

**ELSA: Accounts from Emotional Literacy Support Assistants**

**by**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research seeks to learn from Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) how they perceived the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training had affected their engagement with their school community and the pupils they were working with. The thesis places the role of ELSAs within the context of the rise in interest in emotionality in education and psychology over recent years.

The research was conducted with trainee ELSAs who took part in a semi-structured interview whilst most also kept a reflective journal.

The ELSAs reported they considered the training had provided them with a greater understanding of their pupils’ emotions and that they felt more competent in supporting their pupils with their emotionality. In addition, the ELSAs considered they were more confident discussing the pupil’s emotionality with colleagues and the pupil’s parents. However, many reported obstacles which prevented them in engaging in their role from their senior management team (SMT) and colleagues. The ELSAs perceived this was due to a lack of understanding emotional literacy (EL). In addition, ELSAs faced the challenge of working with parents who held a mismatch with the school’s expectations regarding pupil behaviour.

I make recommendations as to how ELSAs could be supported in their schools. In addition, I explore implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs), schools and local authorities (LAs) with regards to the position of emotionality set against the backdrop of the recent reforms in working with individuals with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Abbreviation** |
|  |  |
| Advisory Teacher (for Behaviour) | AT |
| American Psychiatric Association  | APA |
| Autistic Spectrum Condition | ASC |
| Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service | CAMHS/CaMHS |
| Child/ren and Young Person/People | CYP |
| Child Protection | CP |
| Department for Children, Schools and Families | DCSF |
| Department for Education and Science | DfES |
| Department of Education and Science | DES |
| Department of Health | DoH |
| Education, Health and Care Plans  | EHCP |
| Emotional Intelligence | EI |
| Emotional Literacy | EL |
| Emotional Literacy Support Assistant | ELSA |
| Educational Psychologist | EP |
| Educational Psychology Service | EPS |
| Educational Psychologist | EP |
| General Certificate in Education | GCSE |
| General Teaching Council | GTC |
| Higher Level Teaching Assistant | HLTA |
| Inner London Education Authority | ILEA |
| Interview | i/v |
| Learning Support Assistant/s | LSA/s |
| Local Authority/ies | LA/s |
| Ministry of Education | MoE |
| National Curriculum | NC |
| National Health Education Group  | NHEG |
| National Institute for Health and Care Excellence  | NICE |
| Office for Standards in Education | OFSTED |
| Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  | OECD |
| Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies | PATHS |
| Principal Educational Psychologist | PEP |
| Reflective journal | r/j |
| Standard Assessment Tests | SATs |
| Senior Management Team | SMT |
| Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties | SEBD |
| Special Educational Needs | SEN |
| Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator | SENCo |
| Special Educational Needs and Disabilities | SEND |
| Standard Achievement Tests | SATs |
| Standards and Testing Agency | STA |
| Thematic Analysis | TA |
| United Kingdom | UK |
| United Nations  | UN |
| United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child  | UNCRC |
| United States of America | USA or US |
| World Health Organisation | WHO |
| Young person/people | YP |

Please note:

1. From 1st September, 2014, a new Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice, with the latest version published in January, 2015 (DfE, 2015) has been in place having arisen out of the Children and Families Act (2014). This has meant a change in the process of Statutory Assessment and the use of terminology. One of these changes has been the replacement of Statements of SEN with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). However, for the purpose of this thesis, the term ‘Statement’ is used as the research was conducted whilst the former system was in place.
2. This thesis was written whilst a Coalition Government, made up of Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties, governed the UK. Following the General Election on 7th May, 2015, a new Government made up of just the Conservative Party, was voted into power. It will be of interest how the new Government will approach emotionality in schools but early indicators appear to suggest a children’s well-being runs second to passing Numeracy and Literacy examinations at the end of KS2 with children re-sitting the exams twice, if necessary, whilst in Year 7 (Coughlan, 2015).

**A REFLECTION**

Throughout this thesis I will share reflections of my personal experiences so that the reader can attempt to understand how some of my life experiences and thoughts have influenced me with regards to emotionality. One of the features of my thesis is the use of feminist principles. I say feminist principles as there is no clear cut approach which can be deemed feminist (eg, Stanley and Wise, 1983; Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004; Hussain and Asad, 2012). Nonetheless, this approach recognises the importance of the researcher within the research and, therefore, whilst I attempt to remain impartial throughout the thesis, it is sometimes important to note one’s background, assumptions or positionality (Fonow and Cook, 1991). This, I hope in part, to achieve in my reflections sprinkled throughout the document. I have set these out in boxes in order to emphasise these are my reflections rather than those of the ELSAs.

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| --- |
| My first reflection concerns my experience of being a pupil at school during the 1970’s and 1980’s. I experienced a disrupted education attending at least six primary schools in two countries plus a short spell out of formal education. For one of the schools I attended in England I was placed in the wrong year group for a term (the year above where I should have been). This was during the days prior to the National Curriculum (NC) (DfES, 1988) and the close tracking of movement of children and young people (CYP) and of their attainment between schools. As a result, my teachers were not sure where to position me in the pecking order of attainment in the class so I was placed with the low achievers. From this position I saw at first hand the experiences of some of my peers as they struggled with their learning and, quite often, in their relationships with their peers. The position allocated to them within the class order was destined to continue for the remainder of their school life. This order was rarely challenged as the 1970’s was an age when many parents were not as aware of what was happening in the classroom, especially if they were working class which my parents were (Mortimer and Blackstone, 1982). Teachers were viewed as being highly respected individuals by parents and, rarely, were their actions questioned. My parents were amongst those who placed their uppermost trust in the decision-making of the teachers. I recall the teachers tended to teach the rest of the class whilst the low achievers were given worksheets to work through until the teacher had a few minutes to teach my group. We were expected to get on with our work without talking so as not to disturb the teacher as they taught the rest of the class. I obviously have not forgotten these experiences where I witnessed my fellow group members attempting to make sense of our educational world. As an EP, I can now recognise how several of these pupils, according to Maslow’s hierarchy (1943), as not being in the ideal position to engage in their learning, for example, some were hungry, others were abused at home. Although a generalisation, it appeared to me the era I attended primary school was a time when some teachers were only concerned with how well you engaged in your learning with limited thought given by them as to other factors which could impact on the quality of this engagement. I would hope teachers and educators in schools nowadays are more aware of these factors and to be more sympathetic in meeting their CYP’s needs.Returning to when I was at primary school, it was disturbing to see some of my fellow pupils disciplined for not apparently paying attention to the teacher when many of them were not in the best position to concentrate. Some of these pupils became more and more socially isolated as a vicious cycle of being disciplined for not engaging in their learning made them less attractive to be friends with. In addition, I consider, they became less confident in their own learning ability and their ability to engage with others. Some pupils took advantage of those who had difficulty in articulating themselves and would tell tales in order to set them up to be in trouble with the staff knowing that these pupils struggled to explain their viewpoint. Burton (2008) places emphasis on the importance of a CYP’s ability to use language in order to express their thoughts and feelings. This negative set of circumstances has been influential in providing me with the motivation to achieve. I subsequently qualified to become a teacher and then an EP with the focus to devote my efforts in helping a generation of under-achievers or those CYP who have been referred to as ‘children at the margins’ (Billington and Pomerantz, 2004).  |

**CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

**Introduction**

In this opening chapter I will state the aim of the research, define what EL is and provide a rationale as to why I have decided to study EL. I will detail what an ELSA is, what the training course entails and my involvement with ELSA. The chapter will conclude with a brief explanation of the research.

Before proceeding I feel I need to state at the onset I encountered several tensions as I conducted this research which I will discuss in more depth as they arise. One of these tensions was the contradiction in how to report the data. Although I consider I take an interpretivist social constructionist approach I found it challenging to be true to this methodology as I occasionally lapsed into positivism, ie, presenting my data findings as if it were definite findings. Thus, I acknowledge, in being a researcher, it has been a challenge marrying the practicalities of theoretical analysis with the presentation and interpretation of data. Another tension has been the dual role of being the practical practitioner whilst being researcher with the same group of individuals, thus, I acknowledge the element of possible bias in my research findings. In order to assist me with these tensions I used exploratory questions posed by Yardley (2000) in guiding the researcher using qualitative research approaches which I will explore in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

**The aim of this research**

The central aim and research question of this thesis is to explore:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

ELSA is a training course designed to train Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) to be more effective in supporting CYP with their emotional awareness. As the course was new to the Local Authority (LA) the, then, Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and I considered it would be beneficial to research how effective the training and clinical supervision had been for the ELSAs from their perspective in respect of their own professional development but also whether their role had had any effect on their school community. The reason we wanted to know the ELSAs’ views was due to data collected from previous research on ELSA tended to focus on the views of those in senior positions rather than from those at the grass roots level. This data tended to be quantitative with some additional anecdotal remarks, eg, Grahamslaw (2013), or the data was limited to the responses to the questions provided by the researcher, eg, Hill, et al (2013). Instead, I wanted to know the story the ELSAs had to tell through their reflective journal and/or semi-structured interview. The purpose of knowing the ELSAs’ perspective would, it is hoped, provide a greater understanding of their role and whether the training had made an impact on their skills with working with CYP. In doing so, the outcomes of this thesis could be used to better tailor the ELSA training to suit their needs. This would also have implications for EPs as they play a major role in the training and clinical supervision of ELSAs. The ELSAs’ perspectives would also allow schools to be aware of the challenges facing ELSAs in evaluating whether having an ELSA in their school was making a positive impact on EL awareness amongst their staff, thus, the research outcomes would have implications for ELSAs’ line managers as well.

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| Although I consider it is important for those working with CYP to be aware of all aspects which may affect the CYP’s engagement in their learning, I found a tension between acknowledging this and to what extent should we interfere with a CYP’s emotionality. I question can we truly know a CYP’s emotionality since, often, schools make this judgement based on how the CYP presents only whilst they are at school which, I consider, is too narrow a perspective. In being a trainer on the ELSA course I could appear to be a hypocrite in training LSAs to modify a CYP’s emotionality. However, this tension I also shared with the LSAs on the course. In doing so, the ELSAs questioned their own involvement with cases as to whether they should be working with particular CYP, eg, some schools tended to ask the ELSA to work with CYP who presented as finding it challenging to behave appropriately. Instead, the ELSA was able to inform the SMT that they should be working with CYP who appear to have difficulties managing their emotions. The ELSAs were also aware of taking the teacher’s perspectives, with regards to the CYP’s emotionality, as final. Instead, the ELSA would use the early sessions to develop a rapport with the CYP and, in doing so, ascertain from the CYP what they considered they needed support with. In this way, any work on the CYP’s emotionality was targeted appropriately. There have been occasions when the ELSA had ascertained the CYP did not require support with their emotionality at all but there were other factors at play impacting on the CYP’s engagement in their learning, eg, familial issues causing them to be upset when they were in school. ELSAs even found there were occasions it was the teacher’s approaches to the CYP which were impeding the CYP’s engagement in their learning and relationships. |

**Definition of EL**

The issue of semantics is a tension I have had to engage with in this thesis, ie, what does EL or emotionality mean? Are they the same thing? Even raising this question brings another tension as in attempting to define the words I am presenting them as if they are definite things. Yet are they? Is it possible to judge a person’s emotionality or how emotionally literate they are? Even if we could, life experiences change our perspectives so our state of being is not fixed. Thus, it is not possible to measure how emotional someone is or to say one individual is more emotional or emotionally literate than another. However, ELSAs are working to change CYP to be more emotionally aware as if a judgement has been made that somehow the targeted CYP’s emotionality is not quite as it should be. Burton (2009) even provides a checklist for school staff to rate CYP’s emotionality so that areas of deficit, ie, those areas in which the CYP appears not to be fully developed in, are identified for ELSA support. Using the same checklist, the CYP is rated as to how effective the ELSA intervention has been once completed (usually after meeting with the ELSA over 6-8 weeks). I introduced the checklist with caution on the training course as how the school staff perceive a CYP can be quite different to how they view themselves. Thus, in addition to the checklist, I advise the ELSAs, when they begin to work with the CYP, to use the first couple of sessions to ascertain from the CYP how they perceive themselves and whether they consider they may need support with their emotionality.

Nonetheless, there appears something innate within us that recognises a person’s emotional state or how they engage emotionally with others. For instance, we tend to be aware of the signs others project when they are happy or distressed. When it is the latter, it can be challenging not to want to help bring the person out of their misery. I equate the dilemma to that of a person who has hurt themselves physically such as having broken a bone. We would not leave them alone to struggle; wouldn’t we ensure they received the medical intervention required? So, in a similar vein, why wouldn’t we support the distressed person: Wouldn’t we attempt to help them make sense of the situation they had found themselves in and attempt to empower them to find a way through it so that they can be less distressed or at least acknowledge their discomfort? So it is with working with CYP. I consider, for example, if they are struggling to make friendships shouldn’t we give them the skills to know how to make and maintain positive relationships?

**Rationale for the study**

There are several reasons as to why I consider this thesis is important which I have outlined below:

**Impact of information technology**

Firstly, consideration of anyone’s EL, not only CYP’s, is more important than ever especially with the impact of information communication technology (ICT) in our daily lives. There is no escaping in modern society the increased use of virtual communication, eg, texting and social media. Although ICT can be beneficial to humans it can also cause emotional harm, eg, posting of selfies showing images of intimate body parts, the posting of inappropriate videos such as Happy Slapping, and cyberbullying. The Cybersurvey (Youthworks, 2009, 2010 and 2011 referred to in NICE, 2011) found children as young as 10 -11 year olds were receiving threatening or frightening messages and homophobic insults. This concern is also shared by the National Health Education Group (NHEG) as reported by National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2011) in response to the consultation paper on ‘Promoting children’s social and emotional well-being in primary education’ (NICE, 2008):

Technological advances, ie, Facebook, Twitter, etc, means that the need to understand human interactions of the real (as opposed to the virtual) variety are essential and so teachers need support to address these issues in the curriculum. (p28/9).

There are also websites where individuals can create an avatar and live in a virtual reality, eg, Second Life (2014). However, there are those individuals who can confuse what is reality from that which is virtual. For example, there were cases of people expressing signs of feeling depressed and of suicidal thoughts after watching the film ‘Avatar’ which is set in a virtual world (Piazza, 2010). Thus, CYP need to be guided in understanding what is virtual from reality in order to keep them safe both emotionally and physically. It has also been argued virtual reality websites undermine basic human values (Puttnam, 2007). Although tackling these issues is something faced by society as a whole, when it comes to day to day life an ELSA may be someone who can support CYP in recognising the difference between reality and what is virtual.

**EL and mental health**

Secondly, EL and mental health are intrinsically intertwined, ie, understanding our emotions (and those of others) and being able to communicate our needs impacts on how we view ourselves and our well-being (and those of others). If we have extended periods of time whereby we do not feel good about ourselves we may begin to experience mental health issues, eg, depression (Mental Health Foundation, nd). Furthermore:

Evidence suggests that the more risks in a child's life are reduced (eg, by improving family management and parenting skills, increasing support for learning and treating mental disorders effectively), the less vulnerable that child will be to subsequent poor mental health as well as social and emotional problems (Adi, et al, 2007). In this sense a child's social and emotional well-being is strongly linked to their mental health, independent of any questions over definitions. (Blank, et al, 2010, p34).

Recent reports, including those from the Department of Health (DoH) (see Davies 2013), have illustrated the need to raise awareness and understanding of the mental well-being of our CYP and to provide support where necessary. Suicide is now known to be the main non-natural cause of death for young people (YP) (Davies, 2013). In addition, it would appear that more and more children under the age of 10 are being identified as suffering from stress and being diagnosed with depression. Reasons these children share for feeling this way include worrying about failure due to continual assessments in schools (Gregory, 2014).

Gregory (2014) argues one of the reasons children are more likely to feel depressed is due to the pressure the UK Government has placed on schools (and their CYP) to achieve higher scores year on year in assessments. The outcomes at the end of KS2 and KS4 (when children are aged 10/11 and 15/16 years respectively) assessments are published in league tables which display not only how well the schools have performed but how their performance has compared with the previous year and against, apparently, similar schools. Schools are then held accountable to the Government (and parents) as to why CYP have not reached their targets. Thus, the pressure from the top can be seen to be affecting those at the bottom, ie, CYP.

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| The pressure the UK Government appears to be placing on CYP was apparent to me on a school visit in January, 2014, when I met with an 8 year old child. He informed me how he had witnessed a girl in his class being upset for not reaching her target level in a practice assessment paper. From our discussion, it was clear to me that there was more than one child upset by not reaching their target. The boy also shared with me that all the children in his class were aware of their targets and were regularly assessed. On further investigation I learnt the girl had been expected to perform over and above the targets originally set by the NC (DfES, 1988) for her age to that expected of a child two years older due to new Government expectations.  |

Not only are children being exposed to greater demands on them to achieve better results in Numeracy and Literacy the focus on subjects which are not tested at primary age, eg, Music and Drama, are being pushed out of the curriculum so that more time can be spent on the core subjects. This has meant children have less opportunity to develop other skills and to express their creativity. This can be particularly important for children where Numeracy and Literacy are not a personal strength. OFSTED have also expressed concerns with the amount of time given to the teaching of Numeracy and Literacy as they consider CYP are missing out on a broad and balanced curriculum (Paton, 2014).

Young Minds (2014) have recently launched an awareness campaign, including a feature on Radio 1 (McCamley, 2014), to reassure YP that it is ok to have mental health concerns and to seek support. However, I query why the Government appears reluctant in wanting to take more care of the emotional well-being of our CYP before their mental health should be affected. I will explore links between EL and mental health further in the Literature Review chapter.

**Issues for consideration**

In this research I had issues which I wanted to consider which I hope will be apparent in the outcomes:

**A role for LSAs?**

Firstly, if schools are to deliver support for their CYP with regards to their EL who should work with them? Quite often, it is the LSA who works directly with CYP with SEN so schools may consider they are best placed to support CYP with their EL. If this is the case, do LSAs consider they have the skills to do so? I raise this issue as LSAs tend to be the members of the teaching staff who have undergone the least amount of training to work with CYP yet, paradoxically, they are expected to be knowledgeable in knowing how to support the most vulnerable CYP in the school (Webster and Blatchford, 2013).

**CYP’s relationship with staff**

Secondly, and I consider of greater importance, is the relationship between the CYP and the LSA and CYP and their teachers as to who should work with the CYP and their EL. I have noted CYP are more likely to share their concerns with a LSA rather than with their teacher. This is possibly because, compared to the authoritarian role of the teacher, the CYP may view them as more nurturing. In addition, LSAs may appear more consistently in the CYP’s school life as LSAs often work across the age range in the school so are more likely to enter the CYP’s life over several years rather than in just one academic year which may be the case with their teachers. Thus, a stronger bond can be formed between the CYP and the LSA. Also, according to Webster and Blatchford (2013), CYP with SEN are more likely to work with LSAs away from the classroom. This being the case, the CYP may feel at greater ease to share personal information which, no doubt, will strengthen the relationship between them.

**School ethos**

Thirdly, even if LSAs are given a role in supporting CYP with their EL is there still a place for EL as part of the school ethos? In the Literature Review chapter I will consider whether schools should engage in a holistic approach to EL or to keep LSA interventions piecemeal.

**Fiscal pressure on headteachers**

My fourth issue is concerned with how headteachers deploy their staff especially with having to work with an ever-decreasing fiscal budget (except for schools with the poorest CYP economically who should see an increase in their budget due to Pupil Premium payments) (Chowdry and Sibieta, 2011). Thus, pressure on school budgets has meant less money for headteachers to allocate resources which has also seen staff losing their jobs including LSAs. However, as already stated above, schools are also under pressure to perform to Government generated targets and, so, headteachers have to be increasingly creative as to how to manage their budget. However, there are headteachers who are aware that there is more to a child than just how they perform in their assessments. But headteachers need to be cautious with how they allocate their budget which is understandable as they are accountable for it. From my experience, headteachers tend to use evidence-based practice which demonstrates success before engaging in new initiatives which is a challenge as someone has had to be brave enough to take the plunge to trial out new approaches. A consideration for me in this thesis is for headteachers to have evidence in guiding them as to whether training their LSAs is a good use of the school budget.

**Resource pressure on headteachers**

My fifth issue for consideration is for headteachers to know that the LSA working with their CYP is a good use of the LSA’s and school’s resource time. I have found working with schools I am allocated to and in discussion with colleagues that, historically, where there has been a focus on a CYP’s EL it has tended to be with CYP who are overtly behaving in an inappropriate manner as these are the individuals who tend to disrupt their own and peers’ learning. This focus has been to the detriment of the quieter CYP who may also need support with their EL. As such, this thesis will be able to inform headteachers whether releasing their LSAs to attend the ELSA training and follow-up clinical supervision is not only a worthwhile financial commitment but is also a worthwhile time commitment both in terms of the LSA not being available in the school whilst engaged with the training but in taking on a specific role which will reduce the amount of time they will be available to support CYP in their academic learning. It is hoped, in the long run, if the LSA is able to support CYP to be more emotionally engaged then they will be less likely to be disruptive and affect others’ learning experiences and be better placed to achieve for themselves which may support the school with achieving their targets. However, I do not wish the reader to consider I am advocating ELSA as a means in achieving Government generated targets but in supporting CYP with their EL instead.

**Pressures on EPs**

My sixth consideration is concerned with the role of the EP. EPs need time for the preparation, training and subsequent clinical supervision with the ELSAs. They are already under pressure with ever increasing workloads especially with changes being brought about by the Children and Families Act 2014 (DfE, 2014). Thus, it is important for EPs to know the commitment they are taking on with ELSA is equally valued by schools so that involvement is worthwhile. From this thesis I hope to evidence whether EP involvement in the ELSA initiative is worthwhile.

**Questioning emotionality**

My seventh consideration is the tension within me as to how emotionality should be judged and, even, measured. The British Government’s interest in CYP’s emotions occurred when the previous Labour Government came to power in 1997 leading to the publication of Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) (2005). Previous Governments had given limited consideration to CYP beyond their learning. Nonetheless, this focus on CYP’s emotional well-being has not been welcomed by everyone (eg, Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009) in what has been termed as ‘emotionalism’. I will explore their concerns in greater detail in the Literature Review chapter.

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| My concern for the quieter member of the class (as I was) stemmed from my time as a pupil in school into my teaching training in the mid-1980’s. I queried whether there were factors beyond the obvious to help explain why some CYP did not engage in their learning as well as their peers and why some CYP appeared to be socially isolated. During my first teaching practice I taught a child whom I, subsequently, learnt was the equivalent of what would be referred to nowadays as a ‘Carer’: At seven years of age she was the eldest of several siblings. As such she was expected by her parents to support her siblings’ upbringing which was so exhausting for her, she did not have the resources to engage in her learning when she was in school. Her family were struggling financially and she often appeared unkempt which meant her peers kept their distance from her or taunted her. Although teaching staff were aware of her circumstances, they seemed to compartmentalise her life, thus, they made no obvious connections as to why she held limited engagement in learning, for why her attainment level was low and for why she held a depleted social circle. Whilst on the same teaching practice I recall another child who always seemed to be on the go and was frequently disciplined for her active behaviour. It transpired she suffered from migraines. I took the unusual step for the time of discussing her diet with her and of which foods she might try to avoid. This was an unusual step then as educators tended to keep a CYP’s school and home life separate with one not apparently affecting the other. Thus, even at the early stages of my journey in becoming a teacher I felt there was a connection between the CYP and their life experiences which could not be separated with their readiness to engage in their learning, their relationship with others and how they felt about themselves.  |

**My interest in EL and ELSA**

As I hope the reader will see from my personal reflections so far, I have held a life-long interest in the emotional needs of others and whether society has treated more emotionally vulnerable individuals fairly. My desire to make a greater, positive impact on the lives of CYP, in particular, came about following a major operation which afforded me with the time to reflect on life and where I was going. I subsequently trained to become an EP and began to work at my current LA where, about three years ago ELSA was introduced.

I am one of the original members involved in the setting up of the ELSA initiative in my LA and continue to be a member of the ELSA Working Party. I was one of the consistent co-trainers with the first cohort in Spring term, 2012, I co-presented a session with the second cohort in Autumn term, 2012, was the consistent co-trainer throughout the third cohort training delivered in Autumn, 2013 and I am in the process of co-organising the next cohort to be trained in Spring, 2015. I have been an ELSA clinical supervisor since the first cohort trained and, currently, supervise two of the five groups in my LA.

In this thesis I wanted to know if the ELSA training had made an impact on the ELSA’s skills with working with CYP and whether having an ELSA in their school had made an impact on the EL awareness of the staff.

I acknowledge I have had, and continue to have, a close involvement with the ELSA initiation and I am familiar with the ELSAs in this study. This may place me at a disadvantage in the sense of impartiality, however, it also places me at an advantage point as, being an insider, I can view at first-hand what ELSA is about. Being involved with ELSA has also provided me with a greater understanding of the initiative. It also means I have to be even more cautious about what I report in case I am seen to be biased. In addition, I need to ensure I present my outcomes in a more transparent manner.

I also admit I bring elements of myself into the research which I cannot avoid, ie, my life experiences and influences, which will affect the interpretations of the data. Thus, I recognise that my values and biases will influence the research outcomes in this study. Through reflexivity and discussion with my supervisor I hope I have been as non-judgemental as I can be. In addition, I collaborated with an EP colleague, familiar with the use of thematic analysis (TA), in providing a second viewpoint on the analysis of the data.

At this stage it would be appropriate to explain what the ELSA initiative is about.

**What is an ELSA?**

ELSA is described as putting, “Psychological theory into behavioural, emotional and social development… to empower learning support assistants (LSAs) to increase children’s skills in the area of emotional literacy,” (Burton, 2008, p40).

ELSA can find its beginnings with the development of CYP’s EL in Southampton’s Educational Support Service (EPS) (Faupel and Sharp, 2003). The EPS had been inspired by the publication of Goleman’s book, Emotional Intelligence, (Goleman, 1995), to successfully argue EL should be given equal status to Literacy and Numeracy in schools for all CYP within Southampton LA. In 1998 the LA embarked on a programme to promote EL in schools through a range of activities. In measuring the impact of the programme the EPS drew on LA data which showed the number of permanent exclusions had been reduced by more than 60% between 1997 and 2001. During this time there had been no increase in fixed term exclusions either. In addition, CYP’s attendance rates at school had increased. However, it is not clear from the evidence presented whether these changes were solely down to the programme provided by the Southampton EPS or whether it was a combination of other training initiatives which took place at the same time to promote EL in schools.

Following the apparent success of developing EL awareness in the LA, ELSA was created in 2001 by EPs Gillian Shotton and Sheila Burton (2008) who worked at Southampton EPS. It began as a small pilot project overseen by Burton. The programme began with five peripatetic ELSAs whose role was to visit primary schools. They delivered bespoke programmes of support to CYP who had been referred for various types of social and emotional needs in order to help them to recognise, understand and manage their emotions. In delivering the programmes Burton (2008) considered it was more appropriate to support CYP individually rather than in group situations where, she argued, CYP would be vying for the ELSA’s attention. However, she also recognised small group work still held importance such as when the focus was on developing the CYP’s social interaction skills.

The ELSAs were so well received by schools that many began to appoint their own LSAs to work in a similar way within their own schools (Burton, 2008). Shotton and Burton continued with the programme when they moved to Hampshire EPS in 2002 with training provided for primary, secondary and special school LSAs. Shotton then moved to Northumberland EPS where she also introduced ELSA.

As the apparent success of ELSA became known across England and Wales the training extended to become a country-wide initiative (Burton, 2008) with the number of LAs running the programme increasing all the time (please refer to elsanetwork.org website for a list of some of the LAs). Burton (2008) stresses the importance of the ELSA’s work with CYP:

ELSA support is much more than having a friendly chat with an anxious pupil. It is also much more than problem-solving some difficulties a young person is having. ELSA support is about developing a respectful relationship in which the young person is enabled to think about their situation without feeling judged or criticised. It is intended to be short-term purposeful support, usually to help develop new skills or coping strategies that enable the pupil to experience greater success. (np).

However, there is a counter movement with regards to whether engaging with CYP’s emotionality is appropriate, for instance, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) argue it is debatable as to whether the CYP would consider their time spent with an ELSA should be described as ‘respectful’ especially if the CYP has not been consulted about engaging in the initiative or may not fully understand why they are with the ELSA at all. It could also be argued from this quotation whether the CYP needs new skills or coping strategies to be developed as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) postulates the CYP may already possess these but choose not to use them. I will explore concerns about engaging with CYP and their emotionality later in this thesis.

**Training for ELSAs**

The training course for ELSAs is prescriptive and takes place over six days spread out over the course of a term. It explores psychological theory and provides practical guidance on:

* emotional awareness,
* self-esteem,
* anger management,
* social and friendship skills,
* social communication difficulties,
* loss and bereavement.

In her guidelines for the training, Burton (2009) states the group should be made up of no more than thirty LSAs. In the case of my LA, the first cohort was made up of three groups with each having about twelve LSAs. Due to the initiative being new to my LA it was considered to be more appropriate to start with several smaller groups rather than one large group. The training was funded from the LA’s TAMHS’ (Targeted Mental Health in Schools) budget which meant schools did not pay any fees. The training in each group was co-delivered by an Advisory Teacher for Behaviour (AT) and an EP. The LSAs received their course handbook and materials for free as well as a small number of resources at the end of the training.

ELSAs are then required to attend at least four clinical supervision sessions as part of a group of ELSAs and provide evidence of working as an ELSA in order to gain their ELSA certificate. The clinical supervision sessions are with an EP and tend to be about two hours long. The supervision sessions provide the opportunity for problem solving concerning casework to take place, the sharing of ideas and resources, and further exploration of psychological approaches. Burton (2009) considers the initial training is not exhaustive and other topics can be covered during the supervision sessions (eg, attachment theory). Some LAs have also organised training through ELSA day conferences.

**ELSA in schools**

CYP requiring support are identified by staff members who complete a referral form, designed by Burton (2009), which includes the staff’s ratings of the current level of the CYP’s EL. As I have already written I consider it is questioned as to whether it is possible to rate anyone’s emotionality as this is a subjective opinion.

Following the completion of the referral form, the CYP is discussed with the ELSA and Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). From the rating form areas for supporting the CYP with their EL are chosen. It will be interesting to note if any of the ELSAs in this thesis express any opinions as to how the decision is made as to what the objective should be for the CYP.

The intervention is meant to be time-limited with weekly sessions over 6-8 weeks though the ELSA may meet with the CYP more frequently for shorter periods of time each week. Each session has its own objective that builds towards the longer term aims. At the end of the intervention the CYP is reviewed by the referrer against the original referral form so as to ascertain how effective the intervention has been. As time may be needed for consolidation further intervention may be considered at a later date to work with the CYP again. As the ELSA is a staff member within the school, some informal contact may be maintained following the intervention, for a time, to enable a gradual withdrawal of the support.

However, quite often in practice, once the ELSA has begun to work with the CYP it is not unusual for the aims set by the SENCo and ELSA to change. This is because the perceptions of what the CYP’s emotional difficulties are by the staff are mismatched with how the CYP’s perceive themselves and their needs. For example, the underlying reason for the CYP not engaging in their work might be due to worries about their home situation. If they have not been totally focussed in their classwork the CYP may have missed input from the class teacher which has meant they have not understood the lesson. The class teacher judging the CYP only on their academic performance may view the CYP as having learning difficulties or, even, as acting in a defiant manner. However, if the opportunity had not arisen for the CYP to work with an ELSA their teachers would continue to make inappropriate judgements. With the knowledge obtained by the ELSA the teacher can change their perceptions of the CYP and attempt to cater for the CYP’s needs.

**My approach to the research question**

As to my methodological approach to this thesis, I have found it a challenge to choose a definite paradigm of practice. Nonetheless, my approach is most closely allied with interpretivist social constructionism ([Krauss, 2005](#_ENREF_82)). In this approach it is recognised no two people can have exactly the same life experiences. New realities are constantly being constructed, thus, life is fluid and ongoing. Even on an individual level, how we respond to situations varies

according to numerous variables, eg, our age at the time and our level of fatigue/stress. In addition, people’s perceptions differ, thus, what constitutes as an appropriate emotional response by one person can differ entirely to what another person perceives as appropriate. I also challenge the status quo, eg, arguing it is not possible to categorise individuals. There are those who choose to do so such as using intelligence to place people in a certain rank. The term is a social construct, ie, treating ‘intelligence’ as if it is something that is real when it is not.

This thesis also holds elements of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975/1997) in that I recognize that all observation is fallible, ie, it can hold error, and that all theory is revisable.

I also embraceaspects of feminist principles such as the mode of data collection, ie, the ELSAs were able to keep a reflective journal and/or take part in a semi-structured interview which are methods of data gathering often used in feminist approaches to research. On a more personal level, I trust that in providing the reader some of my reflections they have been given glimpses of my personal struggle to gain an education and of others’ struggle to cope with their life experiences. Another feature of feminist principles is the questioning of the status quo in power relationships. For many of the ELSAs in this research, they had come from the bottom of the pecking order amongst the school’s teaching staff to have been given a unique identity. I would like to think that taking part in the training and in this research has empowered the ELSAs to be agents of change with ELSAs questioning their schools about how opinions were being made of CYP’s emotionality and to invite schools to think about their impact on CYP.

The data from the reflective journals and interviews were analysed using TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I will go into more detail about the methodology and methods used in this thesis later in the study.

**Structure of thesis**

The structure of this thesis will guide the reader as follows:

The Literature Review chapter provides a detailed analysis of the literature concerned with the field of EL. This chapter briefly explores how psychologists and educators have viewed CYP over the last 140 years, what is meant by EL and how its status has ebbed and flowed between Governments. Although this study takes place in England, I also refer to research outcomes from other countries with regards to the importance of EL awareness. In addition, I examine current research outcomes on ELSA and present the counter-argument to emotionalism with particular reference to SEAL (DfES, 2005).

The Methodology chapter provides the rationale for my adopted methodological approach and the tensions I have found in deciding upon a definite epistemological and ontological approach to this study. I will also explore how feminist principles have played a part in this research. I also include pre-research considerations, eg, reflexivity, ethics and the research methods used, ie, reflective journals and semi-structured interviews, and argue why these methods were the most appropriate for this study. Finally, I explain my choice of analysis of the data using TA.

The Methods chapter explains the procedures followed for data collection, which includes the timescale of the research, details of the participants and a more detailed explanation of how the data was analysed using TA.

The Results chapter provides an analysis of the data obtained using TA. Themes and sub-themes are identified with examples of supporting quotations from the ELSAs’ reflective journals and semi-structured interviews.

The Discussion chapter explores the themes and sub-themes identified from the data. This will be explored in relation to the analysis of the literature discussed in the Literature Review chapter. I will also comment on changes made to the ELSA training in my LA following the outcomes of my research.

Finally, the Conclusion chapter presents my reflections and states some of the major challenges I faced whilst conducting this study. Also included are implications for EPs, schools and LAs, the limitations of this research and ideas for future research.

In addition, there is an Appendix which includes copies of documentation given to ELSAs and schools and a breakdown of TA including examples of diagrams of my thought processes.

**CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Introduction**

In order to understand the role of an ELSA it is necessary to understand what is meant by EL and its relevance in education. This chapter explores how CYP have been perceived in education and psychology in terms of their emotionality. It will look at the impact of the rise and demise of government initiatives in addressing EL and the argument against emotionalism. This review of literature will place into context the aim and research question for this thesis, ie,

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

I will also explore feminist approaches as this study uses feminist principles which include empowering the participants in thinking they can make a change. In this case, the ELSAs feeling they could improve their work conditions for developing the EL awareness of their CYP and in raising EL awareness in their schools. Feminist principles also recognise the participants as experts and authorities on their own experiences. In this study, it is the ELSAs who provide the data as they are the front line individuals working with CYP in raising their EL awareness rather than me seeking the data from ELSA’s SMT. Feminist principles require the use of naturalistic approaches to data gathering as it allows the participants to discuss the topic in their own words free of constraints from fixed-response questions. In this thesis the ELSAs had the option of choosing one of two methods, or both, to gather the data. One of which was to keep a reflective journal where they had free rein to note what they considered important about EL and their work as an ELSA, thus, this was a naturalistic approach to gather data.

