research, I negotiated an appropriate place for us to meet and complete the interview process. They had busy schedules and work commitments so it was very important that I was flexible and made arrangements to suit them

(King, 2008).

Punch (2002, p. 328) suggests that the environment in which research with children is carried out needs to be considered with particular care, awareness and sensitivity. She adds, researchers 'should not assume that children necessarily prefer their own environment, they may actually prefer an adult researcher *not* to invade their child space'. After discussing this with their parents, I gave pupils a choice of settings to carry out the interviews (home, school or a community setting), pupils decided they would prefer a quiet space within the school.

## **5.2 Inclusion**

Some IPA studies consider participants' level of spoken language as part of their inclusion criteria; I did not feel comfortable doing so in my research. If I had limited my inclusion criteria based on pupils ability to express their views, this could be highly disempowering (Ingram, 2013) and it may infer that pupils' do not have the autonomy to share their views (Strong, 1995). As Holdsworth (2000, p. 395) questions, 'Who's voices are being heard? Those who speak most coherently?' Smith et al. (2009) suggest participants in an IPA study should be selected on the basis that they can grant access to a particular perspective on the phenomenon under study. I felt that pupils and parents who had experienced the ELSA intervention were well-positioned to do this and I adopt a stance that views pupils as both competent and reflexive in sharing their own experiences (Whitehead, 2012).

## **5.3 Participants' Views and Power Dynamics**

A number of writers promote practice within education that goes beyond just listening to pupils (Fielding, 2004; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2011; Lipman & Sharp, 1978). Rather, researchers should be concerned with finding ways to speak to pupils as equals and in genuine partnership to develop a shared understanding. The nature of my research meant the process was led and facilitate by me, an adult, which inevitably meant my research could not be free of power-dynamics. However, it was still important to me to carry out my research *with* pupils not *on* them (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2011) so I thought carefully and reflexively about how I could create a space to do this. During the interviews I showed respect and a

genuine interest in pupils opinions and views through my use of verbal and non-verbal communication, I was open to different responses and ideas, I answered their questions openly and honestly, I gave them space in the conversation to see where their views led and I tried to scaffold conversations in a way that did not privilege my own agenda (Graham & Fitzgerald, 2011; Lipman & Sharp, 1978). Although I used an interview schedule, which followed my own agenda, I only used questions as a starting point and from this I allowed the conversation to follow the child's lead and ideas.

A possible ethical dilemma within this research relates to what happens to the information gathered; is it acted on, communicated to schools or fed back to participants? (Harding & Atkinson, 2009). The term 'voice' signals having a legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, having the opportunity to speak one's mind, having an active role or influence in decisions and outcomes about and implementation of educational policies and practice (Cook-Slather, 2006; Holdsworth, 2000). Therefore, I felt in order to claim this research's role in eliciting pupils' and parents' voices about the ELSA intervention, I had a responsibility to ensure that their voices were heard and acted upon in meaningful ways. Appendix D outlines some of the ways I have/plan on doing this.

Cook-Slather (2006) states that a potentially difficult aspect of pupil voice research is that it can present challenges that some may not be willing to face, for example, listening to things we do not want to hear. When seeking pupils' views, Earnshaw (2014) suggests that the adult needs to be open to admit mistakes and weaknesses. Furthermore, Ingram (2013) suggests that EPs should be interested in pupil's views to help them critique and reflect about their own views, theories and beliefs. Hobbs et al. (2000) state that EPs need to find ways to position themselves so they can hear pupils' stories and use these stories to challenge the narrative of their own practice. Therefore, I felt it was important to open up dialogue and ask questions that would explore any aspects of the intervention that participants felt could be improved or that they did not like and to not limit my questions to purely focus on the positive/successful aspects of the intervention. I hoped that by doing so, these insights could offer ideas to further develop the training and supervision that I, and perhaps other EPs could provide to ELSAs.



## **5.4 Reflexivity**

An important part of ethical practice, relates to reflexivity (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2010). Reflexivity relates to the process of the researcher reflecting upon the various ways in which they as a person and as a researcher are implicated in the research process and findings (Willig, 2008, 2013). Reflexivity is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of one's subject matter while conducting research' (Willig, 2008, p. 10). As I was actively engaged and involved within the IPA research process and analysis, reflexivity was therefore an integral part of my research (Eatough & Smith, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, Fielding (2004) suggests that reflexivity is an important part of pupils' voice work. Even if adults are supportive of student voice work, there still remains a danger of an adult perspective getting in the way of a deeper understanding of a child's perspective so reflexive questioning is essential.

Willig (2013) suggests that whilst IPA requires a reflexive attitude from the researcher, it does not actually prescribe how to incorporate this into the research process. I found there was very little guidance on how researchers had used reflexivity within IPA studies. So within my own research, it helped to outline a clear definition of what reflexivity meant to me as a researcher. I adopted the following definitions by Willig (2013):

*Table 7: Working definitions of reflexivity*

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <p>Personal reflexivity</p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research.</li> <li>• Thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers.</li> </ul> |
| <p>Epistemological reflexivity</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research and the implications of such assumptions or the research and its findings.</li> </ul>  |

I employed reflexivity as an active and on-going process throughout each stage of the research, not just a one-off exercise (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I applied reflexive strategies; some of these were inspired by techniques used within other qualitative methodologies. Appendix E outlines some of the ways in which I believe I have applied reflexivity throughout my research.

## Chapter 3: Empirical Research

### The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant Intervention: An Exploration from the Perspectives of Pupils and Parents

## **1. Abstract**

Emotional literacy is a process concerned with developing pupils' ability to recognise, understand, express and manage their own and others' emotions. This is considered essential for pupils' academic achievement, development of relationships and mental health. The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant intervention is a school-based intervention to support pupils' emotional literacy skills. Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) are teaching assistants who have been trained and supervised by educational psychologists. Previous research into emotional literacy interventions predominantly adopt quantitative methodologies whereby variables are measured and manipulated and studies aim to specify relationships between interventions and emotional literacy skills. There appears to be a lack of consultation with individuals involved in the interventions, particularly children, young people and their parents.

This research aimed to develop a rich understanding of pupils' and parents' experiences of participating in the ELSA intervention in order to facilitate reflection on current ELSA practices. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was employed as a qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews were used to explore the process and perceived impact of the ELSA intervention with two primary school pupils and two parents. The findings suggest that pupils and parents valued the ELSA intervention. Participants felt the intervention impacted positively on aspects of pupils' emotional literacy development including, improved confidence, coping strategies and skills in managing and expressing their emotions. Important elements of the intervention process included: a need for informed consent, sessions being fun, making the child feel special, space to talk problem-solve and the therapeutic nature of the ELSA-child relationship. The impact of the ELSA intervention was also deemed to have been sustained for a significant amount of time after the intervention had finished. For educational psychologists, this research highlights that through training and supervision of school staff, they can effectively support schools to promote their pupils' emotional literacy development using their own resources (Burton, 2008). The findings add to the small evidence-base promoting the use of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant intervention in schools.

## **2. Introduction**

As well as raising academic attainment, political agendas have specified that schools should be concerned with the social and emotional development of children and young people (Burton, 2008). UK government policies and national strategies including the 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning' emphasise schools' responsibility to promote and teach the skills and values that are essential for supporting social and emotional learning and development. Central to these recommendations is the premise that effective development of social and emotional skills fosters pupils' mental health, physical health and academic achievement and it raises aspirations (Brooks, 2014; Coppock, 2007; Department for Children, 2008-2011; Department for Education, 2005, 2007, 2016; Department of Health, 2015; Faupel & Sharp, 2003; McLaughlin, 2015; National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, 2009; Sharp, 2000; Weare, 2015).

### **2.1 Emotional Literacy**

'Social and emotional skills' and 'emotional literacy skills' are terms used interchangeably within the literature (Coppock, 2007; Weare, 2003). Debates within the field remain contentious regarding the definition and process of emotional literacy development (Gillum, 2010; Humphrey et al., 2007). However, generally it is understood to be concerned with recognising, understanding, managing and expressing emotions and responding to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and to others (Sharp, 2000; Shotton & Burton, 2012; Steiner, 2003; Weare, 2003). Emotional literacy can be promoted at a whole-school, group and individual level (Weare, 2015). Table 8 provides some examples of how schools can promote pupils' emotional literacy at an individual level.

- Supporting pupils to have a positive view of themselves.
- Helping pupils to be aware of the emotions they are experiencing and understanding why they might be feeling that way.
- Exploring the most effective way for expressing their feelings and being able to put it into actions.
- Helping pupils to understand and take into account the feelings of others, then adjusting their response accordingly.
- Teaching and promoting empathy for others.
- Developing and sustaining positive relationships with pupils.
- Teaching pupils to use information about the emotions to plan and solve problems.
- Supporting pupils to repair emotional damage (e.g. recognising and knowing what to do if we upset someone else).

(Sharp, 2000; Shotton & Burton, 2012; Steiner, 2003;  
Weare, 2003)

*Table 8: Supporting pupils' emotional literacy development*

The first part of this thesis reviewed some of the literature into school based, adult facilitated emotional literacy interventions for pupils. These interventions appear to have a positive impact on promoting pupils' social and emotional skills, mental health and improving relationships.

## **2.2 The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant Intervention**

The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention is one type of emotional literacy intervention employed within many UK schools (Burton, 2016). The ELSA intervention was first developed in 2001 by Southampton educational psychology service. It was designed to build the capacity of schools to support the emotional needs of their pupils from within their own resources (Burton, 2016). The ELSA programme is a five-day training course for teaching assistants (TAs) incorporating psychological theory and practical guidance regarding supporting

pupils' emotional literacy in a school context. The training content includes: emotional awareness, self-esteem, anger management, friendship skills, social communication skills, loss and bereavement and family break-up.

The current field of research into the ELSA intervention is small but growing. The majority of research explores the impact of the training programme for teaching assistants. For example, the training has been found to promote TAs' confidence and knowledge base (Mann, 2014), self-efficacy (Grahamslaw, 2010) and improve their relationships with other staff members (Leighton, 2015). In terms of the process of the ELSA intervention, Wilding and Claridge (2016), Miles (2015), Hill, O'Hare and Weidberg (2013), Hill et al. (2013) and McEwen (2015) emphasize the ELSA and child's relationship to be essential in emotional literacy development. ELSAs highlighted trust, giving time and space, listening to the child, building rapport, confidentiality, creating a safe space and making sessions fun as important elements of the intervention (McEwen, 2015). Pupils also valued these factors as well as the on-going support from ELSAs. As ELSAs are based in schools it is possible for them to have regular contact with pupils, outside the intervention sessions. Hill et al. (2013) found that pupils felt the intervention helped to give them a sense of self and to develop specific coping strategies (e.g. managing anger and coping with conflict). Research focussing on pupils' views and experiences of the ELSA intervention is limited. Furthermore, the research by Wilding and Claridge (2016), is to my knowledge, the only study that seeks parents' views about the intervention. Their findings suggested that parents perceived the ELSA intervention to impact positively on their children's social and emotional development and in particular, skills associated with emotional regulation.

