Choose an intervention that supports the learning and development of a pupil/group of pupils. Reflect critically on its potential for ensuring pupil progression and the possible challenges that may arise.

Intro

This assignment will be critically reflecting on how Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) as an intervention within schools can be used to support the learning, development, and progression of an individual Key Stage 2 pupil. To align with 2018 Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2018), the pupil will be referred to using a false name to ensure their confidentiality. Max is a Year 4 pupil in a mixed Year 3/4 class in a school in South Wales where approximately 400 children aged 3-11 years attend. He is eight years old and is an only child. At home, Max thoroughly enjoys playing a number of videogames and in class, Max excels in computing and has been identified as working at progression step 3, occasionally at progression step 4 as part of the Curriculum for Wales. Max does however, struggle with forming and maintaining positive relationships with his peers and others, having been identified as working at progression step 1 in terms of engaging with social influences and forming healthy relationships, in comparison to many of his peers, who are working at progression steps 2 and 3. It has been noticed by members of staff working within the school and with Max that he has begun to struggle significantly more than he previously did within this area after another child joined the class. Max will now often provoke his peers by calling them names, refusing to share classroom resources such as colouring pencils, or snatching items out of other children's hands. When confronted about his behavior, Max becomes incredibly frustrated and upset and struggles to control his emotions, lying down on the floor with his face down. This has caused Max's class teacher to consider the use of an intervention in order to help support Max in developing his social and emotional skills. Attending sessions with the in-school Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) could be a suitable intervention for Max as ELSAs are staff members within a school who have undertaken specific training to help support the emotional development of children and young people (ELSA, 2017). This could be beneficial for Max as during ELSA sessions, specific targets are identified and worked on with the child and coping strategies are introduced and taught to help the child progress in the area they are struggling with (ELSA, 2017). ELSA sessions especially have the potential to aid Max in his development and learning in terms of his social and emotional skills as an ELSAs main aim is to "build [a child's] emotional development and help them cope with life's challenges" (ELSA Support, 2024)

Learning and development

Children's development of social and emotional skills starts at an early age. These skills rapidly develop in the first few years of children's lives and continue to develop through childhood by interacting with both their environment and caregivers. These interactions can have a

significant impact on the learning and development of both children's emotional and social skills, as seen in Bandura's social learning theory, which states that "most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (Bandura, 1977, pg. 5). This theory demonstrates how big an impact children's environments can have directly on their development by suggesting that children who display aggression have learnt this behaviour through observing their surroundings and behaviour of others within hostile environments, while children who display friendly behaviour have been influenced by observing others within positive social environments (Bandura, 1973). There may also be ties with Bandura's theory and modern environmental influences such as social media and videogames, as there is evidence to suggest that children who engage with and observe violent behaviour within videogames are more likely to display aggressive or anti-social behaviour than other children. A 2016 study conducted in a school in Delaware which asked children aged between 10 and 17 years old to complete a questionnaire showed that "both males and females who played violent video games more often were more likely to report having hit someone" (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2016). Whilst this study may demonstrate that observing violence through alternative sources such as videogames can lead to higher rates of anti-social behaviour or aggression, it is important to note that the study also found that other factors, such as parental relationships, race and experiencing violence in the home also showed a positive correlation with the likelihood of children having hit somebody else, so whilst the study still supports and backs up Bandura's social learning theory, it also shows that factors such as videogames are likely not the primary cause behind aggressive or anti-social behaviours displayed by children such as Max. It is therefore important that other reasons, such as home environment, which may be behind these certain behaviours are explored to help support children like Max, who may be struggling to engage with social influences or form and maintain positive relationships. Whilst most researchers and educators agree with Bandura's social learning theory and the importance it pays in explaining the learning and development of children's behavior, it can also be agreed that the theory does not address all possible factors for behaviour, such as biological impacts or the impact of emotions and motivation on behaviour, nor does it acknowledge that people are able to learn by listening to verbal instructions as well as observation, and therefore social development theory may have some limitations as to whether it can fully explain how children's social and emotional behaviour is learnt and developed. A second theory which can be used to explain how children learn and develop social and emotional skills is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Whilst this theory also supports the idea that children learn and develop skills by learning through others, it differs from Bandura's ideas as instead of suggesting we learn via observation, it focuses on the idea that in order to learn and develop cognitively, we need social interaction, culture, and language in order to do so (McLeod, 2024). Sociocultural theory comes from the idea that when children interact with a more knowledgeable other, who is somebody who possesses a higher level of