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| Before I continue I wish to share with the reader another personal reflection which presents a construction of childhood where, I consider, there was a lack of understanding of pupils’ emotionality: I recall, with mixed feelings, my first temporary post following the completion of my teacher training course. I worked at a junior school in what was then known as ILEA (Inner London Education Authority). Hardly a day passed without incident at the school between the children and/or staff. The first major incident I was involved in occurred on one of my first playtime duties. During playtime duty staff would patrol the playground in pairs for their safety. I had become separated from my colleague as I attempted to gain the attention of a group of children who were engrossed in a game of football despite the bell having been rung to mark the end of playtime. As it happened the ball was kicked in my direction and I caught it. There followed an incident which was officially classed as a, “verbal, physical and sexual assault”. In reality, the incident involved a couple of children trying to grab the ball from me whilst they shouted out threats against me. During the commotion one of the children accidentally placed his hand inside the arm hole of my pinafore dress. A few days later, one of the children involved in this football incident also assaulted the deputy headteacher which included her being punched in the stomach. I later learnt the child’s father was in prison charged with committing murder and he had no contact with his mother. Both he and his brother had been passed between foster carers with each placement having broken down due to their challenging behaviour. In the child’s short life of 7 years old he knew no other way of defending himself or how to verbally express what he was thinking in an appropriate manner other than lashing out as no-one had taken the time to show him how to use alternatives means of expression. Would life have been different for this child, and several others at the school who were deemed to have behavioural issues, if someone had supported them with their EL?  |

**The role of education in the UK**

Formal interest in educating the populace by the Government has only been relatively recent compared to other parts of the Western World (eg, Assmann, 2002, referring to Ancient Egypt). This interest can be traced back to Peel’s Health and Morals of Apprentices Act (1802), which is also known as the Factory Act (1802), where apprentices were no longer supposed to work at night and for longer than 12 hours per day with provision to be made so that they received some basic education. However, this Act was not widely enforced due to the lack of means to do so (Parliament, ud). Even then, the Government was not directly involved with providing CYP with an education and it would take about another 50 years before they were to do so with staging of the Great Exhibition in 1851. The Exhibition highlighted the lack of facilities for technical education in England compared with the United States of America (USA) and Europe (Gillard, 2011). As a result, in 1852 the Coalition Government set up the first education department. The Elementary Act (1870) set the framework for the schooling of all children between the ages of 5 and 13 in England and Wales, however, attending school did not become compulsory until 1880 for up to 10 year olds (Elementary Education Act, 1880). Opposition to school attendance was met from many factory owners as they were concerned with their loss of cheap labour (Gillard, 2011). Nonetheless, factory owners soon saw the benefits of children receiving a basic education as they were able to read and take measurements.

Since 1870 the school leaving age has steadily risen. By 1972 the school leaving age had risen to 16 years of age. This latter rise was needed, argued the then Conservative Government, in order to generate more skilled labour (Sheldon, 2014).

Since 2013 YP have been required to stay in education or attend vocational training until 17. In 2015 this is to rise to 18 years of age. These rises in school leaving age the Government has argued as necessary as most 16 to 18 year olds are not self-motivated enough to continue in their education after the completion of their formal examinations at 16. This has meant the overall [unemployment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unemployment) rate has increased as many CYP do not have the certification to fill vacant posts (BBC News, 2007). Other research findings appear to suggest YP who continue in learning or training until the age of 18 are more likely to earn more money, to be healthier and are less likely to be in trouble with the Police (BBC, 2014).

Thus, I argue successive Governments have viewed CYP as commodities, ie, they have received an education in order to provide skilled labour. In doing so, education has meant limiting negative effects on the economy and providing a positive effect instead. Governments have wanted to ensure that the workforce in place is skilled to ensure the UK remains one of the leading nations in the global economy with the power and status this brings (Ball, 2008) and that they are providing the Government with revenue through taxation rather than depleting the Government of revenue by claiming benefits.

The focus on CYP’s academic progress by the Government has also been fuelled by the psychological theories of behaviourism and cognitivism which tended to provide a means of measuring and categorising CYP. In addition, particular members of society could be targeted for specific types of education in order to meet specific roles in society (Gillard, 2011). With the focus being on what YP can offer in their skills, limited attention was given to other aspects of CYP including their emotionality.

I shall now briefly explore the major influences from psychology, in particular, behaviourism and cognitivism on education.

**The influence of behaviourism**

In Russia, Pavlov (1927/1960) trained a dog to salivate on hearing the sound of a bell which became the first example of classical conditioning. Meanwhile, in the USA, Watson (Watson and Rayner, 1920) became a founder of the school of behaviourism believing that all thoughts, feelings and actions are developed through conditioning. Along with fellow American Skinner’s (1938) operant conditioning, their views dominated the practices of successive generations of teachers, psychologists and policy makers and encouraged the development and application of a multitude of behaviour modification derivatives in schools. Many of which tended to be a case of one size fits all with CYP expecting to conform regardless of influences impacting on them, eg, pressures brought upon them by being a Carer.

**The influence of cognitivism**

It is generally held that Wundt (1832-1920) was the first person to ever call himself a [psychologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychologist) (Carlson and Donald, 2010). He is widely regarded as the father of [experimental psychology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experimental_psychology) (Butler-Bowdon, 2007) and founder of cognitivism. Working in a laboratory in Germany, Wundt established a kind of structuralist psychology which used measurement, rank and categorisation. Being able to place CYP into categories was a way of having control over their lives by deciding their destiny in the workplace and in maintaining the social order. By categorising CYP a filtering system was needed to ensure the best use of resources, ie, the type of education they should be provided with. I will explore this thinking in more detail later in this chapter.

In order for CYP to be categorised testing was devised. Binet (1857-1911) and Simon (1872–1961), French [psychologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychologist)s, invented the first practical [intelligence test](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence_test), ie, the Binet-Simon Scale. Binet had developed the test as he wanted to find a way of identifying students who needed special help in coping with the (French) school curriculum. However, it would be one of Wundt’s students, Englishman Spearman (1863-1945), who, with his interest in [statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statistics), would go on to develop the theory that cognitive test scores reflect a single general intelligence factor coining the term ‘*g* factor’ (Jensen, 1998).

Another major influence on cognitive intelligence was Wechsler (1896-1981), eg, [Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wechsler_Intelligence_Scale_for_Children) (WISC). Although born in Romania Wechsler emigrated to America with his parents as a child and became a leading [American](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) [psychologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychologist). During [World War I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) he worked with the [United States Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army) to develop psychological tests to screen new draftees. At the time he was also studying under [Spearman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Spearman) and [Pearson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Pearson) (1857-1936), the latter being another English mathematician. However, Wechsler emphasized that factors other than intellectual ability are involved in intelligent behaviour (Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 2009) and he objected to the single score offered by the 1937 Binet Scale (a derivative of the Binet-Simon Scale). Although Wechsler’s tests did not directly measure non-intellective factors, it takes these factors into careful account in its underlying theory (Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 2009). Wechsler replaced intelligence quotient (IQ) with an arbitrary value of 100 to the mean intelligence and added or subtracted another 15 points for each [standard deviation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standard_deviation) above or below the mean where the participant was. Wechsler also divided the concept of [intelligence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence_%28trait%29) into two main areas: Verbal and performance (non-verbal) scales, each evaluated with different subtests.

In France, the Swiss developmental psychologist Piaget (1896-1980) was also to play a major influence on considering how CYP learn in many countries including England. He postulated that CYP move through developmental stages and set out what CYP should be able to achieve by at a particular age (Piaget, 1964). Much of this discovery was without the need of the teacher’s support. To a certain extent Piaget supported the concept that intelligence could be measured (Piaget, 1964).

Influenced by Piaget was the Soviet psychologist Vygotsky (1896-1934). Although his work was known of in the 1930’s it would not be until the 1970’s that his ideas would become more widely recognised in the Western World. However, Vygotsky differed from Piaget’s thinking by focusing on how language impacted on learning and how a CYP’s cultural background can impact on their development (Vygotsky, 1986). His theory of ‘the zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) takes into consideration an individual’s functioning within social contexts whereby the CYP is being supported in their learning by the use of ‘scaffolding’ (Wood, et al, 1976) by their teacher and/or more-able peers. Vygotsky believed education should give CYP experiences which were within their ZPD and, thereby, encouraging and advancing their individual learning (Berk and Winsler, 1995).

In the next section I will explore how cognitivism and behaviourism played a major influence on educational approaches used in the UK.

**Impact of behaviourist and cognitivist approaches on education in England**

The UK’s first EP was Cyril Burt (1883-1971). In the book ‘How the Mind Works’, which is based on his series of talks broadcasted in 1933, Burt states his definition of 'human intelligence':

By the term 'intelligence', the psychologist understands inborn, all-round intellectual ability. It is inherited, or at least innate, not due to teaching or training; it is intellectual, not emotional or moral, and remains uninfluenced by industry or zeal; it is general, not specific, ie, it is not limited to any particular kind of work, but enters into all we do or say or think. Of all our mental qualities, it is the most far-reaching. Fortunately, it can be measured with accuracy and ease. (p28-9).

Coupled with behaviourism, cognitivism has been hugely influential in determining the nature of education in the UK, especially in England. CYP have been, and continue to be, fitted into categorisations according to the outcome of assessments. These categorisations can determine their educational choices and life outcomes with intelligence being the most supreme attribute. This can be seen in the Education Acts and various publications produced by the Government and its think tanks. I will refer to several of these documents in the next part of this chapter. As will be seen there has been little consideration of a CYP’s emotionality. CYP have been expected to engage in learning regardless of factors which might have affected this engagement with teachers having little option but to go along with the Government’s agenda.

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|  I recall informing a colleague in the summer term of my second year of being a teacher that it was the first year since I had started school that I had not been assessed by an examination. I had attended an education establishment of one kind or another during the 1970’s and 1980’s (except for a short time in 1977). Every year there were examinations. I even had the misfortune of studying a particular specialism whilst at teacher training college which was the only subject to have had examinations at the end of each of the years I attended. Thus, I was well aware of being examined and having to pass a goal though not being exactly clear what the criteria was for most of these exams or even of the outcomes. I wonder if CYP today sense the same feeling of dread which can take place over the Easter holiday as the awareness of tests loom over the coming term?  |

Testing

The driving force behind the use of examinations has been accredited to Burt (1933). Along with educationist, Percy Nunn (1870-1944), they asserted, “The absolute determination of ‘intelligence’ was by hereditary or genetic factors,” (Galton, et al, 1980, p36). I consider this would have been reassuring for the upper and middle classes of Britain in ensuring the working classes remained in their place especially with the rise of socialism, the impact of revolution against the establishment throughout Europe and the devastation brought about by World War I leading to many of the populace openly questioning their place in society. Thus, with cognitivism the Government had found a way in which CYP could be governed and their future path set out for them independent of any other aspects affecting their being: Cognitivism was a means of having control over the general population, in particular, over the working classes.

Two documents which reflect this viewpoint were the circular ‘The New Secondary Education’ (1947) and its accompanying booklet ‘The Nation's Schools’ (1945). Together they explained which secondary school children would be expected to attend. Segregation of the classes was evident with the new modern schools aimed at working-class CYP, “Whose future employment will not demand any measure of technical skill or knowledge,” (MoE 1945, quoted in Benn and Chitty 1996, p5). Determination of which type of school children would attend was based on testing which, in turn, affected CYP’s opportunities with regards to post-schooling. The test, known as the 11+, was introduced in the 1944 Education Act (Board of Education, 1944). The Conservative Government’s expectation was that children from working class backgrounds would be unlikely to pass the 11+ as it was perceived they lacked the intelligence to do so. However, the tests were also culturally designed with the questions more likely to have been explored in schools attended by middle class children. Also, parents of these children were more likely to be able to afford the cost of private tutoring to increase their child’s chances of passing the 11+. Thus, using the 11+ examination was a means for the Government to filter society. The only members of society who could escape examinations for entrance into secondary school would be those who opted out of formal education or could afford a private education.

The effects of the two different types of education and the attitudes towards different family members are detailed in a personal account by Cosker (1996). She had grown up on a council estate but passed the 11+ which opened the world of academia to her but she lacked practical skills. Her sister failed the 11+ and attended a secondary modern school instead. There was less academic stress placed on her sister so she could live her life in a more carefree manner as she did not have to spend hours completing homework as less was given compared to the grammar school. Her sister also had the opportunity to explore a variety of practical subjects. However, when she wanted to pursue a course in higher education, as an adult, obstacles were in her way as she did not have the qualifications to do so. The impact of these sisters’ educational journeys affected the relationship between them and their parents and influenced their children’s aspirations too.

The 11+ examination remained in place until 1976 when the Labour Government was voted into power. They did not advocate the 11+ examination, however, the test continues to exist in some LAs. Apart from examinations at the end of secondary school education, eg, the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), CYP did not have to undergo any other tests directed by the Government. However, under the Conservative Government, with the 1988 Education Reform Act (DfES, 1988), this was to change. Amongst the changes in education meant testing was re-introduced into state schools but this time across a greater number of age ranges. Alongside testing came the establishment of the National Curriculum (NC). The NC set out attainment targets, ie, the knowledge, skills and understanding which CYP were expected to have attained by the end of KSs. CYP would be assessed in order to establish their level of attainment in particular subjects at the end of each KS. The Act defined KS 1 as ages 5-7, KS2 as ages 8-11, KS3 as 12-14 and KS4 as 15-16. Thus, formal testing was to begin as early as 6 years of age (for a child who had not reached their 7th birthday in the year they were being tested). I wonder if the Government had considered the possible implications assessment would bring in terms of examination pressure and exposure to failure/inadequacy for such young children? Nonetheless, the NC continued to exist under the New Labour Government. However, due to pressure from teacher unions and others interested in CYP’s education, the New Labour Government announced in 2003 tests for 7 year olds would be less formal and would form part of teacher-led assessment (Gillard, 2011). Since then, all the countries in the UK have stopped formal assessment in KS2 except for England.

Another concern for me was the NC was prescriptive as it set out the programmes of study to be taught at each KS in ten subjects (except for Religious Education though this was still a compulsory subject). It would appear when it was introduced in 1988 that the Conservative Government considered CYP would all progress in their learning at a similar rate with no regard to their individuality.

The NC was highly criticised with the premise for these concerns due to the document having had virtually no input from teachers in its design or construction (Gillard, 2011). Instead, it had been written by a government quango. The NC was so huge it became unmanageable especially at the primary level. As a result there was a significant drop in reading standards (Gillard, 2011). There was criticism, also, of the curriculum becoming too narrow as schools focussed on the subjects which were going to be assessed. For example, in February, 2004, the Chief Inspector, David Bell, warned the New Labour Government that its enforced focus on Numeracy and Literacy in primary schools was creating a two-tier curriculum, with other subjects - particularly geography, history and religious education - being neglected (Gillard, 2011).

The NC has been revised several times since with the latest version becoming current in September, 2014. Although this version states that it should, “Promote[s] the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society,” (DfE, 2013, p4) and stresses the importance of tailoring learning to CYP from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or with SEN, the main reason for the change are to raise educational standards. The Coalition Government (made up of the Conservatives and Liberals) has been concerned with the UK slipping down in its ranking in the international achievement tables (Ramesh, 2013). Thus, the changes in the NC have also been driven by the Coalition Government to increase its position on these tables. I will discuss the Government’s concern with international league tables later in this chapter.

Establishment of the Assessment Performance Unit

As has already been seen, the succession of Governments have placed pressure on teachers to use cognitive and behavioural approaches. This pressure rose to a new level in 1974 when several politicians calling for schools to become more accountable for what CYP learnt. As a result the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) was established to, “Promote the development of methods of assessing and monitoring the achievement of children at school, and to seek to identify the incidence of under-achievement,” (in Gillard, 2011, np). Attempts by some teachers to deviate from the standard form of teaching to that of an individualised approach, where they could take account of CYP’s emotional well-being, were met with criticism by the Government. A particularly influential document was published by Bennett in 1976 where his research outcomes into primary school teaching methods were represented in the media as, “A condemnation of so-called ‘progressive’ methods,” (Galton, et al, 1980, p41). Bennett’s report concluded that formal methods of teaching, eg, whole class teaching and regular testing and competition, meant that primary aged pupils were typically four months ahead of those taught using informal methods. However, his study was widely criticised, particularly for its use of oversimplified categorisation of teaching methods. Nonetheless, the media appeared to choose to ignore its weaknesses and the objections by the critics (Gillard, 2011), thus, supporting the Labour Government’s views of formal approaches to teaching and making it even more challenging for teachers to attempt to teach in ways which were less cognitively-driven and behaviourist which took account of the needs of the individual instead.

Introduction of Free Market Forces

Another outcome from the 1988 Education Reform Act was the drive by the Conservative Government to bring free market forces into education. The Conservative Government had already begun to use neo-liberal principles in the 1980 Education Act (DfES, 1980) giving parents the right to choose which state maintained school their CYP attended. Previously, their only choice of school had been the one in their catchment area. With the change in the law schools had to compete for pupils. At the same time, where a school was oversubscribed it could select its CYP on the basis of ability and aptitude (Gillard, 2011). So which schools did the CYP who did not have the ability and aptitude go to? They attended, what my tutors on my teacher training course referred to as the ‘dump schools’. That is not to say there weren't other reasons why CYP were on these schools’ registers, eg, the school may have been more conveniently located to where the CYP lived.

Nonetheless, schools were under pressure to attract CYP in order to maintain their numbers. If the school was undersubscribed it would be deemed to be a failing school and would face the possibility of closure (Gillard, 2011). This, I consider, meant more pressure being placed on staff and CYP to focus on academic success especially for schools facing the prospect of closure. The focus for many of these schools was on academic achievement regardless of the impact this pressure had on the CYP’s emotionality. It also meant staff, if they were inclined to do so, had limited time to support CYP with their emotionality.

Introduction of League Tables

The 1988 Education Act exacerbated the situation as it introduced league tables where the general public could see how schools compared in the outcome of assessment at the end of the KSs 2 and 4. In doing so, the Conservative Government had provided parents with quantitative data to assist them in choosing a school. However, league tables met with much criticism, eg, some schools were seen as being reluctant to take pupils on their role who had learning difficulties as they were considered likely to depress the overall test results. In addition, some teachers were being encouraged by their schools to concentrate their efforts on CYP who were on the borderline between one level and the next rather than on those who needed their attention the most in an attempt to ensure enough pupils gained the desired grade set by the Government and to improve the school’s ranking in the league tables. Also, the curriculum became skewed as schools practised for the tests in order to achieve a higher ranking on the tables (Gillard, 2011).

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| I can recall in the late 1990’s the impact of target setting for the Year 6 children at a school I was teaching at and how I was held accountable for the Standard Assessment Test (SATs) outcomes. There were only 20 children in the year group which meant if anyone of them did not achieve the Government target of NC Level 4 in Numeracy, Literacy and Science then the figures for the school would be deflated. In the cohort there was one child who had a Statement of SEN and did not sit the examinations and another child was on holiday during the assessment week. Nonetheless, these 2 children were included in the figures which meant there was a significant impact on the school’s percentage of pupils achieving Level 4. There were also children who did not achieve Level 4 and would not have been expected to do so. Nonetheless, I was held into account by the headteacher for the overall figures even though they were aware of the 2 children who did not sit the examinations. However, the headteacher was under pressure as he was accountable to the Government for the exam outcomes. In addition, there were other mitigating circumstances beyond my control, ie, I had only began working at the school one term prior to the examinations and the class was made up of a newly established mixed-aged group of Year 5 and 6 who had not bonded well together, thus, the classroom ethos did not provide the ideal working environment. Again, these were factors the headteacher would have been aware of, but the finger pointing was at the teacher, ie, me, for the outcomes of the KS2 SATS. Being cynical, perhaps the outgoing teacher was aware of the situation and did not want to be the one having to discuss the outcome of the examinations with the headteacher when the time came to do so. |

OFSTED

As if schools were not already under enough pressure, in 1992 the Office for Standards in Education (more commonly known as ‘OFSTED’) was created as part of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 (DfES, 1992). This meant schools would be scrutinised in every possible aspect and a report published about the school for all to read. The school would be given a grade as to how well they were at meeting their pupils’ educational needs which detailed also the school’s strengths and weaknesses. Individual teachers were also given a rating for their teaching which was also taken into account when the inspectors gave the school its overall grade. Morale among teachers suffered further when government ministers began using OFSTED reports as a basis for naming and shaming so-called 'failing' schools (Gillard, 2011). For some teachers, the sweeping judgements made by the 5-day inspection would prove to be so pivotal that they would take their own lives. In 2011, Channel 4 News reported that since 1998, coroners' inquests into the suicides of at least eight teachers heard that they had taken their lives shortly before or after OFSTED inspections. The reporters also found teachers cited increased pressure with the run-up to [OFSTED](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Inspection-reports/) inspections in that the judgements made could make or break their reputations with the outcome also affecting the reputation of the school (Channel 4, 2011).

Despite the impact of OFSTED inspections these inspections continue in schools though the format changed in 2005, eg, there would be less notice of the visit and the visits would be shorter. The New Labour Government also continued the approach of naming and shaming 'failing schools' (in England). It caused schools, many in less affluent areas, to suffer even more as these schools become less popular with parents and found it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain good staff. It was a vicious circle. Rather than improve the situation for pupils in less financially affluent areas, government policies widened the divide between successful and unsuccessful schools (Gillard, 2011).

OFSTED inspections continue to cause staff stress with schools questioning their approach (eg, Sellgren, 2014). It would appear to me, the Coalition Government has not been willing to reduce the pressure on teaching staff and CYP. With such an approach to education it is easy to recognise how the Government would have limited concerns with emotionality in schools with, apparently, little thought to the effects caused by the scrutiny of OFSTED.

Literacy and Numeracy Hours

In January 1998 literacy targets were set for every LA in England with the Conservative Government threatening to expose primary schools which appeared to not push their pupils in achieving high scores in tests. The targets which children were expected to achieve in the KS (Key Stage) 2 SATs were designed to raise the proportion reaching the required standard in English tests from 57 per cent in 1996 to 80 per cent by 2002. To enable schools to do so the Literacy Hour (DfEE, 1998a) was introduced. This was followed by the Numeracy Hour (DfEE, 1998b) introduced to raise standards in Numeracy as well. I consider the Government viewed children to be filled with information which could be measured against a mandatory measure fixed by them.

Payment by Results

Further pressure on teachers to engage in cognitive and behavioural approaches came in 2002 when predetermined levels of CYP achievement were to be linked to teachers' pay by the New Labour Government through the use of test results. Thus, it became more challenging for teachers to find time to support CYP with issues that might be impacting on their learning such as their emotionality. Nor were they able to make allowances for CYP’s outcomes due to issues which might affect their learning, eg, social deprivation. The focus was on teachers being able to make CYP reach academic targets set by the Government as if all CYP learn at the same rate. Again, CYP were not viewed as being individuals.

Corporal punishment

With particular reference to an unsavoury side of behaviourism it was not until the 1986 Education (No. 2) Act (DfES, 1986) that corporal punishment was made illegal from August, 1987, in state maintained schools. However, independent schools were still permitted to beat their pupils but not those whose fees were paid by the state. It would take until 1999 for corporal punishment to be banned in independent schools in England and Wales, 2000 in Scotland and 2003 in Northern Ireland (Farrell, 2014). Prior to the ban, CYP who were considered to have misbehaved could expect to be physically punished by use of the cane, for example, on their hands or over their trousers on their bottom but other parts of the body were also used. It seems incredible that such an act should be done to a CYP without taking account of possible underlying reasons behind their presentation. In addition, what kind of lesson was the CYP learning about power and relationships, and how to respond when it was deemed someone had made a mistake (deliberate or otherwise)?

In what I consider somewhat surprising, a few Christian private schools did not want the change in law and fought the ban, unsuccessfully, through the courts (Farrell, 2014). I would have thought such schools would have demonstrated more compassion towards CYP rather than using physical punishment to persuade CYP to think and behave differently as these schools are founded on the teachings of Jesus who denounced violence and fought for the right of the oppressed. In addition, Jesus stated in Matthew 18:3, in order to enter Heaven, we need to be more childlike in our ways (Holy Bible, 2011). Despite the ban, there have been examples of parents who have contested schools using corporal punishment towards their children with the judgement finding in favour of the schools, eg, in 1993, was heard in the European Court of Human Rights the case of Costello-Roberts v. UK. The Court found giving a seven-year-old boy three 'whacks' with a gym shoe over his trousers was not a forbidden degrading treatment (Farrell, 2014).

Since it has become illegal to use corporal punishment various guidelines have been produced with regards to touching a CYP especially with concerns around child protection. In the latest guidance from the DfE schools, in England, are legally allowed to use reasonable force towards a CYP but not as a punishment (DfE, 2013). The use of reasonable force should be detailed in the school’s behaviour policy. Schools can decide if they need to undergo training in understanding and applying physical force. They can also decide on whether to report any incidents to the CYP’s parents. The decision to physically intervene with a CYP is with the individual working with the CYP. It is the responsibility of the CYP to prove if unreasonable force has been used. As a parent I would hope (reasonable) force would never have to be used on my children but, if it was used, I would expect to be informed. I also question how would a young child or someone with SEN know that the force used on them has been reasonable and how likely are they to question authority figures? It would appear CYP have less rights than an adult. If force had been used on an adult as a member of the general public they could make a complaint to the Police who would, hopefully, follow up the concern which may lead to prosecution for assault.

However, cognitive and behaviourist approaches in rationalising the development of the mind have been challenged with alternative paradigms especially in more recent times. I will now briefly explore some of the more commonly viewed in the Western World.

**Alternative approaches to cognitivism and behaviourism**

Subjective versus Objective

William James (1842-1910) and his student John Dewey (1859-1952) were concerned with mental life and behaviour in terms of active adaptation to the person's environment (VandenBos, 2006). As their approach was based on experiences, thus subjective, it did not suit many Western governments who focussed on measuring individuals in terms of their position in education using cognitive and behavioural approaches, ie, the use of an objective approach. In the meantime, Freud (1856-1939) was developing his approach of psychoanalysis. Although there have been aspects of his approach which have been controversial, ie, psychoanalysis has been considered by some to be a pseudoscience (eg, Grünbaum, 1977) his work and theories have helped shape many popular discourses about childhood, personality, memory, sexuality and therapy.

Influence of Vygotsky

Although his work is considered to be cognitivist, Vygotsky’s (1986) theories have led to a number of non-cognitivist theoretical and practical derivatives, eg, socio-cultural activity theory (Leadbetter, 2008; Daniels, Edwards, Engestrom and Ludvigsen, 2009) with Bruner’s (1966) conceptualization of learning (scaffolding) bearing similarities with Vygotsky’s ZPD. Bruner is one of several psychologists who has, “Aspired to less disabling forms of practice by demanding that analyses become more sensitive not only to the importance of language but to the dynamic nature of human being,” (Billington and Williams, ud). Bruner also advocated the use of narrative approaches.

Social Learning Theory

During the 1970’s there was further questioning of behaviourist and cognitivist paradigms such as by Bandura (1977) with his social learning theory. Unlike Skinner (1936), Bandura postulated humans are active information processors whose behaviour is affected by what they see. Thus, observational learning requires the use of cognitive processes. For example, in a laboratory experiment on exposing children to aggressive actions, which became known as the Bobo Doll experiment, Bandura demonstrated children can learn to be aggressive through watching the behaviour of another person.

Ecological Systems Theory and Positive Psychology

Other influences in psychological thinking at this time include those of Bronfenbrenner (1979) with ecological systems theory and Seligman (1975) with his positive psychology. Bronfenbrenner postulated that ecological systems, which contained roles, norms and rules, played a part in shaping psychological development, eg, a family living in an economic-socially deprived urban area are more likely to face different challenges from those living in an economic-socially deprived rural community. Whilst Seligman questioned the findings presented by Skinner (1983) when working with conditioning dogs. Instead, Seligman developed the theory of ‘learned helplessness’ whereby an individual has learned to act or to behave helplessly in a particular situation. This usually occurs after experiencing some inability to avoid an adverse situation, even when the individual actually has the power to change its unpleasant or, even, harmful circumstance.

Dynamic Assessment and Multiple Intelligences

Further challenges to cognitivism and behaviourism came from individuals such as Feuerstein (1990) with dynamic assessment and Gardner (1983) with his theory of multiple intelligences who challenged whether the validity of the concept of intelligence and whether it could be given a fixed measurement. Through his work with Jewish refugees, Feuerstein was able to change the cognitive ability assessment score of the CYP and concluded intelligence is modifiable (Feuerstein, 1990). Feuerstein and Bronfenbrenner argued that individuals are affected by environmental variables, eg, the impact of society, culture, politics and economics and have the potential to change. Thus, cognitive ability is not fixed and, as such, individuals should not be placed in a fixed category for intelligence.

Gardner (1983) considered education had become obsessed with the notion of academic achievement in what he termed as ‘abstract intelligence’. In his multi-faceted model, Gardner drew attention to the importance of being intelligent about our own emotions, which he termed as ‘intra-personal intelligence’ (ie, self-smart), and the emotions of others, which he termed as ‘interpersonal intelligence’ (ie, people smart). Moreover, he suggested that these emotional and social abilities tend to be more influential than conventional intelligence for personal, career and school success. This intelligence became known as emotional intelligence (EI). However, there is a danger in using the term ‘intelligence’ as it might be viewed that emotionality can be measured similarly to the cognitive perspective of cognitive intelligence.

Emotionality

Psychologists Goleman (1996) and Steiner (1997) developed Gardner’s idea of EI but changed the focus to that of EL. In doing so, they removed the emphasis on emotions as something that could be measured against a set of scientifically tested norms or standards.

So what has been the impact of cognitivist and behaviourist approaches to education in the UK? I will explore this question in the next part of this chapter.

**Concerns with the UK’s approach to education**

Excessive testing has been raised as a concern from several angles, eg, in 2004, the NUT general secretary Doug McAvoy commented, “History, geography and the arts are suffering because of the government's obsession with tests, targets and tables,” (McAvoy, 2004, as cited by Gillard, 2011) and in 2006 the General Teaching Council for England (GTC) called for all national school tests for 7, 11 and 14 year olds to be scrapped. It pointed out that children in England took around 70 different tests before the age of 16, making them the most tested in the world. In 2007, GTC chief executive, Keith Bartley, as cited by Gillard (2011), exclaimed:

Of course there still needs to be a way of testing pupils when their standard education comes to a close ... But placing added stress on pupils, teachers and parents on a regular basis before that time is not creating the best environment for learning. We need to ... let them [teachers] do what they are trained for. (np).

Even prior to Bartley’s comment a Labour Government-commissioned report by former chief inspector, Mike Tomlinson, warned in 2004 that exam overload was harming pupils (Gillard, 2011). Nonetheless, testing is still a prominent feature in schools with CYP expected to achieve ever higher scores with the threshold having been moved in the SATs.

Although testing at the end of KS 1 has become less formal the emphasis on testing continues with younger children now being targeted, eg, in 2012 a new test for Year 1 (aged 5-6 years) children, ie, the Phonics Screening Check (STA, 2014a) was introduced. However, I consider the Screener is flawed as it does not take account of children who learn reading using the whole word approach. In addition, it would appear two-thirds of teachers consider a variety of methods should be used to teach CYP to read (cited by Gibb, 2014) and not just relying on a phonics-led approach. Any child who fails the test are provided with extra tuition and re-tested the year after when they are in Year 2. Thus, not only might the approach of teaching phonics be letting some young children down but they are exposed to additional testing. I wonder how all the assessments, being targeted for additional phonics lessons and possibly being taught an approach which does not suit their learning needs impacts on a child’s emotional well-being?

As with younger children YP at the end of KS4 have had to face ever more challenging GCSE examinations in Literacy and Numeracy. Pressure on YP to gain better exam results the UK Government appears to equate with driving up standards. However, the UK does not rate highly when compared to countries with a similar economy for educational outcome ratings according to statistics produced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It would appear in 2013, the UK was in 23rd place for reading and 26th place for educational standards in mathematics (OECD, 2013). The Coalition Government would like to improve its rating to be at a level similar to China, Singapore and other East Asian nations (Gove, 2014). However, countries such as China have recognised the effect of intensive learning and ongoing assessment has had on their CYP which I will explore later in this chapter.

Concerns about testing CYP is not confined just to the UK. Academics from around the world have condemned testing of CYP with one of the most recent coming from academics requesting the cancellation of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) for 2014. They argue the assessments kill the joy of learning and increases the reliance on quantitative measures to rank YP and schools (Wilby, 2014).

Another approach in increasing the UK’s positioning in the international achievement ratings has been for the Coalition Government to place ever more pressure on CYP to absorb more learning. Pre-schoolers are now expected to engage in formal learning as the curriculum content has moved from that which children at school would have been taught to those who have not yet started formal schooling (STA, 2014b). It has been argued such an approach is removing young children from learning through exploration and discovery (Gray, 2014).

In addition, the Coalition Government has proposed making school days longer and holiday time shorter so that CYP can spend more hours in school to learn. In doing so, the Government will be reducing the time that CYP have to engage in activities of their choosing and the time for them to be away from the intensity of formal learning (and assessment).

Paradoxically, the Coalition Government’s proposal to lengthen the amount of time spent in school has appeared only a few months after the Chinese ministry of education issued a report, entitled Ten Regulations to Lessen Academic Burden for Primary School Students (cited by Zhao, 2013). The report calls for, amongst other changes, less homework and less testing of CYP. In addition, there should be no judgement on CYP’s academic achievements when deciding which schools they should enrol on with all classes made up of random academic abilities. It would appear some East Asian nations have become increasingly concerned about their CYP’s emotionality and mental well-being and the value of their education system. According to the scholar and author Yong Zhao, who is an expert on schools in China, a common Chinese term used to describe many of their CYP is ‘gaofen dineng’, which means ‘good at tests but bad at everything else’ (Zhao, 2013). Because students spend nearly all of their time studying, they have little opportunity to be creative, discover or pursue their own passions, or develop physical and social skills. Moreover, as revealed by a recent large-scale survey conducted by British and Chinese researchers, Chinese schoolchildren suffer from extraordinarily high levels of anxiety, depression and psychosomatic stress disorders, which appear to be linked to academic pressures and lack of play (Gray, 2014). Perhaps the Coalition Government should take note as to what is happening to some of the CYP in China when aspiring to be at a similar rating on international achievement scales. Is it worth the cost of generation/s of CYP’s emotionality and mental well-being?

The effect of pressure from schooling has been documented in the press with the number of cases of CYP reported with stress, anxiety and depression being on the rise. Not only this, but the age of those being diagnosed with depression is becoming younger (Gregory, 2014). Reasons for these figures have been associated with CYP being, “Tormented by bullies, under pressure to fit in and bombarded with school assessments,” (Gregory, 2014, p4). If CYP were given fewer tests and more time to engage in creative-type activities as well as support in how to deal with bullying then I would speculate there would be fewer cases of stress, anxiety and depression.

It would appear that the Government has given limited thought to CYP’s emotionality, however, in the next part of this chapter I will explore what credence the Government has given with regards to CYP’s emotionality.

**Discourses on emotionality**

In exploring discourses of emotionality there have been occasions when the Government has appeared to take account of factors other than a child’s intelligence affecting their engagement with their learning and their interaction with others. The Board of Education, stated in The Prefatory Note to the 1918 edition of its Handbook of Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers (cited by MoE (Ministry of Education), 1959), declared:

The teacher need not let the sense of his responsibility depress him or make him afraid to be his natural self in school. Children are instinctively attracted by sincerity and cheerfulness; and the greatest teachers have been thoroughly human in their weaknesses as well as in their strength. (p9).