### **3. Research Aims**

#### **Individual Experience**

Previous research into emotional literacy interventions has predominantly been concerned with intervention efficacy in terms of the quantitative measurement of researcher-determined social and emotional concepts. The voice of children and their parents in contributing to this research is also limited. I was therefore interested in adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et

al., 2009). Using this qualitative methodology, it may be possible to explore pupils' and their parents' actual experiences of participating in the ELSA intervention and to explore the phenomenological subjectivity underpinning emotional literacy. Within an IPA methodology, the impact of the ELSA intervention can be explored but from the perspectives of pupils and parents, rather than being pre-determined by the researcher. A number of researchers promote the use of IPA as a method to explore the process and impact of psychological interventions. IPA can help practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of the people they are working with, which in turn may facilitate reflection on current practices and lead to changes that enhance provision (Clarke, 2009; Harris, Collinson, & das Nair, 2012; Hawtin & Sullivan, 2011; Smith, Fox, Hedderly, Murphy, & Trayner, 2016; Smith et al., 1997).

### **Process of Intervention and Sustained Impact**

Studies in the literature review were able to indicate that interventions had some significant impact on developing emotional literacy skills but they gave little insight into the process of how pupils' emotional literacy skills were developed as a result of the intervention. By adopting an IPA methodology, the scope of the present study goes beyond the presentation of objective evidence with regards to the efficacy of emotional literacy interventions. It also aims to explore the psychological process of the ELSA intervention by offering a detailed understanding of the experiences of a sample of individuals who have participated in the intervention.

Interventions evaluated in the literature review demonstrated an impact on emotional literacy skills immediately post-intervention. Few studies demonstrated a lasting impact of the intervention. This research therefore aimed to explore the perceived impact of the ELSA intervention for pupils after 6-12 months.

### **Pupil and Parent Voice**

Educational psychologists need to provide spaces for pupils' voices to be listened to, otherwise they will not be accessed (Fox, 2015; Hobbs et al., 2000). Parent participation in particular, within the ELSA research appears to be very limited. Parental involvement and engagement has been found to be essential for the success of social and emotional interventions in schools (Clarke, Morraela, Field,



Hussein, & Barry, 2015; Weare & Nind, 2011; Zins et al., 2004). It was therefore important to involve pupils' parents within my research too. Finally, recognizing achievements made by pupils regarding their own social and emotional learning has also been found to be important regarding the effectiveness of such interventions (Clarke et al., 2015). This research hoped to provide pupils with the opportunity to reflect on their social and emotional progress and achievements following their involvement with the ELSA intervention.

To summarize, this research aims to:

- Explore the experiences and views of pupils and parents about their participation in the ELSA intervention.
- Explore any perceived impact the participants felt the intervention had.

#### **4. Method**

This section outlines how I gathered and analysed pupils' and parents' experiences and perceptions about their participation in the ELSA intervention.

##### **4.1 Participants**

Contact was made with one primary school in the North East of England in which the ELSA intervention has been running for over two years. The participation criteria were discussed with the head teacher, school ELSA and the special educational needs co-ordinator. This involved pupils to have finished their ELSA sessions 6-12 months previously and they were considered to have adequate confidence to talk to me about their experiences. The latter was essential given that ELSA is designed to support emotional vulnerable pupils (Shotton & Burton, 2012)

IPA is concerned with giving a detailed, full appreciation to each participant during the analysis stage (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In order to do this, a small sample size was required (Smith, 2004). Therefore, a sample of four (two pupils and two parents, all female) was sought. One pupil was in Year 5 (aged 9) and the other was in Year 6 (aged 10). At the time of the interviews, both pupils had finished their ELSA sessions approximately 8 months previously. I was not involved in the

discussion of participants with school staff in relation to the inclusion criteria, as I did not want additional background information prior to the research process. This was because as a researcher, I was actively involved and engaged with the research process so I wanted to try to reduce any biases or judgments influenced by having prior knowledge about participants. School staff approached parents to initially discuss the research. I then made contact with the parents who expressed an interest in taking part to discuss the research in more depth. After verbally consenting, parents were sent written information regarding the research and letters requesting their written consent. Parents were asked to consent to both themselves and their children's participation (Appendix G). After gaining parental consent, I met with pupils to introduce myself, explain the research and seek their consent. Chapter 2 (Bridging Document) details the ethical considerations within this research in more depth.

## **4.2 Data Generation**

Guided by writing on recommended IPA procedures, a semi-structured interview approach was adopted (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2004). I designed two interview schedules (one for parents and one for pupils, Appendix B) which included a number of questions within three over-arching (e.g. individual's views about the ELSA role and emotional literacy, experience of the process of the intervention, perceived impact of the intervention). The questions in the interview schedule were constructed to explore gaps identified in the literature view (e.g. the process of the intervention) and to encourage participants to talk about various aspects of their experience of the intervention. With parents, explorative, open, non-directive questions were used, designed to not make too many assumptions about their ELSA experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Pupils questions were designed to be less abstract and I had also prepared prompt questions to scaffold the dialogue if participants found some questions too general (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2004). I used questions to open-up dialogue and from this I followed the participant's lead. Often this could move away from the question to new topics that I had not considered, which is a strength of using semi-structured interviews (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and both pupil and parent data were analysed together. Participant, staff and school names were changed to ensure anonymity. Analysis of interview data was guided by the IPA analysis framework by Smith et al. (2009). Smith et al. states that the IPA analysis framework should be applied flexibly and creatively to data and researchers are not required to adhere to the guidelines in a prescriptive manner. My application of these guidelines was as follows.

#### **Step 1: Reading and re-reading**

Analysis of individual transcripts was completed before moving on to another. This follows an idiographic approach which is consistent with IPA's methodology (Smith et al., 2009). The initial stage involved close reading and re-reading of a single transcript. I also listened to the audio recording alongside the first few readings as this helped to recall the atmosphere of the interview (e.g. visualizing the interview, hearing pauses, intonation, overlapping voices etc.) (Smith et al., 2009).

#### **Step 2: Initial noting**

Annotations were made in the left-hand margin of the transcript. I commented on the content of the data (descriptive comments). This involved highlighting, for example, words, key phrases, events and experiences, as described by the participant. I made comments on the language used by the participant (linguistic comments) and I made more interpretative comments (conceptual comments). The latter involved reflecting on and questioning my initial noting, reflecting on the interview process and drawing upon my own experience and professional knowledge.

#### **Step 3: Developing emerging themes**

I drew out emergent themes from my notes of the transcript. These themes reflected the participants' original words and thoughts but also included my interpretations of these. This reflects the double hermeneutic process of IPA; I was making sense of the participant making sense of their ELSA experiences.

#### **Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes**

I created a list of all my emergent themes in chronological order. I then moved themes around to form groups of related themes to create super-ordinate themes.

#### **Step 5: Moving on to the next case**

The above process was repeated with the remaining transcripts. Inevitably, I was influenced by the analysis process and findings from completing previous transcripts. However, it was important to treat each transcript as a single case and try as far as possible, to adhere to the ideological nature of IPA. To support this, I used a number of reflexive strategies (see Chapter 2 and Appendix D). I also ensured that I continuously checked my themes against the transcription data to ensure that participants' meaning-making and experiences remained prominent throughout.

#### **Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases**

I looked for themes across cases. Common themes were grouped together to form master themes which represented shared high-order qualities. Relevant extracts from transcripts were selected for each super-ordinate theme (Appendix F).

## 4. Findings

Through the process of IPA, I interpreted interview transcripts to create three final master themes and a number of super-ordinate themes to encapsulate pupils' and their parents' views and experiences about their involvement with the ELSA intervention.

*Table 9: Master themes and super-ordinate themes*

| <b>Master theme</b>                     | <b>Super-ordinate theme</b>                    |
|---|--|
| <b>Process of intervention</b>          | Enjoyable and special                          |
|   | Communication and informed consent             |
|   | Perceptions of the ELSA role                   |
|   | Space to talk and problem-solve                |
| <b>Perceived impact of intervention</b> | Improving relationships and friendship skills. |
|   | Managing and expressing emotions               |
|   | Improving confidence.                          |
|   | Developing coping strategies                   |
|   | Alleviating worries and anxiety                |
| <b>Evidence of impact</b>               | Feedback from others                           |
|   | Observable changes                             |
|   | No set-backs                                   |

Whilst the master themes and super-ordinate themes are represented visually as distinct categories in the table, I would suggest that there are links and overlap across and between themes. I have attempted to highlight these dynamics in more detail in the following section. For each master theme I present the findings and discuss them alongside previous research and psychological theory.

### 5.1 Master theme: Process of Intervention

This theme is my interpretation of pupils' and parents' experiences of the process of the ELSA intervention

## **Super-ordinate theme: Enjoyable and Special**

For both parents and pupils, it appeared that it was important that the ELSA sessions were enjoyable and fun.

*Table 10: Quotes from theme 'enjoyable and special'*

*"it was like fun and you were doing it with your friends" (Emma, child)*

*"no because she enjoyed it. There wasn't at any point she came home and she was frustrated with it. I think it's almost, made to be a fun thing for them in that school because she never came home frustrated about it" (Louise, parent)*

*"she seen it as something special because her brothers and sisters weren't doing it and her friends weren't doing it" (Faye, parent)*

If young people are asked to engage in activities that are not of value or worth to them then they are unlikely to respond positively (Mowat, 2010). Playing games and having fun are crucial to the process of emotional literacy development and they can help to promote pupils' engagement in social and emotional learning (Hill et al., 2013; Hromek & Roffey, 2009; Kelly, Longbottom, Potts, & Williamson, 2004; Mowat, 2015). The ELSA training encourages TAs to think creatively about how they can support pupils to achieve objectives and games and activities are strongly recommended to help with this (Burton, 2016). With targeted interventions like ELSA, there is a risk that pupils may find attending the sessions stigmatising (Craig, 2007; Mowat, 2015). This did not appear to be the case for either child and one parent spoke about how the ELSA sessions made their child feel special. Leighton (2015) found that ELSAs try to ensure they worked with pupils when they were least likely to miss something exciting happening in their class or one of the pupils' favourite lessons. In addition, when ELSAs met with pupils they tried to make their session together interesting and fun.