Several years later the Labour Government's Consultative Committee, chaired by Sir Henry Hadow, produced six reports, two of which are worth noting here as they appear to demonstrate the growing awareness of the needs of (young) children beyond the ‘3Rs’, ie, The Primary School (Hadow, 1931) and Infant and Nursery Schools (Hadow, 1933). Hadow’s 1931 report suggested, for example, that,

“A good school... is not a place of compulsory instruction, but a community of old and young, engaged in learning by co-operative experiment,” (Hadow 1931, xvii) and that, “The curriculum of the primary school is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored.” (p93).

Ellen Wilkinson became the Minister of Education in 1945. She saw a new kind of schooling with, “Laughter in the classroom, self-confidence growing every day, eager interest instead of bored uniformity,” (Wilkinson, 1947, p5, cited by Jones, 2003, p24). Unfortunately, her untimely death came about in 1947 and so it would appear her views on schooling for several years until the publication of the Plowden Report (1967) on primary education.

Plowden (1967) appeared to have concern for children’s emotional well-being as she called for less focus on academic outcomes. Within the Report are recurring themes of individual learning, flexibility in the curriculum, the use of the environment and learning by discovery. Teachers should, “Not assume that only what is measurable is valuable,” (Plowden, 1967, p202), thus, there appeared to be a move away from judging a child only on their cognitive ability but exploring the whole of the child: “At the heart of the educational process lies the child,” (p7). Plowden continues, “Individual differences between children of the same age are so great that any class, however homogeneous it seems, must always be treated as a body of children needing individual and different attention,”(p25). Nonetheless, the Government continued to place emphasis on cognitive and behavioural approaches to learning with limited regard to CYP’s individuality such as their emotionality.

However, in the early 1990’s the Conservative Government appeared to question Piaget's notion of learning readiness in the discussion paper ‘Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools’ (Alexander, et al, 1992). This publication was known as ‘The Three Wise Men Report’. The authors argued that instead of the teacher being regarded as an instructor they should become a facilitator. This approach was more in line with Vygotsky’s viewpoints in the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Vygotsky, 1986). The discussion paper also argued pupils should be grouped by ability in subjects ie, set, rather than taught as a whole class, ie, streamed, stating, “Teachers must avoid the pitfall of assuming that pupils' ability is fixed,” (Alexander, et al, 1992, p27). It would appear the Government had recognised not all CYP learn at the same rate and that they could be individuals. In an article in the ‘New Statesman and Society’ (17 July 1992) John Patten, who was then Education Secretary, stated:

The fact is that children excel at different things; it is foolish to ignore it, and some schools may wish specifically to cater for these differences. ... Such schools are already emerging. They will, as much more than mere exotic educational boutiques, increasingly populate the educational landscape of Britain at the end of the century, a century that introduced universal education at its outset; then tried to grade children like vegetables; then tried to treat them ... like identical vegetables; and which never ever gave them the equality of intellectual nourishment that is now being offered by the NC, encouraged by testing, audited by regular inspection. (Patten, 1992, p20-21, quoted in Chitty and Dunford, 1999, p27).

But this quote appears to give mixed messages: Although there was the recognition CYP are individuals who will learn at different rates they were still going to be provided with an identical curriculum using testing as a motivator with the whole process checked by OFSTED.

The New Labour Government was voted into power in 1997. The theory of Attachment (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) were to be influential along with the Government’s concern with figures indicating CYP growing up in economic-socially deprived areas were at a greater risk of performing poorly at school, having relationship difficulties with their peers and agents of authority and, ultimately, experiencing compromised life chances, eg, leaving school early, having a greater chance of being unemployed and more likely to become involved in crime (DfE, 2010). These outcomes were a concern not only for CYP but for their families, communities, and for society at large. Thus, in 1998, the Government set up the Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) with its remit to cut child poverty, reduce social exclusion and save money by creating well-balanced youngsters. In addition, SSLPs would support the community by bringing health, education and family life benefits together, eg, setting up programmes to dissuade pregnant women from smoking so safeguarding the well-being of both the mother and her unborn child.

SSLPs not only aimed to enhance health and well-being during the early years, but to increase the chances that children would enter school ready to learn, be academically successful in school, socially successful in their communities and occupationally successful when adult. Indeed, by improving - early in life- the developmental trajectories of children at risk of compromised development, SSLPs aimed to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty, school failure and social exclusion. (DfE, 2010).

SSLPs brought together under one roof education, social and health professionals, primarily engaged with early years, so making it easier for families to access their support especially as the Sure Start was set up in their community. The Programme can be compared to similar initiatives in other parts of the world engaged in tackling disadvantaged communities in respect to economically-socially deprivation, eg, the [Head Start](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_Start_Program) programme in the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) of America, Australia’s Head Start and Ontario's Early Years Plan.

SSLPs eventually became known as Children’s Centres with control of them moving from Central Government to Local Government in 2005 and 2006 However, due to financial pressure on LAs in recent times several have closed or have had the services they offer reduced.

There has also been mixed reviews as to how successful SSLPs/Children Centres have been, eg, DfE (2010) study found when comparing five year-olds in SSLPs/Children Centre areas with their contemporaries in non-SSLP/Children Centre areas there were fewer obese children in the areas where the Programme had run. Parents also reported benefits, eg, their children were healthier and better behaved. However, this same study found SSLPs/Children Centres had not been as successful as the Government and LAs would have liked them to have been, eg, there was no measurable improvement in the SSLPs/Children Centre’s assessment scores of children in their catchment area when they started school compared to children who lived in areas where the Programme was not in place and parents were less likely to attend school parents' evenings (DfE, 2010).

Whilst SSLPs were primarily involved with supporting young families and increased positive life outcomes for pre-school children the New Labour Government also wanted to explore emotional and social competence and well-being of pupils. Thus, in January, 2002, they commissioned Southampton University’s Health Education Unit to undertake a study to examine how CYP’s emotional and social competence and well-being could most effectively be developed at national and local level. The study was conducted by Weare and Gray (2003) who included in their recommendations the Government should approach ‘problem behaviour’ as having underlying social and emotional causes which needed to be addressed in a holistic, environmental way. They also advised the Government that they should develop an evidence base for EL as research was lacking in Britain.

Weare and Gray recommended the DfES undertake a survey with LAs to find out what was currently happening in terms of emotional and social competence and well-being within their schools. Examples of good practice would then be published to inspire LAs and schools. Also recommended was the need for early intervention and use of a developmental approach which included providing support for secondary schools whom the authors perceived were less likely to engage in work on emotionality.

Weare and Gray (2003) had exposed the need to recognise the influences affecting CYP in their engagement in their learning. Thus, schools needed to be concerned with the all-round development of CYP as can be seen in the Ministerial speech at the Antidote Conference in 2002 (cited in Weare and Gray, 2003):

Emotional literacy is beginning to show encouraging outcomes and policy makers are taking these seriously….there is ample scope for promoting emotional literacy across the curriculum and through current developments in inclusion, citizenship, healthy standards and PSHE [Personal, Social and Health Education] work. (p37).

Based on recommendations by Weare and Gray (2003) the New Labour Government introduced the structured whole-school intervention of SEAL (DfES, 2005) which itself was influenced by a similar programme used in the USA called Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (Kusché and Greenberg, 1994). SEAL was introduced into primary schools as part of the behaviour and attendance strategy and was, subsequently, extended into secondary schools. However, I question the intention behind the Government’s implementation of the initiatives such as SEAL: Was the Government trying to equate EL to that of cognitivism and behaviourism in that when CYP managed to achieve a certain level in their emotionality then they could be considered emotionally competent? Although since 2010 schools have not been required to follow the SEAL initiative its legacy can still be found in, predominantly, primary schools with members of staff using modules from it, eg, working on social skills. I will explore the reaction to SEAL in relation to arguments against emotionalism later in this chapter.

In 2003 the New Labour Government also published its green paper Every Child Matters (ECM) (DCSF, 2003), as its response to the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, which led to the 2004 Children Act (DfES, 2004). The Act established a Children's Commissioner to champion the views and interests of CYP and it required LAs to make arrangements to promote co-operation between agencies and other appropriate bodies (such as voluntary and community organisations) in order to improve children's well-being.

In the meantime, and after numerous revisions, the new National Curriculum (NC) (DfES, 2004) was published. It now stated two aims for the NC. One of which focussed on academic achievement whilst the other focussed on the CYP’s personal qualities stating:

The school curriculum should promote pupils' self-esteem and emotional well-being and help them to form and maintain worthwhile and satisfying relationships, based on respect for themselves and for others, at home, school, work and in the community. (p11).

Thus, it could be argued, from this quotation, the New Labour Government had begun to consider CYP’s emotionality. However, in practice, this aim was to be dwarfed by the pressure on schools because of the Government’s league tables. Thus, the aim had limited impact in addressing the emotionality of CYP (Burton, Osborne and Norgate, 2010). In addition, although the NC was introduced to raise standards, some have argued that the means by which this was conducted may have been ill conceived and served to undermine CYP’s motivation instead (Sainsbury, 2003).

In 2007 amongst the New Labour Government’s publications included Guidance for Schools on Developing Emotional Health and Well-being (DCSF, 2007a) and the Children's Plan: Building Brighter Futures (DCSF, 2007b). The latter was based on consultation involving CYP, parents, teachers and policy makers. Amongst its aims was to eradicate antisocial behaviour by 2020. In his Foreword, Ed Balls, the then Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, stated he wanted to make Britain, “The best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up,” (DCSF, 2007b, p3).

The Plan was based on five principles which included all CYP being provided with the potential to succeed, to enjoy their childhood and to be prepared for adult life. It set out ten goals to be achieved by 2020. These included enhancing CYP's well-being, particularly at key transition points in their lives. It was also proposed for YP to have the opportunity to develop their personal and social skills and well-being, and to reduce behaviour which would place them at risk. I will report later in this chapter as to how effective the Government has been in achieving these goals so far and how the UK rates compares with other countries with regards to well-being.

In 2008 the New Labour Government requested Sir Jim Rose (who had collaborated in ‘The Three Wise Men Report’ (1992)) to conduct an Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (IRPC) (DCSF, 2009). Shortly after, another independent review, known as The Cambridge Review, headed by Alexander (2009) (who had also collaborated in ‘The Three Wise Men Report’ (1992)) begun its research into the state of primary education.

The IRCP published its Interim Report in 2008 (DCSF, 2008) which included amongst the main recommendations, children should acquire a range of personal, social and emotional qualities essential for their health, well-being and life in order to be responsible citizens in the twenty-first century. It proposed the primary curriculum should comprise of six areas of learning which included human, social and environmental understanding and understanding of physical health and well-being. It would appear the Government had begun to listen to psychologists who provided a counter argument to cognitivism and behaviourism, eg, Gardner (1983) and his theory of multiple intelligences.

The authors of The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2009) presented a similar argument which placed less focus on academia as they:

Bemoaned the politicisation of the curriculum and warned that children's lives were being impoverished by the government's insistence that schools focus on literacy and numeracy at the expense of creative teaching. It argued for a broad, balanced and rich curriculum including art, music, drama, history and geography. (Gillard, 2011).

The most extensive inquiry into primary education since the Plowden Report (1967), The Cambridge Review published its final report in 2009 (Alexander, 2009). In its 75 recommendations it argued that formal lessons should not start before the age of 6, SATs (Standard Achievement Tests taken at the end of each KS) and league tables should be replaced with teacher assessments in a wider range of subjects, and the system of generalist primary teaching should be reviewed. The report was critical of political decision-making processes as it condemned, “The politicisation of the entire educational enterprise so that it becomes impossible to debate ideas or evidence which are not deemed to be 'on message', or which are 'not invented here'; and, latterly coming to light, financial corruption,” (Alexander, 2009, p481). It noted a growing pervasive anxiety about children’s lives, and emphasised the link between educational underachievement and poverty: “What is worrying is the persistence of a long tail of severely disadvantaged children whose early lives are unhappy, whose potential is unrealised and whose future is bleak,” (Alexander, 2009, p71). The Review's conclusions were backed by all the teacher unions.

The New Labour Government published its White Paper ‘Your child, your schools, our future’ (DfES, 2009) which appeared to take account of CYP’s needs over and above attainment: CYP were individuals so that they should be taught in a way that met their needs. All pupils should have the opportunity to take part in sport and cultural activities and all schools were to promote their pupils' health and well-being. However, the Government still wanted more academies and trust schools (who could decide which pupils they enrol). The Government also appeared to have ignored the recommendations by Alexander (2009) about delaying the start of formal learning until the age of 6 by announcing, instead, every 4 year old in England would be offered a place at school or nursery so that they could start full-time education a year earlier (The Guardian, 24 October, 2009, in Gillard, 2011). Thus, the Government was still focussed on academic achievement.

However, the New Labour Government’s time in office came to an end in 2010 when the Coalition Government was formed. It ended several of the New Labour Government’s initiatives, eg, ECM (DCSF, 2003), SEAL (DfES, 2005) and Healthy Schools (DfE, 2005) but established a new curriculum for children under five with personal, social and emotional learning as one of three prime areas to be prioritised. Whilst for YP aged 13 to 19 the Department for Education (DfE) emphasized the importance of developing YP’s social and emotional capabilities in their Positive for Youth cross-government policy (DfE, 2011). The Government wanted to make it clear that their success in governing the country would be measured by the nation’s well-being according to statistics collected by the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2014), and not just by the state of the economy (DoH, 2011).

The Coalition Government also introduced initiatives such as the Pupil Premium, ie, CYP on free school meals were to be allocated money to help improve their outcomes, and the setting up of a specialist clinical network for children. Schools were also being challenged to consider how they could support CYP with their (emotional) well-being:

CMO [Chief Medical Officer – Dame Sally Davies] seeks to develop further the evidence base for how to nurture resilience in young people, and the link between health and well-being with educational attainment. CMO is also asking that PHE [Public Health England], PSHE Association and other leading organisations promote models of good practice in this area for educational establishments to use. (Annex 8, p2)

However, there appeared to be a conflict in agendas between the Coalition Government and the National Health Service’s (NHS) way of thinking which was seen in the way schools were currently inspected: In 2011 OFSTED passed judgement on how well a school addressed its CYP's personal and social development but since the start of 2012 this was no longer the case. The revised framework did not refer to health or emotions and the word ‘well-being’ had disappeared. The Education Secretary at the time, Michael Gove, stated the new framework would allow inspectors to concentrate on what mattered and to forget the, "peripherals," (Gove, 2014). It would appear the Coalition Government’s focus was to continue to be on academic results and improve its position in the international league tables for academic achievement.

**What is the relevance of EL?**

Researchers have argued being emotionally literate improves learning outcomes (eg, Greenhalgh, 1994). It would appear there are emotions, such as sadness and anger, which can inhibit our learning, whilst there are other emotions, such as a sense of well-being, feeling safe and feeling valued, which promote learning. Thus, learning to manage these emotions is needed to assist in learning (Greenhalgh, 1994). Research on the structure of the brain appears to indicate emotions are essential for rationality, thus, emotional and social processes are inseparable from cognitive processes (eg, Sylwester, 1995). Mayer and Salovey (1997) continue with this viewpoint by suggesting emotions help us prioritise, decide, anticipate and plan whilst Weissberg and Elias (1993) argue individuals are unable to think clearly when dominated by powerful emotions especially negative ones. Our ability to develop our emotional and social competences are, apparently, more influential than cognitive abilities for personal, career and scholastic success (Goleman, 1996; Durlak, 1995; Durlak and Wells, 1997; US Government’s General Accounting Office, 1995).

It has been argued teaching social and emotional competences have played an active part in including CYP who exhibit apparent ‘inappropriate’ behaviour (Rogers, 1994; Epstein and Elias, 1996). Not only does EL awareness affect the individual but it impacts on the school environment as well, eg,Weare and Gray (2003), in their review of the impact of programmes designed to address EL, postulated CYP who are more skilled in their emotional and social competences are more likely to be positively effective in their communities and workplaces. It would appear there is a circular causality in the argument with the need to be EL aware with weak EL awareness increasing the likelihood of poor behaviour in school leading to academic underachievement (Rothi and Leavey, 2006), a greater potential for school exclusion (Rothi and Leavey, 2006), increased likelihood of offending, antisocial behaviour, marital breakdown, drug misuse, alcoholism, mental illness in adolescence and adulthood (Buchanan, 2000) and negativity on the quality of life (Rothi and Leavey, 2006).

I will explore the counter argument in delving into CYP’s EL later in this chapter but I now wish to turn the reader’s attention to the relationship between emotional well-being and mental health.

**Emotional well-being and mental health**

The term ‘EL’ is also often used interchangeably with social and emotional well-being. It has been argued our emotional well-being and mental health are closely linked which, in turn, impacts on our physical health and overall health needs (Richards, Campania and Muse-Burke, 2010). The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2008) defines mental health as,

A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. (np).

WHO (2008) considers mental health as paramount for personal well-being, family relationships, and successful contributions to society. They argue it has an impact on the development of societies and countries:

Mental ill-health and poverty interact in a negative cycle: mental ill-health impedes people’s ability to learn and to engage productively in their economies, and poverty in turn increases the risk for developing mental disorders, and reduces people’s ability to gain access to health services. (p1).

Belfer (2008) argues the long-term consequences of mental health disorders in childhood, if not effectively treated, can include weak academic achievement, unemployment, premature morbidity and long-term physical and mental health problems in adulthood.

Davies (2013) quotes the cost of treating CYP with mental health concerns as being in the billions of pounds each year, thus, it makes economic sense for CYP’s mental health concerns to be addressed early and this could be done by addressing their EL awareness. Also, I would add, the cost would be much less for the individual and those significant in their lives in terms of emotional expenditure. By putting in place mental health provision for all CYP, Merrell and Gueldner (2010) argue, they can be effectively immunised from later difficulties. Wigelsworth, Humphrey and Lendrum (2013) state such a provision could be considered as more cost-effective to implement than using costly screening procedures to identify those at-risk. Using screening procedures, Wigelsworth, et al (2013) also argue are not necessarily effective as some children in need of targeted support could be missed out. As a result, it would appear universal preventive approaches would be more appropriate. Also, because universal approaches would mean working with all CYP, the potential for stigmatising individuals is reduced (Greenberg, 2010), however, there are those who disagree with the need to place emphasis on CYPs EL awareness. I will explore concerns on focussing on emotions later in this chapter though it is superfluous to say the apparent treatment of CYP’s mental health which would entail exploring their emotional well-being is to make out these are tangible concepts which are measureable and, somehow, fixed. It is also questionable as to the reasoning behind the agenda to fix CYP and where it could lead to. In this respect, the most extreme thought that comes to my mind is what makes the perfect person, eg, the Nazis exterminated individuals who did not fit into their criteria of perfection. This ignores the qualities of humanity and focuses on the CYP as the holder of an impairment without taking account of their experiences and predisposition. For instance, I have recently learnt that an underactive thyroid can cause issues with inappropriate behaviour and mental health concerns, eg, depression. With hormone medication the condition can be controlled. Thus, the individual with an underactive thyroid is not deliberating presenting in a particular way rather it is the chemicals in their body which is influencing their behaviour.

The apparent need to develop CYP’s EL awareness has also been recognised by the United Nations (UN) in its Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). At the UN General Assembly, 1989, it was stated, amongst other aspects with regards to a child’s education the need to encourage the: “Development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential,” (UNCRC, 1989, Article 29, 1a), thus, it could be inferred, EL should be considered as a core element in the school systems along with developing CYP’s cognitive-academic skills. However, according to a recent survey of CYP the UK has room to improve their well-being as it was ranked in the mid-range in a table of 29 countries (these countries described as ‘rich’ in the report) based on the outcomes of viewpoints of CYP (UNICEF, 2013). Nonetheless, this was an improvement on the previous report which ranked the UK at bottom place of 21 developed countries (UNICEF, 2007).

The UNICEF (2013) states two reasons for why we should be concerned about our CYP’s well-being. Apart from the moral obligation they also state:

Failure to protect and promote the well-being of children is associated with increased risk across a wide range of later-life outcomes. Those outcomes range from impaired cognitive development to lower levels of school achievement, from reduced skills and expectations to lower productivity and earnings, from higher rates of unemployment to increased dependence on welfare, from the prevalence of antisocial behaviour to involvement in crime, from the greater likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse to higher levels of teenage births, and from increased health care costs to a higher incidence of mental illness. (p4).

As a consequence the Coalition Government is keen to know how happy the nation is with surveys on individuals’ well-being (ONS, 2014). However, there is a fundamental flaw in conducting such surveys as ‘happiness’ is subjective and transient, thus, the findings need to be treated with caution.

I will now examine whether there is evidence supporting successful outcomes for developing CYP’s EL awareness in schools.

**What is the evidence base for success in developing EL in schools?**

It would appear there has been limited research into the effectiveness of EL interventions in the UK. Durlak, et al (2011) note in their meta-analysis of EL interventions 83% of studies originate from the USA. Thus, caution needs to be used as to the reliability of the transferability of interventions from one country to another as replication cannot be assumed (Blank, et al, 2010). Furthermore, systematic review of universal EL interventions in secondary school settings identified only 3 UK-based studies, each of which was methodologically flawed (Blank, et al, 2010). In reviewing the research it would appear whole school interventions, in general, were not well developed, especially in terms of good quality effectiveness studies and, particularly those conducted in the UK (Blank, et al, 2010).

One of the earliest and most widely-used intervention tools in the USA was PATHS (Kusché and Greenberg, 1994). It is also one of the most widely reviewed interventions with outcomes apparently indicating CYP showed improvements in emotional understanding, self-control, ability to tolerate frustration, and being able to use effective conflict resolution strategies (Greenberg, et al, 1995). Greenberg, et al, also found CYP who received the PATHS curriculum showed significant improvements in their ability to use words in describing their own and others’ emotions, emotional understanding, tolerance, social skills and peer relations when compared with those in the control group.

Kam, et al (2004) explored the long-term impact of PATHS and found, over time, ratings of externalising behaviour for the intervention group decreased whereas those for the control group increased. However, it should be noted Greenberg and Kusché (who were co-authors in all the research into PATHS noted here) were co-developers of PATHS so they may be biased in their reporting of research outcomes on the curriculum.

I will now focus on research that has been conducted in the UK.

PATHS has been followed in the UK but not as widely as in USA. Kelly, et al (2004) evaluated the introduction of PATHS to a class of 9-10 year olds at a Scottish primary school. They found the pupils’ emotional understanding and problem solving skills had improved significantly following the intervention. Questionnaires revealed that staff recognised positive changes in their pupils in relation to their ability to use words in describing their own and others’ emotions, to empathise, to manage emotions, and in handling relationships. However, the results need to be treated with caution due to the small sample size and the lack of a control group.

In a much larger study evaluating PATHS intervention involving nearly 300 KS 1 pupils, Curtis and Norgate (2007) found a significant improvement in all five dimensions of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1997) for those who participated in the intervention compared to the control group. Teacher interviews also appeared to indicate the programme had helped children acquire a better understanding of emotions, and had developed better empathy and self-control skills.

Kam, et al (2004) found that the impact of PATHS was significant only in schools where there was headteacher support and the implementation quality was high. Hallam (2009) reported similar outcomes with respect to SEAL (DfES, 2005): SEAL was deemed most successful where the SMT allowed sufficient time for staff training (so that staff could develop an understanding of CYP’s social and emotional development) and planning, valued the teaching of the programme and facilitated the integration of the materials into schemes of work for PSHE lessons. However, despite Hallam’s (2009) outcomes the first national review of SEAL by Humphrey, et al (2010) reported null outcomes in the effectiveness of the intervention despite it being implemented by up to 80% of primary schools in England in 2008 (Humphrey, et al, 2008) and 70% of secondary schools in England in 2010 (Humphrey, et al, 2010).

Other initiatives involving the development of CYP’s EL awareness include the North and East Devon School Nurse Innovation Project (Buckland, et al, 2005) whereby school nurses supported primary schools to reduce the incidence of exclusions. They worked with whole classes to promote EL and offered targeted support to children who had either been excluded or were at risk of exclusion. The project was positively perceived by staff, children and the parents interviewed in the evaluation study (Buckland, et al, 2005). More recent research outcomes include that of the Pyramid intervention with Year 3 pupils in schools in England where the socio-emotional competency of targeted pupils had improved compared to the control group (Ohl, et al, 2013).

However, it has been argued for staff to engage with EL they need to be committed to it which has been an area of contention for some secondary schools as NICE (2011) note:

One of the key questions is also about whether this work should continue into secondary schools. NSCoPSE’s [National Personal, Social and Economic Association for Inspectors and Consultants] view is that secondary students are as much in need of this kind of work as those in primary schools, perhaps even more so in the light of the skills needed for employability. The evaluations of secondary SEAL [DfES, 2005] present a clear message however, that there has been inconsistency of adoption and a lack of clarity about the nature of “whole school‟ to involve a curriculum entitlement, additional support for the vulnerable and extra-curricular activities alongside a commitment to a supportive ethos. Many secondary schools and teachers remain unaware of the contribution of social and emotional well-being to learning or are unsure how to adequately or appropriately incorporate aspects of social and emotional well-being into core curriculum or E-Bac subjects. These are issues that would need to be addressed in any future work in this area. (p32).

Nonetheless, despite the teenage years being a period of time in which YP are at increased risk of developing mental health problems (Davies, 2013) there have been relatively few empirically validated preventive interventions designed for implementation in the secondary/high school phase of education (Wigelsworth, et al, 2013).

I will now explore the argument as to whether schools are the most appropriate avenue to deliver interventions on raising CYP’s EL awareness

**Delivering EL awareness in schools**

It would appear schools are increasingly being seen as central sites for the promotion of emotional well-being. Greenberg (2010) postulates:

By virtue of their central role in lives of children and families and their broad reach, schools are the primary setting in which many initial concerns arise and can be effectively remediated. (p28).

A similar opinion has also been expressed by the CMO, Dame Sally Davies (2013):

Just as schools and other organisations can play an important role in resilience, so too can they play an important role in well-being. **There is a strong association between school connectedness or sense of belonging and well-being.** (np) (Davies’ emphasis)

The teacher’s role in their CYP’s well-being has been outlined by a number of policy documents from both health and education sectors. NICE (2011) guidance advocates primary schools as having a duty to improve CYP’s emotional and psychological well-being. Schools are expected to both prevent mental illness by combating factors that contribute to it, eg, by developing EL awareness, and to provide interventions to alleviate mental health problems. The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (DoH, 2004) includes teachers in tier one for intervention. As such, teachers have a role in terms of problem recognition and early intervention.

Weare and Gray (2003, p7) argue, “There is evidence that the school environment is the largest determinant of the level of emotional and social competence and well-being in pupils”. They consider in promoting EL awareness it is vital to first concentrate on getting the whole context right. They argue programmes designed to nurture EL awareness constitute a valuable part of the whole school ethos.

Lister-Sharp, et al (1999) concluded that whole school approaches can be very powerful ways of tackling a whole range of health, including emotional and social issues. Their view is supported by reviews and meta-analyses which appear to indicate schools are as effective as (and in some cases, more effective than) external specialists, at least when it comes to delivering universal interventions (Wilson and Lipsey, 2007; Durlak, et al, 2011). One approach schools are in the best place to use is known as ‘herd immunity’ according to Weare and Gray (2003). The principle of ‘herd immunity’ in this respect means the more people in a community who are, apparently, emotionally competent, then the easier it will be to help those with more acute problems (Stewart-Brown, 1998). This approach may be considered as less stigmatising for individuals or small groups of CYP as it means those with problems are more likely to engage in services/interventions offered as they are not seen as different to everyone else.

The pressure on schools to support CYP’s well-being comes also from parents. In a survey conducted by Green, et al (2005) on children’s mental health survey in England it would appear a third of parents worried about their child’s mental health. 90% of these parents had sought help with nearly three quarters of the parents having first approached a teacher in contrast with a quarter who had visited their family doctor (Green, et al, 2005). In addition, it would appear most parents would rather schools conduct interventions with their child (Waschbusch, et al, 2005). Although from these findings it would appear parents who have concerns for their child’s mental health do not consider themselves the best person to support their child, it has been argued parental involvement is paramount in working with their CYP along with the educational setting (eg, Webster-Stratton, et al, 2001; Reid, et al, 2003; Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2003; Webster-Stratton, et al, 2004). Shucksmith, et al (2007) state:

Work with parents is seen as essential for ensuring the best effects of offering children an intervention, given that they can support and reinforce at home the messages children are learning at school if they are clear what is involved. (p42/3).

The importance of parents being mindful of their children’s emotional well-being is to become enshrined in law in England and Wales as announced by the Queen in her Speech in June, 2014 (Puffett, 2014). Parents who cause emotional/psychological harm to their children could face a maximum sentence of 10 years. Examples of such cruelty would include deliberately ignoring their child, not showing them any affection over prolonged periods, forcing them to engage in degrading punishments, allowing them to witness domestic violence, and making them into a scapegoat (BBC News, 2014).

The importance of EL should not be left at the school level but should be at the governance level as well consider the Royal Society for Public Health (NICE, 2011) who state, as part of their contribution to the consultation document ‘Promoting children’s social and emotional well-being in primary education’ (NICE, 2008): Schools should appoint a governor (possibly the SEN governor) to evaluate and scrutinise the school’s systems for dealing with social and emotional well-being,” (NICE, 2011, p38), as well as, “More focussed evaluations of school based systems for dealing with children’s social and emotional well-being difficulties by OFSTED, augmented by appropriate health and social services staff would be beneficial,” (NICE, 2011, p38).

In addition, the importance of EL should be also a focus at directorship level considered NICE (2011):

In future, Directors of Public Health should ensure that children’s social and emotional well-being is included in area health assessment plans and that appropriate data is submitted by schools for a proper analysis of need and provision to be carried out. This should form part of the agenda for local health and well-being boards and be supported by local authority children’s services committees. (p38).

But should it be school staff delivering the approaches? It would appear there is an overwhelming trend for schools to conduct programmes directed at supporting CYP’s emotional and mental health rather than availing of specialist external agents (Vostanis, et al, 2013). But are school staff qualified to do so? Vostanis, et al (2013) reported in their national scoping survey of mental health provision in English schools (the first large-scale study of its kind to be conducted in England) that the majority of the staff involved in helping CYP with their emotional and mental health concerns had no specialist mental health training. Of a greater concern, research outcomes have revealed teachers are not always accurate in their rating of their CYP’s mental health (Loades and Mastroyannopoulou, 2010). Although primary school teachers were good at recognising whether a child presents with a problem, recognition was affected by both the gender of the child and the type of symptomatology being displayed. As such they were more likely to identify mental health concerns in girls and to identify behavioural rather than emotional difficulties in boys (Maniadaki, et al, 2003; Meltzer, et al, 2003; Jackson and King, 2004; Loades and Mastroyannopoulou, 2010). Thus, I consider if schools are going to use interventions aimed at developing CYP’s EL awareness staff require training to undertake this role or schools should commission suitably qualified external agents.

However, it has also been argued that developing EL awareness should be done by imitation rather than by explicit teaching (Craig, 2007). Some neuroscientists have found that imitation is an important feature in how the brain learns and that, “The teacher’s values, beliefs, and attitude to learning could be as important in the learning process as the material being taught,” (Blakemore and Frith, 2005, p163). Nonetheless, there are CYP who do not appear to pick up the signals of how to behave appropriately due to, for example, the presence of Autistic traits or due to an inadequate attachment in the CYP’s early years. These CYP may need individual support especially if they present as disruptive in a group exercise (Carnwell and Baker, 2007; Burton, 2008).

I would also argue why should a CYP want to speak to someone about their emotionality especially if they do not consider there are any issues with their emotionality? Besides, even if the CYP wanted to share any concerns what choice would they have as to whom they could speak to? Carnwell and Baker (2007) found some CYP considered it difficult to relate to teachers as facilitators due to the role they play within school, eg, as educators and disciplinarians. Research outcomes by Coombes, et al (2013) found three aspects which affected YP sharing their thoughts about their emotional health and well-being (EBWB): Firstly, the quality of EHWB lessons, ie, how enthusiastic and creative the teacher was; secondly, the need for confidentiality, which led to the third aspect, ie, many YP preferred to talk to their friends about EHWB issues. Research outcomes by Dunn (2004) found CYP’s friends to be one of the most resilient factors in their lives. However, confiding only in friends may not always be a wise decision by CYP as it could lead to erroneous advice being given, their friends not understanding the significant signals about the seriousness of their friend’s emotional well-being or their friends taking on a burden too heavy for them to cope with and, possibly, affecting their own emotional well-being as well.

An alternative to the teacher could be a LSA. The training of LSAs to support CYP with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) has been recognised by OFSTED (2006). They found CYP who were considered to have SEBD were the least likely to receive effective support and the most likely to receive support too late. One of the recommendations from the OFSTED report was for mainstream schools to analyse critically their use and deployment of LSAs.

However, LSAs require training and support in carrying out such a role. One option is training LSAs to become ELSAs as, following the training, they receive ongoing clinical supervision from an EP. Burton (2008) argues because ELSAs are part of the school team, they are readily accessible to work with CYP whilst the CYP can continue to receive informal support beyond the duration of their time with the ELSA. In addition, as many of the ELSAs also spend time as LSAs supporting in the classroom and/or playground, they are able to assist the CYP in generalising their increased EL awareness into different contexts. Furthermore, research outcomes of views expressed by CYPs who had been supported by an ELSA, highlighted the importance of the CYP being able to share their feelings safely and confidentially with adults who have time to listen to them (Kelly, et al, 2004; Carnwell and Baker, 2007; Burton, 2008). This can be challenging for a teacher in the classroom situation where their primary role is to teach the class.

In the next part of this Literature Review I will explore how effective the ELSA training has been.

**Evaluation of ELSA**

Research into ELSA has been limited. I accessed most of the research outcomes from the elsanetwork.org website. As such, it is not surprising evaluations of ELSA have deemed it to be positively received by schools (eg, Bravery and Harris, 2009; Murray, 2010; Grahamslaw, 2010; Hill, et al, 2013). However, I found a publication of more neutral standing, ie, ‘Social and Emotional Well-being in Primary Education’ (NICE, 2011) which makes reference to ELSA. NICE (2011) highlighted the running of ELSA by York Social and Emotional Well-being Group (SEWG) at City of York Council as being:

Instrumental to identifying and assessing early signs of social and emotional difficulties in York and has further enhanced education’s relationship with CaMHS [sic] [Child and Adolescent Health Service] – leading to more accurate assessment and more timely intervention. (p21).

As well as being another positive evaluation for ELSA, NICE have made a link between EL and mental health.

According to research outcomes Bravery and Harris (2009) found the majority of headteachers who completed an online questionnaire about ELSA considered the ELSAs had made a positive impact on the CYP’s behaviour, emotional well-being, relationships and academic achievement measured by improvements in attendance and academic achievement. In addition, there were fewer reported incidents of bullying and a reduction in exclusions. Furthermore, the ELSAs reported feeling better able to support vulnerable CYP (Burton, 2008) and more emotionally literate (Cardiff EPS, 2012). Grahamslaw (2010) found the rating of ELSAs’ self-efficacy beliefs increased following the training and were higher than the self-efficacy beliefs of LSAs who had not been part of the training. Grahamslaw (2010) also found the self-efficacy beliefs of CYP who had received ELSA support were higher than those of CYP who had not been involved with ELSA. Thus, it would appear, intervention is of mutual benefit to both the giver and the receiver. However, Grahamslaw (2010) also found, in order to maintain the ELSA’s self-efficacy beliefs rating, they needed to have protected time to attend refresher training events. Being provided with an appropriate place to work as an ELSA was also important in fulfilling their role as it was not unusual for ELSAs to have to work in rooms designated for other purposes including for the delivery of first aid treatment and/or speech therapy programmes (Grahamslaw, 2010; Harris, 2010a).