## **Super-ordinate theme: Communication and Informed Consent**

Transparency and a having a clear understanding about the intervention was talked about by pupils and parents. They indicated confusion and a lack of clarity

about their initial involvement.

*Table 11: Quotes from theme ‘communication and informed consent’*

*“my mum told me. But when my mum told me she had to explain it coz I didn’t understand” (Pippa, child)*

*“[my friends] were confused coz they didn’t know where I was going..” (Emma, child)*

*“to be fair, they (school) didn’t explain a lot of it..” (Faye, parent)*

*“I didn’t receive any feedback from school but obviously I’m presuming those sessions are confidential... I’ve got a really good relationship with Pippa and we do talk a lot but I also understand that sometimes she may feel that she doesn’t want to talk to me about certain things and that she might find it easier to talk to someone outside the family” (Louise, parent)*

It is important that pupils are not passive recipients of intervention programmes and that they are fully consulted about their involvement (Mowat, 2010). These findings highlight the importance of involving pupils in the referral, explaining the intervention to them and consulting with them about what the sessions may entail (Hills, 2017). Pippa highlights the importance of parents being fully informed about the intervention as it appears that she looked to her mother as a source of reassurance and information about her own involvement.

In terms of parental participation, there is no set guidance or expectations within the ELSA training about how ELSAs communicate and work with parents. Wilding and Claridge (2016) argue that to promote emotional literacy development it is essential that skills are positively reinforced within the home context as well as in schools. They recommend that directly involving parents in the intervention process could support this. However, in the present study, one parent did indicate that it was helpful that the school took responsibility and onus for developing her daughter’s emotional literacy and the ELSA did so confidentially.

## Super-ordinate theme: Space to Talk and Problem-Solve

The ELSA training not only considers how ELSAs can support pupils' communication skills but it encourages ELSAs to adapt and reflect on their own communication. The training explores some of the elements and skills that promote a therapeutic relationship between the ELSA and the pupil (Shotton & Burton, 2012). Elements of the relationship that appeared to be beneficial for pupils in the present study, were the process of talking and problem-solving with the ELSA. It appears that the ELSA was able to develop a positive and trusting relationship and created a safe space whereby pupils felt comfortable talking through their problems or worries.

*Table 12: Quotes from theme 'space to talk and problem-solve'*

*"she said 'yeah I quite like that I can talk to someone about my worries'" (Louise quoting Pippa).*

*"she asked us if there's anything wrong and then if there is we talk what to do about it" (Pippa, child)*

*"So it was just looking at what her worries were and sort of taking those worries away so that she knew what strategies were in place so she didn't have to worry about it" (Louise, parent)*

This reflects a process whereby pupils' social and emotional skills can be developed and learned over time and can be shaped by the interactions and relationships they experience within their environment and social context (Adams, 2011; Haddon et al., 2005; Park, 1999; Sharp, 2000; Steiner, 2003; Tew, 2007). Forging an effective relationship between the ELSA and pupil has been found to be essential to the success of the intervention (Hill et al., 2013; McEwen, 2015; Miles, 2015; Wilding & Claridge, 2016). This perhaps links to an area of positive psychology which postulates that healthy relationships, and positive emotions within these, are essential for promoting pupils' well-being, learning and resilience (Hattie, 2008; Roffey, 2012; Sarkova et al., 2014; Segrin & Taylor, 2007; Weare & Gray, 2003)



Mowat (2010) suggests that as pupils have to operate within the school environment, interventions that help to build relationships with an adult with whom they will continue to have contact throughout their schooling (not just at the time of the intervention) are of vital importance. The ELSA intervention does this; ELSAs are based in school and are members of the staff team so pupils may already be familiar with them and have regular contact with them outside their sessions.

## **5.2 Master Theme: Perceived Impact of Intervention**

This theme is my interpretation of pupils' and parents' views about the impact the ELSA intervention had on them.

### **Super-ordinate theme: Improving Relationships and Friendship Skills**

Both parents and pupils reflected on how pupils' relationships with their siblings had improved as a result of the ELSA intervention; to my understanding, no other research has reported this finding. Pupils' constructions of friendships were also found to have developed.

*Table 13: Quotes from theme 'improving relationships and friendship skills'*

*"I used to be a bit mean with my brother as well and we used to argue.. now we don't argue as much...if my brothers in a bad mood, I'm not going into his room and asking to play Minecraft." (Pippa, child)*

*"she has a better relationship with her brother and her little sister, she's more tolerant with her little sister" (Faye, parent)*

*"with her friendships and everything. The way she talks about her friends, she never used to before" (Faye, parent)*

*"I've got a lot more friends than I did before" (Emma, child)*

*"I am extremely grateful for that intervention that child did because it's nice to see her not be as in herself as she was. And it's nice to see her come out of her shell and wanting to help others" (Faye, parent)*

Emotional literacy includes understanding and taking into account the feelings of others, then adjusting your own responses accordingly (Steiner, 2003; Weare, 2003). The ELSA may have supported pupils to develop these skills which could have benefitted their relationships and friendships. This may have been facilitated by the ELSA modelling (Bandura, 1977) and scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) social skills with pupils during their sessions, which is covered in the ELSA training course. One pupil mentioned that she used to speak with her ELSA about arguments with her brother and her peers. This could reflect emotional literacy skills developing as a result of the therapeutic relationship that forms between the ELSA and the pupil (Leighton, 2015; McEwen, 2015) and links to the theme 'process of talking and problem-solving'. Humphrey (2013) suggests that given that schools are social places and learning is a social process, emotional literacy helps to improve outcomes for pupils as it enables them to work better with others.

### **Super-ordinate Theme: Developing Coping Strategies and Expressing and Managing Emotions**

Emotional literacy involves using information about the emotions to plan and solve problems (Weare, 2003). Parents talked about how the ELSA sessions had supported their children to work through specific worries or problems by developing strategies that were personalised to their child's situation and context.

*Table 14: Quotes from themes 'developing coping strategies' and 'expressing and managing emotions'*

*"I think seeing ELSA gave her strategies to cope with anxiety. So in a morning she wasn't feeling so overwhelmed by everything whereas before, mornings were awful, absolutely awful... um and I think within the ELSA, from what Pippa said to me, she talked through that and with Mrs Robinson (ELSA) and they put strategies in place" (Louise, parent)*

*"she isn't afraid to say how she's feeling. Whereas before she would have stayed very quiet and not said how she's feeling" (Faye, parent)*

*"if someone had said, "no that's not quite right darling" she would have broken down and that would have been the end of it and you wouldn't have got anything out of her. Whereas now she's asking more to the teachers, asking peers" (Faye,*

*parent)*

*“it means.. if I like get stuck at something I like ask a question and ask if someone can help me” (Emma, child)*

The ELSA training encourages TAs to work in a solution-oriented way by encouraging and facilitating conversations that focus on change, hope and thinking about solutions to problems, rather than purely analysing problems (De Shazer & Berg, 1997). Furthermore, the training encourages TAs to apply their knowledge and understanding of the pupils’ social context and to empower pupils to develop strategies, as opposed to just telling them what to do (Rogers, 1956). This relates to elements of emotional literacy concerned with helping pupils to develop an awareness of the emotions they are experiencing, understanding why they are feeling that way and knowing the most effective way for expressing their feelings (Shotton & Burton, 2012; Steiner, 2003; Weare, 2003).

### **Super-ordinate Theme: Improving Pupils’ Confidence**

Pupils growing in confidence was another outcome associated by parents and pupils with the ELSA intervention. Parents used the word ‘confidence’ directly to describe their child’s behavioural changes and they gave examples which I interpreted to fit with the construct. An important aspect of emotional literacy is developing a positive sense of self (Sharp, 2000; Weare, 2003), which relates to self-confidence. Perhaps because of pupils’ growing confidence, parents spoke about how their children’s friendships had improved and how they were able to engage more with learning and classroom activities.

*Table 15: Quotes from theme ‘improving pupils’ confidence’*

*“they (the sessions) helped me like, coz I used to didn’t like putting my hand up to questions coz I was a bit nervous but when I was speaking with Mrs Robinson I started putting my hand up more” (Emma, child)*

*“You know like the saying ‘walk a little taller’ and I know its daft and I know it’s a figure of speech but that child since doing this, she does seem to do that” (Faye, parent)*

*“when I spoke to her teacher at the end of last year compared to the beginning of*

*the year at parents evening she remarked on what a different child, she'd grown in confidence um and she was just a lot more sure of herself" (Louise, parent)*

### **Super-ordinate Theme: Alleviating Worries and Anxiety**

Possibly closely interlinked with the process of pupils' developing confidence and managing their emotions, an additional finding in the present study related to the reduction of worry and anxiety. This theme is the only one that I have interpreted to have benefitted both pupils and parents. The ELSA intervention appeared to have an impact directly on reducing pupils' anxiety. Therefore, perhaps as a consequence of seeing this impact and observing their child's anxiety reduce, it indirectly reduced parents' worries.

*Table 16: Quotes from theme 'alleviating worries and anxiety'*

*"I'm not that much nervous now and stuff" (Emma, child)*

*"I am grateful for it because she has this new found confidence that I don't think she'd have without it.. I think I'd still be the one sat there thinking, she's never guna settle..' (Faye, parent)*

*"that is a huge relief for me. Because I don't have to see her battling with, almost anxiety" (Faye, parent)*

*"it's relieved a lot of stress.. having to deal with Pippa's meltdowns, stress, anxiety, having to leave her at her child minders and peel her off me, all of that meant I was coming to work extremely stressed.. so now, that has completely alleviated all that so we don't have any of that on a morning any more" (Louise, parent)*

### **5.3 Master Theme: Evidence of Change**

This theme relates to my interpretations about some of the additional factors and processes that participants attributed to seeing change as a result of the ELSA intervention.

### **Super-ordinate Theme: Feedback from Others**

For parents, feedback from other people appeared to be a source that reinforced their views about the positive changes relating to their child's participation in ELSA.

*Table 17: Quotes from theme 'feedback from others'*

*"My mum is a mental health nurse and even she said the difference in her since doing the ELSA intervention has been unreal" (Faye, parent)*

*"the child-minder feeding back to me. I mean her words were "what a completely different child she is" (Louise, parent)*

*"At the last parents evening I went to see her class teacher and he just said that she's still quiet but she's developing her confidence within Year 5 so he has no worries about her at all..." (Louise, parent)*

### **Super-ordinate Theme: No set backs**

Parents also talked about how they felt after their child had completed the ELSA sessions. They initially anticipated that the positive changes might not be sustained, particularly when pupils were faced with an upcoming change or transition. This however was not the case; perhaps this indicates that the ELSA intervention also helped to develop pupils' resilience (their ability to process and 'bounce back' from difficult situations (Weare, 2003, p. 4).