Evaluation of ELSAs’ own well-being using the Fenman EQ test, which can be found in the ELSA training course, indicated most of the ELSA’s rating for emotional well-being had increased with attending the training. Of the five ELSAs whose rating had not changed it would appear there were extenuating factors not linked with the training (Devon EPS, 2010). In addition, it would appear ELSAs received job satisfaction from their role (Bravery and Harris, 2009; Hill, et al, 2013).

Other positive comments ELSAs provided about the training included the opportunity to meet with other ELSAs during supervision (Bravery and Harris, 2009; Cardiff EPS, 2012). It would appear the immediacy of their role was important as well as being available for the CYP after the intervention had completed (Grahamslaw, 2010). However, it would also appear success in fulfilling their role was dependent on the general EL awareness of the staff and the school community. ELSAs were more likely to continue in their role in schools where they considered the school’s EL awareness was ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ (Bravery and Harris, 2009).

Originality of My Research

However, in exploring the methods used by the researchers in gathering information on ELSA it appeared none have engaged directly in a conversation with an ELSA in a one-to-one situation. I found two studies where there had been direct engagement with ELSAs but they were not on their own, ie, Hill, et al (2013) and Grahamslaw’s (2013) studies. Hill, et al (2013) had collected data from only two schools where semi-structured interviews were conducted jointly with the headteacher and the ELSA. Hill, et al (2013) acknowledge their research findings were limited in regards to the number of staff members interviewed and the freedom the ELSAs had to express their true reflections adding the need to be aware of making generalisations from their findings. In Grahamslaw’s (2013) research study focus groups were used to gather data from the ELSAs. This approach does not easily lend itself to ascertaining everyone’s perceptions.

Before I continue to explore the approach I used for my study, I would like to share the argument presented by those who consider interfering with CYP’s emotionality is inappropriate in what has been coined emotionalism.

**Critiques of emotionalism**

Not everyone considers it appropriate to emphasise the development of emotionality in CYP. The focus on affective aspects of learning, eg, self-esteem, has resulted, according to critics such as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009), in a proliferation of interchangeable and ill-defined terms, eg, EL, emotional well-being, self-esteem and mental health, alongside an ever-expanding list of disorders and syndromes. They consider the emotional in SEBD has become professionalised at the expense of more traditional learning.

Furthermore, critics of emotionalism have expressed CYP’s emotions are being assessed by government or state agencies which is diminishing the humanity of the CYP (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). Thus, should the state be in control of our emotions? Ecclestone (2007) believes the state considers CYP are in need of, “Ritualised forms of emotional support,” (p.xiii) which brings about unnecessary heightened awareness of a problem for the CYP:

There is no robust, independent evidence that making children and young people express their feelings in formal rituals at school will develop lifelong emotional literacy and well-being. Inserting a vocabulary of emotional vulnerability into education is likely to encourage the very feeling of depression and hopelessness it is supposed to deal with. (p.xiii).

Care needs to be given as to what is considered to be normal behaviour, ie, just because an individual is quiet in class does not mean they necessarily need to have social skills training. It could be this individual is quiet because they come to school as a place of sanctuary where their home life is fast-paced. It could be they want to concentrate on learning and are able to modulate their behaviour when their peers are becoming excitable. Music (2011, p5) adds, “Ideas about what is ‘normal’ all too often hide cultural and other biases”. He continues, “Exactly what is ‘necessary’ for someone to become human is controversial, and much that people assert is ‘necessary’ can be based on cultural beliefs or prejudices,” (Music, 2011, p7) and, referring to Burman (2007), Music cautions against the use of research that has normative and moral assumptions hidden in it. It would appear research outcomes from the USA has shown attention to assumed problems of low self-esteem has led to narcissism, depression and lower educational standards (Craig, 2007; Stobart, 2008), thus, it could be argued, schools assuming CYP have issues with their emotionality are creating issues that were not present in the first place.

Furthermore, labelling CYP with some kind of condition is not always productive. Nolan (1998) draws attention to the, then, American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) ‘Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders’, ie, the DSM-IV. This document provided the criteria to identify over 800 psychological syndromes and disorders that create physical symptoms and behaviours. Nolan notes the drive to give a label for every state of being. In the latest edition of the DSM, ie, DSM--V (APA, 2014), being extremely shy and suffering from extreme bereavement have become mental disorders. I consider it will come to the point when it will be abnormal not to have some kind of issue with one’s mental health or emotional well-being.

One of the driving factors behind labelling, argues Lane (2007), comes from pharmaceutical companies encouraging psychiatry and psychoanalysis professions to prescribe medication so that society can cure it’s ailments by popping pills and increase company profits at the same time.

Associated with this labelling of mental illness is class division with those in power using mental health as a means of controlling society. Sharp (2003) cites a study of several thousand children aged 5-15 who were interviewed and had questionnaires completed about them by their teachers. It would appear 14% of the CYP with mental disorders were found to be from social class V compared to 5% from social class I, ie, there were fewer children from the highest social class identified as having a mental disorder compared to those in the lowest class.

Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) consider it appears to have become a trend in society to express one’s inner feelings. The listener will then say what is wrong with feeling how they are and how they should be feeling rather than focussing on the individual’s strengths though Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) state:

At the heart of our analysis is a challenge to a popular and political obsession with people’s emotional fragility and what we characterise as ‘the diminished self’… this reflects deeper cultural disillusionment with ideas about human potential, resilience and capacity for autonomy. (p.xiii).

Therapeutic education, of which ELSA can be termed as being, has been argued as anti-educational as it, “Creates a curriculum of the self that lowers educational and social aspirations in its quest to be more ‘personally relevant’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘engaging’ and to reflect students ‘real needs,’” (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009, p.xiii). The argument here is CYP have to expose their inner most feelings to an array of professionals and various support workers including, in some cases, peers which could be interpreted as CYP lowering their expectations and allowing others to judge them as vulnerable and in need of help.

Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) postulate the Labour Government seemed to have focussed on exposing any possible negative experience in life as causing vulnerability which would then require some kind of therapy. In doing so, the Government appeared to have ignored that people have experienced setbacks throughout their lives without major negative consequences (which could be referred to as demonstrating resilience). They also argue the Labour Government appeared more than happy for therapeutic practices to take place as they wanted to show they were in the best position to meet people’s emotional needs. Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) criticise the Government for linking emotional well-being with economic-social deprivation. The Government believed if they could improve one’s emotional well-being then they would come out of deprivation. However, Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) refer to research outcomes by Huppert (2007), from the Centre for Well-being at Cambridge University, which appeared to suggest social and environmental factors account for just 10 per cent of happiness and feelings of well-being.

Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) also argue we can become so overly concerned with how others might react to (constructive) criticism that we do not give them the support they need to improve, eg, a teacher not correcting a CYP’s work for spelling mistakes and, in doing so, the CYP will continue to make the same errors.

Those who argue that individuals require their EL to be developed are faced with another limitation: Kagan (2010) proposes that emotion is a psychological phenomenon controlled by brain states and that specific emotions are products of context, the person’s history, and biological make-up, thus, there are elements in our makeup which are pre-set and not easily changed. Kagan also explains emotion as occurring in four distinct phases. These are the brain state (created by an incentive), the detection of changes in bodily movement, the appraisal of a change in bodily feeling, and the observable changes in facial expression and muscle tension. Thus, attempts to develop someone’s EL awareness is complex, eg, the individual may not be in the ideal state of mind to explore their emotions during therapeutic sessions. This may be one of the reasons why individuals with Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) (the word ‘autism’ is also used by some individuals) find it challenging to transfer skills learnt in the classroom into everyday practice. Kagan (2010) argues these emotions vary in magnitude, and usually differ across ages and when expressed in different contexts, so this may mean that the individual whose EL awareness is being developed may not be a position to do so because of the state of the maturity of their brain.

Having explored the arguments presented by those concerned with the rise of emotionality, in particular the views expressed by Ecclestone and Hayes (2009), I acknowledge that there are concerns which they raise that are valid. As such, this causes a tension in how I view working with CYP and their emotionality. For instance, I think care needs to be given that schools do not consider that they have to ‘fix’ a CYP’s emotionality because it does not fit into their way of viewing the world. However, on the other hand, CYP need to have the skills in order to engage with others in a manner that is deemed socially acceptable. I think the dilemma here lies in what this socially acceptability is.

I am also concerned with the pathologising of an individual’s personality, eg, shyness being equated to having a mental health condition. In addition, the involvement of pharmaceutical companies in providing a pill to change that person’s personality into something else is a concern for me. When can society make the decision as to which personality traits are not socially acceptable and those which are not? I recognise this is another tension for me as the work of an ELSA could be viewed as changing a CYP’s personality. It is also a tension that I shared with the ELSAs during the training. From our discussions I consider I instilled into the ELSAs not to take as ‘carte blanche’ the views of staff members with regards to a CYP’s emotionality.

Taking them emotionalism into account I consider, through the ELSA training, it is appropriate for ELSAs to work with CYP where it has been deemed to be appropriate for the CYP to have support in understanding their emotionality. I compare it to a physical ailment, eg, someone having a broken foot, then it would be irresponsible not to seek support from a doctor for that individual otherwise they will always struggle to walk. If an individual has difficulty in managing their anger at times of high arousal then they need to be supported in understanding what is happening to them to prevent a situation from deteriorating.

In the next section of this chapter I will explore emotionalism with respect to SEAL (DfES, 2005) since SEAL was the largest government orchestrated programme designed to work on CYP’s EL awareness in schools in England.

**Emotionalism and SEAL**

SEAL (DfES, 2005) was introduced into primary schools and, subsequently, secondary schools in England as a whole-school intervention addressing social and emotional issues. Since the Coalition Government came into power in 2010 schools have not been required to follow the initiative. Besides, there has been much scepticism as to how effective the intervention has been. In this part of the chapter I will set out some of the various arguments about SEAL.

Raudenbush (2008) proposed a framework to explain why an instructional regime may fail, ie, theory failure and implementation failure. “Theory failure is evident when a programme has been implemented as designed and robustly evaluated, but there are problems with the underlying programme theory,” (Wigelsworth, et al, 2013, p105). SEAL’s theoretical underpinning was based on EI which, Wigelsworth, et al, argue meant it was doomed not to be successful. They also argue, in accordance with Raudenbush’s framework, SEAL possessed implementation failure, ie, there were issues with its practice: The authors of SEAL had given schools the flexibility in how to use the intervention which meant there was no single model of implementation, thus, this strength became its downfall as Wigelsworth, et al (2013) found in evaluating SEAL in secondary schools:

The increased difficulties in implementing a universal social–emotional learning initiative in a secondary setting… highlighted issues includ[ing] the organisational complexity of the secondary school setting, which was seen as creating barriers in terms of consistency of delivery, reinforcement, communication and reduced quality of teacher–pupil relationships… To this, we would add the general observation that the more rationalist/technicist ethos of many secondary schools (when compared to primary schools) may act as a further barrier, especially given that EI and related constructs are often perceived as being ‘at odds’ with rationalist model of schooling. (p106).

Craig (2007) argues much of the research into SEAL (DfES, 2005) has been biased as the researchers were in favour of the intervention so were more likely to report the positive outcomes and focus less on the not so positive. When Weare and Gray (2003) were commissioned by the DfES to explore ‘What Works in Developing Children’s Emotional and Social Competence and Well-being?’ they completely dismissed shortcomings, according to Craig (2007), and focussed on providing positive evidence for developing EL awareness in schools:

[There is] little doubt that Professor Weare, alongside other people who are enthusiastic about emotional literacy are genuinely committed to the improvement of young people’s well-being. When we read much of Weare’s work we find that we are often in agreement with the aims and values inherent in her work, however, we believe her desire to see large-scale, intensive work across English schools on emotional literacy is based on a prior, commitment to this type of work rather than the evidence. (p28).

Craig (2007) cites the views of Professor Nicholas Emler (2001) with the concern that SEAL is a psychological experiment which lacked thorough investigation before its implementation:

We strongly advise against undertaking this type of work [SEAL] formally with young children – particularly if it is being undertaken on a year on year, whole school basis, where students are assessed on their skills. As there is still not enough evidence to support this type of intense, on-going work with young people, we believe that the DfES Guidance is encouraging a major psychological experiment on England’s children which we think could unwittingly backfire and undermine some young people’s well-being in the longer term. Such work will also distract schools from their main educational purpose. (p4/5).

Another criticism of the SEAL initiative was the lack of training in how to use it as well as understanding what was meant by EL (Burton, et al, 2010). Hallam (2009), in evaluating SEAL, found:

The psychological concepts underlying the programme were new and difficult to assimilate for some school programme co-ordinators which led to less than optimal dissemination to staff within their schools. Where training for school staff was inadequate, implementation of the materials was problematic; many staff lacked understanding of the concept of social, emotional and behavioural skills. (p317).

Durlak, et al (2011) found one-fifth of studies reported significant difficulties in the implementation of SEAL (DfES, 2005). In addition, Wigelsworth, et al (2013) argue, the majority of the literature reports on efficacy trials were carried out under tightly controlled conditions in which schools had access to a high level of technical support and assistance not usually available to them which meant the external validity of many interventions had not been established. This is important given the acknowledged difficulties of bringing universal interventions to scale (Elias, et al, 2003).

The SEAL (DfES, 2005) initiative also appears to have had mixed impact in schools. OFSTED (2007, p5) in their evaluation of SEAL stated, “Separating what the pilot [SEAL] had achieved from the range of other initiatives in which the schools were involved was difficult.” This outcome was reinforced by OFSTED in 2008 when they evaluated many secondary schools had already well-established interventions and ways of working (OFSTED, 2008) without the need for SEAL.

A national evaluation of SEAL in primary schools was commissioned by the Labour Government and led by Humphries, et al (2008). They included research outcomes by Hallam, et al (2006) who reported although primary SEAL had made significant impact on children’s EL there had been a decline in academic performance for children in KS 1 and negative changes in attitudes towards school and relationships as viewed by teachers of the children in KS2. In secondary schools (Humphrey, et al, 2010) there appeared to be mixed outcomes for YP. The authors reported that:

In terms of impact, our analysis of pupil-level outcome data indicated that SEAL (as implemented by schools in our sample) failed to impact significantly upon pupils’ social and emotional skills, general mental health difficulties, pro-social behaviour or behaviour problems, emotional skills and general mental health difficulties (indicating the possibility of a ‘SEAL effect’. (p2).

While on the other hand, Humphrey, et al (2010) state:

School climate data also showed a significant increase in pupils’ feelings of autonomy and influence, and this was supplemented by anecdotal examples of positive changes in general outcomes (eg, reductions in exclusion), as well as more specific improvements in behaviour, interpersonal skills and relationships. (p2).

However, research outcomes by Wigelsworth, et al (2013), when comparing students following SEAL (DfES, 2005) to those who were not at secondary level, found no difference, overall, in emotional symptoms. Other studies which have seen similar outcomes include Social and Character Development Research Consortium (2010), and Sheffield, et al (2006). However, it should be noted Wigelsworth, et al (2013) used quantitative approaches in analysing their data which ignores the qualitative outcomes that cannot be accessed by number crunching, eg, anecdotal evidence. In addition, the data was gathered by means of a questionnaire completed under exam-like conditions which can be argued is not the most conducive means to extrapolate CYP’s perceptions.

A further source of criticism comes from the high costs attributed to supporting SEAL-related programmes for schools as Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) state in the use of public funds:

SEAL cost £10 million in 2007-8, with a further £31.2 million earmarked over the next three years. Anti-bullying schemes cost £1.7 million a year, while peer mentoring currently receives £1.75 million. Another £60 million was added in July 2007 to educational expenditure for schools to improve emotional well-being, phased over the next three years to be £30 million in 2010-2011. In October 2007, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) announced £60 million for 25 pilot projects to introduce therapeutic interventions in schools for children at risk of mental ill health. (p.xii).

SEAL (DfES, 2005) has been viewed by some of its critics as contributing to a decline in self-determination amongst YP (eg, Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). This was because the examination of affective qualities, eg, motivation, awareness and empathy, had promoted the idea of CYP as being at-risk, disaffected, hard to reach or possessing low self-esteem (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2009). A preoccupation with SEAL-related activities, according to Ecclestone and Hayes (2009, p136), had resulted in a situation which, “Erodes the idea of humans as conscious agents who realise their potential for individual and social change through projects to transform themselves and their world.”

A criticism of the Labour Government includes one of its intentions of introducing SEAL to raise self-esteem which they had linked to improving CYP’s educational outcomes. However, it would appear, self-esteem is irrelevant to academic success (Baumeister, et al, 2003). Conversely, Craig (2007) found high self-esteem to be a greater issue for society than low self-esteem: Their research outcomes appeared to indicate those who felt better about themselves were more likely to be aggressive or indulge in risky behaviours.

Before continuing onto my next chapter entitled ‘Methodology’, I would like to explore what I mean by feminist research. From the outset, I wish to make it clear that I do not consider myself to be a radical feminist with this thesis not being a strictly typical example of feminist research. Instead, I have used some of the principles associated with feminism, such as the mode of data collection with ELSAs keeping a reflective journal and/or taking part in a semi-structured interview. Rather than challenging women’s position in society I have considered how my life experiences have impacted my views on emotionality and my engagement with ELSA and the ELSAs. I consider I have provided a group, as it happens to be, of women with a name and a position in the school hierarchy and, with it, for them to have power to be agents of positive change and challenge.

**Feminist research**

Within the feminist school of thought there are various extremes from the early days of feminism with Liberal Feminism (eg, Abigail Adams in USA in 19th century, Pankhursts in England early 20th century), where women attempt to bring about change from inside the system, to Radical Feminism, who view the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression. Feminist movements can be specific, eg, to particular countries and sexual orientation.Feminist research can be considered as a radical approach to research (Billington, March, 2014), however, as I have already pointed out, my research should not be considered radical in the true sense of feminism though it contains features of the approach.

Whilst there is considerable debate about what feminist research is (Klein, 1983; Harding, 1986; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002), early descriptions portray it as research conducted by women, for women and about women. In relation to this thesis I am a woman and the ELSAs involved with this research all happened to be women, thus, I possess power and knowledge of being a woman. In what other ways might this study be considered to be feminist? Brayton (1997) states:

Methodologically, feminist research differs from traditional research for three reasons. It actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between researcher and participants; it is politically motivated and has a major role in changing social inequality. (np).

Along with working with the ELSAs I hope the outcomes from this thesis will act as a catalyst in providing the ELSAs with empowerment to bring about improved working conditions for developing the EL awareness of their CYP and in raising EL awareness in their schools.

Feminist researchers recognise people are not all the same and can be affected by factors such as culture, religious beliefs, society mores and politics. That being the case they argue then knowledge is humanly produced (Cope, 2002) and humans are active participants in its production: “Knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its constructors,” (Code, 1991, p35). If knowledge production is an active process specific to individuals, then people’s experiences, beliefs and contexts will influence what they count as knowledge and how they participate in its production and legitimization (Cope, 2002). Social and human contexts will influence the questions asked, the approach to the questions, and the interpretations from the outcomes (DuBois, 1983). Thus, from a feminist perspective, there is no research in the social sciences that can be considered to be completely neutral or value-free (Eichler, 1991). Instead, the values, presumptions and context of researchers need to be stated clearly in any research in order for readers to appreciate the context of the research (Bowles and Duelli, 1983) which I trust has been evident in my approach to this study. Whilst the issue of subjectivity in research may cause some researchers to have concerns, Code (1991) argues that the traditional way of viewing objectivity and subjectivity as two polar opposites tends to emphasise exclusions and reinforces many other dichotomies. Rather than seeing either term as pejorative, she argues for more interaction between the two factors within research (Code, 1991).

Brayton (1997) postulates the feminist researcher may be both insider and/or outsider to the environment and the topic they are exploring. I consider myself to be an insider as I have travelled along the journey with the ELSAs in their training and, subsequent, clinical supervision. As such, I have, “a stronger understanding of the dynamics and play of social relationships that inform the situation under investigation,” (Brayton, 1997, np). As a result, I hoped, the ELSAs would have felt more at ease in sharing information with me (Matsumoto, 1996). I am also an outsider in that I am not a staff member in their schools as such ELSAs were given the opportunity to critically assess their own lived realities with me through the data gathering processes with the added reassurance the data had been anonymised and all their views treated with confidence (Brayton, 1997).

One protagonist of feminist psychology is Erica Burman. In her book Deconstructing Developmental Psychology (2008)she provides a critical response to mainstream dominant approaches in psychology, in particular, developmental psychology, which she argues holds specific cultural assumptions in their exploration of concerns for women, eg, working class and minority ethnic women. Burman explores matters of knowledge and power, the truth of particular claims, and critical pedagogy. She touches on imperialism, colonisation and patriarchy and links the inventions of psychology to the major issues of contemporary research. Burman addresses oppressive discourses which are reproduced in developmental psychology, particularly concerning gender, racism, disabling practices, and oppressive practices. Instead, Burman draws upon [feminism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminist_theory) as an alternative means to understanding the female perspective. Her argument has been viewed as,

Powerful in deconstructing oppressive discourses which masquerade as forms of *legitimate truth* and in equipping the reader to identify and critique research processes which privilege certain types of knowledge above others. (Nic Giolla Easpaig and Fryer, 2009, np).

Burman views radical constructionism as refusing individualist identity moderated by context and insists upon the use of constitutive constructionism instead. Whereas academics may arbitrarily discuss topics such as economics, politics, psychology, as separate entities Burman insists links to be made between them, ie, their inter-connectedness. In a similar vein as Rose (1985) and Foucault (1991), Burman discusses the notions of problematising, discourse and the psy-complex, the assemblage of professions, disciplines, practices, and so forth, including psychology, psychiatry, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy as well as counselling, nursing, education and social work practices, which assume or deploy notions of the psychological and as constructing and regulating subjectivity and, thus, contributing to governmentality. Burman (1998) is explicit about using,

The term 'deconstruction' in the sense of laying bare, of bringing under scrutiny, the coherent moral-political themes that (developmental) psychology elaborates, and to look beyond current frameworks within which (developmental) psychology investigation has been formulated to take up the broader questions of where these themes fit into the social practices in which psychology functions. (p1).

There are several parallels in Burman’s way of thinking and my research which include the areas of interests we both have, in this case, CYP and emotionality and how these are constructed. In my introductory chapter I present several arguments as to why a study of this kind is necessary with my arguments crossing several disciplines, eg, the case for the individual child to school economics. Further overlap will be seen in the Methodology chapter as I will explore in more detail the paradigm I have chosen to use in this study.

Kitzinger (1996) is an advocate of radical feminism and relates herself as being part of the second wave feminists (the first occurring in late 19th/early 20th century). The main difference between the two feminist waves is the recognition the second wave is concerned with all personal, day-to-day activities. Hanisch (1969) uses the term ‘the personal is political’ to emphasise this argument, ie, all actions have a political meaning, whether intended or not, eg, housework, sex, relationships with sons and fathers, mothers, sisters, so that all actions are shaped by and influenced by their broader social context. Kitzinger develops this argument further by stating politics affects our very being, ie, our thoughts, emotions, and the choices we make about how we live. I do not consider myself to be as extreme in my feminist position as radical feminism which advocates the only way of removing the differences between the sexes is to eradicate gender to the point of babies being produced independently of women. In this way, women are not placed at a disadvantage in the workplace in terms of losing their pay whilst on maternity leave and the possibility of bearing a child affecting their progression in the workplace. I believe such extreme views removes the strengths and positive aspects of being a male or a female and appears to associate qualities and opportunities with a single gender.

**The research question**

Being an ELSA requires patience, ingenuity and spontaneity in order to support the CYP with the short time they have together. The ELSA training course and follow-up clinical supervision is designed to support the ELSA to develop the skills required to meet the task. In this study, I wanted to learn how the ELSA training and clinical supervision supported them in the acquisition of these skills and whether the presence of an ELSA in their school had affected the school community. This will have implications for EPs as they play a major role in the training and clinical supervision of ELSAs. The ELSAs’ perspectives will also allow schools to be aware of the challenges facing ELSAs in conducting their role and whether having an ELSA in their school had made an impact on the EL awareness of the school community, thus, the research outcomes have implications for the SMT as well. So, as a reminder of the research question:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

**Introduction**

This chapter discusses the conceptual basis for the way my research has been conducted in my exploration of the research question which is:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

The rationale for the methodology chosen to conduct the research is provided including my ontological positioning and how my chosen epistemology affected my research. The methods of data collection are discussed including why they were deemed the most appropriate in addressing the research question. This is followed by a discussion of the practicalities of how the data collection was conducted and the approach used to analyse the data gathered.

Whenever a researcher is choosing a methodology it has to be fit for purpose (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p91). The task of research within the field of psychology is not only scrutinised for its outcomes but the approach used to ascertain those outcomes (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the research strategy as:

A flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical materials…. [it] situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, persons…… [and] specifies how the investigator will address the two crucial issues of representation and legitimation. (p25).

Before I continue outlining my methodological approach I would like to share another personal reflection with the reader.

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| --- |
| My interest in working with children with SEN led me to become the SENCo at a large primary school in an economic-socially deprived area in a city in the north-west of England. Compared to where the children were meant to be in their attainment, according to various achievement tables produced by the Labour Government at the time, most lay in various degrees of below average. For many of these children school was a place of security (I had the opportunity to gain some insight as to what life was like for many of these children when I was involved with the distribution and collection of booklets for the Census in the local neighbourhood in 2001). One eight year old boy had a social worker accompany him whilst in school because of his potential for violent behaviour. Unfortunately, he was excluded for attacking his social worker and was, eventually, permanently excluded when he brought a gun onto the school grounds. Various initiatives were developed in order to meet the emotional well-being of the children, eg, the setting up of a nurture room, but the resources were inadequate as only a minority of the children who needed the support were able to benefit. Many of the interventions introduced were unsustainable due to the lack of support staff. Despite the headteacher and deputy headteacher appearing to be proactive in their approach, along with many other members of staff, they lacked appreciation of the obstacles facing these children which impacted on their engagement in learning and developing positive relationships. Unfortunately, the children were considered as choosing not to want to engage and were referred to as being naughty, eg, many staff members questioned why certain children were accessing the nurture room as they considered it unfair to children who behaved appropriately as they missed out accessing the soft furnishings, snacks and time off the curriculum. It would appear the objective of the nurture room provision as a place to develop social interaction skills had not made an impact on these members of staff. In addition, the headteacher and deputy headteacher adamantly refused to acknowledge the diagnosis made by health professionals as to why children were presenting in a particular manner and considered them to be deliberately misbehaving, eg, a child in my class had been given the diagnosis of Tourette’s Syndrome which displayed itself with motor tics. The two school leaders considered this child was in control of his behaviour and labelled him a ‘naughty child’. He was aware of their views as they made no allowance for his behaviour and I could see his self-esteem diminishing to the point of him beginning to believe he was a naughty child. These staff members held a powerful position in determining the views of staff, governors, parents and children. If certain viewpoints about individuals are reinforced they can begin to believe this the case as found by Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in their research on ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ or the ‘Pygmalion’ effect. I consider schools need to be aware of emotionality.  |

**Research design**

In this study, I wanted to learn how the ELSA training and clinical supervision supported the ELSAs in their work and whether having an ELSA affected the school’s community in their EL awareness. The purpose of knowing the ELSAs’ perspective was to gain a greater understanding of their role and whether the training had made an impact on their skills when working with children and in their own EL awareness. The ELSAs’ perspectives would also allow schools to be aware of the challenges facing ELSAs in conducting their role as well as being informed as to how their presence had impacted on the EL awareness in the school community. So, as a reminder of the research question:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

I considered the most appropriate method to ascertain the ELSAs’ perspectives, ie, to hear their story, was to use a qualitative approach. This was because I was not testing a predetermined hypothesis but, instead, using one broad research question which would scaffold my investigation. The analysis process can, therefore, be described as an inductive one, that is, driven by the data, rather than a deductive approach, that is, driven by existing theory and literature. To analyse the data I used TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Carter and Little (2007) outline three key concepts which provide the foundations for conducting qualitative research in the social sciences. A researcher’s epistemological stance is the first fundamental component which needs to be clarified. In doing so it has a direct impact on the specific approach taken (methodology). This, in turn provides justification for the specific techniques used to gather data (method) (Carter and Little, 2007). Thus, the theoretical paradigm a researcher chooses provides the reader with an understanding of the researcher’s perspective in designing and conducting the study ([Krauss, 2005](#_ENREF_82)).

**Epistemology and ontological assumptions**

Epistemology has its roots in philosophy and is concerned with the ‘theory of knowledge’ (Thomas, 2009). When thinking epistemologically, researchers should attempt to answer questions such as, ‘What is the nature of knowledge?’ and ‘How is knowledge produced?’ (Willig, 2013). Whilst ontology asks ‘what is there to know?’ (Willig, 2008).

I will explore epistemology and ontological assumptions in general followed by my positionality as well as justifying the assumptions chosen.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology is concerned with what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge; also referred to as validity concept: “Epistemology is a theory of knowledge with specific reference to the limits and validity of knowledge,” (Cope, 2002, p43). It helps answer the question, “How do I know what is true?” (Cope, 2002, p43) as well as formulating an approach to looking at how individuals understand the world around them. Willig (2001, p12/13) implores the researcher to consider, “Three epistemological questions,” which are to ascertain what kind of knowledge does the methodology aim to produce, what kinds of assumptions does the methodology make about the world and how does the methodology conceptualise the role of the researcher in the process? With the first, I needed to give regard to giving my participants a voice. With respect to the current research I will be aiming to take the perspectives of the ELSAs and use them to influence future practice in supporting CYP’s EL as well as having a positive effect on how they are able to deliver their input. The second question is concerned with ontology, ie, “What can we know?” (Willig, 2001, p13) which I will go into more detail later in this chapter. The third question acknowledges the researcher cannot completely separate themselves from the research process but the degree they do so can vary, ie, they can be the central figure as they are the one constructing the outcomes or they could be someone who uses their skills to uncover the data.

Madill, et al (2000) identify three different epistemological positions and argue that instead of these being viewed as distinct and unrelated, it is more appropriate to view them as positions on a continuum:

Objectivism

At one end is the realist perspective which assumes that knowledge is pre-existing and the researcher’s role is to discover this through an objective and detached approach (Madill, et al, 2000). Objectivism, in general, asserts that, “Social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors,” (Bryman, 2001, p17), ie, structures within the social world are objective entities that are not influenced by humans or other social forces. It is closely linked to positivism and natural science disciplines as it seeks to explain situations and link causal variables.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism postulates that people have an active role in constructing social reality and social structures. These social phenomena are in a constant state of flux as people and their society changes (Bryman, 2001). This interpretative approach seeks to understand the meaning people ascribe to social entities. Social constructionism focuses on the role of social processes in knowledge creation ([Milutinović, 2011](#_ENREF_92)) highlighting the role of language (Willig, 2008). Gergen ([1997](#_ENREF_57), p117) refers to this notion as the, “interpretive mix within society,” which, he suggests, takes us in new directions and affects our actions towards each other. In other words, social constructionists believe an individual’s perceptions cannot be separated from their experiences as a human being. Ponterotto (2005) argues that meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection, which can be encouraged through interaction between the participant and the researcher, in this case, the ELSAs and I.

Social Constructivism

A variant of social constructionism (Burr, 2003), social constructivism views human experience, knowledge and understanding to be historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003). Therefore, what is perceived is not a direct representation of the environment, rather an interpretation of the conditions at a certain point in time (Willig, 2008). From this perspective, human-beings are regarded as perceivers, constructors and sense-makers (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). In contrast to social constructionism, social constructivism accepts that human beings can derive meaning from objects in their environment in the absence of direct social interaction. However, this meaning is coupled with social interpretations and previous experiences (Kim, 2001), therefore, it is socially rooted. Psychologists who can be said to have used social constructivism approach include Piaget (1964) and Vygotsky (1986). Piaget’s developmental theory of learning and constructivism are based on discovery. According to his constructivist theory, in order to provide an ideal learning environment, children should be allowed to construct knowledge that is meaningful for them whereas the approach can be seen in Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD.

My Positionality

My epistemological position is that of a social constructionist of which the following features can be recognised in this thesis:

* I explored the experiences of several ELSAs who have each been influenced by their life experiences in moulding them into the people they are, thus, their comprehension of the world will differ from each other and that of mine;
* Through the use of semi-structured interviews and, for the most of the ELSAs, reflective journals, I was allowed into their world as an ELSA;
* The use of reflective journals (by most of the ELSAs) and taking part in a conversation in the form of a semi-structured interview can be considered as naturalistic approaches to gather data.

My approach to this study places emphasis on the individual’s unique interpretation and sense-making of phenomena which occurs as a result of social processes. I acknowledge that my experiences (eg, the cultural, historical and societal influences) will shape my interpretations of the ELSAs’ experiences and views. This is one of several dichotomies running through this research.

Having stated my epistemology, I now consider my ontological beliefs.

**Ontology**

Mantzoukas (2004) argues that a researcher’s epistemological stance is directly related to their ontological position and, therefore, this should also be clarified at the outset of the research process. Ontology is concerned with how we regard ‘reality’ ([Krauss, 2005](#_ENREF_82)), or the nature of knowing ([Bracken, 2006](#_ENREF_16)). Willig (2001, p13) argues, “ontological concerns are fundamental and that it is impossible not to make at least some assumptions about the nature of the world”. When thinking ontologically, researchers should attempt to answer questions such as, ‘What is there to know?’ or ‘What is the nature of reality?’ (Willig, 2013).

More commonly found ontologies in research are: Positivism, critical realism and interpretivism. Whilst it is outside the scope of this thesis to provide an extensive critique of each position, the central tenet of each approach is outlined below. However, it should be noted the barriers between each are not necessarily unbreachable and there may well be a blurring between them (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Positivism

Positivists argue that science can be conducted in a value-free, objective manner with the researcher, “Describing what is ‘out there’ and get it right,” (Willig, 2001, p3). A neutral process can discover a single ‘truth’ which looks at the relationships through cause and effect. The goal of the research is to,

“Produce knowledge objective knowledge; that is, understanding that is impartial and unbiased, based on a view from ‘the outside’, without personal involvement or vested interests on the part of the researcher.” (Willig, 2001, p3).

Positivism advocates the application of traditional methods using quantitative data analysis. According to Willig (2001, p3) this approach is outdated as, “It is now generally accepted that observation and description are necessarily selective, and that our perception and the understanding of the world is therefore partial at best.”

Critical Realism/Post-Positivism

Critical realism comes from the position that believes that there is an objective reality that is possible to know which is separate from our description or understanding of it. Willig (2001, p13) adds it, “Maintains that the world is made up of structures and objects that have cause-effect relationships with one another.” It shares some common ground with positivism in that it also adopts the same approach for studying the natural and social worlds and is concerned with uncovering truths or rules about the social world. However, the difference between positivist critical realism and post-positivist critical realist is that the latter recognizes that all observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is revisable (Trochim, 2006). Because all measurement is fallible, the post-positivist emphasizes the importance of multiple measures and observations, each of which may possess different types of error, and the need to use triangulation across these multiple sources to try to get a better formulation on what is happening in reality. The post-positivist also believes that all observations are theory-laden and we are all influenced by our backgrounds and life experiences, eg, cultural, religious, education. Nonetheless, we can acknowledge these biases and attempt to make sense of each other's experiences or try to understand one another. Most post-positivists are constructivists who believe that we each construct our view of the world based on our perceptions of it. Because perception and observation is fallible, our constructions must be imperfect.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism, in contrast, seeks to emphasise human behaviour and the social world, whereas a positivist would seek to explain the situation (Bryman, 2001).

An interpretivist attempts to understand the social world that people live in (Lewis-Beck, et al, 2004) and places emphasis on experience and interpretation (Henning, et al, 2004). They are concerned with meaning and seek to uncover the way members of society understand given situations. In addition, they produce descriptive analysis that highlight deep understanding of the social occurrences (Henning, et al, 2004). An appreciation of subjectivity and bias is, therefore, important to interpretivists. Individuals within society are regarded as important actors who can change social structures. Therefore, studying the structures alone, removed from human interpretations or meanings is not applicable. Instead, concerns such as the interpretations of individuals and what meanings they ascribe to social structures are central to the research process with the purpose of the research known to both the researcher and the participant/s.