Table 18: Quotes from theme 'no set backs'

*"My child-minder commented to me as well just at the start of the year.. Um she said I was half expecting Pippa to come back and for us to be at square one but that's not the case.. she's gone back absolutely fine" (Louise, parent)*

*"I think for what it was, it's had that impact and that impact has been sustained" (Louise, parent)*

*"when she finished it. Just before the end of the summer term. Both me and the teacher said. If it has made an impact; we will see it in September. Because that's when the whole cycle starts again normally with her. And god love her, she's gone in and she hasn't changed to how she was in July, and that is a huge relief for me" (Louise, parent)*

My interpretations about the sustained changes after the ELSA intervention are multiple. At an individual level the ELSA intervention may have helped pupils to develop their emotional literacy skills and resources to cope with transitions and changes. Alongside this, the rapport and therapeutic relationship forged between the ELSA and pupils is likely to have evoked change (Roffey, 2012; Rogers, 1956). In addition, change could also be linked to organisational factors. It was beyond the scope of the present research, however, an important area for future research could be to explore the organisational emotional literacy factors of the schools in which the research took place (Humphrey, 2013). For example, previous research suggests that the ELSA intervention works more effectively when it is embedded within a whole-school emotional literacy ethos (Weare, 2015), when school staff have a shared understanding and awareness of the intervention (Burton, 2016), the schools' senior management team support and promote the intervention and ELSA role (Leighton, 2015) and when ELSAs have clearly defined and established roles, resources and time allocations for working with pupils (Leighton, 2015; McEwen, 2015; Rees, 2016).

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Summary of Findings**

The first aim of this research was to explore the experiences and views of pupils and parents about their participation in the ELSA intervention, with a focus on the process of the intervention. As far as I am aware, this research was the first to

explore the ELSA intervention from the perspectives of primary school children and their parents. The findings support previous research into the intervention as well as offering some new findings. Regarding the process of the intervention, having someone to talk to and share the responsibility of worries or problems was found to be an effective part of the process. The importance of confidentiality, fun and enjoyment within the ELSA sessions and the need for parents and pupils to be fully informed about the intervention were also highlighted in relation to the process; which supports previous research findings by Burton (2008), Hills (2017), McEwen, (2015) and Leighton (2015).

The second aim of this research was to explore any perceived impact of the ELSA intervention. Pupils and parents indicated that they felt the intervention helped to build pupils' confidence, which in turn supported their relationships, engagement and participation in activities inside and outside of school. This finding adds to previous research which found that the ELSA intervention promotes pupils' confidence (Bravery & Harris, 2009; Burton, 2008; Dodds, Blake, Garland, & Shotter, 2015) and impacted positively on their friendships (Burton, 2008; Hills, 2017; McEwen, 2015). A new finding from this study was that participants highlighted that the ELSA sessions helped pupils to develop their relationships with their siblings. Another new finding was that the ELSA intervention helped to reduce pupils' worries and anxiety and, perhaps in turn, this helped to reduce their parents' worries about them. To my understanding, this study is also the first to explore whether the ELSA intervention was perceived to have had a lasting impact on outcomes for pupils. Participants suggested that they felt the impact of the ELSA sessions had been sustained and continued, over eight months after pupils had finished the intervention.

## **6.2 Implications for Educational Psychology Practice**

### **Consulting with Pupils and Parents**

This research shows the importance of consulting with pupils regarding educational provision. Pupils are not always consulted or participate in the development of systems that are designed to support them (Todd, 2007). Interventions are often 'done' to pupils; they should not be passive recipients of

interventions and in order to continue to develop and improve the ELSA intervention, it is crucial that pupils are consulted (Mowat, 2010). Furthermore in a wider context, Fox (2015, p. 394) suggests that by helping children to speak up for themselves, EPs are promoting social justice. Finally, the experience of participating in this research may also help to increase pupils' confidence, self-esteem and enhance their beliefs that their views matter and can effect change (Kirby, 2004).

Research into parents' experiences and views within the ELSA literature is very limited; to my knowledge, only one other study involves parents (Wilding & Claridge, 2016). In line with Wildings & Claridge's findings, my interpretations indicated that perhaps parents would have valued more communication with school about and during the process of their child's participation in the intervention. Wilding & Claridge suggest that through the ELSA training and supervision sessions, EPs can help ELSAs to develop positive, mutually supportive relationships with parents.

### **Use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Educational Psychology**

This research promotes the use of IPA within educational psychology research as an effective way to elicit pupils' and parents' voices. EPs need to provide spaces for pupils' voices to be listened to, otherwise they will not be accessed (Hobbs et al., 2000; Mercieca & Mercieca, 2014). A primary aim of IPA as a methodology is to create a space that allows participants to tell their story and for the researcher to get as close to each participant's view as is possible (Smith, 2004; Willig, 2012). IPA could be effectively used as a tool to develop understanding about psychological interventions through the co-construction of meaning between the EP and service users. IPA encourages EP practice to move away from categorizing and explaining behaviour, it can open up understanding about what it is like to be a child or young person and how the world is experienced from their perspective (Danaher & Briod, 2005; Gilling, 2012). Danaher and Briod (2005) argue that interpretative phenomenological approaches should not be limited to research projects. They argue that the principles should be applied more generally in professional practice and adults should be encouraged to regularly think about what it means to be a child to develop teaching, learning and



relationships. Using consultation, EPs are well placed to facilitate this kind of thinking with schools and families as well as creating spaces for children and young people to share their views directly with the adults around them.

### **Evidence-based Practice**

The educational psychologist-led ELSA training and supervision is potentially a traded service that can be commissioned by schools across many local authorities in England (Burton, 2016). There is an increasing need to demonstrate value, worth and accountability of the services being offered to schools (Lee & Woods, 2017; Weeks et al., 2017). It is therefore essential that EPs promote the evidence-base behind ELSA (Hills, 2017). EPs have a duty to be accountable for their interventions and to be confident in the knowledge of what works (Coppock, 2007; The British Psychological Society, 2016). This research offers a contribution to the small but growing evidence-base into ELSA. I hope these findings can be used by EPs to promote the effectiveness of the ELSA programme as a service that can be offered to schools, to help EPs develop the training and supervision of ELSAs, and by ELSAs to develop their intervention work within schools.

### **Direct Links to Educational Psychology Practice**

An important aspect of pupils' voice work should be that it helps the EP to critique, challenge and reflect on the narratives of their practices, theories and beliefs (Hobbs et al., 2000; Ingram, 2013). Some of the findings in this research could be applied not only to ELSA work but to EP work too. For example, the role of the ELSA may have initially been confusing for pupils and parents. It is essential for EPs to take time to explain, clarify and negotiate their involvement with service users, especially pupils and parents. The EP role is not always communicated appropriately to families and it can be unclear what the nature of EP involvement is (Lawrence, 2014). Furthermore, Wagner (2000) suggests that when EPs clarify and work out ways of explaining their role with service users, they increase engagement and contribution.

The value of the therapeutic relationship that pupils and ELSAs foster is highlighted throughout the findings in the present research and in previous

research. McEwen (2015) found that pupils attributed a range of qualities and behaviours to their ELSA that helped to create a positive relationship and enhanced their enjoyment of sessions (e.g. being helpful, kind, playful, calm). ELSAs also had a view on what attributes they felt they had that supported their role, such as being a good listener, being empathetic and having to use their initiative (Leighton, 2015; McEwen, 2015). Hills (2017) suggests that for EPs, this could have implications regarding the selection of ELSAs to the training programme. During recruitment to the ELSA programme, EPs may need to promote the importance of the aforementioned characteristics and skills required in the ELSA role.

Finally, as children and young people spend a large proportion of their lives in school, there is potential and growing responsibility for schools to develop the ways they support pupils' social, emotional and mental health and EPs are well placed to facilitate this (Weeks et al., 2017). EPs do not always have the capacity to carry out their own therapeutic interventions directly (Atkinson, Squires, Bragg, Wasilewski, & Muscutt, 2013). Therefore, by offering training and supervision in this area, EPs can help schools to build their capacity to support the emotional needs of their pupils from within their own resources (Burton, 2016).

### **6.3 Strengths and Limitations of this Research**

Given the nature of IPA in representing individuals' experiences and voices; this research therefore does not claim that the experiences of the pupils and parents in the present research are generalizable to a wider population of others participating in the ELSA programme. However, I advocate that it highlights important considerations for future development.

Another possible limitation of this study was that it was based on participants' retrospective accounts. Whilst this allowed for a view about how participants felt about the impact of the ELSA programme after a significant time period, participants views may have been influenced by their present circumstances, retrospective interpretation of events or forgetting details (Willig, 2013). Heath et al. (2009, p. 97) suggest that retrospective semi-structured interviews can produce a sense of change over time. However, they can be 'tinged by a

perspective based on hindsight'. Perhaps repeating interviews at different time points before, during and after the ELSA intervention would allow for an engagement with change as it unfolds over time (Heath et al., 2009).

Perhaps another limitation of using IPA is that it cannot make claims regarding the objective and truthful accounts of experience. However, Smith et al. (1997) challenge this limitation; they advocate that IPA seeks to capture how individuals experience and respond to phenomena. IPA therefore has a different epistemological commitment to quantitative research where issues of validity, reliability, effect size etc. are important (Smith et al., 1997). Another possible limitation of IPA could be that the analytic process cannot achieve a genuinely first-person account (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA however is described as a 'double hermeneutic' or dual interpretation process whereby the interpretation of phenomena is always constructed by the participant *and* the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Despite these considerations, employing an IPA methodology is considered to be participant-centred research (Smith et al., 1997). This is important in psychological research as it puts people's perspectives and experience at the forefront of the study and reinforces that personal phenomena are of value (Larkin et al., 2006). This is of particular relevance when exploring and providing suggestions with regards to psychological interventions like ELSA (Smith et al., 1997).

#### **6.4 Future Considerations**

It was not possible within the scope of the present study but it may have been insightful to seek the views and experiences of the pupils' ELSA and class teacher. By involving teachers, perhaps it would be possible to explore if there was any impact of the intervention on academic outcomes for pupils, which is a gap within the field (Humphrey, 2013). Furthermore, given that emotional literacy is considered to be a dynamic process, developed between individuals (Weare, 2003), understanding the ELSAs experiences of supporting these pupils may have given additional insight into how pupils' emotional literacy was developed.