My Positioning

I have found it challenging to find a position to label myself as I do not feel comfortable being categorised. However, my ontological approach appears to have more in common with the interpretivist paradigm with elements of critical realism. From this position, I recognise that the ELSAs bring their own unique perspective to the way they view and understand the world, therefore, due to the number of participants in this research, multiple realities exist ([Krauss, 2005](#_ENREF_82)). This perspective is in a similar vein with my epistemological beliefs as I consider reality to be an individual experience. This being the case it is a challenge to have a shared reality or universal perception ([Darlaston-Jones, 2007](#_ENREF_30)) as we can never fully experience life as each of the ELSAs do. Since we can never detach ourselves from our own reality we, therefore, can never be completely objective. The use of phrases such as EL and emotionality are also challenging to define and, even if it they could be, they are not something that can be measured nor are they fixed as we are emotional creatures who are affected and affect the world around us.

Researchers need to be clear about the objectives of their research ([Willig, 2008](#_ENREF_137)). Having expressed my views on knowledge and reality, I needed to be explicit about the goal of my empirical research. My aim as the researcher was to interpret the ideas, experiences and constructions (as expressed through language) of the ELSAs. I needed to be explicit about the influence of the unique lens I was looking through to interpret information, considering my previous experiences and who I am. I also needed to be clear about my role as the researcher in constructing the research process and outcomes. I consider human beings can and do influence the social world. Categories and concepts within society can be considered to be socially constructed eg, the notion of femininity is created by society and the people within it and its understanding has changed over time. As to the methodology employed by feminists, Brayton (1997) states there is no one unified research approach as:

There are many varying and diverse interpretations of what feminist research is and should be. The only agreement seems to be to have no agreement - to revel in the diversity and recognize that these differences facilitate and permit different knowledge to be put forth. (np).

Trying to provide one agreed research methodology would mean operating within patriarchal perspectives which is anathema to the feminist paradigm. By traditional patriarchal perspectives I mean the understanding of one truth, one knowledge in the world to be objectively discovered rather than feminist research which is about multiple, subjective and partial truths, however, recognising it cannot claim to speak for all women but, “Can provide new knowledge grounded in the realities of women’s experiences and actively enact structural changes in the social world,” Brayton (1997, np).

I considered alternative approaches to this study, eg, action research (see Willig, 2013), but I did not think any other than the use of semi-structured interviewing and the keeping of a reflective journal by the participants would have been suitable. I will go into more detail later in this chapter on the pros and cons of the approaches I chose to use.

**Pre-research considerations**

Criteria for Qualitative Research

Although the current research can be replicated to some extent the outcomes would not be the same as qualitative approaches look for differences and idiosyncrasies as well as to similar outcomes to previous related research. Furthermore, it would not be possible to recreate the exact situations or combination of people should the same study be conducted by a different researcher. Even if I attempted to repeat the same study it is highly unlikely the outcomes would be exactly the same as people’s as life experiences are constantly changing our perspectives: “The search for both validity and reliability rests on the assumption that it is possible to replicate good research. A qualitative researcher, however, will never make the mistake of claiming that their work is perfectly replicable,” (Parker, 1996, p11). Thus, the findings from my research need to be viewed as being generalised rather than specific.

Nonetheless, qualitative research stills holds a criteria or guidelines as to what makes the research credible. Yardley (2000) sets out a series of questions the researcher needs to bear in mind:

With reference to sensitivity to the research, Yardley (2000, np) asks: “Is the analysis and interpretation sensitive to the data, the social context, and the relationships (between researcher and participants) from which it emerged?” I would hope with having an interest in ELSA I would have chosen a method of analysing and interpreting the data which demonstrated sensitivity to it. In the presentation of my findings I trust I have not caused undue distress but will be construed as having provided constructive criticism. Throughout my involvement with the ELSAs I consider I have treated them with respect but should they feel they needed to make any complaint about me I provided them with the details of who to contact in the information letter which can be seen in Appendix 1.

Yardley (2000) also states the researcher needs to consider their involvement with the research, eg, prolonged engagement, immersion in data. As the reader will be aware I have been involved with ELSA for about four years and continue to be involved as a trainer and supervisor. In the Methods chapter I have laid out a table of my overall involvement with the research which focussed on the views of the first cohort I trained who happened to be the first cohort trained in my LA. Taken as a whole, I have been intensely involved with ELSA and have had at least two years to ponder over the data. Thus, I consider my involvement with the research has not been fleeting and continues to affect my involvement with ELSA and in how I view EL.

Further, Yardley (2000, np) states, “Does the researcher consider how he or she may have specifically influenced participants' actions (reflexivity)?” I am aware that I am known to the ELSAs and acknowledge this at various points during this thesis especially bearing in mind the ELSAs may have chosen what they said to me based on how it might impact on our relationship. The data findings may have been quite different if the research had been conducted by someone else. How a researcher influences the participants’ actions is a challenge. With the methods of data collection used that I have tried to lessen the impact of our relationship, eg, the use of reflective journals (which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter) will have provided the ELSAs with the opportunity to be more forthright in their opinions compared to when I asked them questions, engineered by me, during the semi-structured interviews to which they had to respond to in my presence. With the latter I provided the ELSAs the chance to reflect on the questions in advance so that they could provide me with a fully informed response (see Appendices 5 and 7).

In addition, Yardley (2000, np) asks, “Does the researcher consider the balance of power in a situation?” I would respond to this question with a clear, “Yes.” I was aware of the power I held in the research (and continued to do so with being the supervisor to some of the ELSAs who took part). However, this power relationship I sought to view from the feminist perspective, ie, the ELSAs using me to have a voice as if acting as a conduit in order to have their opinions known from which constructive criticism could be provided.

When considering the data collection, analysis and interpretation, Yardley (2000) questions whether the size and nature of the sample was adequate to address the research question. I admit the number of participants is small but the most appropriate individuals were involved in it. However, compared to similar research into ELSA the number of participants involved is not unusual. What makes this research stand out from research I have read on ELSA is that ELSAs themselves provide the data free of possible influence of their SMT and the use of reflective journals provides them with the opportunity to dictate what thoughts they want to share about ELSA.

Yardley (2000) goes on to question,

Is there transparency and sufficient detail in the author's account of methods used and analytical and interpretive choices (audit trail)? Is every aspect of the data collection process, and the approach to coding and analyzing data discussed? Does the author present excerpts from the data so that readers can discern for themselves the patterns identified? (np).

In response to this question I will explore the methods used in my research in more detail in this chapter. I share the findings in the Results chapter with further analysis, including interpretation of the data, in the Discussion chapter. In addition, in Appendices 10-15 can be found examples of the various stages I went through in using TA. Furthermore, numerous quotations are taken from the reflective journals and transcripts of the semi-structured interviews to evidence the themes from the data. Collectively, I consider the answer to Yardley’s question is another, “Yes”.

Yardley (2000, np) also asks, “Is there coherence across the research question, philosophical perspective, method, and analysis approach?” Again, I would like to think so with each of these areas covered within the thesis.

Reflexivity is another criteria Yardley (2000, np) questions, ie, “Does the researcher reflect on his or her own perspective and the motivations and interests that shaped the research process (from formulation of the research question, through method choices, analysis and interpretation)?” I consider I have demonstrated my reflexivity throughout the thesis including the use of reflective boxes in order to provide the reader with an insight as to the influences in my thinking. The thesis is also organised in chapters to help present my justification as to the choices I have made in the use of methodology, methods, analytical tool and approach to interpreting the data.

Finally, Yardley asks the ultimate question, “Is the research important - will it have practical and theoretical utility?” I consider the research is important and have spent several years of my life working on it which has meant many hours away from my husband and young family so I will be disappointed if the thesis does not make a positive impact whether this is for practical change or enlightens the reader on the issues with working with CYP’s EL awareness. I would be very pleased if both these occur. In my final chapters I present how the findings can have a practical usage whilst also linking these with past and current thinking as well as ways forward.

I will now explore some pre-research considerations mentioned above in more detail.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is concerned with my ability to reflect on how my presence may impact on the research process and outcomes. Willig (2001) states:

It is impossible for a researcher to position themselves ‘outside’ of the subject matter because the researcher will inevitably have a relationship with, or be implicated in, the phenomenon he or she is studying. (p9).

In my reflexivity I am aware I have a relationship with the ELSAs as their trainer and researcher but, in addition, for some of the schools, I was also their EP. In an attempt to keep the roles separate, I emailed using my University email address for matters associated with the research. I avoided initiating a conversation with the ELSA about the research whenever I was in their schools with my EP hat on. On the couple of occasions a discussion did take place it had been initiated by the ELSA. With regards to being reflexive about the use of semi-structured interviews I needed to consider to what extent I agreed/disagreed with the ELSA and, in doing so, being mindful of betraying my thoughts and possibly influencing the ELSAs’ views. I also needed to be mindful how I interpreted the data collected though it is impossible to be fully subjective. As can be seen throughout this study I have added reflective boxes in order to provide the reader an insight into my experiences and thoughts which have impacted the way I have approached the subject matter.

**Ethics**

With regards to ethics, Badiou (2001, p15) sets out in his ‘arguments’ or ‘resources’ on the matter for the need to be careful of treating all people the same. They argue that when exploring our research outcomes, if something occurs which is not expected, rather than considering it as an error to treat it as an addition instead as Badiou (2001) states:

Psychology should not search for ways to fit things together as if that is the way to truth. Instead it may be that the differences of viewpoint between the participants (or between the participants and ourselves) are a function of such radically different lived realities and conflicts of political perspective that it would actually be a mistake to try and smooth over those differences using one overall covering account. (p15/16).

A code of ethics is used by professional and academic associations to gauge moral principles which can be divided into four areas: Informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. Thus, in my own research I have needed to demonstrate to the Ethics Committee at my University how I would ensure I would not breach these areas. Guidelines are set by the University and by the British Psychological Society. Thus, I provided an oral presentation and written information (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the information given) about the study to the ELSA cohort in training at the time detailing the research and how to keep a reflective journal (see Appendix 4 for a copy of the information sheet). On the same occasion I provided the ELSAs with the opportunity to ask questions and my contact details if there were any further queries that needed responding to. I also provided information on how to make a complaint about me, if they needed to do so. In both my presentation and in the written information I covered what the research was about, what the involvement would be, how the research was going to be conducted including the duration, how the data would be used and presented, and the option to remove themselves from the research at any point without any judgements being made. In addition, information was provided on confidentiality and anonymity. A letter of consent was provided with questions which required ticking by the participants to ensure they had received the information about the study, they were aware of what they were consenting to, how their privacy and confidentiality were being protected, and acknowledging they had the right to withdraw from the research at any point without providing a reason (see Appendix 2 for the ELSA’s letter and Appendix 3 for Headteacher’s letter). Whilst working with the participants I treated them with respect, eg, not causing them embarrassment or harm. In advance of interviewing the ELSAs I provided them with a copy of the main questions I intended to ask and I provided a reminder at the start of the interview of their option to withdraw if they wished. I also reminded them they had the option to decline the interview being recorded. After the interviews and/or receipt of the reflective journals I thanked the ELSAs for taking part. No reward of any kind was given to the ELSAs for participating. In my research I needed to ensure all I recorded was not fabricated with the research outcomes being an accurate account.

In practice, some aspects of the ethical code can be challenging to uphold. Christians (2005) gives examples of difficulties in maintaining this guideline, eg, researchers familiar to the field of research may recognise locations and participants despite the use of disguised locations and pseudonyms. Also participants may interpret the researcher’s outcomes as being misleading or as a betrayal of trust despite no intention implied by the researcher. Participants may consider they have been misinterpreted especially if generalisations have been made when the data set is a large one and the participant’s viewpoint is in the minority. In addition, what the researcher records, as they perceive as being neutral, may cause conflict in practice. Anonymity, “Serves to protect the researcher,” (Parker, 2005) argues Parker:

The discussion with the participants about the value to them of anonymity may also draw attention to the stakes and privileges the researcher has in being able to control and disseminate information about the study. (p17).

**Qualitative research approaches**

An interpretivist social constructionist uses qualitative research techniques. Feminist researchers use naturalistic methodology such as ethnography, eg, written observations/reflections, and discussions, eg, semi-structured interviews. To gather the data for this study I used semi-structured interviews whilst most of the ELSAs kept reflective journals as well. I will now examine each data gathering method in turn.

**Ethnography: Reflective Journals**

One type of ethnographic approach is the keeping of reflective journals. The ELSAs kept reflective journals to note what was of significance to them whilst working with their CYP and their engagement with staff. This approach recognizes the ELSAs as experts and authorities on their own experiences which is taken as the starting point in feminist research. According to Brayton (1997, np): “Participants are part of the social world and as critical thinkers are also conscious and aware of the patterns of social relationships that can impact upon their own lived realities.”

Chan (2009) gives advantages for using reflective journals including:

* Encouraging the exploration of concepts and ideas by the writer both of their own thoughts and feelings and from different perspectives. It can be an opportunity to problem-solve.
* The opportunity for value judgements about themselves can take place
* Enhancing critical thinking and creativity

However, there are disadvantages to the use of reflective journals, eg, how do I know the thoughts the ELSAs report back to me is what they consider I want to read rather than a true reflection of their own thought processes in case they consider I am making a value judgement about them. This conflict Parker (2005) also recognises:

Ethnography that calls upon the services of trustworthy ‘informants’ then, always risks encouraging ethnographic stories about themselves that fit with the views of their world that they think are called for by the research. (p36).

Parker’s solution to this dilemma is to treat all writing as suspicious.

Chan (2009) also adds to the list of disadvantages and, in relation to this study, these include:

* Disclosure, ie, the ELSAs may be unwilling to honestly disclose their real perspectives. Again, this is a challenge but as with the semi-structured interviews I informed the ELSAs all data provided would be treated with confidentiality and would be kept anonymous.
* The process of writing a reflective journal, ie, not knowing what to write. To overcome this I provided the ELSAs with information on how they might write their reflective journal (see Appendix 4 for the guidance sheet) accompanied by a short presentation by me.

**Interviewing**

Cohen, et al (2000, p267) describes interviewing as a means of “[enabling] participants … to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express situations from their own point of view.” Robson (1999) suggests that the researcher should know the environment of the study so as to increase credibility and attract more interest from the participants. I would have thought that my background as a trainer on the ELSA course and as a clinical supervisor would provide this credibility and, as such, would hold the ELSAs’ interest.

I wanted to use a method of research which did not impose my ideas into the minds of the ELSAs but I still required structure, thus, I considered the use of semi-structured interviews to be the best compromise. Parker (2005) states:

An interview in qualitative research is always ‘semi –structured’ because it invariably carries the traces of patterns of power that hold things in place and it reveals an interviewer’s, and interviewee’s, creative abilities to refuse and resist what a researcher wants to happen. (p53).

Of the different approaches to interviewing, face-to-face interviewing was chosen for this study. Face-to-face interviews offer the possibility of modifying the line of enquiry, to follow-up interesting responses and investigate underlying motives in a way other data collection, eg, questionnaires, cannot (Robson, 1999). In using this method of data collection I needed to be aware of not falling foul of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) with the ELSAs providing me with the answers they thought I wanted to hear. This is a challenge that can never be fully resolved as we can only be true to ourselves. In an attempt to distance myself as their trainer and clinical supervisor any correspondence related to the thesis was through my University email address and at the start of the interview I introduced myself as a researcher and not as an EP. In addition, I reminded them of confidentiality and anonymity so as to make the ELSAs feel more at ease with what would happen with the data following the interview.

Being one-to-one with the ELSA afforded them the chance to say whatever they wished without anyone else being present to judge. Nonetheless, there can be a perceived power imbalance in an interview situation as the interviewer has the control over the questions being asked. Burman (1994, p49) states, “However much this is warded off by professional and personal defences, an interview is at some level inevitably a personal and sometimes intimate … encounter”. In order to avoid this situation occurring I emailed the ELSAs a copy of the main questions in advance of the interviews. To reduce any influence I might have had on the ELSAs I avoided making any judgemental remarks on their responses.

In order to make the experience as natural as possible, I did not take notes whilst I engaged with the ELSAs but used two Dictaphones (one as a back-up) instead. I informed the ELSAs in advance the interviews were going to be recorded and reminded them of this again at the start of the session so the ELSAs had the option of the interview not being recorded. Therefore, the interview resembled more of a conversation between two people, thus, making the scenario less formal and, hopefully, more relaxing for the ELSA.

**Scaling**

I also used scaling during the semi-structured interviews. This approach is usually associated with quantitative approaches in gathering data but scaling still finds a place in qualitative approaches as a means to add a shared clarity to the viewpoint expressed by the ELSA. Scaling provides a more definite appreciation as to the strength of feeling towards an issue.

**Analytical methods**

Having collected my data through semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, I needed to make sense of it all. Consideration was given to various qualitative approaches to analyse the data including discursive psychology, case study and Grounded Theory but I decided to use Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method of TA. The process of the approach can be found in the Method chapter. Reasons for rejecting the other approaches included discourse analysis which focuses on the language used whereas I wanted to focus on the ELSAs’ perceptions. I considered use of a case study would restrict the broad view of the perspectives and the use of Grounded Theory was unsuitable because, as an ELSA trainer and supervisor, it would be challenging for me to ignore the knowledge I already held with my involvement with ELSA.

**Thematic Analysis (TA)**

TA is a method of analysing data which is associated, but not exclusively used, in a social constructionist framework as it, “does not seek to focus on motivation or individual psychologies but, instead, seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided,” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p14). Braun and Clarke (2006) argue TA is a method often labelled as something else, eg, discourse analysis or content analysis (eg, Meehan, Vermeer and Windsor, 2000) and there are times researchers use the method even though they do not specifically label it as such; instead, they make reference to describing the process, eg, Braun and Wilkinson (2003).

TA allows the researcher to use data in a systematic way that increases their sensitivity in interpreting the participants’ accounts of events ([Boyatzis, 1998](#_ENREF_15)) and is appropriate for investigating a diverse range of experiences ( Lack, et al, 2011) including noting irregularities in responses (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This allows the participants to discuss the topic in their own words, free of constraints from fixed-response questions as commonly found in quantitative studies. As such this method of data analysis also fits well within feminist research principles.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p6), TA: “Is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” They describe a ‘theme’ as being able to, “capture something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” TA minimally organises and describes the data set in (rich) detail and interprets various aspects of the research topic.

In using TA I needed to determine which process of data analysis I intended to use, ie, inductive or deductive. With the former, the themes identified are strongly linked to the data because assumptions are data-driven (Boyatzis, 1998), ie, the coding do not fit within a preconceived framework, whereas deductive approaches are theory-driven (Braun and Clarke, 2006), ie, presumptions have already been made as to which themes to focus on. The approach I used to explore the perceptions of the ELSAs was the former whilst acknowledging my active role in constructing the outcomes.

In addition, I needed to consider whether to use semantic or latent themes. Using semantic themes would mean identifying the explicit and surface meanings of the data where I would give the reader a sense of the important themes and provide a rich description of the entire data set but at the cost of depth and complexity. Whereas identifying latent themes would provide underlying ideas, patterns, and assumptions. As the latter requires closer interpretation of the data I would need to focus on one specific question or area of interest across the majority of the data set ([Boyatzis, 1998](#_ENREF_15); [Braun and Clarke, 2006](#_ENREF_17)). In practice, I chose to use semantic themes as I wanted to learn of the ELSA’s perspectives rather than find evidence to reinforce my own.

An advantage of TA is that it is not attached to any pre-existing framework so it allows the researcher flexibility (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Other methods, such as Grounded Theory, suggest that the researcher should not carry out a literature review prior to the data collection and analysis as this is likely to provide them with theoretical ideas and may influence their theoretical understandings ([Gordan-Finlayson, 2010](#_ENREF_59)). In contrast, TA encourages the researcher to be explicit about their influence in interpreting the data and creating the themes but TA also acknowledges the researcher cannot deny their active role in the process. Thus, using TA was more appropriate for me rather than using Grounded Theory as, being an ELSA trainer and supervisor, I was already familiar with the subject area. Advantages of using TA include:

* It is suitable for use with large data sets (Guest, 2012)
* Interpretation of themes are supported by data (Guest, 2012)

* It allows for categories to emerge from the data (Saldana, 2009)

In addition, it is my judgement to determine which themes are relevant but this can be a disadvantage as this judgement is also subjective. Thus, I needed to ensure reflexivity, ie, I needed to consider how my biases and values might affect how I identified and determined which themes to be chosen and discussed. Another consideration in using TA is the danger of using the research question to code instead of creating codes and then failing to provide adequate examples from the data to support the codes. To overcome this, I cross-referenced my research outcomes with an EP colleague who was familiar with TA. Other disadvantages with the use of TA include:

* Possibility of missing nuanced data (Guest, 2012)
* Its flexibility makes it difficult to concentrate on what aspect of the data to focus on (Braun and Clarke, 2006)
* Discovery and verification of themes and codes are meshed together (Charmaz, 1988)
* It can be difficult to maintain sense of continuity of data in individual accounts (Braun and Clarke, 2006)
* It does not allow researchers to make claims about language usage (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Nonetheless, I considered TA to be the most appropriate approach for analysing the data generated as it fits within the interpretative social constructionist framework and feminist principles. Furthermore, it is a systematic, rigorous and accessible method, and a good starting point for qualitative researchers (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Howitt, 2010).

**Summary**

In this chapter I have explored the methodology behind my thesis. I utilised an interpretative social constructionist approach, with elements of critical realism and aspects of feminist principles, for the methodology to explore the question:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. It was analysed using TA. Along this journey I have needed to reflect on considerations, eg, ethics, reflexivity, which would have impacted on my approach to, and the interpretation and recording of the research outcomes.

In the next chapter I intend to provide the reader with information on the participants, and how the data was collected and analysed.

**CHAPTER FOUR: METHOD**

**Introduction**

Willig (2001, p2) equates the research process, “as a form of adventure,” with the research methods as, “the way to the goal” (Kvale, 1996, p278). There are a variety of methods which can be used to gather information which can be generalised as quantitative and qualitative. One of the advantages (or disadvantages, depending on your point of view) with using qualitative approaches to information gathering is the interpretation of it as it can go in several directions with Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p26) stating: “There is no single interpretative truth”. Using qualitative research is not as straight forward as entering numbers into a computer and being provided with significant figures or correlations as is in the case of quantitative approaches. The use of qualitative approaches requires time for reflection as Parker (2005) comments:

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that the interpretation of the material… cannot be proved to be wrong simply if another plausible interpretation can be given in its place. The question is not whether a particular argument is correct or incorrect, but whether it is a plausible agreement that makes sense in relation to the material and the chosen theoretical framework. (p10).

Nonetheless, qualitative researchers can make the error of not reporting ‘how’ they conducted their analysis of data. Thus, they need to be clear about what they are doing and why, and include the often-omitted ‘how’ they did their analysis in their reports (Attride-Stirling, 2001). As Braun and Clarke (2006) state:

If we do not know how people went about analysing their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, it is difficult to evaluate their research, and to compare and/or synthesise it with other studies on that topic, and it can impede other researchers carrying out related projects in the future (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For these reasons alone, clarity around process and practice of method is vital. (p7).

In order to support the reader with understanding the timescale of this research I have completed the following table (Table 1) detailing what I did and when.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Event/actions** |
| Autumn, 2011 – Spring, 2015 | Reading/researching background materials on ELSA and associated subject matter plus methodological approaches, etc. |
| Spring, 2012 | ELSA training courseApproval given by University’s Ethics Committee to conduct researchConsent received from ELSAs and their schools to participate in the research |
| Spring – Autumn, 2012 | Participating ELSAs, who have opted to do so, start their reflective journals |
| Summer, 2012 – ongoing | Clinical supervision |
| Summer, 2012 | Pilot semi-structured interview questions with ELSAs |
| November/December, 2012 | Semi-structured interviews held with ELSAs |
| 2013 | Transcription and analysis of reflective journals and interviews including consulting with EP colleague familiar with TA |
| 2013 – 2015 | Writing up of thesis |

**Table 1: Timescale of research**

**Aims of the current research**

I wanted to find out how the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness. I utilised an interpretative social constructionist approach, with elements of critical realism and aspects of feminist principles, for the methodology. This study acknowledges the view that knowledge is created through interactions, or social processes, between people ([Milutinović, 2011](#_ENREF_92)) where individuals bring their own unique perspective to the way the world is understood (Krauss, 2005). The data was collected using reflective journals and semi-structured interviews and analysed using TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

**Background reading/research**

I researched peer-reviewed ejournal articles from the following databases: Medline, PsychInfo, ERIC, and British Education Index using the University’s online library service as well as accessing Google Scholar. The key words I used were ‘ELSA’, ‘emotional literacy support assistant’, ‘emotional literacy’, ‘emotional’, ‘emotional intelligence’, ‘emotional competence’, ‘emotional well-being’, ‘social intelligence’, ‘social competence’, ‘social literacy’, ‘social well-being’, ‘social and emotional learning’, ‘emotional and social learning’, ‘behaviour’, and ‘bullying’. These were combined with the terms ‘children’, ‘schools’, ‘adolescents’, ‘young people’, ‘teachers’, ‘teaching assistants’, ‘learning support assistants’ and ‘parents’. Other key words searched included ‘school ethos’, ‘school climate’, ‘school organisation’, ‘healthy school’ and ‘health promoting school’.

In addition I subscribed to ‘Zetoc’ so that I could be alerted of articles as soon as they were published which I then attempted to retrieve from the University’s online library service. For Zetoc I used the search words ‘emotional’, ‘emotional literacy’ and ‘ELSA’ to appear in the title of articles.

Often as I read each article I learnt of further material to read from the references section at the end of the articles. I also sought the support of individuals, in particular, Dr Sheila Burton, who signposted me to other ELSA trainers who had links with ongoing research within their LA into the impact of ELSA.

**Participants**

My research question was presented to the ELSA training group I co-trained towards the end of their 6 day training. From this presentation, which included the opportunity to ask questions, 7 ELSAs consented to participate. Throughout the research 7 ELSAs have participated, however, they have not all been the same participants. At the end of the Summer Term, 2012, one of the ELSAs informed me that she was not able to continue with the research. Coincidentally, at about the same time another ELSA (who was also from my original training group) approached me to request if she could take part in the research which I was delighted to have her participate in.

The SMT from the ELSAs’ schools were also informed about the research in a presentation on the final afternoon of the ELSA training. All schools that had ELSAs participating in the research also consented their approval. As with the ELSAs, all the schools were provided with an information sheet and requested to complete a consent form which also displayed tick boxes to ensure they had received and read all the information provided, thus, acknowledging their awareness of what the research involved (see Appendices 1-3 for a copies of the information sheet and consent forms). Information also detailed privacy and confidentiality with the option to withdraw at any point without the need to provide a reason.

**Procedure**

The study was approved by Sheffield University’s Ethics Committee in Spring, 2012. The ELSAs had the choice of keeping reflective journals and/or taking part in semi-structured interviews.

**Reflective Journals**

All the ELSAs who took part in the research were given a short presentation during the ELSA training course as to what is a reflective journal and were provided with a hand-out (see Appendix 4 for guidance form given to ELSAs). I stressed there was no one right or wrong way to keep a reflective journal and it was not compulsory to do so in order to be part of the research. The ELSAs were given free reign of what to write, when to write their journal entries and what length the entries could be as long as the entries related to being an ELSA. Five of the seven ELSAs chose to keep a reflective journal. The journals produced were a mixture of styles from descriptive, ie, detailing the activities conducted with the children, to reflective, ie, the ELSAs thinking about how their actions impacted on the CYP they worked with and what they felt they needed to do next in this involvement. Entries included positive comments along with their frustrations. Entries were of varying degrees of frequency, ie, daily or whenever the opportunity arose, and time frame: Some ELSAs began writing whilst still on the training course whilst others began when they had become involved as an ELSA.

**Interviews**

The questions for the semi-structured interview were piloted with several of the ELSAs the term after their training, ie, Summer, 2012. The ELSAs were emailed the questions in advance (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 for my prompt sheet). As not all the ELSAs had begun to work with CYP by this stage, the interviews did not provide informed/sufficient/reliable data to be analysed. After minor adjustments, the questions were emailed to the ELSAs in readiness for interviews the following term, ie, Autumn, 2012 with the outcomes of these interviews used for this study (see Appendix 7 for the list of questions emailed in advance to the ELSAs and Appendix 8 for my prompt sheet).

All the ELSAs who consented to take part were interviewed. Arrangements to meet with the ELSAs were made individually to suit the ELSA which happened in quiet and private locations in their schools. In advance of our meeting I emailed each ELSA a reminder of what the research was about and a list of the main questions I intended to ask (see Appendices 5 and 7 for copy of the questions sent) which gave the ELSAs the opportunity to reflect on their responses rather than being placed on the spot during the interview. Both on this occasion and when we met, as part of the, “social ethics of research,” (Cohen, et al, 2000, p56), I informed the ELSAs their responses would be treated with confidence, ie, no individual would be mentioned by name and the schools would also be anonymised in the thesis. It was important the ELSAs felt secure in their responses and that they would be protected from harm, and that their well-being, health, values and dignity would be preserved at all times. Before conducting the interviews I checked with the ELSA whether they were still comfortable for me to record them on the Dictaphones. Going through this process forms part of, “ethical considerations,” (Cohen et al, 2000, p279).

Each ELSA and I held a short conversation before conducting the semi-structured interview and beginning the recording so as to develop a rapport between us as well as providing the ELSA with the opportunity to understand more clearly the purpose of the interview otherwise the authenticity and validity of the data may be called into question (Cooper, 1993). The interviews were recorded on two Dictaphones (the second Dictaphone acted as a backup in case the first Dictaphone should fail). A Dictaphone is a more reliable method of data collection than relying on the memory of the interviewer (Cohen, et al, 2000) whilst the use of note-taking by the researcher can be off putting for the interviewees (Cohen, et al, 2000). I also wanted the interviews to be as natural a communication as possible without the distraction of me making notes so use of the Dictaphones, I consider, was the most appropriate means of collecting the data in this situation.

The ELSAs allowed me to introduce them using their first names after I explained their names would only be used for me to be able to identify between the semi-structured interviews and would not be used in the thesis. None of the ELSAs objected to this. As is typical of semi-structured interviews many of the questions asked were open-ended with the questions used flexibly, eg, omitted, adapted or elaborated, according to the demands of the individual context. In this way I was able to adopt a stance of ‘talking back’ to the interviewee (Griffin, 1990) which promoted a two-way dialogue. Some of the questions were closed as scaling was used which required the ELSA to make a personal value judgement based on a scale of 1 to 5 as to the outcome to a question (1 being least favourable and 5 being most favourable).

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 20 – 45 minutes with the length varying depending on the length of responses from the ELSAs. At the end of the interviews I thanked the ELSAs for their involvement. I checked with the ELSAs at the end of the interview if they had been comfortable with the process and ready to return to their daily activity. All ELSAs responded positively.

**Analytic procedure**

I used inductive or ‘data driven’ (Boyatzis, 1998) TA to identify the semantic themes across the reflective journals and the transcripts of the interviews using the model developed by Braun and Clarke ([2006](#_ENREF_17)). This type of TA involves coding the data, ie, the reflective journals and interview transcripts, without trying to fit it into a pre-existing framework ([Braun and Clarke, 2006](#_ENREF_17)) in order to find repeated patterns of interest or meaning. The inductive process was chosen in order to acknowledge my active role in constructing and interpreting the data and creating themes. Nonetheless, I did not dismiss the data where a point occurred just the once as valuable research outcomes can be lost this way.

The TA procedure, with each of the phases and description of the process for each phase, is set out in the Table 2 below. In the Appendix 9 can be found Braun and Clarke’s (2006) ‘A 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis Process’ which I also referred to.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Phase** | **Description of the Process** |
| 1 | Familiarizing yourself with your data | Transcribing data (when necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas |
| 2 | Generating initial codes | Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code |
| 3 | Searching for themes | Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme |
| 4 | Reviewing themes | Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis |
| 5 | Defining and naming themes | Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme |
| 6 | Producing the report | The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis |

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p36)

**Table 2: The Phases of TA**

The first part of the TA approach was to transcribe the semi-structured interviews. The importance of transcription cannot be under-rated as Braun and Clarke (2006) state:

The process of transcription, while it may seem [sic] time-consuming, frustrating, and at times boring, can be an excellent way to start familiarising yourself with the data (Riessman, 1993). Further, some researchers even argue it should be seen as, “A key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology,” (Bird, 2005, p227) and recognised as an interpretative act, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical one of putting spoken sounds on paper (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). (p16).

Listening and reading over the transcripts (including the reflective journals) gave me the opportunity to generate initial codes and to start to recognise commonly occurring themes. Going through the transcripts, ie, the data, I found myself reflecting in a similar vein to Willig (2001) and Kvale (1996) viewpoints stated at the start of this chapter: I became excited with discovering the themes as if I had come across a secret world which had been revealed exclusively for me. The interpretation of these themes was conducted by a process of reading and re-reading, as well as in consultation with an EP colleague familiar with using TA.

After the fourth reading, I generated a final list of codes from the semi-structured interviews and, separately, from the reflective journals. I then brought together these outcomes to produce over-riding themes. Examples of the transcripts with their codes can be found in the Appendices 10 and 11. I selected and organised data extracts with the relevant codes; some extracts supported multiple codes and were used several times. At this stage, Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the importance of giving full and equal attention to each data item, ie, looking for themes across the entire data set (see Appendices 12 and 13). Therefore, I worked systematically and methodically through the data. During this process, some codes were combined as I noted repeated meanings between codes which later became a theme. This process allows for links and overlaps between codes to be seen. Thus, from the tables I had produced from the data I began to list recurring themes. These I then made into spider diagrams. There are examples of spider diagrams in the Appendix 14. A subsequent thematic map was developed and reviewed to check that it still captured the ‘essence’ of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Final amendments were made before the entire data sets were re-read to ensure that the final themes reflected the reflective journals and interview transcripts (see Appendix 15). Thus, once I had completed the diagrams for each set of data I combined them to identify overarching themes which I have displayed in the next chapter where I also share the findings from the data.

**CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS**

**Introduction**

The aim and central research question of this thesis was to explore:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

The data was collected from seven ELSAs in the form of reflective journals and semi-structured interview transcripts and analysed using TA. In brief, TA involves transcribing data, reading and re-reading this data to establish codes which are then collected to form themes. It may mean revisiting the data several times. As the process is subjective and the amount of data can be massive no two thematic sets will be exactly the same. Even at the write-up stage I found myself making changes to the contents of the codes.

From the analysis two main themes were identified collectively from the reflective journals and the interviews (see Figure 1):

**Figure 1: Final overall thematic map from outcomes from the reflective journals and semi-structured interviews transcripts**

Both of these main themes contained several sub-themes which are presented below in flowcharts. The sub-themes in the ELSA’s role have been broken down on the next page whilst the sub-themes in Relationships have been broken down on the following three pages. The themes will be explored in more detail after the flowcharts.