Finally, in line with Weare's (2003) assertion that emotional literacy is required at different levels within a school, Roffey (2008) created an eco-systemic model of

emotional literacy. Further research is needed to explore factors and practices at each of these levels within schools to effectively understand and develop how schools can promote the emotional literacy and well-being of their staff and pupils both at a whole-school and individual level (Humphrey, 2013; Roffey, 2008).

## **7. Conclusions**

This research's findings promote the use of school-based, targeted interventions to support pupils' emotional literacy development. In order to further understanding about these types of interventions and to inform future training and supervision of ELSAs, this research highlights the importance of exploring the experiences and perspectives of the pupils and parents directly involved, as well as enquiring into the elements that contributed to the perceived effectiveness.

For EPs, I hope this research promotes the use of a potentially effective resource that can be offered to schools; the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant intervention. The small but growing body of research, including the present study, indicates that through training and supervision of school staff, EPs can effectively support schools to promote their pupils' social and emotional development from within their own resources (Burton, 2008). For anyone working with children and families, I hope this research process emphasizes the importance of trying to understand what the world is like from their perspective. Most of all, I hope this research shows the importance of helping children and young people to love, understand and accept themselves and other people and it shows how powerful supportive relationships can be in over-coming difficulties.

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## Appendix A: Assessing study quality using EPPI Weight of Evidence

| EPPI Weight of Evidence Questions  | 1. Humphrey et al (2010)   | 2. Ohi, Fox & Mitchell (2013)  | 3. Knowler & Frederickson (2013)  | 4. Liddle & Middleton (2010)   | 5. Waters (2008)  | 6. Mann (2014)  |
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| <b>1. Are there ethical concerns about the way the study was done?</b>                               | <p><b>Pros:</b> school, parent and child consent obtained. Staff who knew children well identified them for intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no information regarding how nature of study was explained to pupils/parents.</p> <p><b>No ethical concerns.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> parental and school consent obtained. Chose not to have a waiting list comparison group as the funding was only available for certain time period (so wanted all children identified to receive intervention). University ethical approval granted.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no mention of child consent.</p> <p><b>No ethical concerns</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> consent gained from pupils parents. Ethical approval granted from University ethics committee and school district. Method of peer nomination system clearly explained to pupils. Informed consent gained from pupils. Reasons for excluding pupils from study deemed ethical (no consent/children moved out of area).</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> research explained but no explanation given to children about nature/purpose of intervention.</p> <p><b>No ethical concerns</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> parental and child consent gained. Two information sessions about research and intervention held for parent and carers. Support to complete questionnaires provided for pupils with limited literacy or language skills.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> children excluded from intervention if they were deemed 'unable' to participate in small group; not appropriately explained to reader.</p> <p><b>Yes, some ethical concerns</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> pupils' names changed for confidentiality. Individual information sessions provided for parents and pupils about intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no information about how researchers discussed or gave information about the research to their participants. No discussion of consent.</p> <p><b>Yes, some ethical concerns.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> indepth consideration of ethical issues including informed consent, confidentiality, duty of care and right to withdraw.</p> <p><b>No ethical concerns.</b></p> |
| <b>2. Were students and/or parents appropriately involved in the design or conduct of the study?</b> | <p><b>Cons:</b> no involvement from parents or pupils in the design or delivery.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>   | <p><b>Cons:</b> no involvement from parents or pupils in the design or delivery.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>   | <p><b>Cons:</b> no involvement from parents or pupils in the design or delivery.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>  | <p><b>Cons:</b> no involvement from parents or students in design or delivery.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> parents involved in the delivery of intervention</p> <p><b>Yes.</b></p>   | <p><b>Cons:</b> no involvement from parents or students in design or delivery.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>  |

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| <p><b>3. Is there sufficient justification for why the study was done the way it was?</b></p>                 | <p><b>Pros:</b> Good justification for study aims and intervention. Links made to relevant legislation at time of study. Rationale links clearly to aims and aims clearly outlined.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no explanation/warrant given for chosen terms (e.g. social competence not emotional intelligence). No discussion of researchers' philosophical assumptions.</p> <p><b>Yes, sufficient justification given.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> clear rationale and aims. Reference to legislation. Some definitions of key terms. Good justification for target population and intervention. Links to existing empirical research.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> theoretical stance and background not made clear. No discussion of researchers' philosophical assumptions.</p> <p><b>Yes, sufficient justification given.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> justification for peer nomination method supported by other research. Explanation about how intervention fitted with current practice in school. Good justification for target population (children displaying bullying behaviours) and relevance of intervention. A lot of prior research discussed. Clear rationale and aims.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no definition given of some of the key terms (emotional literacy/emotional intelligence) and theoretical background of these not made clear.</p> <p><b>Yes, sufficient justification given.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> aims of study clearly outlined. Reference made to UK national statistics and relevant information about current context of health and education services. Justification given for importance of area</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of researchers' philosophical assumptions.</p> <p><b>Yes, sufficient justification given.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> in-depth justification for study aims and intervention. Links made to relevant legislation at time of study. Rationale links clearly to aims and aims clearly outlined. Rationale for target sample clear. Explanation of theoretical assumptions of intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of researchers' philosophical assumptions and links to design or method.</p> <p><b>Yes, sufficient justification given.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> clear description of key terms and reasons why. Links to relevant legislation. Discussion of theoretical basis. Discussion of error/bias in data collection. Discussion of researchers' epistemological beliefs and links to design and methods.</p> <p><b>Yes, good</b></p>                                      |
| <p><b>4. Was the choice of research design appropriate for addressing the research question(s) posed?</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> pre- and post-comparison group design.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> questionnaires used were described as emotional literacy/emotional intelligence; study measured social and emotional competence (no explanation given as to whether researchers deemed these constructs the same/different). 'Mental health difficulties' measured on strength and difficulties</p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> pre- and post-design. Questionnaire fits with intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> explained why waiting list comparison group was not used but did not explain who the comparison group were. Chose not to use self-report part of questionnaire for children as too young.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> good justification given for relevance of intervention and population. Random assignment to groups. Lengthy intervention duration (12 weeks) School staff delivering intervention were trained and had contact with supervising educational psychologists. Pre- and post-comparison group design.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> small sample</p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> measures used were those employed in previous studies of same intervention, to allow comparability. Questionnaires fit with constructs intervention aims to improve.</p> <p><b>Yes, appropriate choice.</b></p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> pre- and post-intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no rationale or discussion of research design or methodology. No comparison group. No limitations of research design discussed.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> discussion of how philosophical assumptions fit with aims, design, methods etc. Strong rationale for study with reference to empirical studies. In depth discussion of limitations of design/data collection.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> sample size too small for conclusive statistical analysis.</p> <p><b>No</b></p> |

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|  | <p>questionnaire; again no warrant for this. No details given about the content of the intervention and whether this fits with questionnaires.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>   |   | <p>size, only one school.</p> <p><b>Yes, appropriate choice.</b></p>   |  |  |  |
| <p><b>5. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the repeatability or reliability of data collection methods or tools?</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> clear description and referencing of intervention and explanation about how it was used. Empirical support for chosen questionnaire.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> researchers did not carry out data collection. Overview of intervention structure but no content and unable to find this online.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> clear description and referencing of intervention and explanation about how it was used. Empirical support for chosen questionnaire.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no information given about comparison group (demographics, recruitment etc.). Pyramid leader required for implementation of intervention but no expansion on what this entails (qualifications, training etc.).</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> repeatable standardised tools used. Good description and references provided for each tool. Evidence given to support retest reliability for one tool.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> Intervention scheme written by author; no access or information online (but did state it is available from direct contact with author).</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> clear description and references for each measure<br/>Structured manual for intervention providing guidance on sessions and delivery.<br/>Accredited one-day training course for those wishing to run intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> No attempt to describe the reliability of data, tools or methods used.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> expert evaluator was employed to monitor subjectivity of the primary researcher in data collection and analysis. Good reasons given for excluding data. Accredited training course provided for staff running intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> No attempt to describe the reliability of data, tools or methods used.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> researcher collected data. Examples of questionnaires/interview questions provided in appendix. Procedure and data clearly outlined. Empirical support for chosen questionnaires. Clear rationale for choice of methodology.</p> <p><b>Yes, good</b></p> |



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| <p><b>6. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the validity or trustworthiness of data collection tools and methods?</b></p> | <p><b>Cons:</b> no information about school staff training/qualifications in running intervention and the researchers involvement in this.<br/>Not an equal gender split.<br/>Data not collected by researchers.<br/>Only one method of data collection.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>                                | <p><b>Pros:</b> intervention participation criterion set to ensure 'treatment integrity'. Supervision provided for intervention leaders throughout.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> data not collected by researchers.<br/>Different people delivered the intervention across schools.<br/>No explanation given about details of comparison group.<br/>Large difference in size between comparison and intervention groups.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt.</b></p>            | <p><b>Pros:</b> training for intervention delivered by author to all staff and fidelity methods used for intervention teaching.<br/>Telephone contact and drop in sessions for staff delivering intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no explanation about who collected data.<br/>Intervention/training adapted from current intervention.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> measures before and immediately after intervention, therefore more attributable to it than if carried out later</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> different people delivered the course across samples.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> most data gathered by researchers.<br/>Staff and researchers received all received training for delivery of intervention.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of any factors impacting data collection.<br/>Unequal gender split.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempt.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> data gathered by researcher, consistent across participants.<br/>Thorough discussion and consideration of factors impacting the trustworthiness/validity of data.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion about how interventions differed/were consistent across the schools taking part.</p> <p><b>Yes, good.</b></p>  |
| <p><b>7. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the repeatability or reliability of data analysis?</b></p>                    | <p><b>Pros:</b> description of statistical analysis given. Between and within variables used.<br/>Cronbach's alpha used.<br/>Non-significant results stated.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no explanation of how data analysis was carried out and by whom.<br/>Data not collected by researchers</p> <p><b>Yes</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> detailed descriptions of statistical analysis used. Effect sizes given.<br/>Analysis' to account for violations included and explained.<br/>Between- and within-subject variable used (fuller analysis).<br/>Results shown graphically.<br/>Significant and non-significant results discussed.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no explanation of how data analysis was carried out and who by.<br/>Data not collected by researchers.</p> <p><b>Yes</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> Cronbach's alpha used to determine groups. One standardised tool used (not all).<br/>Statistical methods of analysis clearly stated and mapped to hypothesis.<br/>Effect sizes given.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no description of how/how many/who did analysis.</p> <p><b>Yes</b></p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> analysis clearly stated to measure impact of intervention over time (repeated measures: ANOVA)<br/>Results shown in tables.</p> <p><b>Yes.</b></p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> method of analysis for qualitative data stated and used across sample.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of analysis used on quantitative data.<br/>No examples of questions given for interviews.</p> <p><b>No.</b></p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> clear description of qualitative analysis method. Quantitative data presented graphically.<br/>Qualitative data presented clearly in themes with corresponding quotations from data given.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> quantitative analyses unclear (justification given in discussion for not using statistical analysis due to small sample size).<br/>No effect sizes or significance levels given.</p> <p><b>No</b></p> |
| <p><b>8. Have sufficient attempts been made to establish the validity or trustworthiness of data analysis?</b></p>                     | <p><b>Pros:</b> significance levels given.<br/>Large sample size.<br/>Effect size given.<br/>Control group used.<br/>Data presented graphically.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no raw data.<br/>intervention group much</p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> children's results excluded from data analysis if receiving another intervention/attendance low.<br/>Effect sizes and significance levels provided.<br/>Large sample size.</p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> data provided with significance levels and non significant results discussed.<br/>Data presented graphically.<br/>Control group used.<br/>Data did not violate assumptions required for</p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> Bonferroni correction used and justification.<br/>Data provided with significance levels.<br/>Control group used.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no raw data set provided.<br/>No effect sizes given.</p>                                | <p><b>Pros:</b> case studies used and quotations provided.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of alternative perspectives/positions.<br/>No discussion of negative cases/non-significant results.</p>   | <p><b>Pros:</b> acknowledges studies limitations throughout.<br/>Outliers/exceptions discussed.<br/>Explanation of terms.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no effect sizes/significance levels</p>  |

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|   | <p>bigger than comparison group.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempts</b></p>  | <p>Violations accounted for.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no raw data provided.<br/>No information provided about the comparison group (a waiting list comparison group was not used as deemed unethical due to funding and time limits, no information provide about the children in the comparison group). Comparison group much bigger than intervention group.<br/>Only one method of data collection used.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempts</b></p> | <p>analysis used.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no raw data set provided.</p> <p><b>Yes, sufficient attempts</b></p>   |  | <p>No discussion of underlying factors/influences on or within data.<br/>No raw data set, significance levels or effect sizes given for quantitative data.</p> <p><b>Yes, some attempts.</b></p>   | <p>provided.</p> <p>Yes, some attempt</p>   |
| <p><b>9. To what extent are the research design and methods employed able to rule out any other sources of error/bias which would lead to alternative explanations for the findings of the study?</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> intervention delivered by familiar school staff.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no description about consistency of person collecting data/delivering intervention across groups. No information about comparison group. Participants not randomly assigned to groups; school had already selected pupils for intervention group before intervention started.</p> <p>A little</p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> some extraneous variables taken into account (e.g. children receiving other intervention).</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no description about consistency of person collecting data/delivering intervention across groups. Only one method of data collection used. No information about comparison group. Participants not randomly assigned to groups.</p> <p>A little</p>  | <p><b>Pros:</b> fidelity questionnaires used to indicate how closely each session had been implemented to intervention scheme.<br/>Intervention delivered by school staff.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no description about consistency of person collecting data/delivering intervention across groups.</p> <p>A lot.</p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> participants randomly assigned to control/experimental. criteria for control and experimental groups were the same (all children needed the intervention).</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> students deemed 'unable' to participate in small groups excluded.</p> <p>A little</p> | <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of negative cases, non significant results or exceptions.<br/>No discussion of results in line with other populations/evaluations of same intervention.<br/>No control group.</p> <p><b>Not at all</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> discussion of exceptions.<br/>Links made to theory and other interventions of similar nature.<br/>Control group (small size)</p> <p><b>A little</b></p> |

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| <p><b>10. How generalisable are the study results?</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> large sample size across a number of schools and 12 local authorities. Some demographics provided. Ages across the primary phase. Questionnaires used popular in UK across settings. Comparisons can be made to other intervention studies based around SEAL.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> unequal gender split. Unequal comparison/intervention group.</p> <p><b>Generalisable to an extent</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> large sample size; 7 schools. Detailed description about samples demographics. Intervention is available for others to carry out. Gender relatively equally represented. Questionnaire used popular in UK across settings.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> Year 3 pupils only. UK only; two large cities. Only one previous study evaluating intervention (same author).</p> <p><b>Generalisable to an extent</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> detailed description of samples demographics.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> gender not equally represented (but justification given). KS2 pupils only. One tool standardized only UK sample. Adapted version of intervention so results would not directly comparable.</p> <p><b>Generalisable to an extent</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> intervention delivered in a number of countries. Already a number of existing intervention evaluations. Measures employed consistent with other intervention evaluations. Even gender split.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> gender and age variables collapsed across each experimental measure. Small sample of schools.</p> <p><b>Generalisable to an extent</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> large sample of schools.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of results in line with wider population. No description of study context and how results may be generalized. No links back to initial theory discussed in introduction. No links made to other intervention evaluations. Unequal gender split and small sample.</p> <p><b>Poor generalizability</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> findings linked to empirical research and theory and other research into interventions of a similar nature (small number). Intervention employed in study is used in a number of UK schools.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> small sample.</p> <p><b>To an extent.</b></p> |
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| <p><b>11. In light of the above, do the reviewers differ from the authors over the findings or conclusions of the study?</b></p>                  | <p>Not applicable</p>   | <p>Not applicable</p>   | <p>Not applicable</p>   | <p>Not applicable</p>  | <p>Not applicable</p>   | <p>Not applicable</p>  |
| <p><b>12. Have sufficient attempts been made to justify the conclusions drawn from the findings, so that the conclusions are trustworthy?</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> non significant results discussed. Limitations acknowledged in-depth. Tentative conclusions made in line with findings.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> effect size stated but no numerical data.</p> <p>Medium-low trustworthiness</p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> non-significant results discussed. Some limitations discussed. Effect sizes given.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> strong claims made about impact of intervention; did not consider alternative explanations.</p> <p><b>Medium trustworthiness</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> non-significant results discussed. Author acknowledges that children may already be benefitting from whole school interventions. Limitations thoroughly discussed. Conclusions consider flaws. Effect sizes given.</p> <p><b>High trustworthiness</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> general conclusions clear and supported by significant results.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> no discussion of limitations/flaws. No effect sizes given. Strong claims made about impact of intervention; did not consider alternatives.</p> <p><b>Medium trustworthiness.</b></p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> general conclusions clear but strong claims made with little elaboration or discussion of limitations or alternative conclusions.</p> <p><b>Cons:</b> themes used were not derived from data (used researchers own themes). No discussion of no linking of theory to findings or results. No consideration of</p> | <p><b>Pros:</b> conclusions clear and claims made with discussion of limitations and alternative conclusions. Themes emerged from data set and evidence of this provided in appendix. Clear links made between analytic assumptions and data.</p> <p><b>High trustworthiness</b></p> |

|   |                   |                      |                      |               |   |               |
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|   |                   |                      |                      |               | alternatives/limitations.<br>No effect sizes/significance levels given for quantitative data.<br><b>Low trustworthiness</b> |               |
| <b>13. Weight of evidence A:<br/>Can the study findings be trusted in answering the study question?</b>   | Medium            | High trustworthiness | High trustworthiness | Medium        | Medium-low  | Low           |
| <b>14. Weight of evidence B:<br/>Appropriateness of research design &amp; analysis for addressing this systematic literature reviews research question?</b> | Medium            | Medium-High          | High                 | Medium-low    | Medium  | High          |
| <b>15. Weight of evidence C:<br/>Relevance of particular focus of the study for addressing this systematic literature reviews research question?</b>        | Medium            | Medium               | Medium               | Medium        | High  | Medium        |
| <b>Overall Weight of Evidence rating (WoE)</b>  | <b>Medium-low</b> | <b>Medium-High</b>   | <b>High</b>          | <b>Medium</b> | <b>Medium</b>   | <b>Medium</b> |



## Appendix B: Interview schedules

### (Children)

- 1) What do you like about coming to school?
- 2) Is there anything you don't like about coming to school?
- 3) What does Mrs Robinson do when she works with children in your school?
- 4) What did you think when you found out you were going to work with Mrs Robinson?
- 5) What did you like about working with Mrs Robinson?
- 6) Was there anything you didn't like?
- 7) Is there anything that could have made the sessions better?
- 8) Do you think these sessions helped you?
  - In what ways?
  - Example?
- 9) Have you learnt anything from the sessions?
  - What?
  - Examples?
- 10) What do you think your friends thought about it when you worked with Mrs Robinson?
- 11) What do you think your Mum thought about it?
- 12) Have you changed since you started working with Mrs Robinson?
  - In what ways?
  - Examples?
- 13) Can you remember what you felt like before working with Mrs Robinson?
  - Why?
  - Can you tell me a bit more about \_\_\_?
- 14) How did you feel after you had finished all your work with Mrs Robinson?
  - Why?
  - Can you tell me a bit more about \_\_\_?
- 15) How do you feel now?
  - Why?
- 16) Is there anything else you'd like to say about your work with Mrs Robinson?

(Parent)

- 1) How did you first hear about the ELSA intervention?
- 2) Tell me what it was like for you when school spoke to you about [child] accessing ELSA support?
  - *Can you tell me a bit more about \_\_\_?*
  - *Was there anything else you felt?*
- 3) What do you think [child] thought about it?
- 4) In your own words, what was your understanding of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant's role in supporting [child]?
  - *Can you tell me more about this?*
  - *Where did you get information about it?*
  - *Can you give me an example of this?*
  - *Can you tell me what you mean by \_\_\_?*
- 5) What are your views on schools having these types of interventions for children?
  - *The good?*
  - *The bad?*
- 6) Tell me about the time period [child] was attending the sessions, what was that like for you?
  - *Can you tell me a bit more about \_\_\_?*
  - *What could have made you feel different?*
  - *Was there anything else you felt?*
- 7) Tell me about any impact you think the ELSA intervention has had on [child] in school?
  - *Can you tell me more about this?*
  - *Can you give me an example of this?*
  - *Can you tell me what you mean by \_\_\_?*
  - *Can you tell me how you knew of this impact?*
- 8) What impact do you think the ELSA intervention has had on [child] at home?
  - *Can you tell me more about this?*
  - *Can you give me an example of this?*
  - *Can you tell me what you mean by \_\_\_?*
  - *Can you tell me how you knew of this impact?*
- 9) Overall, can you tell me about how your experience of the ELSA intervention has impacted on you as a parent?
  - *Thoughts?*
  - *Feelings?*
  - *Relationships?*

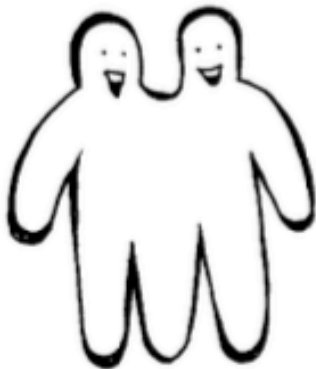
10) Is there anything else you would like to mention about your experience of the ELSA intervention?