**Figure 2: Theme 1: ELSA’s role**

1.1 Impact on ELSA

1.1.1 New opportunities

1.1.2 Immediacy of role

1.1.3 Discovery of resources in school

1.2.1 Greater understanding of CYP’s presentation

1.2.2 Managing expectations

1.2.3 Managing workload

1.2 Personal development

1.2.4 Reinforced qualities already possessed

1.2.5 Job satisfaction

1.2.6 Questioning personal skills for role

 **Figure 3: Theme 2: Relationships**

2.1.1 Positive

2.1 With trainers and supervisors

2.3.1 Recognised ELSA’s potential

2.2.2 Sharing of ideas/resources

2.2.1 Camaraderie

2.2.3 Learning about ELSA’s experiences

2.2 With other ELSAs

Frustrations

Positive aspects

2.3.2 Closer working with SENCO

2.3.3 Provided with resources/budget

2.3 With SMT

2.3.4 ELSA had no idea why they had been trained

2.3.5 Limited encouragement

2.3.6 Conflict as to which CYP to work with

**Figure 3: Theme 2: Relationships (continued)**

2.4.7 Lack of support

2.4.8 Hierarchical attitude

2.4.6 Limited EL awareness

2.4.5 Development of friendships

2.4.3 Team building

2.4.2 Raising EL awareness

2.4.1 Supportive

2.4 With teachers

2.5 With LSAs

Positives aspects

2.5.1 Supportive

2.5.2 Providing training to LSAs

Frustrations

Positive aspects

2.5.3 Created tension

Frustration

2.6.2 Creating a positive environment

2.6.3 Importance of trust

Frustration

Positive aspects

2.6.5 Awareness of limitations

2.6.4 Making a difference

2.6.1 Unique role

2.6 With CYP

2.7.1 Confidence to speak with parents

Positive aspects

2.7.2 Parents seeking ELSA support for their child

2.7 With parents

2.7.3 Conflict in approaches between home and school

Frustration

**Figure 3: Theme 2: Relationships (continued)**

The next section describes the themes in detail and includes direct quotes from the transcripts, coupled with my interpretation of the data. The reference after each quotation can be used to cross-reference to the source of the quotation (ie, ‘r/j equates to reflective journals whilst ‘i/v’ equates to interviews) and link it to the themes.

As a reminder, data from the reflective journals and semi-structured interviews was analysed using TA until two main themes were identified. Within each of these themes were sub-themes. Below I have discussed the themes and sub-themes with supporting quotations from the data set.

**Theme One: ELSA’s role**

With reference to Figure 2 I will address the themes which come from the ELSA’s role. This theme consisted of two sub-themes: Impact on ELSAs and personal development.

* 1. **Impact on ELSAs**

Within this sub-theme several areas were identified as impacting on ELSAs, ie, new opportunities, immediacy of the role and discovering resources in their schools. I will explore each of these areas in more detail below:

1.1.1 New opportunities

Despite some initial apprehensions as to how ELSA would work in their school, eg, “I was slightly worried about how this could be delivered into our school on a daily basis,” (r/j 9) and confidence issues, eg, “Feel like I’m being asked to provide a service which requires far more expertise than I have,” (r/j55) for many of the ELSAs the training opened up new opportunities for them to work differently in their schools. In addition, it raised their status, gave CYP someone they could go to with concerns, made the ELSA feel more part of the school team and gave them the confidence to develop their organisational skills as can be seen by the views of the following ELSAs:

It gives me a whole different side to my job that I didn’t have previously… now I’m doing all sorts of things one to one with children, small group things and I’m almost in a consultancy role… so it’s a whole different role… that didn’t exist before... (i/v40/38/39/42/40/21)

Range of work being requested is growing and my involvements are growing…. I am happy to discuss with teachers, suggest ideas, prepare resources etc… This work utilises a skill I have of being able to relate to others and build their confidence etc. Now have extra tools, ideas of how to achieve it. (i/v42/43/30).

In addition, several ELSAs indicated that they had a clear role to play in their school, eg,

I feel a bit more like I’m contributing so I feel a bit more proud about my job and perhaps my role within school is more important than just being a LSA so I think that it’s given me, not an air of authority but a place. (i/v177).

The following ELSA considered they were able to manage their new role with ease alongside their other roles such as being a LSA (however, the number of roles the LSA played was confusing for CYP and will be explored later in this chapter):

I’m quite good at having different hats on and swapping according to the role that I’m doing and so this has just been another hat and so because I’m quite used to doing that anyway, that’s quite easy to swap into my ELSA role and come out and be on playground duty and then go in and do whole class teaching and then do some numeracy and so it’s just another role that I play. The stuff we did on the ELSA sort of made it quite clear what your role was and how long it was and the type of head I needed on to do that and so that’s been really useful actually, but I can flick in and out so it’s quite nice they’re not getting blurred. I don’t do ELSA stuff while I’m doing Maths or anything like that, it happens in that time slot as planned. (i/v51/52).

Another ELSA shared that they had developed the confidence to seek support from their SENCo:

Well, I think it’s down to you as an individual to say what you need because I was not very confident with the bereavement and the anger management. I’ve asked [SENCo] to look and see if there’s anything along them lines that I could go on anymore training for. So I think it’s down the individual of what they feel they might need. (i/v151).

1.1.2 Immediacy of role

Along with their new role came the immediacy of being able to work with CYP in their school to the fact they were already working there. In addition, the ELSA could start to work with the CYP more quickly rather than the CYP waiting several weeks for an appropriate outside agency to become involved:

In our school it’s a whole different role that nobody else currently fills and so it’s a whole different type of thing that could be offered to children as and when they need it. How it runs here is it’s so flexible that it’s like, ‘Yes, it’s fine. Yes, we can do that. We can go in and start immediately.’ There’s no, ‘Right we’ll wait ten weeks and then we’ll come and speak to [the EP].’ There’s no, ‘Right, it’ll have to be Monday morning between 9 and 7 minutes past because that’s the only time slot I have.’ (i/v66/67).

Meeting the needs of the CYP more quickly was leading to positive consequences as one ELSA informed me:

I think things are getting dealt with quicker, the children are being referred quicker. They’re not going up the school having outbursts, it’s being dealt with and I think that’s been the main thing, is that we can catch it earlier rather than let it fester. (r/j49).

1.1.3 Discovering resources in school

ELSAs were discovering aspects of their school they had never thought about prior to becoming an ELSA such as the wealth of resources their school already had and expressed the usefulness of making note of resources appropriate to ELSA prior to starting the course:

Didn’t realise we had some resources on this at [school] already – this keeps happening – but this not my usual role – I teach Numeracy! Perhaps before starting course it would have been useful to complete an audit of resources in our school. Perhaps a pre-course task for future courses but would need to be very specific. (r/j17/18).

Whilst another ELSA was so inspired by the training they could not wait to check out the school’s resources and order what was needed:

I need a box of puppets! I also need to see where we have gaps in our resources and put in my wish list. (r/j98/105).

**1.2 Personal Development**

Also coming under the theme of the ELSA’s role was the sub-theme of how the training had impacted on the ELSAs’ personal development with several areas identified: Greater understanding of CYP’s behaviour, managing expectations, managing workload, reinforced qualities already possessed and job satisfaction, however, there was an element of ELSA’s questioning their personal skills for their new ELSA role. Each of these is explored in more detail below.

1.2.1 Greater understanding of CYP’s behaviour

The course provided the ELSAs withpsychology to enable them to consider some of the possibilities behind a CYP’s behaviour such as dealing with anger, eg,

I’m using things all the time from the course that I wouldn’t have known where to start within. I’m doing anger management with a boy which I’ve never done in this sort of structured way before and I’ve followed some things [the psychology] out of the [hand]book… how it progressed, for me that was incredibly useful. (i/v58/59/57).

The course provided the opportunity to learn new approaches when working with CYP as well as to affirm the appropriateness of approaches already being used as this ELSA informed me:

[The training] re-alighted a lot of the areas especially actually listening and looking at the children... actually listening to what they have to say. That sort of re-triggered areas which, on a mundane day, you tend to forget and… with the puppets, I found that really useful because I’ve never used puppets before. So I found that really beneficial. (i/v121).

1.2.2 Managing expectations

In order to manage their workload a transparent referral system was very important for the ELSAs. This assisted them in organising themselves as the following reflective journal excerpt states:

One thing I like is that I have a good referral process. I will organise my file into social skills, friendship skills, anger etc. I would then be able to add resource sheets to it. I also have to organise my book shelf in a similar way. Hope it works. (r/j106/103).

When the system was used it appeared to work well:

After meeting looked at all referrals, discussed new ones, progress etc. … Good, the system seems to be working even though still in infancy. (r/j31).

1.2.3 Managing workload

For one ELSA, the more involved she became with the role the more she realised the importance of managing factors such as time and her workload as she wrote (in separate entries):

Concerns about time required by this role. Already fairly full as are all of us…. Range of work being requested is growing and my involvements are growing. Need to keep tight hold of this. (r/j19/42).

Even with ELSAs who had more flexibility in how they managed their time they needed to resist the urge to work with too many CYP:

I’m quite lucky in that I’ve got a lot of hours to do my role and I find that I have to be really strict, I say I can’t take on any more children but I can have a chat with the child and see if - if I think it’s really desperate then I have got some ad hoc time that I could use, but I use that [time] to get my resources together. (i/v67).

Organising time to plan and reflect was a challenge which meant for, at least one ELSA, they have had to plan in their own time:

A lot of the planning I do at home, I don’t do it at school because I just haven’t got the time to. There’s not the timing to go away and consider things and think about actually that might not work so… you’ve got 2¼ hours, half an hour, half an hour, half an hour, half an hour, fit four children in. So it’s kind of been a bit, you can have them back to back. I don’t think the realisation of perhaps how much planning is involved has gone into it… (i/v183).

Another ELSA was provided with 1 ½ days to work as an ELSA. In this time she worked with thirteen CYP on an individual basis as well as having to plan, prepare and reflect. She had been left to organise her own time with no experience of planning her own timetable. As a consequence she learnt on the job the importance of pacing herself as she informed me:

Well I must admit I am struggling a bit with the planning time so because of that my second intake, which is the new rota, I’ve lessened it a bit so I can cope with planning. It’s all trial and error the first one isn’t it, what you do and what you don’t. (i/v134).

In order to cope, this ELSA reduced the number of CYP she was seeing to eleven and shortened the sessions from 45 minutes to 30 minutes. This meant she had acquired a two hour session for planning but this would still only give her about 10 minutes per child to reflect, plan and prepare.

Some ELSAs were not provided with additional time to prepare for their sessions and were expected to fit the planning into the time slots already provided for when they taught cover lessons. Even then, this time was not protected:

… I cover PPA [planning, preparation and assessment] for Religious Education for 2 ½ per week, that’s my planning time as well so it’s, I sort of do ELSA for the first hour and then my planning for the second hour. So more time would be nicer and more regular being able to do it every week and I’m sometimes sent for as well. I can have children and sometimes something goes on in the infant classroom. Nobody’s there to cover me for them, and the teacher’s on their own so sometimes things happen where I have to go through and help out as well. (i/v154).

Another ELSA wrote in her reflective journal tips for herself and future trainees as she learnt of the importance of planning time versus eagerness to become involved with the role:

In future I would say:

* do not over book the intervention sessions
* allow time after each sessions for writing evaluation
* don't try to conquer the world!
* Allow room for change in the planning
* Be flexible. (r/j92).

1.2.4 Reinforced qualities already possessed

Some of the ELSAs considered the characteristics of being a good ELSA were already present in them, however, there was also a feeling the training course had helped to bring these to the fore, eg, being empathic and using their initiative:

I think as a listener, a good listener, patience, seeing things from other people’s points of view, not jumping in before you know all the facts and just basically looking and listening at what’s actually going on. (i/v127).

I think you are more tolerant, patient, understanding lots of reasons why, definitely I think it’s made me more compassionate, not that I wasn’t before, but I think even more so now. (i/v127).

1.2.5 Job satisfaction

All of the ELSAs expressed how they enjoyed their role of being an ELSA, eg,

Am very much enjoying the work I’m doing so far and look forward to seeing official slots on my timetable next year! (r/j43).

Well for me it’s working on your own initiative. I think you get a lot of chance to work on your own initiative. To give feedback what’s relevant about children what wouldn’t necessarily have been flagged up. Having the time to spend with them, just having the time to spend with the children and working with them directly. (i/v127).

Similar sentiments were shared by this ELSA:

I think probably the ability to listen and help, just provide that support. It’s not always about providing an activity. It’s just being, you know, a problem shared. And I’ve found that that’s been, especially when you’ve been approached by some of the older children, who just want to talk to somebody without there having any comeback. So you are just a neutral person, you are just listening, it’s not going to go any further because it doesn’t need to but they’ve just sounded off. They’ve got it off their chest and they can move on. (i/v127).

1.2.6 Questioning personal skills for role

The ELSAs were keen to begin working with CYP and prepared to face challenges though there were some reservations as to their confidence as one ELSA wrote, following the session on developing friendship skills:

Not sure if I would be confident enough to run a circle of friends or PIKAS [programme to promote friendships] but like the idea of direct intervention to tackle issues head on. (r/j15).

However, this same ELSA continued she would read around the subject and was not daunted by the task as she continued to write: “New area – want more!”(r/j15).

The same ELSA had concerns with writing therapeutic stories but as they had not been the only ELSA from their school on the training course they knew there was someone close at hand to support them:

Would have liked to have a go at writing a therapeutic story – new to me. But no time. Would not be confident to write any as not sure what/ how. Again the value of having two [LSAs] from our school. (r/j14/13).

Despite ELSAs being keen to engage in their work there were times they found themselves overwhelmed by whether they had the skills to work with the CYP and how they could manage the number of referrals coming through as one ELSA recorded in her reflective journal:

Feel bit daunted today – some of concerns being asked to take on feel out of my comfort/ knowledge area… Lots of work started. Need to remember to start small and build relationship! Also I know I am a yes person – I don’t like to say no to anyone if it is something I can do – but need to remember boundaries of ELSA and that I work p/t! (r/j33/31/34).

**Theme Two: Relationships**

With reference to Figure 3 I will address the theme of relationships. This theme is sub-divided into the different types of relationships mentioned by the ELSAs, ie, with trainers/supervisors, with other ELSAs, with their SMT, with teachers, with other LSAs in their schools, with pupils, and with parents. All, except the relationship with the trainers/supervisors, had positive aspects and frustrations associated with each relationship. I will consider each relationship in turn.

**2.1 Relationship with the trainers/supervisors**

The relationship with the trainers and supervisors was considered important and was viewed overwhelmingly as positive by the ELSAs. They appeared to particularly value the communication whether it be face-to-face or virtual to seek advice and clarification as being particularly beneficial, eg,

Because there was always an opportunity to ask them any questions, even if you thought about something over the week, the following week, there was always the opportunity to chat or email, you know, the communication was really good. (i/v26).

Without the support of clinical supervision it would be questionable how many ELSAs would have been able to work in their new role, for example, at least one ELSA informed me how the clinical supervision sessions empowered them to persuade their SMT to enable them to work with CYP as an ELSA:

You come away [from clinical supervision] thinking, ‘Yeah, I’m going to do that! Yeah, that’s what I’m going to do!’ I… think it was the support I was given. The last time I went I thought, ‘No, I’m going to go into school and I’m just going to say, ‘Look, you’ve had me on this course. You’ve had me do it. What are we going to do?’ And that is when [I] started getting the Friday afternoons. So it was support from [the EP] that really helped me and it was good. (i/v102).

Again, this ELSA shared clinical supervision had given them the confidence to approach their line managers to make requests as they learnt from other ELSAs what was happening in their schools, eg,

I think the first supervision, when I didn’t feel as confident as what I do now, I think they gave me the confidence to say to them – the higher people at school/the managers -this is, what I’m needing. I need a bit more support and they gave me the confidence to be able to say that. (i/v102).

I asked the ELSAs to rate how well they considered they were supported by the trainers whilst on the ELSA training course on a scale of ‘1’ indicating no support to ‘5’ where they felt they had been fully supported. Three of the ELSAs rated the support as ‘4’ while four of the ELSAs rated the support at ‘5’.

I asked the ELSAs a similar question but this time to rate how well they considered they had been supported during clinical supervision on a scale of ‘1’ indicating no support to ‘5’ where they felt they had been fully supported. Two of the ELSAs rated the support as ‘3’, one at ‘4’ and four at ‘5’. The ELSAs who rated at ‘3’ wanted to qualify their decision: Both had not been working with any CYP as an ELSA and felt, because of not being able to contribute, the supervision sessions were not as beneficial as they could be to them. One of these ELSA even described herself as a “phoney”. In exploring relationships with others, including SMT, later in this chapter (and in the next) more light can be ascertained with how the LSAs felt with how their schools engaged with them. It would appear to be a strange situation for these two LSAs with their schools having signed a contract to use their skills in the school, having released them to attend the training and subsequent supervision, and for a representative from their SMT having attended a meeting on the final afternoon so they could gain a more fuller understanding of the ELSA role for these LSAs then not to be utilised by their schools.

**2.2 Relationship with the other ELSAs**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it several areas which were: Camaraderie, sharing of ideas and learning about ELSAs’ experiences. Each of these are explored in more detail below.

2.2.1 Camaraderie

The overarching view from ELSAs was how much they had enjoyed the training and the new relationships they had made. Of the many positive comments made included increased sense of confidence and the opportunity to receive mutual support from peers, eg,

So that was quite nice as well because we was there all in the same boat really and I felt more at ease because, the very first time I thought, ‘Are they going to know a lot more than I do?’ but it wasn’t the case. We had all different ideas that came together what supported each other so that’s what I liked about that. (i/v47).

2.2.2 Sharing ideas/resources

The training offered the opportunity for the ELSAs to discover how emotionally literate their schools were and to share ideas between the ELSAs. It also gave ELSAs the chance to compare their schools with other schools, eg,

… the more I learn about different schools, I’m not from a schools’ background. All schools work so differently that all I really know about is how I do it here, and this seems to be quite different to other LSAs working in other schools. (i/v61).

In addition, the training provided them with resources ideas, eg,

This is the subject area, this is the type of work you can do, these are the types of resources and this is where you can get lots more. That’s really great for me. That’s brilliant. That’s something to put in the tool bag and pull it out when you need it. Absolutely spot on for me, that. To me that is what it needed to be, and so I do think it got better and better as we got more into it and what everybody wanted out of it. (i/v57).

2.2.3 Learning about other ELSAs’ experiences

Not only did the clinical supervision provide the ELSAs with a chance to share casework but also to explore how to set up the intervention. One school had quickly developed a referral system which was clearly set out in written format along with a referral form. This was shared by the ELSA and was gratefully received: “… particularly useful was the launch information produced by the staff at [school]”. (i/v65).

Supervision gave one ELSA the opportunity to have guidance in setting up ELSA in their school as they lacked formal managerial supervision as she informed me:

Just speaking to the other people and being involved with somebody that’s doing the same thing, trying to do the same thing as I am, and I think by being able to do that it’s helped me in how I am with the children as well and sometimes how I put the sessions together. It’s helped me because had I not been on the training I don’t think I would have been able to put in quite as much as what is needed in the sessions if I had not have got this knowledge, this information. (i/v147).

Irritation was expressed by ELSAs who, despite being sent on the training course and allowed to attend clinical supervision, were not fulfilling their role as ELSAs. Hearing about their ELSA colleagues’ frustration, several of the other ELSAs became equally exacerbated as shared by the following ELSA during their interview:

ELSA: I just don’t understand why schools would do that. For one, it seems a waste of a place for people that could get stuck in, but then I know some of the ladies are really frustrated because they’re fired up ready to go and they’ve done nothing and I know all schools are different and they all work differently. I just think what a waste of everybody’s time really… I don’t know how it could be done differently, because the women that were chosen seemed very appropriate for the role, they’d just not been given the opportunity to get on with that role really. I don’t know. It would be a shame if it was training for training’s sake because it was good stuff which should then be implemented and it’s not been for everybody, so. (i/v31/30/29/32/34/35/37/36).

For this ELSA the lack of recognition by some of the schools was causing division in the supervision sessions as they wrote in their reflective journal:

Interesting hearing what all doing but gap getting wider between those doing and getting stuck in and those still dabbling. Shame some schools not embracing role. (r/j11/26).

**2.3 Relationship with SMT**: **Positive aspects**:

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects as to how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with their SMT. The first area to be explored are the positive aspects which were: Recognising the ELSAs’ potential, closer working relationship with the SENCo and being provided with a budget or given resources. Each of these are explored in more detail below.

2.3.1 Recognising the ELSA’s potential

Several of the ELSAs appeared to work closely with their SMT. They felt their potential had been recognised with working with CYP with SEN and this had been why they had been asked to become ELSAs, eg,

I think it’s basically because in the past I’ve dealt with children with problems in their development. I’ve had lots of experience with children with special needs and I suppose my empathy for them and the way that they’ve learnt to trust you have shown that I could be a good ELSA. (i/v4/18).

For most of the ELSAs they considered they were chosen because they possessed the characteristics set out in the ELSA personal specification (as set out in the ELSA training materials and provided to schools as part of the application process) as this ELSA informed me:

I think it was due to having an interest in emotional literacy with children anyway but also on the ELSA form it said somebody with an outgoing personality and bubbly so I think that I was chosen because I am always having a giggle and a laugh and good at listening. (i/v172).

In addition, another ELSA added her position as a HLTA (Higher Level Teaching Assistant) placed her in a more flexible position to work with CYP across the school as she was not tied to working in the classroom:

[The headteacher] said it’s because of things I’ve done previously. I’m a HLTA here, which puts me in a more flexible position than the class LSA’s, and previously I’d worked with challenging behaviour and children with a range of needs and issues going on and trying to sort those out with them really, so it was those two factors. (i/v1/5/2/3/4/6).

As to whether a discussion had taken place to ascertain the ELSA’s opinion on attending the training by a member of the SMT there were varying responses. These ranged from the ELSAs from being included in considering an application for the course before the application form had been completed to being told they were attending the course but with no further information about it, for example,

[The] head [teacher] met with myself and [colleague] before the paperwork was submitted but after she’d thought she’d like us to go on it and spoke to us a little bit about what it would be about and that our roles may change afterwards. (i/v9).

In some cases it was the SENCo who liaised with the ELSA about the course and it was the then left to the ELSA to follow-up that initial interest from the SENCo:

Yes, my SENCO spoke to me about it and at first she wondered whether I was already doing the role so it wouldn’t really be worth it [to go on the course] but there were things that interested me on the course, things that I hadn’t worked with, things that I didn’t know an awful lot about, so I was glad that I actually got to go on the course, because I was looking forward to doing those things…I think it was that there was nobody else in the school that was suitable for the course, they weren’t working with children like, you know, on the scale of what I’m working with them. There was only one other person, she didn’t feel that she could commit or that she wasn’t fulfilling all of the requirements, so in the end it was decided that I should do it. (i/v85/86/87/88).

2.3.2 Closer working relationship with SENCo

Following the training, one of the ELSAs informed me how they worked more closely with their SENCo:

I do have more conversations with my SENCO about it, I do go to her for advice and things, so she’s been very supportive of me … Yes and discussion because we work in the [same] room together as well. But sometimes that does get eaten up with managerial meetings or children that I’ve had to see on an ad hoc basis so it doesn’t always happen, but we always do, even if it’s after school when everybody’s gone for 10-15 minutes, there is always an opportunity at some point to have a chat with her, so, cos she’s always based near me, so that’s good. (i/v42/98).

2.3.3 Provided with resources/budget

One of the ELSAs, expressed how she was pleased with the support she was given by her SENCo which had included the provision of a budget, room and resources (these requirements are set out in the ELSA contract with the schools):

Yes I do [feel supported]. I’ve been given time, budget, a room, you know, access to resources so it’s been really good and also we have a new SENCO in and she’s been brilliant for asking advice or questions, so it’s been really good. (i/v42).

**Relationship with SMT**: **Frustrations:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with their SMT. Having explored the positive aspects this section will now explore the frustrations of working with their SMT which were: The ELSA had no idea why they had been chosen to be trained as an ELSA, the limited encouragement from the SMT and conflict in identifying the CYP to work. Each of these frustrations are explored in more detail below.

2.3.4 ELSA had no idea why they had been trained

Contrary to some ELSAs being consulted about going on the ELSA training course, there were SMT in other schools who were more authoritarian in their approach with limited discussion taking place about the training before the ELSA embarked on it. Some of these ELSAs had limited understanding of what the training was about, eg,

We were consulted but there wasn’t a lot of information available. We just read the letter that came with the pack. A lot of people don’t know what it involves and still don’t know what it involves. (i/v120/11).

Another ELSA had no idea why she was chosen and had to guess why she had been approached:

Just, yeah for personal development I guess, and they wanted a person, yeah, I don’t know… Really, why it was me and not somebody else? (i/v140).

Yet another ELSA thought she was on the course by a matter of default, ie, she was the only LSA working at the school. Whilst another ELSA was informed the day before Day 2 of the ELSA training that she would be attending as her colleague had dropped out after Day 1. This ELSA knew nothing about the course or that their colleague had even started the course.

There appeared to be a general view schools did not know what the role of being an ELSA was about and were not prepared for when the ELSA had completed their training. This was despite schools receiving information about the course and having to complete a bid to demonstrate how their ELSA would be used in their schools as part of the application. I consider the ELSAs who were not consulted with prior to starting the training were less prepared for the training which is highly inappropriate. One ELSA was clearly affected by this as she wrote in her reflective journal:

[I] Hadn’t understood the significance of becoming an ELSA, the whole registration, and up keep of this is a little intimidating. I’m sure that it is probably a lot less scary in reality rather than the contemplation. (r/j64).

Another ELSA, who had not been fully informed of what their new role would entail prior to starting the course, questioned as to whether they would be able to be an effective ELSA:

… in the afternoon when we was told what we would be doing I was a bit taken back I was a bit surprised but I was looking forward to it and looking forward to the challenge but I was a bit surprised and thinking can I really, is this something that I’m going to be able to do and do properly. (i/v161).

I asked the ELSAs to rate how well they considered they had been consulted prior to starting the training course on a scale of ‘1’ indicating no consultation had taken place to ‘5’ where they felt they had been fully consulted. Three of the ELSAs rated consultation at ‘2’ while the remaining four rated consultation as ‘3-4’. Therefore, nearly half of the ELSAs had been instructed to attend the training without full knowledge of what the course was about or entailed. Two of these ELSAs came from the same school where ELSA, even after their training, had not been shared with other staff members. Interestingly, one of the ELSAs who had rated their school at ‘4’ for being consulted about the training prior to starting found themselves in a position where staff had not been informed about their new role even after they had completed the training.

2.3.5 Limited encouragement

One of the biggest frustrations for the ELSAs was the mismatch between their schools’ and the ELSAs’ understanding of their role. I would speculate, as it was provided as a free course, schools may not have taken the time to read what the schools’ commitment was in having their LSAs trained as ELSAs. The last session of the training is a meeting with a representative of the SMT from the ELSAs’ schools to explore how the ELSA will work in their schools. Their new role seemed to be a surprise for several of the schools, eg,

Maybe more the understanding of the schools of how much, I mean it might just apply to this one, but how important it is and I think they were quite surprised when they came on that day as to how much time [the role required] and I think they just saw the leaflet, oh yeah that seems like a good idea and didn’t really take it serious so maybe more - I won’t even say clearer as to what you needed to do afterwards because it was quite clear but I just don’t think they maybe make the schools understand more, what is needed after the training to make it work. (i/v170).

One of the ELSAs, who considered they had been consulted about the training, expressed they had been let down by their SMT as they did not know if anyone was going to attend the final session. It was not until that very afternoon did they know if a SMT representative would be attending. This ELSA’s angst can be seen in their reflective journal:

Meeting with [headteacher] – general feedback, supervision requirement and who to accompany us on Day 6. Not sure regards Day 6 as [headteacher] out of school, and Deputy covering. Bit annoyed about this. I only work 3 days a week so this has been a substantial time commitment for me which has impacted on the children/ groups I work with... Until [school representative] arrived we are unsure if anyone coming or not. Not good enough. Undermined us and the course. (r/j20/21).

As I have already noted in this chapter there were a couple of ELSAs who were not working as ELSAs in their schools. One of the ELSAs informed me she had no time on her timetable to work as an ELSA as she provided support for a child with a Statement. Whilst the other ELSA informed me, although she was working with a CYP as an ELSA at the school, the teaching staff were not aware of the ELSA training. Again, frustration was apparent for this ELSA but she found solace in the support she received from attending clinical supervision meetings:

I think it’s down now to the school getting this up and running and getting the, I get more out of the sessions out of school than I do within the school from the teachers. (i/v91).

For several ELSAs there was no awareness amongst the teaching staff of who they had become and how they could support vulnerable CYP as well as assist in developing the EL ethos of the school:

ELSA: In my opinion, I don’t think they’re aware of an ELSA’s training or what it involves. It hasn’t, as a school, been discussed openly or they’re not aware of the actual ELSA position.

ML: So if a member of staff had a concern about their child’s emotional awareness, they would not know there’s a member of staff, well two members of staff that they could approach?

ELSA: No. (i/v95).

This ELSA also shared with me the amount of effort she and her ELSA colleague had gone into setting up the initiative but they could go no further until SMT informed the staff:

We have set up enough, well [ELSA colleague]’s set it up all. The ELSA things that we get are on the staff shared area. All books and everything, they’re on the staff shared area, the social books, for example, if someone’s had a bereavement or anything, they’re all available but a lot, I mean I know none of the teachers are aware of what we’ve done. (i/v91).

Both these ELSAs informed me at their separate interviews that their biggest frustration in being an ELSA was not being recognised for their skills in the school which meant they were not being utilised to support vulnerable CYP in the school, eg,

ELSA: Other people’s understanding… they’re not being made aware that there’s this facility out there…. I think one or two children could benefit from having sessions. (i/v95).

These ELSAs appeared to be continually let down by their SMT as they had been informed the teaching staff were going to be told about ELSA:

We were told that the ELSA thing was going to be addressed in a meeting that we had with teachers and teaching assistants every Wednesday but at the moment, it hasn’t. (i/v95).

An ELSA, working at a different school, with similar challenges in having ELSA recognised in the school informed me although staff appeared to be supportive of her role the majority of them did not know of the ELSA training they had undertaken**.** Nonetheless, this ELSA was being proactive in ensuring staff were aware of their skills:

They [the staff] don’t really know an awful lot about the training that I did. It’s just what I’ve been drip feeding them every time I see a pupil in their class… But again, it’s only what I’ve drip fed to them, it’s nothing that’s come from the headteacher... I did my own hand-out information about my role, what the process would be, the ideas surrounding the ELSA, my training, the length of training that I did, what we covered, so I did my own little sort of one sheet A4 hand-out, I’ve done my own, working from the ELSA materials that we were given I’ve done some forms, like referral forms, I use a lot of the ELSA materials, I adapt them if I need to and go through those with the teacher, so they’ve got an idea of what it is, what it entails, how long I’m going to see those children for and the level of feedback that is required. (i/v90).

Ultimately, several ELSAs considered their schools did not appreciate what the ELSA course was about with the following quote being representative of the consideration of many of these ELSAs:

There was very little understanding of what the course really entailed before I started, but then I don’t think that the school really understand what it was about, despite whatever literature they’d had, I don’t think they really understood the commitment to it. (i/v133).

In some schools the ELSA role had been given fleeting importance, eg,

I had said that I was going on the ELSA course… and it was mentioned in [the] staff meetings as well so they [the staff] sort of did know [about it]. (i/v21).

It appeared as though it was not unusual for the ELSAs not to receive support in how to manage their planning time. For most of the ELSAs they did not receive any formal managerial supervision. For those who did it, it tended to be on an ad hoc basis: One of the ELSAs, who expressed she had been involved in the consultation process prior to attending the course, she felt she was not particularly well supported once on the course or after completing it with any support provided having to be initiated by the ELSA herself. She informed me,

I’m not hugely supported by senior management because there’s two of us, we’re both HLTAs and we both meet and we both talk about what we’re doing and we bounce ideas off each other, so to a large extent that’s - our support mechanism is each other and I have often nipped into [headteacher’s] office and discussed things with her and run things by her but I don’t ever have a meeting with her that she calls where we talk about it or whatever, it’s more if I need anything, the support is from myself and the other ELSA. (i/v14/15/16).

Another ELSA informed me no-one had supported her in setting up ELSA or guided her through setting up a timetable:

That’s why from the very initial start I felt it a bit daunting having to do that because it’s something that I’ve never had to do in all the years that I’ve been a LSA, but now I’ve sort of got over the initial part of it, I’m feeling more confident that I can do it now. (i/v14).

For several ELSAs, who were working as ELSAs, one of their main frustrations was the lack of time provided to prepare for their sessions. One ELSA informed me of the unreasonable behaviour of their SMT with regards to having time but, fortunately, she was given support by one of the teachers:

Then she said, ‘Oh well and you could do your preparation in another assembly time,’ but I actually do other things in the other assembly time. No, it’s not that I don’t get time because my teacher makes sure that I have time, but it’s not been allocated by the school. (i/v123).

Sometimes the ELSA sessions clashed such as with a one-day special event in school for one ELSA. Ideally CYP should be prepared for any cancellation and for their session to be re-arranged to take place as soon as possible after. Unfortunately, there were times when sessions were cancelled with limited notice as ELSAs were re-directed to complete another task. It was disheartening to read that several sessions were being cancelled in one of the ELSA’s reflective journal. One of the ELSAs reminded me of the importance of not cancelling sessions and how it impacts on the child:

… and when you’ve got the consistency, that’s when you really see the results. Sometimes it’s out of my hands, it’s nothing I can do, it’s a school trip or something, and you do explain to the child – ‘Oh I won’t be able to see you cos you’re going on your school trip but you can tell me all about it next week.’ So that’s really good, you know, when I can pre-empt it it’s fine, but sometimes it is hard and I’m rapidly realising how much they actually rely on me. (i/v111/112).

On other occasions ELSAs were being asked to deal with matters concerning inappropriate behaviour at playtime which is not the responsibility of the ELSA and distracts from what had been planned for the session. This would also alter the nature of the relationship between the ELSA and the CYP from one who is there to support the CYP in their EL awareness to being that of a disciplinarian.

2.3.6 Conflict as to which CYP to work with

One of the ELSAs appeared to come into conflict with their headteacher (who was also the SENCo) as to which CYP they should work with. There were CYP whom the ELSA had identified as requiring their involvement but the headteacher disagreed despite the ELSA having the capacity to work with these CYP as they told me:

There’s been a couple of children where referrals have been put in but then it’s been said, ‘No, that needs to be dealt with within the class down in the foundation stage,’ and that’s a shame because there are things that I could just get on and start with immediately. And then there was another child who in Year 2, and we almost got - he was lower down on the list of important things and we’ll just see how that goes. And I know sometimes if there’s a lot of work coming in there has to be some prioritising. So that’s frustrating sometimes because particularly the lad who’s in Year 2. There’d have been all sorts of things that we could have done that wouldn’t have been heavy on time - practical things that we could have got set up in classrooms. Yes, so that was a sham And it just seems a shame to think we’ll wait and see if it becomes a bigger issue. Let’s just get it early on when it’s not a bigger issue and there’s currently time in our timetables to do it. (i/v70).

I asked the ELSAs to rate how supported they felt they had been by their SMT since becoming an ELSA using a scale of ‘1’ for no support to ‘5’ for total support. One of the ELSAs who worked at the school where the staff had not been informed of the training provided a rating of ‘1’. Their colleague rated their SMT at ‘2’. Two further ELSAs rated their SMTs’ support at ‘2’ which included the ELSA who had been empowered by the clinical supervision meetings to challenge the school to implement her role. Surprisingly, the ELSA who rated her SMT’s support at ‘2’ came from a school where the headteacher had consulted with them about the training prior to attending. The remaining three ELSAs rated the support they received from their SMT as ‘4’ which also included an ELSA working at a school where the staff had not been formally told of the training. For another one of these ELSAs they considered support had been at ‘2’, initially, but had improved to ‘4’.

**2.4 Relationship with teachers**: **Positive aspects:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the teachers at their school. The first area to be explored are the positive aspects which were: Teachers being supportive of their ELSA role, the level of EL awareness amongst the teachers, and how the role had encouraged team building and developed friendships. Each of these is explored in more detail below.