**Appendix C: Example of Blob People resource**



# BLOB PUPILS

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## Appendix D: Advocating views

As requested by the head teacher of the school, I will provide written feedback regarding my research findings so that the school can use some of them in an ELSA information sheet for parents.

I am planning to write letters to each pupil to thank them for their contributions and to highlight some of their achievements they discussed with me.

In the debrief sheet given to pupils and parents I reminded pupils that the information they provided will help to develop future training and supervision for people like their ELSA teacher.

I will use the findings and my experiences from the research process to help me in my planning of future ELSA training and supervision sessions. In particular, I am interested in possibly developing some training in relation to how ELSAs work with parents and the ways ELSAs can communicate to pupils and parents about the nature of the intervention.

My research proposal is currently on the ELSA Network Website. I have been contacted by another trainee educational psychologist as a result of this to discuss literature and potential research areas on ELSA. I will share my research findings with Sheila Burton (ELSA Network Manager). It may be possible for her to share my research with other EPs/researchers involved with ELSA.

I have communicated the findings of my research to and held a focus group with some of the ELSAs working in my LA.

I communicated the findings of my systematic literature review as part of a workshop delivered at the North East Educational Psychology Conference (2016). The theme of this conference was 'Supporting Children and Young People's Well-being and Mental Health'. I led a workshop about ELSA work and my research which generated interest in ELSA from other EP services.

## Appendix E: Ways in which reflexivity has been applied

Prior to writing the interview schedules I took guidance from the writing by Callary, Rathwell, and Young (2015) who recommend that when using IPA, ask yourself questions about your thoughts, beliefs and assumptions on the phenomena being researched. I also used questions by Fielding (2004) to reflect on issues such as power-dynamics between adults and children within research and the implications of adult-led research findings for pupils. It was important for me to not consider or view the latter as 'biases' which needed to be removed from the research, rather an appreciation of how they frame and make the research possible which will inevitably shape my research and the findings (Willig, 2013).

Careful consideration of the use of language and wording within the interview schedules, information sheets and consent forms.

During the initial noting stage of the data analysis of transcripts, I included comments associated with my own personal reflexivity (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

After each interview I noted down my 'hot thoughts' and immediate reflections. Commenting on, for example, thoughts and feelings in relation to my role and experience of the interview, the participant, the process of the interview and aspects to consider at the next interview. When I did the next interview, I returned to some of these points to think about how I could adapt and improve my interviewing techniques.

I kept a research diary throughout the process of my research. I noted down my thoughts on my role and assumptions, ethical issues, epistemological issues, how I made decisions, emotional aspects, relational issues, positioning and power-dynamics.

Rolls and Relf (2006) suggests that although research diaries can provide the researcher with a reflexive space, the process of writing is a singular and private event and it may not capture material at a deeper and unconscious level. To aid with this deeper-level reflexivity, they suggest supervision. I used a number of my supervision sessions with my placement supervisor to talk about my research, the

interviews and my involvement and views on ELSA generally. I also reflected with other TEPs about the process of the research, my role and ethical considerations. The process of speaking out loud to others, I thought, helped me to re-think and expand on some of the issues I had captured in my research diary alongside providing some new ideas and thoughts.

I reflected on ethical aspects throughout the research process, guided by advice and frameworks within literature (Fielding, 2004; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Mauthner, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2010; Stutchbury & Fox, 2009).



## Appendix F: Themes and extracts

| Master theme                       | Super-ordinate themes   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>Intervention process</b></p> | <p><b>Enjoyable and special</b></p> <p>“she really looked forward to it. She didn’t dread it” (parent)</p> <p>“it was like fun and you were doing it with your friends” (child)</p> <p>“she seen it as something special because her brothers and sisters weren’t doing it and her friends weren’t doing it” (parent)</p> <p>“she seen it as exciting because it was something the others weren’t doing it” (parent)</p> <p>“no because she enjoyed it. There wasn’t at any point she came home and she was frustrated with it. I think it’s almost made to be a fun thing for them in that school because she never came home frustrated about it” (parent)</p>  |
|                                    | <p><b>Communication and informed consent</b></p> <p>“my mum told me. But when my mum told me she had to explain it coz I didn’t understand” (child)</p> <p>“(my friends) were confused coz they didn’t know where I was going..” (child)</p> <p>“I didn’t receive any feedback from school but obviously I’m presuming those sessions are confidential... I’ve got a really good relationship with Pippa and we do talk a lot but I also understand that sometimes she may feel that she doesn’t want to talk to me about certain things and that she might find it easier to talk to someone outside the family” (parent)</p> <p>“to be fair, they (school) didn’t explain a lot of it..” (parent)</p> <p>“I might have gone away and researched it myself on the internet” (parent)</p> <p>“just that obviously it would be nice if there was more. Coz I didn’t know</p> |

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|  | <p>anything about the ELSA intervention before the EP report. So I didn't even know the school was involved with it, I'd never heard of it.. which was why, I went home when it came up on the EP report and looked at it." (parent)</p>  |
|  | <p><b>Space to talk and problem-solve</b></p> <p>"I quite like that I can talk to someone about my worries" (Parent quoting their child).</p> <p>"she was able to express herself and feel comfortable and she had that outlet to talk" (parent)</p> <p>"she asked us if there's anything wrong and then if there is we talk what to do about it" (child)</p> <p>"so it was just looking at what her worries were and sort of taking those worries away so that she knew what strategies were I place so she didn't have to worry about it" (parent)</p> <p>"it was the little games and things that they played with the ELSA that helped her to do it" (parent)</p> <p>"because people stopped being.. people used to make fun of me but they've stopped it now coz I used to have a different accent. They used to make fun of my accent. So I told her (ELSA) and she like told me to ignore them. And, go and play with my friends. And if they keep doing it just tell a teacher" (child)</p> |

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|                                      | <p><b>Perceptions of the ELSA role</b></p> <p>“she helps people speak up in class” (child)</p> <p>“I can see how valuable it is for the children” (parent)</p> <p>“erm but this ELSA programme that’s at school. She’s really good with them and it does seem to benefit the kids that are doing it” (parent)</p> <p>“it would be nice if there was more (ELSAs)” (parent)</p> <p>“because it’s for those who need a little bit of support and a little bit of nurturing” (Parent)</p> <p>“I think personally it’s invaluable” (parent)</p> <p>“from seeing it from a parental point of view, I can see how valuable it is for the children” (parent)</p> <p>“I quite liked the idea of it and the way its worked. Erm, especially the way its worked with her” (parent)</p> <p>“The ELSA intervention has massively impacted on her life” (parent)</p> |
| <p><b>Impact of intervention</b></p> | <p><b>Improving relationships and friendship skills</b></p> <p>“I used to be a bit mean with my brother as well and we used to argue.. now we don’t argue as much...if my brothers in a bad mood, I’m not going into his room and asking to play minecraft.” (child)</p> <p>“she has a better relationship with her brother and her little sister, she’s more tolerant with her little sister” (parent)</p> <p>“my poor little boy, he feels pushed out all the time coz he’s the only boy, so he’s got like three sisters then him. So he’s erm, but even now she’ll play with him more, she involves him more. But yeah she goes and plays with him and does things with him and it’s nice to see that. Coz he’s never really had that with any of them” (parent)</p> <p>“because me and my brother had really big arguments and then I was upset</p> |



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|  | <p>for the day because me and my brother used to get on really well when we lived where we used to live. Then I felt bad” (child)</p> <p>“she’s helping at school, she goes and helps with the younger kids, she helps at dinner times and she is just more confident in herself” (parent)</p> <p>“I’ve got a lot more friends that I did before” (child)</p> <p>“with her friendships and everything. The way she talks about her friends, she never used to before” (parent)</p> <p>“she’s made her own friends” (parent)</p> <p>“erm coz I like talking to my friends now” (child)</p> <p>“they’d read (in ELSA) a story about people left out and they had to write a review on it or something and erm. she said, do you think he (brother) feels left out and I said why would he feel left out he’s got all us and she was like yeah but he’s the only boy and I was like yeah well he might, and she was like we’ll I’m guna go play with him” (parent)</p> <p>“I am extremely grateful for that intervention that that child did because its nice to see her not be as in her self as she was. And it’s nice to see her come out of her shell and wanting to help others” (parent)</p> <p><b>Managing and expressing emotion</b></p> <p>“she isn’t afraid to say how she’s feeling. Whereas before she would have stayed very quiet and not said how she’s feeling” (parent)</p> <p>“there’s not as many tears at school anymore” (parent)</p> <p>“if someone had said, “no that’s not quite right darling” she would have broken down and that would have been the end of it and you wouldn’t have got anything out of her. Whereas now she’s asking more to the teachers, asking peers” (parent)</p> <p>“erm and, again she’s not afraid to ask if she’s struggling with something. Like her homework. Like before it would have been like I can’t do it, I’m not doing it. Erm whereas now its like will you help me with this?” (parent)</p> |
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|  | <p><b>Improving confidence</b></p> <p>“they (the sessions) helped me like, coz I used to didn’t like putting my hand up to questions coz I was a bit nervous but when I was speaking with Mrs Robinson I started putting my hand up more” (child)</p> <p>“she got awarded in school for erm, putting her hand up in class. Which she’d never done before” (parent)</p> <p>“she is a lot more willing to ask for help when she needs it. Whereas before she’d just sit there and not do anything” (parent)</p> <p>“watching her confidence grow, was unbelievable” (parent)</p> <p>“when I spoke to her teacher at the end of last year compared to the beginning of the year at parents evening she remarked on what a different child, she’d grown in confidence um, and she was just a lot more sure of herself” (parent)</p> <p>“it’s like a big confidence that she’s got that just brings herself out of herself” (parent)</p> <p>“last year’s teacher, saying again, how she’s gained confidence and that uh you know she felt a lot more confident within the classroom and school itself” (parent)</p> <p>“Erm. I think I’ve said before I am grateful for it. Because, she has this new found confidence that I don’t think she’d have without it.” (parent)</p> <p>“she’s a lot more willing to ask for help when she needs it” (parent)</p> <p>“she’s just confident.” (parent)</p> |
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|  | <p><b>Developing coping strategies</b></p> <p>“I think seeing ELSA gave her strategies to cope with anxiety. So in a morning she wasn’t feeling so overwhelmed by everything whereas before, mornings were awful, absolutely awful... um and I think within the ELSA, from what Pippa said to me, she talked through that and with Mrs Robinson and they put strategies in place” (parent)</p> <p>“I’ve sort of developed that strategy with her now” (parent)</p> <p>“she’s a lot more willing to ask for help when she needs it” (parent)</p> <p>“if someone had said, “no that’s not quite right darling” she would have broken down and that would have been the end of it and you wouldn’t have got anything out of her. Whereas now she’s asking more to the teachers, asking peers” (parent)</p> <p>“she doesn’t have to ask 101 questions before she’d even got up to do it before. Erm she just seems to have worked out what’s right and wrong” (parent)</p> <p>“it means.. if I like get stuck at something I like ask a question and ask if someone can help me” (child)</p> <p>“You know like they saying ‘walk a little taller’ and I know its daft and I know it’s a figure of speech but that child since doing this, she does seem to do that” (parent)</p> <p>‘I know to like ask for help if I need to” (child)</p> <hr/> <p><b>Alleviating worries and reducing anxiety</b></p> <p>“I was quite relieved actually that she had some way of expressing herself and some outlet really” (parent)</p> <p>“I’m not that much nervous now and stuff” (child)</p> <p>“I am grateful for it because she has this new found confidence that I don’t think she’d have without it.. I think I’d still be the one sat there thinking,</p> |
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|  | <p>she's never guna settle..' (parent)</p> <p>"She's gone in and she hasn't changed to how she was in July and that's such a big relief for me. Because I don't have to see her battling with almost anxiety.' (parent)</p> <p>"I think it has helped with more specifically with her anxieties about going to school" (parent)</p> <p>"it's relieved a lot of stress, having to deal with Pippa's meltdowns, stress, anxiety, having to leave her at her child minders and peel her off me, all of that meant I was coming to work extremely stressed.. so now, that has completely alleviated all that so we don't have any of that on a morning any more" (parent)</p> <p>"so I can come into work now and know she's happy. I've dropped her off and she's happy and she's ok. And I can come to work happy and ok as well" (parent)</p> <p>"that is a huge relief for me. Because I don't have to see her battling with, almost anxiety" (parent)</p> |
|--|--|