2.4.1 Supportive

Where ELSAs had had the opportunity to share their role with staff, typically at staff meetings, the staff appeared to be supportive, eg,

Within the staff team, the teachers are aware of what we’re doing and they often catch me and ask, ‘Do you think this would come into or have you any ideas for this?’ or then when I’m working with somebody, there’s lots of conversations and so and that. The other LSAs are aware of what we’re doing and often they’re asking us for either some resources or, ‘Have you any ideas about this?’ So within the school I think it’s developing its role nicely. (i/v21/22/23/24/25).

The teaching staff I’m getting along with really well now and they are showing a lot more [interest]. I feel as though they’re appreciating more of what I’m trying to do. (i/v146).

One of the ELSAs informed me staff members were protective of the ELSA’s time due to other CYP not being aware of their other role as an ELSA and disturbing them when engaged with a child during an ELSA session, eg,

Because of where I am in the school to do the ELSA work, if they [staff] see children coming for me that’s when they say [not to disturb me] and sometimes they will send their LSA instead of me [as if] to say well, ‘Here’s our LSA. How can they help?’ so then I can get on with my ELSA… The majority of the people of the staff I’d say are definitely supportive of it for, even to the point of if I’m in a session sometimes if they see children coming through they’ll intercept and say, ‘Right why do you need [ELSA’s name]? Is it very important?’ (i/v164).

One of the ELSAs, where the staff had not been informed of their training, found support in the teacher of the one child she was working with as an ELSA:

[The] Teacher that I’m working with at the moment, if I discuss anything with her to do with the child that I’m working with, cos I’m actually in the class with the child that I’m working with. Yeah she’s more than supportive. She’s yeah, she’s very good. (i/v138).

2.4.2 Raising EL awareness

Awareness of EL appeared to vary from school to school. Fortunately, not all teachers were deemed as lacking in EL awareness as this ELSA informed me:

… I’m sure they [teachers] already knew what it [EL] was through training and becoming a teacher, it just now [it] has a face attached to it and it has forms that you can complete and so it’s a lot more high up in the conscious [sic] really. It’s something that we think about and talk about a lot more. With the LSAs probably less so because, [ELSA colleague] and I talked about all different ways that we could involve LSAs in - but then, as a school, we’re looking at positive behaviour and positive interactions with children as one of the main things that the school’s having a push on, and so all the LSAs are involved in that side of it really, because we like the idea of LSAs being more involved and you know, maybe having so many children that they make a point of having a positive interaction with each day. But we’re all now doing that across the school as a major big push, all the LSAs, the teachers, everybody, so probably less of a change that the LSAs are seeing, but I do think it’s had an impact on keeping it in the forefront with the teachers, definitely. (i/v74/75/76/77).

Another example of EL awareness amongst staff came from an ELSA who wrote in their reflective journal of their meeting with a CYP’s teacher concerning their behaviour which resulted in further discussions with a wider circle of adults around the CYP. If the ELSA had not been involved with the CYP it is likely their needs may not have been addressed with the ELSA acting as a catalyst to bring about support for the CYP:

[I] met with NQT [newly qualified teacher] following conversation with [a] LSA about bizarre behaviour of Year 1 boy. [I] just asked, questioned and listened. NQT unsure where to go with child - acknowledges not in place of learning. Attention needs to refocus from negative behaviour which results in child being in red [traffic light system used for behaviour with ‘red’ the most extreme inappropriate behaviour witnessed by the teacher] every day to praising them. We need to set up reward schemes and try to work to his wants and needs so he can enjoy coming to school. Discussed strategies with lunchtime and playtime LSA. More of a consultation role but with flexibility in timetable I can ensure all staff involved with child hears same strategies etc. This new for me but fine – I have access to all LSAs. (r/j30/44).

2.4.3 Team building

An ELSA informed me how their training had impacted on the team building amongst staff within their school because teachers sought them out for support:

I think I probably work with them [teachers] more closely at support level so we support each other more… we’re a better team I think for being able to share and support each other in that sense. And I’ve received support from them for different things that I’ve had to deal with [as an] ELSA so it’s definitely relationship building. (i/v178).

2.4.5 Development of friendships

One ELSA also informed me they had made close friendship with two teachers because of working with CYP in their class due to ELSA.

**Relationship with teachers: Frustrations:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the teachers at their school. Having explored the positive aspects I will now explore the frustrations for the ELSAs working with the teachers in their schools which were: Teachers’ limited EL awareness, lack of support by the teachers and the ELSAs’ perceiving a hierarchical attitude amongst teachers. Each of these frustrations are explored in more detail below.

2.4.6 Limited EL awareness

A matter of frustration for several ELSAs who, following their training, had a greater understanding for reasons behind CYP’s presentation but found themselves exacerbated by the lack of EL awareness amongst staff members. In a scaling exercise, where ‘1’ equated to be least positive to ‘5’ equating to be most positive response, it would appear the ELSAs’ perceptions of EL awareness in their schools to be weak although this awareness improved for some ELSAs after they had attended the training course. For the latter group this was because they felt they were able to make a positive impact on developing EL awareness in their schools. Initially, most schools were placed at ‘2’ or less. For one ELSA EL awareness remained at ‘1’ and for another it remained at ‘4’ following the training. After the training all schools, except for one, moved up one or two points, therefore, most schools were on ‘3’ or above. None of the ELSAs placed their school on ‘5’ before or after attending the training.

The ELSAs provided several examples to illustrate the apparent lack of EL awareness amongst the teaching staff. The following ELSA also wrote how the staff’s lack of EL awareness impacted on them personally:

[I] had my first bad day involving ELSA children after this session. After feeling very pleased with myself about all the wonderful things that were happening [in the session]. [I] Had a run in with this child’s class teacher. She had not fully understood what was happening in the ELSA sessions and tried to intervene with these 3 [ELSA] children herself. She arranged a meeting with all 3 [ELSA] children so 2 of them could tell B why they thought she was being a rubbish friend. She wanted to sit B down and let them have it out with her and let her know how they were feeling. She [teacher] even rung one of the children's parents to say that he was going to be doing the ELSA sessions (without even consulting Head or myself on whether this was suitable for him) and that it would be starting that afternoon but she would be running it. Felt so let down by the fact that she could have ruined all of the work I had done just because she wanted to do a bit of ELSA work, [I’m]very disappointed. Note to self....[ELSA’s punctuation] explain fully what my role as an ELSA is to this teacher so as to avoid run ins in the future! (r/j13/74).

2.4.7 Lack of support

There also appeared to be a lack of understanding of the purpose of the ELSA’s role amongst the minority of the staff but this was not going to deter the following ELSA:

[I felt supported by] the majority of the teaching staff, definitely the management and all the LSAs definitely. But just the odd one or two that haven’t really seen the value of it [ELSA] or have sort of made a negative comment that you pick up on and you just think, ‘Ummm’... [I] just ignored the negativity and kind of just carried on. I’m here to do a job at the end of the day and that’s it. So that’s my role and just embrace it and face it head on. (i/v176).

An example of the lack of awareness of what the work of ELSA is about can be seen in this ELSA’s reflective journal entry:

I am finding that the more hands on sessions that involve them [CYP] running round or moving works better rather than the formality of sitting round a table. [I] felt a little unhappy about having to move rooms due to a meeting. [The] meeting had been scheduled weeks before but had been planned in the library on the same day as ELSA sessions take place. [I] had to find a space to work in and set up so everything felt a little disorganised. Sometimes think that people don't really appreciate how much set up time there is or how much planning time there is for all of the sessions. (r/j80/81).

Another common reason for the lack of support for ELSAs by the staff appeared to be due to the teacher’s personality. The following ELSA writes about planning to go to the headteacher with their concern:

One concern I have is that I expected to get no referrals from a particular teacher because she is more ‘standoffish ‘with non-teaching staff. Surprise no referrals. But soon end of year and children in different class in September. If none again with her new class even though identified now, will discuss with [head]. (r/j42).

An ELSA wrote about a teacher who did not appear to appreciate the importance of her work with a CYP in the class by not following up an activity:

Disappointed with staff in child M class – so far this week has only completed jigsaw once – should be several times daily, initially. Will meet with both again to discuss. Propose child sits at teacher’s feet so good sitting, listening, etc, is caught. If not may need to change tactic. (r/j42).

Even with schools who had an ELSA referral system, it was not all smooth going as the systems set up became burdensome, eg, in one school it was necessary to obtain academic assessment outcomes before the ELSA could engage with the CYP. One particular teacher was not forthcoming with the information so this delayed the time the ELSA could start working with the CYP. It may be pertinent to ask whether being aware of the CYP’s academic ability is necessary so as to delay the CYP’s involvement with the ELSA.

I asked the ELSAs to rate how well they considered they were supported by the teachers since embarking on becoming ELSA on a scale of ‘1’ indicating no support to ‘5’ where they felt they were fully supported. One of the ELSAs working at a school where the teachers had not been informed about the training indicated ‘1’. Their colleague who trained to be an ELSA at the same school rated the teachers as ‘2’ but she was working with a CYP and she considered the class teacher to be supportive. The remaining ELSAs rated their teacher colleagues at ‘4’ for their support, however, for one of these ELSAs she rated the LSAs at ‘1’ and another wanted to clarify there was a teacher who was not as supportive as they could be and wanted to distinguish them from the rest of the staff and so rated them as at ‘2’.

2.4.8 Hierarchical attitude

The ELSAs were aware of the fine line of authority which exists in many schools: When working with teachers there can be a non-formal pecking order with LSAs usually seen as below that of the teacher. This can be an issue for ELSAs when they know more about the CYP’s emotional well-being than the CYP’s class teacher. For one particular ELSA, they were concerned about how far they should inform the CYP’s class teacher in how to engage with the CYP:

…discuss new referral – child low independence – cloakroom, learning etc… [ELSA colleague] and I [held] lots of discussion about possible intervention – good but soon became unclear where our role ends and the teachers begins. ELSA still new to school [so] don’t want to get too stuck in and put teachers off accessing it. (r/j38).

**2.5 Relationship with LSAs: Positive aspects:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with their LSAs at their schools. I shall begin with exploring the positives aspects which were: LSAs being supportive of their ELSA role and being able to provide them with training.

2.5.1 Supportive

There seemed to be a shared view that for most of the ELSAs the training had not altered their relationship with their LSA colleagues. One reason given for this is that the other LSAs were not aware they had been on the training course and, for the few that were aware, there was limited opportunity to discuss the course due to different working patterns. For one of the ELSAs most of the LSAs who were aware they had been on the training course these LSAs were extremely supportive of her. With another ELSA, it would appear raising EL awareness was a whole school objective so providing LSAs with ideas on how to work with supporting their EL awareness was more readily accepted by them:

Originally, I liked the idea that the LSAs are [sic] kept up to speed and involved in everything and they are aware of it and they are aware that [ELSA colleague] and I are doing different things, but it was ways that we could involve the LSAs… and we’re all making a big push… With certain children that I’m working with, [for example] the guy with the anger issue, I talked to the LSA as much as the teacher about what’s going on in class and… I’ve spoken to quite a few of the LSAs who are out on the playground with him… So obviously, a lot of the LSAs have got on board to do with that guy and that is something, if they see something, if they hear something’s passed on to them, it is very visibly dealt with and they go back and speak to this lad afterwards, so there’s an end result as well… he’s been listened to, it’s happened, there’s been a consequence for the child, sort of thing, so yeah, they are involved, but if you pull them in and say what is ELSA within your school they may not be aware to that extent really. (i/v76/77/75).

2.5.2 Providing training to LSAs

One of the ELSAs found themselves providing training to their LSA colleagues in understanding CYP’s behaviour, eg, Autism. This had come about due to the realisation of how unprepared their colleagues were in working with a CYP with Autism:

[I] delivered some informal training with both nursery nurses and a LSA Re: Working with our autistic boy: What to expect, triggers when [things] goes [sic] wrong, what to do, strategies, expectations etc. Really so they can offer support or cover for 1:1 if a ‘bad’ day. Went ok. Though should have been delivered back in Autumn. Makes me realised how unready we were last September and how unsupported the 1:1 must have felt. Shame on us. Not good enough for LSA or the child. Maybe offer to other staff in preparation for September and child moves to Year 1 and more visible and more part of main school. Discuss with [headteacher]. (r/j35/36/37).

**Relationship with LSAs: Frustrations:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the LSAs at their school. Having explored the positives I will now explore the frustrations perceived by the ELSAs between themselves and the LSAs at their schools the main one being how the role created tension between them.

2.5.3 Created tension

The ELSA role created tension between themselves and their LSA colleagues for one ELSA, in particular, she considered this was due to her LSA colleagues querying why she was chosen to attend the training over them. However, when her LSA colleagues reflected on her new role they appeared to appreciate they did not possess the personal qualities to be an ELSA:

I feel awkward at times that I feel like they might be saying, ‘Well why has she done the training and nobody else has?’ So I do feel a bit, but then a lot of them say that they couldn’t do what I do anyway, you know, they couldn’t run after a child who’s had a kick off or listen to some of the things or work with some of the children… They say, ‘Gosh, don’t know how you deal with it’. (i/v103).

**Relationship with the CYP: Positive aspects:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the CYP at their school. The first area to be explored are the positive aspects which were: Being able to work with the CYP in a unique role and in providing a positive environment to do so, developing trust with the CYP and the feeling of making a difference in that CYP’s life. Each of these positive aspects are explored in more detail below.

2.6.1 Unique role

ELSAs shared how the training had improved their understanding for possible reasons behind a CYP’s presentation. They found themselves in a role different to that of a teacher or a LSA in knowing how to meet the CYP’s needs as this ELSA shared:

The two Year 6s that I was involved with last term, theirs was all about communication and friendship building and confidence and they were quite different children when they left the school. Obviously I was one part in that whole process, but I do think my role was - did contribute to that. Because it was different, I wasn’t the teacher, the teacher was working on the academic things, the LSAs were the support side. I had a whole different role and we could talk about - right down to things like when they were doing, case studies, or whatever they were, up at [secondary school], who they were going with, how they were getting there, organising themselves with a diary so we could start getting organised now as they’d have to be and they’d gone home and told their parents they had to stop getting their school uniform out and stop packing their bags for them, and we had a very amusing few weeks, until they got in the swing of it. So yes, I mean all that side, nobody else, it doesn’t fit as easy in somebody else’s role as it did within the ELSA. Within that whole package of things we were doing, so yeah, I think they had a big impact, really, on them. (i/v81).

For one ELSA the training had given her the confidence to ‘think outside the box’ to adapt ideas shared on the course with one CYP and to think even more creatively for another:

Two children that spring to mind: One who is a complete worrier and it was actually the video that we watched on the ELSA training course, the worry worms. I changed it a bit and made them out of card, laminated them and cut them out and put them in a little bag and that changed quite significantly that child’s life. That was overnight. And then also another one… we had a child who was moving to Wales… he was worried, not sleeping… I asked him what his main worry was about going to Wales. He says, ‘It’s because I won’t be able to speak Welsh,’ and it was a predominantly Welsh speaking school that he was going to so I said well learn it then… It took me hours and hours and hours… preparing this book in Welsh… and that book he carted about with him everywhere. And they [CYP and their family] actually went… [to] look at the school and he took the book with him and they said, ‘Has a Welsh speaker prepared this for you?’ and she said, ‘No’. And they said this person has done a really good job so that in itself was, although it was doing something simplish [sic] like that, it just helped him… Because it’s not just thinking, I need[ed] to do this activity for this child and not worrying about moving and talking to them. No, it was doing something more, it was giving that child something to focus on that was different so it’s not always just thinking this is the solution. We’ve got to… [use] solution focused thinking… his main worry is learning Welsh, let’s learn Welsh, let’s make it really simple. (i/v81).

As the ELSAs became more confident in their role they found the CYP’s perspective of how they viewed themselves and their interaction with others to be quite different to those of the staff. It was not unusual for staff to misread CYP’s behaviour and to ascertain which skills they considered the CYP needed to develop when there were other skills/areas of concern which the ELSA considered needed to be addressed first having met with the CYP. Thus, planning for a six-eight week intervention ahead of time had to be treated with caution. Instead, the ELSAs found planning needed to be conducted on a weekly basis in order to best meet the CYP’s EL awareness and, even then, they had to be prepared to abandon the planning in order to meet the CYP’s needs as recognised by the following ELSA in her reflection journal:

Spent quite a while planning first session trying to get it right but, as always, the planning went out of the window and I let the child talk. This resulted in a lovely relaxed first session and me feeling like this could be a good start. (r/j48).

Another ELSA informed me:

I’ve got a better understanding now of not to expect and what to expect, do you know what I mean? It’s actually knowing take the time get to know the child and not make of any sort of like judgments or I don’t anticipate anything. I don’t expect and that’s a good thing that’s come out of it. (i/v130).

2.6.2 Creating a positive environment

The ELSAs, if within their power to do so, tried to ensure CYP saw them when they were least likely to miss out on something exciting happening in their class or during one of the CYP’s favourite lessons. In addition, when the ELSA met with the CYP they tried to make their session together interesting:

… so in the sessions we play fun and games and I make it as fun as possible, like there’s a game where to notice to something different you wear something silly and they quite enjoy the games that they do. (i/v167).

2.6.3 Importance of trust

One of the challenges recognised by the ELSAs was explaining to CYP why they were working with them without drawing too much attention to why they are seeing the ELSA but, at the same time, not wanting to misinform them either since the ELSAs wanted to build relationships based on truth and honesty. This ELSA recognised the conflict in trying to achieve this balance and how she managed to find a way round it:

Group of 8 children, how do I tell them that they are here because of their self-esteem issues and need to work on their friendship skills and end up with children feeling worse?? I decided to tell them that they were my friendship ambassadors and that they would be learning about how to be good friends with other children and how if those children are a little worried or wobbly about something then perhaps these children may be able to identify and help these children. The children responded well to this thought and talked about different ways in which may help. I think that cherry picking the information helped to get the children to come out of their shells a little and talk to each other. They probably reflected on their own feelings and insecurities. (r/j42/75/42).

The importance of trust between the ELSA and the CYP they are working with was very important as one ELSA wrote:

The biggest thing for me is the knowing they’ve got somebody cos teachers can’t always be there. They’ve got a class of thirty children to look after. So it’s just being there for that child and when that child actually comes and seeks you out to tell you something, whether it’s good or bad, it’s the best feeling in the world that you’re there for them and they trust you. (i/v112).

2.6.4 Making a difference

The joy of making a significant impact on a CYP’s behaviour for the better was a feature with the ELSAs, eg,

What a lovely session! [I] felt so proud of child as she told me all about keeping diary and how, even when someone had broken her bracelet, she had kept calm and not lashed out. She remembered all of the things we had discussed previous week and acted on them. [I’m] so pleased with her. Just hearing that she had not lashed out made me walk on air. The feeling like you have given this child a magnificent tool to build on! (r/j72/43).

The relationship between the ELSA and their CYP appeared to have been very special which was more apparent when reading through ELSAs’ reflective journals than was ascertained during an interview. This I rationalise as writing a journal is similar to writing a diary which is a more personal, intimate way of recording thoughts. For example:

I have enjoyed working with HP. I have seen a small improvement which is encouraging. Year 3 can be a huge upheaval for some children. I hope that she finds herself in year 4. She is happy about her new teacher so that is a start. (r/j43).

As a result of attending the training this ELSA felt they had broken down the barriers and increased the CYP’s confidence:

Saw [CYP] in the corridor today – she said ‘[ELSA’s name]’ to get my attention and waved to me. I feel this is a breakthrough in her confidence. Previously she has just walked by looking very shy and timid. (i/v81).

**Relationship with CYP: Frustrations:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the CYP they worked with in their school. Having explored the positive aspects I will now examine the frustration the ELSAs shared which was their awareness of the limitations of their involvement with the CYP. This area is explored in more detail below.

2.6.5 Awareness of limitations

ELSAs often build a close bond with their CYP, however, they need to be guided to ensure they have time for themselves:

But I also make myself available, they always know where to find me, even if it’s not their turn to come and see me, they know where I am, so - and I’m always doing lunch club and things, so I always say - come down if you need to have a chat. (i/v63/112).

Although ELSAs tend to work with CYP in a one-to-one situation, in the main, there are occasions when group work is appropriate, eg, working on developing social interaction skills. This ELSA shared the frustration of the dynamics of group working in her reflective journal:

[I] discovered that the circle time games really pull them all together. Great for a group activity. All worked together well and enjoyed it. I find that if it’s not fast paced and interesting then the boys of the group get a bit rowdy. Making sure that they all have an activity to do for the whole session and also sitting boys apart from each other. (r/j77/42).

The ELSAs informed me of the limitations of their involvement when trying to bring about positive change for a child due to their personality as seen in the following reflections:

It’s really difficult … I suspect the input I’m giving to him, although I don’t get a lot out of him in a session (I think that’s his nature) I think he probably takes that information away and does what… he will [with it] and it does make a certain difference to him. (i/v143).

I think it’s when you’ve done the sessions and you’ve come to the end of the session and you review what progress you’ve made and sometimes it’s very little if any at all, it is a big frustration because you know when you’ve put a lot of time and effort into it and you feel you’ve really done what you can and then you think well, ‘These haven’t really progressed on much at all, if any’. I think that’s the frustrating part of it. (i/v153).

There is also the inevitable issue of ending the ELSA involvement as this ELSA shared in her reflective journal and of her strategy to help the children through it:

I wasn't sure how to end, after having the children for so many sessions they were all a little sad for it to end. I think that letting them know it’s only short term doesn't raise any expectations. … We discussed how they would be using their new skills in the playground and discussed what they would have done in a variety of situations then and how they would do it differently now. (r/j83/84).

**2.7 Relationship with parents: Positive aspects:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the parents of the CYP they were working with. The first area to be explored is the positive aspects which were: Increased confidence in speaking with parents and parents seeking ELSA support. Each of these will be explored in more detail below.

2.7.1 Confidence to work with parents

ELSAs informed me they were now more confident to engage with the CYP’s parents, eg,

It’s given me some confidence. I do feel like I know what I’m talking about, if that makes sense. Parents do scare me because you don’t know how they’re going to react, but I have had a few phone calls from parents, you know, asking for help and I’ve asked the Headteacher if it was OK, you know, if I sort of dealt with the parent or had a chat with the parent and she said that it’s fine. (i/v102/53).

The ELSAs considered they were better able to direct their questioning of the CYP with parents:

It’s definitely made me more understanding as of the children as to reasons what they might be acting like they’re acting instead of just thinking well they’re being a bit naughty definitely your reasons are there or you know what’s gone wrong and you can say, oh they’ve been a bit, to a parent you can say, ‘They’ve been a bit upset today is there anything I should know?’ You know so I think it definitely gives you that understanding to work with parents. (i/v102).

The ELSAs also demonstrated their ability to be use reflexivity on what and how to discuss issues with parents, eg,

I think I’m a lot more guarded in what I tell them. I would work on a ‘need to know basis’ so as not worry them about things. I’m not a 100% sure on that. I don’t think I’m particularly any different in my personality wise but I just think that obviously you don’t draw into conversation, well your son’s kicked a child, do you think it could be your divorce or, you know, I wouldn’t pry for information. I would give them benefit of coming to talk to me or perhaps, rather than jumping to conclusions about their behaviour. (i/v107).

One ELSA informed me they already worked with parents but tended to find their initial meeting negative, however, the ELSA training had equipped them in making the first impression more favourable:

I think it’s [ELSA training course] steered you in the right direction in what sort of things to say not out of turn. Give you the right language and things to say and sort of how far to go before ‘passing the buck’ onto someone else so I think that’s been quite [helpful]. (i/v107).

2.7.2 Parents seeking ELSA support for their child

In some of the schools where the ELSAs worked there were parents who have actively sought ELSA support for their CYP, eg,

His mother has also identified problems [with bullying] to me during discussion when the children arrive in the morning, and [the mother] has asked when I will be starting work with her child. (r/j30).

It’s normally the parent who has requested some sort of help from the school for one reason or another. (r/j106/105).

Where ELSAs have been involved with a CYP, on the whole, parents had been extremely supportive as this ELSA wrote in her reflective journal:

After the first couple of days the child was coming into school happy, with a worry worm in his pocket. It seemed that the worms were doing the trick. After a week I received a lovely message from mum saying how she had a different child and that she was so grateful for all of the time that I had spent with her child and that she and dad couldn't believe the difference in him. She also rang the school and spoke to a colleague and explained that he was sitting in the bath every night and telling each worm a worry (as directed) and that every morning he would wake up happy to go to school. (r/j87/86)

**Relationship with parents: Frustrations:**

This sub-theme under Relationships held within it positive and not so positive aspects of how the ELSAs perceived their relationship with the parents in their school. Having explored the positive aspect it would appear there was a frustration for the ELSA in their relationship with parents, ie, the conflict in approaches in how a CYP managed situations between home and school. This is explored in more detail below.

2.7.3 Conflict of approaches between home and school

There appeared to be a tension for the ELSAs with parental approaches to dealing with situations differing from the school’s approach as one ELSA informed me:

You could be working with the child and that can all just go. The parents do the complete opposite of what you’re working on, for example, anger. And you’re telling the child, ‘Walk away’, and the parent’s telling the child - you know how it goes, ‘Hit ‘em back’, and stuff… Things like keeping the children off when they really shouldn’t be off [from school], that’s when you don’t get the consistency; and feeding the children things, about friendships so the children have this whole perception of what a friend should be or what friends shouldn’t do, and you think it’s no wonder they have low self-esteem. If this has been told at home, this is what’s said at home, or this is how they’re treated…

Though this same ELSA had thought about ways in trying to avoid this conflict but they still faced obstacles:

Information for parents, maybe. I found various leaflets and things, but, a lot of the trouble is, I’ve found things and thought, ‘ooh they’re great. I’ll slip one of those in the book bag’, but, unfortunately, they just stay in the book bag and it’s very hard to give a parent a, ‘Ooh look, this is about parenting, you might want to have a look at it’. It’s not the easiest in the thing in the world... And we give them the parent support adviser number, but again, they don’t always get in touch with her, so it’s very much, you know, you’ve done what you can and it’s on the parents… Yes, sometimes it can be the smallest thing that really could help the child, just giving them ten minutes of their time every night for a cuddle and a chat and a catch up would make so much difference to these children and that’s quite frustrating. (i/v114/113).

**Summary**

As a reminder, the central aim and research question of this thesis was to explore:

How had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community in working with developing their CYP’s EL awareness?

I wanted to know the story the ELSAs had to tell whether that be through their reflective journal and/or semi-structured interview. The purpose of knowing the ELSAs’ perspective was to gain a greater understanding of their perception of their ELSA role and whether the ELSA training had made an impact on their skills with working with CYP and their EL awareness. In acquiring the ELSAs’ perspective the training course could be adapted to suit their needs. The research findings also have implications for EPs as they play a major role in the training and clinical supervision of ELSAs. The ELSAs’ perspectives would also allow schools to be aware of the challenges facing ELSAs in conducting their role. Schools would also be able to ascertain whether having an ELSA in their school assisted in raising EL awareness amongst the school community.

From the feedback I received from the ELSAs in this study there appears to be two main themes: ELSA’s role and relationships. Within each of these themes there presented sub-themes most of which divided up into positive and not so positive aspects. On the whole, ELSAs shared positive experiences such as being provided with new opportunities and job satisfaction. Their potential was being recognised by their (some) members of the SMT, their role was supported by (some) colleagues, they considered they were making a real difference for CYP in developing their EL awareness, the ELSAs felt more confident when engaging with parents and they were appreciative of the ELSA network in their area. However, there were areas which could be improved especially being provided with greater support from (some) members of their SMT and teaching colleagues. They felt their role caused tension with (some) LSAs, and they felt frustrated by the conflict between different approaches with some parents and school with regards to how CYP handle social situations. In the next chapter I will discuss the themes in more detail.

**CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION**

**Introduction**

This thesis explored how had the ELSA training affected the ELSA’s engagement with their school community with working in developing their CYP’s EL awareness taken from the perspective of the ELSAs from semi-structured interviews and (for most of the ELSAs) from their reflective journals. All seven ELSAs who participated in this study consented to be part of a semi-structured interview whilst five also kept reflective journals. All the data was analysed using TA (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify themes. I have kept in mind questions Yardley (2000) invites the researcher to consider whilst conducting their study, eg, my involvement with the research such as the length and depth of my engagement with the data.

The results have been presented with small commentaries added as I worked through the (sub)themes identified in an approach similar to Hollway’s (1989) analysis of her data for her thesis. Like her, when reflecting on the data generated from interviews and focus group activities, where she states, “In the end I would easily have had enough of the right kind of material, that is participants’ accounts of themselves and their relationships, without organising the weekend,” (Hollway, 1989, p12), I also found I had generated a wealth of data from the semi-structured interviews and the reflective journals. However, the two methods of data gathering supplemented each other as I found the latter to be a more personal reflection by the ELSAs where they had a greater degree of control over what they wrote compared to the more formal setting of an interview which no matter how relaxed I could have made the sessions it would never be as natural an engagement as writing the equivalent of a personal diary.

In this chapter I intend to explore the (sub) themes and how they relate to findings in existing literature whilst I acknowledge the claim this study can never be perfectly replicable (Parker, 1996, p11). I also acknowledge,

People’s subjectivities are produced within discourses, history and relations, and the meanings that they produce in accounts of their experience and themselves both reproduce these subjectivities and can modify them. (Hollway, 1989, p41).

Throughout this thesis I have provided reflections on aspects of my personal journey to where I currently am. I hope these reflections will have aided the reader in understanding my perspective and give licence to my interpretation of others’ discourses. I have detailed my epistemological and ontological positioning though I have found it challenging to find a position to label myself as I do not feel comfortable being categorised. However, my ontological approach appears to have more in common with the interpretivist paradigm with elements of critical realism whilst I consider reality to be an individual experience. The use of phrases such as EL and emotionality have been challenging to define and are not something that can be measured nor are they fixed. I also acknowledge the influence of aspects of feminist principles:

Feminist research personal accounts by being sensitive to contradictions and avoidances, by exploring similarities and differences between them and by encouraging participants to go beyond abstract generalities…. I have realised that there is no context, however privates and searching, which could provide the account which tells the whole truth. (Hollway, 1989, p41).

I will end the chapter with a summary of the overall outcomes in respect to the aim of this study.

**Theme One: ELSA’s role**

As with Grahamslaw’s (2010) findings the ELSAs in this research shared the training and supervision had provided them with a greater awareness of how to support CYP. Knowing that there was regular ongoing clinical supervision following the initial six day training course provided the ELSAs with even greater confidence in supporting CYP with their EL awareness as they knew if they needed support it would be available to them.

The ELSAs felt they had a distinct, but important, role to play in their schools over and above being a LSA. It would appear the ELSA training had provided them with new opportunities, eg, one of the ELSAs acted in a consultancy role for LSA colleagues with regards to Autism. Several ELSAs expressed how they had been given greater autonomy to plan their timetable, had found ingenious ways of informing colleagues about ELSA and how they had set up referral systems.

The training had also reinforced qualities and capabilities many of the ELSAs had not realised fully they had within them. This can be indicative of the need for line managers to acknowledge and praise their staff whenever possible. In addition, some of the ELSAs felt overwhelmed with the role and questioned within themselves whether they had the skills to be able to support CYP with their EL awareness but these concerns were secondary to the enthusiasm in wanting to engage in the role. Nonetheless, it raises the issue of communication between ELSAs and their line managers in preparing the ELSAs for their new role and providing ongoing support.

The ELSAs expressed how they liked being available to provide immediate support to CYP without the need for the school to complete (lengthy) referral paperwork to request external agency involvement. Working as a staff member negated the need for the school to set up meetings with parents for them or for the school to seek external support. In addition, being a staff member meant the ELSA was aware of the school systems and familiar with the staff. Quite often, the ELSA was also familiar with the CYP and vice versa so a rapport could be established much more quickly than with the CYP having to work with someone less familiar. Another advantage of the ELSA working at the school meant that once the intervention had been completed the ELSA could keep in touch with the CYP on an informal basis rather than, possibly, not ever seeing them again which quite often happens with intervention from external agents.

Following the training several of the ELSAs shared how they undertook a review of resources within their schools and were pleasantly surprised as to how much there was which had been underutilised. Nonetheless, the training and supervision had provided the message of encouraging ELSAs to think about the importance of placing the needs of the CYP first and not assuming a single resource would be suitable in meeting the CYP’s needs. As such I have found the ELSAs to be extremely creative in thinking about and making up bespoke resources for their CYP.

**Theme Two: Relationships**

The ELSAs expressed their relationship with their trainers and supervisors as being positive with the support provided by clinical supervision, in particular, helping to alleviate apparent lack of support from their SMT. A similar observation was made by Burton (2008) as she states:

For ELSAs, the difficulty identified by Carnwell and Baker (2007) of adequate support for group facilitators is overcome by regular group supervision led by EPs and by the possibility of individual support from the school’s link EP. ELSAs are encouraged to contact their link EP by phone or e-mail in the event of any additional need. Feedback suggests they feel well supported by this direct access to psychologists. (p48).

In addition, the training and clinical supervision had provided the ELSAs with a close bond with each other as they felt at ease to share ideas and resources as well as their experiences both positive and not so positive. In general, the ELSAs expressed not only did they feel more confident in working with CYP but also in engaging with school colleagues in discussing the CYP’s EL and with the CYP’s parents. However, one of the main concerns expressed by the ELSAs was their frustration with their schools of not understanding what their new role would entail.

This frustration was also apparent in supervision sessions especially for ELSAs who were not being utilised by their schools yet, contradictorily, the SMT of their schools were releasing them to attend supervision when they had no children to discuss. Not only did the ELSAs who were not being utilised by their schools feel frustrated but they also felt uncomfortable attending supervision as they considered, with no casework to share, they were not able to contribute fully to the meetings. Practising ELSAs were equally frustrated with their plight with one, in particular, appearing so frustrated with the lack of contribution by them that they did not return to clinical supervision sessions after completing the minimum of four sessions. I presume they were not gaining as much from the sharing of experiences as they were putting in.

However, after attending several supervision sessions one of the ELSAs, knowing they had the support for her ELSA colleagues and the EP, had the confidence to approach their line manager to seek an explanation as whether they would ever be a practising ELSA. As a consequence, shortly after, they began to work as an ELSA. I consider if there had not been clinical supervision following the training it would have been unlikely this ELSA would have become an active ELSA. My reasoning for this is I observed ELSAs who stopped attending clinical supervision following the initial four sessions were less likely to be utilised by their schools. Unfortunately, for those ELSAs who were not practising their role they do not receive the ELSA certification as one of the requirements is to evidence such practice, thus, their time and energy (as well as the loss for the school of a LSA whilst they attended the training and supervision sessions) was for no official recognition. I found from the scaling exercise with the ELSAs during the semi-structured interviews on how they gauged EL awareness by SMT seemed to be a determining factor as to whether ELSAs were likely to conduct their role. That is, the schools where the ELSAs considered there to be a high level of EL awareness were more likely to be utilised. However, this scaling exercise did not equate to their perceived level of EL understanding by the school: One of the schools was considered by two ELSAs to be EL aware but lacked understanding. This same school had not utilised one of the ELSAs whilst the other had been involved with just the one child.

Some ELSAs shared there were barriers which appeared to be placed by SMT preventing them from informing staff about their role. Only two ELSAs (from the same school) were given the opportunity to present their new role at a staff meeting and a referral system established as soon as the training had completed. However, in the majority of cases, teachers became aware of the ELSA because they were working with a CYP from their class who had been identified by the ELSA or SENCO as requiring ELSA support. One of the ELSAs approached teachers individually to inform them about their role and created a small poster about ELSA for the staff room and placed information leaflets in the staff pigeon holes. In order to promote the ELSA’s skills Burton (2013) has supplied a flyer highlighting how ELSAs can support CYP along with a letter for headteachers to remind them of how to make effective use of their ELSA (see Appendix 16 for the adapted version for my LA).

Although the ELSAs who were working with CYP considered themselves more confident in their work and relationships with staff and parents, there appeared to be a mixed picture as to their relationships with school colleagues. On the positive side, some of the ELSAs expressed how the SMT had singled them out to become ELSAs as they had the potential to be more than classroom LSAs, which, no doubt boosted their confidence. In addition, it is important for our line managers to recognise the capabilities of those they line manage and encourage them to feel safe in moving onto the next step. For some becoming ELSAs meant they worked more collaboratively with their SENCo in discussing casework and other matters associated with being an ELSA. The feeling of being supported also came through with being given the resources, eg, space, to carry out the role and a budget in order to purchase resources needed without having to ask each time for money.

In line with findings by Grahamslaw (2010), Harris (2010a) and Harris (2010b), for some ELSAs they were not able to carry out their role as there was no planned managerial supervision and, when it did happen, it tended to be ad-hoc. Harris (2010a, p2) states, “[The] opportunity to regularly discuss their work with their line manager is essential”.

Some ELSAs had complete control over their timetable and were so enthusiastic about wanting to work with CYP they had misjudged the time they needed in order to plan, prepare and reflect outside of the sessions. However, even those who were directed by their line manager also shared they had insufficient time to plan, prepare and reflect. If schools are to make effective use of their staff’s skills then time is required: “Quality work needs planning,” (Harris, 2010a, p2) especially in the early days of being an ELSA as they become familiar with their, establishing systems and raising awareness of their role in the school.

The importance of providing ELSAs with the time, as well as the resources and space whilst working with CYP is stated in the application pack and is reiterated by the trainers at the meeting with a member of the ELSA’s SMT on the final afternoon of the training. Since training the cohort in this study, on the first afternoon of the training course, trainers in my LA now go through the application pack received by schools with the ELSAs. This includes the contract signed by their line managers acknowledging what the ELSA needs in order to carry out their role. The pack provides details of what the role entails (ie, the job specification), guidance as to who the school should consider for the role (ie, the person specification) and the conditions ELSAs should expect in order to work with CYP, eg, somewhere pleasant and private. It appears this was an area which needs to be re-emphasised with schools and is not an issue specific to the ELSAs in this research: Devon EPS (2011) have made attempts to meet the needs of ELSAs in fulfilling their role by holding embedding conferences where ELSAs and school representatives attend to explore what the challenges were for ELSAs and possible ways forward/issues for schools to think about in addressing these concerns. In addition, Burton (2013) has produced a letter reminding schools of their commitment to ELSA (copy of adapted version for use in my LA can be found in the Appendix 16).

Some of the ELSAs shared their frustration with their school’s views as to who they should work with. They considered the SMT saw their role was to work with CYP with overt behavioural issues at the expense of those CYP who did not take up as much of the teacher’s or SMT’s time. However, there were some CYP in this latter group who the ELSA considered would benefit from talking to someone about any concerns. In addition, some ELSAs found the attitude of the SMT to be demeaning, ie, somehow the ELSA was going to fix the CYP as if the issues for the CYP’s presentation were entirely within child with no account taken of environmental factors including how staff’s approach to the CYP impacted on them. This could be summed up as, “Do as I say, not as I do”. One ELSA talked about how the child she was working with had apologised to their class teacher over an incident. In front of the class, the teacher rolled up their eyes and dismissed what the child had said as not being heartfelt and would be short-lived.

As with Grahamslaw (2010) for the ELSAs who were practising as ELSAs their profile, in general, had been raised especially amongst the teaching staff. However, in my study where staff were aware of the ELSA there were mixed views as to the acceptance of the ELSA’s role, eg, there was a reluctance by some teachers to seek ELSA support, to follow-up ELSA work with the CYP and to release the ELSA from their classroom LSA duties to conduct their ELSA role. One of the ELSAs shared she had been alienated from her LSA colleagues possibly due to jealousy or, possibly, with them not understanding what the ELSA role involved.

However, there were more positive experiences shared with me than negative, eg, one ELSA had struck up a close friendship with teachers who taught the CYP they were working with. For another ELSA the role had provided them with the opportunity to act as a catalyst in bringing staff together to support a particular CYP in providing them with a team of support. This mixed profile was also found by Cardiff EPS (2012) where just over half of the ELSAs felt they were respected in their role by their schools whilst 67% of school staff noticed the benefits of the ELSAs’ work with CYP. I speculate, as is often the case when new initiatives are being established, with the ELSA’s determination for the role and the positive results from their involvement with CYP SMT and their colleagues will develop a clearer understanding of their role in supporting the development of EL awareness in CYP. Once a new role becomes established schools often wonder how they ever managed before.

The practising ELSAs perceived the most enjoyable (and successful) part of the role was when they are working with CYP. They considered their role was unique in supporting CYP in developing their EL where they were able to make a difference in that individual’s life and whom the CYP was able to trust. The ELSAs tried to make the time spent with the CYP purposeful and fun. However, the eagerness for the role also emphasised the ELSA’s limitations, eg, ensuring they had time for themselves, and in determining the best way of informing the CYP that their time together would be coming to an end. Other limitations tended to be those commonly faced every day when working in schools, eg, controlling the dynamics in group situations and being patient in seeing positive changes in CYP’s EL awareness despite the enormous amount of effort being put in.

It would appear prior to becoming ELSAs they had limited direct involvement with parents, however, following the training some of them were directly involved with the CYP’s parents. As with Grahamslaw’s (2010) study, the ELSAs in my research felt valued by parents including parents seeking out ELSA involvement for their CYP. The ELSAs felt much more confident in engaging with parents but were also more mindful with how to express their concerns. However, ELSAs were frustrated with the inconsistent messages between home and school about how the CYP should deal with a conflict situation. Coverdale and Long (2015) in their research on YP’s emotional well-being and mental health also found parents appreciated the support school is able to provide for their YP’s EL awareness. Coverdale and Long (2015) identified parents’ acknowledgement of needing to develop their understanding about their YP’s emotionality but parents reported feeling uncomfortable about doing so, thus, there is also the need to remove the stigma associated with such discussions for both YP and their parents, eg, by creating more ‘family time’ where the parents and YP engage with activities together. I would consider a possible neutral venue to do so would be at school.

**Summary**

On the whole, the ELSAs reported positively on the training and supervision provided, in particular, enjoyment of the course, acquiring greater understanding of the reasons behind why CYP behave in a particular manner, the opportunity to share experiences, good practice and resource ideas, and to be able to meet and support other ELSAs especially when they were the only ELSA in their school. These outcomes are in line with those of Burton (2008), Bravery and Harris (2009), Hill, O’Hare and Weidberg (2013) and Cardiff EPS (2012). Clinical supervision was also rated highly by the ELSAs with the lowest rating given by the ELSAs being ‘3’ (out of 5). This was from two ELSAs who explained the score was not meant to reflect on the supervisor but there were school-based factors which impacted on their engagement with supervision.

However, it would appear in order for ELSAs to be successful in fulfilling their role there needs to be general EL awareness amongst the staff and the school community. In my study the determining factor of how quickly, and successfully, an ELSA became established in their role depended on the EL awareness of the SMT, ie, the greater the awareness level by the SMT the better the chance the ELSA would carry out their role. As with Bravery and Harris (2009) outcomes, once ELSAs were practising as ELSAs then they were more likely to continue in to practise as ELSAs.

Going hand-in-hand with this was how valued the ELSAs felt they were by their schools: Those who were not practising as ELSAs considered themselves to be less valued while at the other extreme the role of the ELSA had been shared at a staff meeting and referral systems put in place. In between these polar points were various levels of raising the ELSA’s profiles, eg, such as introducing themselves in a piecemeal fashion, catching staff for individual chats about a CYP which the ELSA considered might benefit from their involvement and placing leaflets in staff pigeon holes about their role.

On the whole, relationships with staff members were positive, however, for some ELSAs, there were teachers who did not appear to appreciate the need for consistency for the ELSA when working with CYP. There was also a possible element of jealousy from other LSAs. There appeared to be varying degrees of support from SMT for the ELSAs as well, ie, from closer working relationship with the SENCo, having resources and a budget to ad-hoc supervision and no support in planning their timetable. One of the issues arising out of the latter was ELSAs taking on too many cases and not giving themselves time within the school day to plan, prepare and reflect. The lack of managerial supervision was a major concern for all ELSAs. However, CYP and parents, on the whole, appeared to value their work. For ELSAs the main areas of achievement was working with the CYP especially in making positive changes in their EL awareness.

I consider the involvement of the SMT at the meeting on the final afternoon of the training and ELSAs’ access to half-termly supervision to be the back-bone in establishing and maintaining the ELSA provision in schools. In attending the meeting the SMT is able to learn at first-hand what the ELSAs have covered in their training (albeit in a summarised form). The half-termly date in the diary for clinical supervision session keeps the initiative in mind. The training and clinical supervision enables ELSAs to be empowered to discuss their role with their SMT as they are aware of how ELSA is being run in other schools. Since ELSA trainees are also given the application pack on Day 1, which schools the signed contract for, they are more aware of the school’s commitment to the initiative.

**Issues arising out of the outcomes**

Schools cannot expect ELSAs to work in isolation in supporting CYP with their EL awareness. EL awareness affects everyone and the community as a whole. Understanding what is EL enables us to understand ourselves and those around us. Schools should develop a whole school approach in raising EL awareness. This viewpoint is shared by the NHEG (NICE, 2011) as can be seen in their response to the targeting of specific groups of CYP requiring support with developing their EL awareness as they state in the consultation document ‘Promoting children’s social and emotional well-being in primary education’ (NICE, 2008):

Not sure we like the idea of a deficit model. If learning in this area is a core entitlement (supported by Education Acts in the past) we should seek to develop this for all pupils not seek to see that some pupils lack this. (p29).

In a similar vein, Morewood (2009), who shared lessons learnt from setting up therapeutic approaches at a secondary school at the Promoting Mental Health in Schools Conference in 2009, states:

My work with, and research of, such provision over the past seven years has left me in no doubt that for any therapeutic provision to be truly effective, the approach must be reflected throughout whole-school policy and practice. Bolt-on provision and expectations that therapy can work in isolation, does not provide sustained positive outcomes for the young people concerned. (p22-23).

Schools also have the responsibility to safeguard the emotional well-being of their ELSAs with regards to the number and types of cases. ELSAs should not be exposed to emotional harm by being stressed with the number of cases they are expected to undertake (bearing in mind each case needs time for planning, preparation and reflection) and should be protected from taking on (too many) cases which are emotionally-draining for them. Systems should be in place for ELSAs to be able to debrief should be the need arise.

Nor should ELSAs be viewed as being able to fix a CYP. It has taken many years for the CYP to be the person they are; changes in their presentation cannot be expected immediately but the ELSA can sow the seed with the opportunity for re-engagement with the CYP later in the year. There will be times when not even the skills of an ELSA will be able to meet the needs of the CYP. Thus, ELSAs should feel comfortable in informing the SENCo the need for the CYP to be signposted for additional support, eg, to the school’s EP or to CAMHS without any judgement being made of their capabilities.

Furthermore, ELSAs will require a higher level of Child Protection (CP) training over and above the universal course given to all staff members due to the greater likelihood of a disclosure being made to them.

**Final comments**

Davies’ (2013), in her report on the state of CYP’s health (including mental health) in England and Wales, calls upon headteachers and LAs to play their part in helping to support CYP’s (mental) health. I consider there to be a close link between emotional well-being and mental health: If an individual is having difficulty managing their emotions for an extended period of time this may lead to mental health concerns. The Coalition Government in their 2011 publication ‘No Health Without Mental Health’ (DoH, 2011) also seeks for schools to be more aware of who has mental health concerns as YP are more likely to have mental health concerns than any other group (DoH, 2011). The latest figures indicate 75% of adult mental health problems begin before the age of 18 (Davies, 2013), thus, schools have a great deal of responsibility in supporting the national agenda in meeting the EL needs of our CYP by early identification of possible signs of mental health concerns so the CYP can receive the support they need from the onset. Schools can be supported with this in training staff in mental health awareness, eg, Youth Mental Health First Aid (MHFA, 2012).

The current financial climate has been more challenging than ever for schools. My LA is one which receives the least amount of funding from central government. This has a knock on effect with the amount of money allocated to schools and then for schools to allocate their resources. Nonetheless, schools have a statutory duty to ensure CYP with SEN Statements (or an Education, Health Care Plan (EHCP) from September, 2014) are provided with the support they are legally obliged to; after this, it is then up to the discretion of the headteacher as to how to use their LSAs. Unfortunately, I am aware schools have had to cut back on staff members due to financial pressures and LSAs are often the first to be cut back on, thus, once schools have met their legal obligation with regards to CYP with a Statement of SEN (and those with an EHCP) there is limited LSA time available for the remaining CYP. As schools have to be ever more accountable for the academic progress their CYP make and to show value added, work on supporting CYP’s EL awareness can appear low in the list of priorities compared to achieving numeracy and literacy targets. But are schools making best use of their LSAs?

The use of LSA time for CYP with a Statement (or EHCP) in mainstream education has been a focus in a recent study by Webster and Blatchford (2013). It would appear these CYP make less academic progress than their peers due to spending time out of the classroom to be taught by the LSA. This means they have less access to qualified teaching and with their peers. In addition, as well as the quality of teaching being of a lower standard the planning of the CYP’s curriculum is also of a lower standard as it is often left to the LSA to plan. Although Webster and Blatchford (2013) recognise the good intentions of the LSA, however, it is not surprising these CYP are failing since a LSA does not have the same level of training as a teacher. Even then, Webster and Blatchford found teachers considered they lacked the training to be able to meet the needs of the CYP with Statements and, misguidedly, were relying on the LSA to plan and execute the teaching as it was considered by the teacher the LSA had a greater understanding of the CYP’s needs with working with them more intensively. Similar findings to that of Webster and Blatchford’s can be seen in the current study in that many teachers did not seem to be aware of what the ELSA was doing with CYP. It would appear teachers and ELSAs need to liaise with each other with teachers providing opportunities to follow-up on the work CYP have been covering whilst with the ELSA. In terms of financial commitment, I consider the cost of establishing an ELSA in a school is financially worthwhile compared to the cost of other initiatives, eg, SEAL (DfES, 2005) which Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) state cost at least £40 million pounds to roll out across the country. Despite this expenditure the SEAL initiative is no longer recognised by the current Coalition Government so it has fallen by the wayside in many schools.

The ELSAs in this study received their training for free paid for by TAMHS money allocated to the Educational Psychology Service. Despite the financial pressure on schools budgets, Burton (2008) has found there has been a sharp growth in the take-up of ELSA training which is also reflected in my LA with all training courses full and a waiting list for future courses. One of the drivers for this is for schools to demonstrate good use of Pupil Premium (money given by the Coalition Government aimed at improving the outcomes of CYP from lower socio-economic backgrounds). ELSA has been shared by the LA as an example of good use of this money (Charlesworth, 2013).

In addition, I also consider the demand for ELSAs in my LA is due to many of the headteachers being aware of the importance of ensuring developing their CYP’s EL awareness. I consider these headteachers want their CYP to feel secure and safe (whilst in school) along similar lines to Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ (1943). They know if their CYP are able to manage their emotionality they are more likely to engage in their learning and have positive social interactions. In addition, the learning of their peers is less likely to be affected by inappropriate behaviour. One example of a school who placed the importance of their CYPs’ emotional development above all else was where the headteacher and the Year 6 teacher wrote to all their Year 6 pupils when issuing the outcomes of the Year 6 SAT examinations. As well as informing them how well they had achieved in their examinations, these staff members shared how much they valued them as individuals. They stated the pupils should not base all their school experience on one set of examinations. These staff members informed their pupils they were more important than examination results describing the children as, “special and unique” (ITV News, 2014). I consider this letter was written in response to then Secretary for Education, Michael Gove’s, pressure on schools for children to ascertain even more demanding academic higher targets in literacy and numeracy at the expense of its impact on CYP’s emotionality.

ELSA is different to other interventions implemented by the Government in that it does not use a ‘one size fits all’ approach, for example, as SEAL does with its whole-school termly themed approach. Instead, the ELSA recognises where the CYP are at with their emotionality and supports them to fill the gaps in their emotional awareness.

In the long run, I argue not only is it better for CYP to be able to manage their emotions and have a better understanding of the emotions of others but they will take up less precious teacher (and other staff members’) time in dealing with incidents especially if they occur in the classroom and affect the learning of others. The outcome of all this, it would be hoped, would be for more CYP being able to engage in their learning with improved educational outcomes which will satisfy the Government, with its league tables, and OFSTED, with its focus on academic outcomes and, when CYP leave education, to be able to engage with the world in appropriate manner. Thus, raising EL awareness is a win-win for everyone.

One criticism I would place with ELSA is the referral tick sheet whereby the referrer, which is typically the teacher, rating from 1-5 how the CYP presents, eg, in their ability to make friendships, as a snapshot judgement of an individual usually seen in one context, ie, the school environment. I have raised this concern on the training course. Fortunately, it has been in my experience, ELSAs use the referral sheet as that taken from the referrer’s perspective only. The ELSAs tend to keep an open mind and ascertain from the CYP, in their initial meetings, how they perceive their needs and then work from this premise. Even then, we need to be guided by the CYP as to how far they wish to go along the journey at that current time in being supported with their emotionality. We also need to be aware of the CYP’s perspective as we can misjudge a CYP’s presentation. There have been occasions, when the ELSA has met with the CYP, there has appeared to be no issues with their emotionality rather it has been the referrer who has had the issues, eg, conflict of personalities. There have also been cases where the ELSA’s involvement has raised concerns about the home situation which has explained why the CYP presents as they do. Thus, the ELSA has been the catalyst in placing a support team around the CYP as was seen with one of the ELSAs in this current study.

I also believe that it is extremely important for staff members to be aware of their own level of EL awareness and how their actions, both overt and covert, can affect their relationship with their CYP, staff members and the school community. I do not advocate the screening of how emotionally aware staff are as I consider emotionality cannot be measured as an exact science. For most individuals, I feel, there is something innate within us to appreciate when an individual may need support with managing and recognising their emotions and/or how to understand the emotions of others.

The next chapter will explore what impact the outcomes from this research has on EPs, schools and LAs, the limitations of this research and areas of further research inspired from this study.

**CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION**

**Introduction**

The outcomes from this research showed ELSAs felt empowered to carry out their role with the increased knowledge of possible reasons behind a CYP’s presentation and how they might support them in developing their EL awareness. However, ELSAs faced many obstacles, eg, varying degrees of support from their SMT in enabling them to fulfil their role, colleagues’ limited understanding of EL, and the mismatch of expectations with regards to appropriate emotional responses to situations from parents. This chapter will explore what the impact of the outcomes may have for EPs, schools and LAs, the limitations of this research and areas of further research which have arisen from this study. In addition, I have added a section entitled ‘Out takes!’ detailing some of the obstacles I had to overcome in my professional life to produce this thesis.

**What are the implications for EPs?**

1. The training course covers 6 days but the setting up and planning requires time which means there is a time implication for EPs in delivering the course. However, the investment is worthwhile for EPs and schools as the number of cases discussed with EPs concerning emotional, social and behavioural concerns are lessened. This is because, in an ELSA, there is a member of staff in the school who can offer support to CYP as it is needed with many of these cases may not requiring EP involvement at all. Schools have immediate access to their ELSA, who the CYP may already know. This means the CYP is not having to wait several weeks for the EP to become involved and is more than likely to be a stranger. Nonetheless, as each cohort is trained more EPs will be required to support clinical supervision sessions so that the groups do not become too large. Although clinical supervision is only half a day each half-term it can make a difference to an EP’s workload especially with the changes in SEN provision and statutory assessment procedures (Children and Families Act, 2014).
2. One of the requests heard from ELSAs is the need for more training. The ELSA course is intense and time is required to reflect on the material covered, thus, follow-up sessions to cement the learning covered in the original course would be greatly appreciated by the ELSAs. In addition, several ELSAs have requested training covering aspects not covered in detail on the course, eg, Attachment Theory. This could be provided by one-day conferences which would allow as many ELSAs as possible to come together. Working in collaboration with ELSA trainers from neighbouring LAs may help to spread the pressure of delivering this training. Although my LA was not involved with the setting up of the event, a neighbouring LA approached ourselves to ask if any of our ELSAs would like to attend their recent ELSA conference.
3. The focus on developing EL awareness has been on mainstream schools, however, the ELSA training course has been adapted for special schools whilst a one day ELSA training course has been devised for early years’ establishments covering attachment and working with parents (S. Burton, personal email communication, 2012). All this training would be delivered by EPs. It offers exciting opportunities but this needs to be explored against other pressures on EP commitments and changes in SEN, in particular, the Children and Families Act (2014).
4. It has been acknowledged that EPs are well placed to support schools in developing their EL awareness (Denham, et al, 2007), however, supporting CYP with their EL cannot be done by schools alone; they require parental support. As it happens, EPs are also well placed to work with parents ([Crozier and Davies, 2007](#_ENREF_28)). EPs have knowledge of interpersonal skills, such as inter-subjectivity ([Trevarthen, 1979](#_ENREF_131)), and working with parents to enhance their interactions with their children, for example, through the application of Video Interaction Guidance (Kennedy, et al, 2011). Similarly, when addressing the ‘home-school communication’ and ‘barriers’ to engagement, EPs can draw on frameworks for finding solutions and moving forward, eg, solution oriented practices ([O'Hanlon, 2000](#_ENREF_96)).
5. Most importantly, with the passing of the recent Children and Families Act (2014), and bearing in mind the CYP is at the heart of any intervention, CYP are entitled to express their opinion. The voice of the child must be considered with the CYP having the right to make informed decisions. Unfortunately, their voice has been often overlooked and they have been unaware of their needs. For example Gillespie (2006) found most CYP with a Statement of SEN are unaware they had a Statement and that a meeting was held each year to review it (Annual Review Meeting). CYP require the skills to understand what is being discussed, to reflect on the discussions and communicate their viewpoints as clearly as they can. EPs can support CYP and schools to address this imbalance through their ELSA who can support them in understanding their needs and emotions as they make sense of their world and to communicate their viewpoints.
6. Along with the passing of the Children and Families Act (2014) has been changes as to how CYP’s behaviour is viewed with the revised SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). Instead of referring to CYP with having BESD, ie, behaviour, emotional and social needs, as was the case with the previous SEN Code (DfES, 2001), CYP can be considered in light of their SEMH, ie, social, emotional and mental health. This give EPs an opportunity to explore with schools the factors underpinning a CYP’s challenging behaviour and helps to promote the idea that behaviour may be around SEMH needs and/or unmet SEN. However, school and parents may need support in the journey of understanding the different perspective.

**What are the implications for schools and LAs?**

1. With the introduction of EHCPs from September, 2014, the focus will be on pedagogical processes and strategies to assist in meeting the CYP’s needs. Parents and CYP will be entitled to know what support is available for the CYP. Should they request ELSA support then schools will need to ensure they have at least one LSA available whilst the LA will need to ensure that ELSA training and follow-up supervision is also available to meet this need.
2. In order to be able to support CYP in their EL awareness adults working with them may need to be more comfortable with their own EL awareness. As such, training may be required but staff will need to buy into this exploration. So who should provide the training? The first port of call is often the LA, thus, are LAs ready to take up the challenge? One of the goals suggested by Coverdale and Long (2015) in promoting emotional well-being and mental health for YP and families is to raise awareness of these areas for teachers in their initial teaching training and ongoing as part of the continuing professional development. Teachers should also support and enable discussion on emotional issues both formally, eg, in PSHE lessons, and informally, eg, peer support. I consider the role of the ELSA could supplement this work.
3. Despite the pressure from the Government on raising academic standards (to the detriment of other areas of the curriculum and pupil well-being) schools and LAs need to be remindful of what they are doing with their CYP. Many schools have mission statements which include reference to developing the whole child that are usually displayed prominently in their entrance area and in their prospectus while LAs often have their equivalent mission statements. The council in which I am employed has a Cultural Strategy 2011-15 - Memorable Places, Motivating People, More Participation document. Within it states: “Its starting point is the concept of ‘place-shaping’, a term used to describe the creative use of powers and influences to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens”. It would appear between the LA and schools there is a responsibility for the EL awareness of all within the county. How are schools and the LA going to live up to this statement? What is happening in practise for their CYP and citizens?

**Final thoughts**

Webster and Blatchford (2013, p77), citing from the Cambridge Primary Review remind us, “That we ‘cannot wait’ for changes in wider societal or educational ecosystems (eg, schools and classrooms) to become ‘more equitable and inclusive’”. In doing so, there are times when those in education, such as schools, LAs and EP services need to think about what is best for our CYP and initiate change in the appropriate direction in order to meet their needs and not those of Whitehall. We need to think of what kind of footprint we are leaving for future generations with how we engage with the whole child. How are we supporting the current generation who will be the ones to take care of us into our old age? Will our CYP be concerned with the dignity of others if they have not had the opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills due to the detriment of spending so much time with academia and working towards assessments? There are those in education who have attempted to raise their concerns with the Government as to the pressures facing CYP as individuals (eg, I know of one deputy headteacher who regularly emailed the former Secretary for Education, Gove, with her opinions) and through their unions. Some of these concerns included responses to proposals by Gove to introduce tougher tests, 10-hour school days and better discipline (whatever the latter may mean and how it would relate to the issue lying behind the CYP’s presentation remains to be seen). Even parents had shared considerable concerns with Gove’s reforms: “Jen Allford wrote: ‘I think he needs to get real and think about children as children, not 'things' that needed testing every damn year, and forced to stay in school for ridiculous amounts of time. He has NO idea about schools, children or teachers (or what parents want for their children),’ (cited by Kendrick, 2014, np). CYP already face enough stress in their daily lives, eg, expectations to confirm to a particular ideal as presented by the popular media, and the pressure to engage with social media and to be readily responsive to it without the added worries of longer school days and more testing. The old adage goes, “Let children be children”.

**Limitations**

Although the intention is that this research will contribute to the ongoing discussion about EL and the role of the EP in supporting schools in developing EL such as through the ELSA training it needs to be recognised that there are also limitations inherent in this research.

1. Overall the sample size used in this research was small. There were seven participants who all took part in attending semi-structured interviews whilst five of the participants kept reflective journals. I am aware the participants knew me as their trainer and, for most, as their school EP as well, thus, limitations could include threats to trustworthiness, eg, the participants may have said/written what they thought I wanted to hear. To overcome this dilemma I provided the participants an information sheet prior to them committing themselves in taking part which they would have anonymity and the data would be treated with confidence.
2. Another factor that may have affected the research outcomes can be perceived as emotional, ie, as ELSA was a new project to the LA, the trainer/researcher and the ELSAs may have experienced a buzz about the novelty of it which may have led to an inflation of positive responses given by the participants which is commonly known as the Hawthorn Effect (Landesberger, 1958). Their viewpoint may also have been tainted to be overly positive as the course had been provided for free including the hand-outs and manual. In addition, all the participants received free resources on the final day of the training.
3. I am also aware that my active role in planning, conducting and analysing the research would be influenced by my preconceived ideas and assumptions including my commitment to the training. Undoubtedly the questions I posed during the semi-structured interviews would have led the participants to respond in a certain way and shaped the data, which relates to the assumptions I brought to the research process. Although no two conversations can ever be the same between the same two people nonetheless, greater reliability may have been achieved if I had recruited an individual who was more detached from the research process to conduct the interviews. The use of reflective journals was not consistent between participants either but this is part and parcel of qualitative research. I could have provided a template to guide the ELSAs through their thought processes but I considered this would have been too controlling. In addition, it may have placed an unnecessary burden on the ELSAs as they focussed on getting the paperwork right instead of sharing their thoughts. Although I was the sole interpreter of the data I shared my outcomes with an EP colleague familiar with TA in order to ascertain whether they considered the outcomes to be similar.

**Future Research**

The ELSAs involved with this study attended their training in Spring, 2012. It would be interesting to revisit the ELSAs in the near future to ascertain how their role has developed. It would also be interesting to find out why some of the schools had not utilised their ELSAs.

It would be beneficial to explore how CYP had been identified to work with the ELSA and learn of how their impact had affected the CYP in terms of, amongst other aspects, their emotions, social interaction, academic performance, attendance and health. As noted by Davies (2013) the whole CYP needs to be considered in their development with particular reference to the more vulnerable members of society, eg, looked after CYP. Longitudinal follow-up of the CYP involved in ELSA into their adult life would be worthwhile to see if ELSA had a contributory factor to their outcomes.

Research into the CYP’s perspective of ELSA, especially in terms of how they felt it had supported them in developing their EL skills, would be useful. Very few studies have examined the emotional, health or well-being of a CYP from their perspective (Coombes, et al, 2013). One exception is that of Burton, et al (2009), who asked CYP whether they felt ‘happy’, ‘ok’ or ‘sad’ about working with their ELSA. They found 85% of primary-aged pupils were ‘happy’ while 60% of secondary pupils responded the same way with the remainder of all pupils saying, they felt ‘ok’. Of primary pupils, 83% felt they were improving in relation to what they were working on with the ELSA (compared to 50% of secondary pupils).

In order to ascertain the EL awareness in schools it would be useful for them to complete a baseline assessment using such tools as the Fenman EQ Test (found in Burton’s (2008) training manual) and/or the assessment in SEAL (DfES, 2005), and then to revisit these assessment tools several terms later to ascertain whether the school had changed in its level of EL awareness.

**Final views**

My intention is for this study is to make a positive impact on the work of ELSAs and in how well received and respected the ELSAs are within their schools in being able to act out their role as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state:

Empirical materials and theoretical arguments are evaluated in terms of their emancipatory implications. ( p24).

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| I have learnt so much more about what being emotional literate is and am learning more each time I deliver the course and support ELSAs during clinical supervision. The reading of articles and taking part in discussions about EL with colleagues has made me reconsider whether it is appropriate to focus on CYP’s EL awareness. This quandary has been a challenge for me: On one hand, who has the right to say what is normal in terms of emotions but, on the other hand, do we allow CYP to struggle to understand theirs and other’s emotions when, for one reason or another, they do not have the tools/ability/strategies to fully understand them. For some CYP this can lead to becoming socially isolated, bullied and/or lead to mental health concerns. In order to help me to decide how to solve this dilemma I thought of the analogy of seeing someone with a broken leg: Do we leave them to suffer pain and subsequent complications of not attending to the fracture or do we provide them pain relief and care so that their bones will mend appropriately? Applying this analogy do we support CYP who lack EL awareness with providing them with opportunity to work one-to-one with a significant other in their life who is concerned with their EL awareness needs and has the skills to do so or do we allow them to struggle on and possibly become an isolated, misunderstood individual who may develop mental health concerns? ELSAs who are given the opportunity to fulfil their role are an inspiration as they are creative and inventive in finding ways to help CYP develop their EL awareness. The more they work with CYP the more they will come to realise the answer to supporting these CYP cannot be found in a single commercially produced box or book but in learning where the CYP is at and moving forward with the CYP to engage with to them and meet their EL awareness needs. |

Despite the ups and downs which can come with research I am not the only one who has learnt from this study as one of the ELSAs involved commented the use of reflective journals should be a device all trainee ELSAs should use:

Decided to complete journal as way of gathering thoughts and reflecting on work. Feel should be part of course anyway. Keeps you focussed and working on your journal can reignite your enthusiasm etc. (r/j41/18).

**Out takes!**

Parker (2005) postulates:

The best research enable surprising things to happen as opposed to bad and boring research where everything runs according to plan and all is exactly as we expected. Parker (2005, p58)

There were moments during this research when planning did not go according to plan:

1. The ELSAs were, originally, going to be interviewed at the end of the Summer Term 2013 which would have been two terms since the start of their training and one term after completing it. Burton (2008) indicates ELSAs can begin their role at the start of the training course. Unfortunately, most of the ELSAs had not begun to work with CYP or had only just begun to do so. This meant most of the ELSAs were not in the position to reflect on the impact of their work with CYP which became apparent during the interviews. Thus, a new schedule was set up for the interview process to take place at the end of the following term, ie, nearly one year since the ELSAs had begun their training. One of the ELSAs who had volunteered to take part in the initial interviews decided they no longer wanted to be involved with the research which she was perfectly at liberty to do so as it had been clearly set out on the information leaflet provided in taking part in the research any of the ELSAs could drop out at any point with no reason. Coincidentally, I was approached by another ELSA from the same cohort, whom I was also providing clinical supervision, as to whether she could take part in the interview process. As it happens neither ELSA had wished to keep reflective journals so the status quo was returned.
2. Another issue arose during the first round of interviews, ie, one of the Dictaphone tapes was damaged by a typist before the interviews had been transcribed which was highly unfortunate as it had been a new tape and was the only recording. However, an EP colleague’s husband, with a technical mind and equipment for recording, spent several hours painstakingly undoing the case and repairing the tape which I duly recorded a copy of before submitting to typing! When it came to the second round of interviews I ensured I used two Dictaphones!
3. During the course of researching my thesis I also had a change of university supervision tutor at the end of the first term when I was putting my thesis proposal together and submitting it to the University Ethics Committee. As is often with human nature, we do not see things in the same way and so with a change of tutor came a change of perspective and revision in my application. This change of tutor I had been informed would be temporary until a replacement could be found, thus, for the following year I was not in the position to be truly comfortable with my research as I was facing the prospect of another change of tutor and with it a change of perspective. My temporary tutor was also under a lot of pressure with having to share the workload with being a third of the department down so I did not have as regular contact with them as with my first tutor. Time management and approach to meetings was also different between the tutors, ie, my first tutor was a competent user of IT including the use of Skype which meant I did not have to travel the long distance from home for meetings with meetings typically being shorter than the time travelled. After a year of uncertainty, my replacement tutor became my permanent tutor so I was able to focus more clearly on my research knowing I had a shared understanding of what that research was about.

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| **A FINAL REFLECTION**I thought I would close my thesis with an account from one of the ELSAs’ reflective journals on the impact her involvement had been on working with a group of children on friendship skills which included the targeted child for the ELSA’s involvement. This one entry shows the highs and lows almost instantaneously of being an ELSAs, ie, the success of developing awareness versus the apparent lack of awareness by their class teacher:Again another great session, it seems to be having such a great impact on this child. I am so proud of the way she is keeping calm. Keep giving lots of positive praise and reinforcing her appropriate behaviour in the classroom. The session about friendship skills has bought out a few things. We have a triangle! Child 1(ELSA child), Child B (ELSA child’s best friend) and Child C, (child B's friend).Session resulted in discussing how it’s good to have lots of friends and that sometimes our friends don't enjoy the games we are playing and may sometimes like to play with other people. She seemed really receptive to the idea of having more friends to play with. (We have only 2 girls in her year so makes it a bit difficult!)The triangle has become a problem! My child, Betty\*, has been having some difficulty with the other child, Bob\*. Bob is putting a bit of a divide between Betty and her friend. He and friend like to play together and get on very well but Betty is not liking this and it has become a problem. Betty being often excluded for the games they are playing, partly due to being pushed out and partly due to being stubborn and not wanting to join in with Bob’s game.Bob, however, is a bit of a monkey because he has been enjoying dividing and has been caught on a couple of occasions being quite mean to Betty.This has resulted in the friend being torn between the two of them. Trying to extend her friendship group to try and sort out these problems although they are often resolved by the 3 of them by the end of playtime.Had my first bad day involving ELSA children after this session. After feeling very pleased with myself about all the wonderful things that were happening.Had a run in with this child’s class teacher. She had not fully understood what was happening in the ELSA sessions and tried to intervene with these 3 children herself. She arranged a meeting with all 3 children so 2 of them could tell Betty\* why they thought she was being a rubbish friend. She wanted to sit Betty down and let them have it out with her and let her know how they were feeling. She even rung one of the children's parents to say that he was going to be doing the ELSA sessions (without even consulting Head or myself on whether this was suitable for him) and that it would be starting that afternoon but she would be running it. Felt so let down by the fact that she could have ruined all of the work I had done just because she wanted to do a bit of ELSA work, very disappointed.Note to self....explain fully what my role as an ELSA is to this teacher so as to avoid run-ins in the future! (r/j40/70/73).\*real name has been replaced. |

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