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| <b>Evidence of impact</b> | <p><b>Feedback from others</b></p> <p>"my mum is a mental health nurse and even she said the difference in her since doing the ELSA intervention has been unreal" (parent)</p> <p>"at the last parents evening I went to see her class teacher and he just said that she's still quiet but she's developing her confidence within Year 5 so he has no worries about her at all" (parent)</p> <p>"the child-minder feeding back to me. I mean her words were "what a completely different child she is" (parent)</p> <p>"last years teacher, saying again, how she's gained confidence and that uh you know she felt a lot more confident within the classroom and school itself" (parent)</p> |
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|  | <p>“she (mother) thinks ELSA has helped me a lot” (child)</p> <p>“The teachers have noticed, my mums noticed, erm and in, she swims. They all swim. And even they’ve said she’s started to not let people take advantage of her in a lane, so whereas the boys would have pushed past her before and she says no I’m going first and she does it” (parent)</p>   |
|  | <p><b>Observable changes</b></p> <p>“after seeing the difference it’s made for Pippa; we don’t have meltdowns on the morning anymore” (parent)</p> <p>“watching her confidence grow, was unbelievable” (child)</p> <p>“I used to like didn’t like to put my hand up to ask questions coz I was a bit nervous but when I was speaking with Mrs Robinson I started putting my hand up more” (child)</p> <p>“I’m getting a long with my brother a bit better” (child)</p> <p>“I said this time last year Emma you wouldn’t have put your hand up. Never mind answered the question. If your teacher asked you a question this time last year you used to put your head down and pretend the teacher hadn’t spoken to you. I said, now you’re putting your hand up and answering questions. How good is that? She was like oh I never thought about that” (parent)</p> |

**No set backs**

“my child-minder commented to me as well just at the start of the year. Um she said I was half expecting Pippa to come back and for us to be at square one but that’s not the case. She’s gone back absolutely fine” (parent)

“I think for what it was, it’s had that impact and that impact has been sustained” (parent)

“she went back into Year 6 and she’s continued to strive” (parent)

“I am grateful for it because she has this new found confidence that I don’t think she’d have without it. I think I’d still be the one sat there thinking, she’s never gonna settle.’ (parent)

“when she finished it. Just before the end of the summer term. Both me and the teacher said. If it has made an impact; we will see it in September. Because that’s when the whole cycle starts again normally with her. And god love her, she’s gone in and she hasn’t changed to how she was in July, and that is a huge relief for me” (parent)



## **Appendix G: Information sheets, consent form and debrief letters**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Hannah and I am a University student. I also work with children in schools. To help me with my job I would like to learn more about your work with Mrs Robinson. To do this I am going to speak to children who have worked with Mrs Robinson and their parents. It is very important to me to hear what you have to say.

I'd like to spend some time talking to you. This is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear your ideas. I won't ask you to tell me about the things you talked to Mrs Robinson about but I will ask you about what you thought about sessions and how they have helped you. Our talk will take about 20 minutes.

Our talk will be recorded using a digital recorder and then written up on a computer. This is called a transcription and it will be stored safely. I am the only person who will see what you tell me. The information will help people understand more about how ELSAs work with children.

You only have to take part if you want to. Even if you do decide to talk to me you can stop talking at anytime and you can go back to class. You do not have to give me a reason for stopping and you will not get into trouble. I will take you back to class and will speak to your teacher, just to make sure that you are happy in class.

If you would like to take part, please tell your me and parents and I will come into school to meet with you again.





**Pupil Consent Form**

Would you like to take part in this project to talk about your work with Mrs Robinson?

I have read the information in the letter. I agree to:

**Being asked questions about my work with Mrs Robinson?**

**My voice being recorded**

**My information being used as part of a project**

**I know my name will be removed from the recordings and project**

**I know I can change my mind if I want to**

**Name:** .....

**School** .....

**Signature:** ..... **Date:** .....



The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant Intervention:  
An Exploration from the Perspectives of Pupils and Parents

**Parent/Carer Information Sheet**

**Who am I?**

My name is Hannah Barker. I am final year trainee educational psychologist from Newcastle University. I also work in schools across \_\_\_\_\_. As part of my doctoral training I am carrying out a research project which will explore children's and their parents' experiences and views of the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention.

**The research**

I am involved with the training and supervision of ELSAs and I am keen to support the development of the intervention in schools. One of the most important ways educational psychologists can do this is to listen to the children who have experienced the intervention. I am also very interested in your thoughts as a parent.

You and your child do not have to participate – I am looking for volunteers. However, if you consent to your child taking part I will also take time to meet with them, explain the purpose of the research, who I am and why I am speaking with them. I will ask them to complete a consent form and give them an information sheet too. The interview will be recorded using a digital recorder.

To gather data, I will be conducting interviews with children and parents. The interviews will take approximately 20-40 minutes and will be carried out in a very friendly, conversational manner. I am just interested in your child's experience and thoughts about the ELSA sessions and the impact you feel it's had on them, not the content of sessions.

The data will be held confidentiality until it is transcribed within 6 months of the interview. The recordings will then be deleted. The transcriptions will be stored on a password protected encrypted USB stick for 6 months. Only I will have access to the transcriptions. I will analyse the transcriptions to create themes which will help us understand more about how pupils and parents experience ELSA.

I do not anticipate any harm or risk to your child whilst taking part in the interview and I will give them the option of where they would like the interview to take place (e.g. home, school, other). At the start of the interview I will remind them they can stop at any time if they wish.

### **After the interview**

You can withdraw yours and/or your child's data from the study at any time up until the point of write up (end of Autumn term 2016). The results of the research study will be written up and submitted as a thesis to Newcastle University for assessment. All names and personal details will be removed. You, your child and the school will not be identifiable in the final report.

### **Taking part**

If you and your child would like to take part, please complete the attached consent form and return it to \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_. I will be holding interviews after October half term but I will be in touch in good time to arrange a time and a place that suits you.

If you have any questions or would like any additional information please contact Hannah Barker, trainee educational psychologist:

\_\_\_\_\_

or

Billy Peters - \_\_\_\_\_ (Research Supervisor and Academic Tutor).

Thank you very much for your time.

Hannah Barker



The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant Intervention:  
An Exploration from the Perspectives of Pupils and Parents

**Parent/Carer Consent Form**

I am inviting you to take part in this research into the ELSA intervention. Before you agree, please take time to read the information sheet.

You and/or your child can withdraw from this research at any point, even after consent has been given. All data collected will be confidential and anonymous. If you would like to take part, please sign the consent slip and return it to \_\_\_\_\_ .

Please contact Hannah Barker if you have any questions or require any more information on:

\_\_\_\_\_

or

Billy Peters \_\_\_\_\_ (Research Supervisor and Academic Tutor)

Many thanks,

Hannah Barker

## Consent Form

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I have read the information sheet and I agree to the following (please tick):

I agree to being recorded about my views on the ELSA intervention

I agree to my child being recorded about their experiences of the ELSA intervention

I agree to recorded interviews being transcribed

I am aware I can withdraw/my child can withdraw at any time

I understand my data will be anonymous and confidential

The research being written up and submitted as a thesis

I understand my right to opt out at any time up to the point of writing up

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred method of contact (please fill in):

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ (Home/Work/Mobile)

or

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



**The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant  
Intervention: An Exploration from the  
Perspectives of Pupils and Parents**

Thank you very much for participating in this research. Yours and your child's views will be included as part of a research project exploring the ELSA intervention. The information you provided will help develop future training and supervision for ELSAs.

You can withdraw yours and/or your child's data from the study at any time up until the point of write up (end of the first academic term 2016). The results of the research study will be written up and submitted as a thesis to Newcastle University for assessment. All names, schools and any personal details will be removed. You and your child will not be identifiable in the final report.

If you would like to discuss the interview or the research further, please contact Hannah Barker, trainee educational psychologist:

\_\_\_\_\_

or

Billy Peters - \_\_\_\_\_(Research Supervisor and Academic Tutor).

# Thank you

Thank you for taking part in this study. I hope you enjoyed talking to me. It was very helpful to hear about your work with Mrs Robinson. I am also asking your parents about what they think of it. This will help understand what it is like for children who work with people like Mrs Robinson (ELSAs). The information you provided will be part of my research project that will be sent to a University to be marked.

If you would like to talk to someone about the interview or research, please tell your teacher or parents.

Thank you.

From,

Hannah