understanding or ability than the child does, such as a parent, teacher or older sibling (McLeod, 2024) this helps the child to enter part a part of sociocultural theory known as the zone of proximal development, which is the "area of exploration for which the [child] is cognitively prepared for, but requires help and social interaction in order to fully develop" (University of Manchester, 2024). By entering this zone of proximal development with the help from a more knowledgeable other, this allows the child to learn new skills and develop existing skills further. This is because the more knowledge other is able to provide the basic scaffolding required in order for this development to happen, for example, if two children within a classroom have an argument, they may already know that in order to resolve the conflict they may need to reach an agreement or apologise to each other, however, they may not yet have the knowledge to do this independently, which is where a more knowledgeable other may step in and either demonstrate or help them to resolve the conflict. The idea of learning from somebody more knowledgeable can be considered particularly important, especially regarding areas such as social and emotional development, as without the social and emotional skills required for success in school, children are more likely to face issues such as becoming alienated from the classroom due to rejection from peers and educators and are therefore more likely to fall behind in not only their social development, but their academic progression as well. In response to this, children may use a number of their own coping strategies to deal with this such as withdrawing or 'acting out,' especially if they are not receiving the necessary support from more knowledgeable others due to rejection (Whitted, 2011). Vygotsky's theory may help to explain some aspects of Max's behaviour, such struggling to share or provoking other children if he has not had the support in order to reach the zone of proximal development. However, sociocultural theory also has some limitations, for example, the zone of proximal development "does not explain the process of development or how development actually occurs" (Ameri, 2020) nor does it account for individual learning needs. It is however potentially a useful theory to have in mind when taking into account how children are helped to progress by educators and occasionally peers within classroom environments.

Progression

Supporting children's progression is a crucial key step used to check development and aid progress in several key areas of children's lives. Children's progression not only includes their academic progress but also their social, spiritual, physical, and emotional development. It is essential that children make progress within all these areas, as without these key skills, children can fall behind and may end up lacking in the necessary skills required in order to thrive within their environments. The rate of children's progression within educational settings can be measured using the progression steps within the 2022 Curriculum for Wales. These progression steps can be used as reference points for the pace of progression, and whilst they are "not designed as stand-alone tasks, activities or assessment criteria" (Welsh Government, 2020) they

can be used as an indicator to provide guidance on the pace of pupil's progression so that lessons can be adjusted and catered to individuals in order to ensure pupils are given the opportunity to reach their full potential and make maximum progress within a number of areas across the curriculum. The progression steps are divided between the different ages of pupils in school, and although children can fall anywhere within the progression steps, they can be used by educators as a "rough guide as to where children of certain age groups are expected to be" (Twinkl, 2024) for example, children aged 3-5 are expected to be working roughly at progression step 1, and children aged 8-11 are expected to be working roughly at progression step 3. Max, for example, is known to be excelling at computing within his class as he is working at progression steps 3 and 4, suggesting that he is progressing within this area much faster than other children in his class. However, in terms of his social and emotional development, he is considered to be progressing more slowly within this area than other children his age. For children who are in interventions, tracking progress can be considered especially important as it shows that the intervention is working as intended and helps to ensure that they are progressing at a rate which means that they are able to participate in class activities without being at a disadvantage. In order to track progression for children like Max, who may be having interventions with an ELSA, using tools such as mood charts, or making a note each time a learnt coping skill is used. Progress can also be tracked using the statements of what matters and the descriptions of learning within the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020). An example being that if Max is able to notice and communicate how he is feeling within the health and wellbeing area of learning and experience under the description of learning (Welsh Government, 2019), 'how we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional wellbeing', this can be an indication that he may be working at progression step 1. If Max is able to develop his existing social and emotional skills with help given by the ELSA during sessions, he may begin to be able to notice when he needs help to manage his emotions, this would imply that Max is beginning to work closer towards progression step 2, as being able to identify when help is needed with emotion falls under progression step 2 for that particular description of learning. Using reference points such as this allows staff to monitor the progression of individual pupils in a number of areas, which can be beneficial for several reasons, for example, it allows teachers to place and identify where pupils are in terms of their personal goals, reflect on the effectiveness of their own teaching and adjust areas if needed, and ensure that interventions are put in place for pupils who may need help in order to reach their expected progress.

Critical reflection (1088 words)

Due to Max's development, progression and challenges in his social and emotional skills, a suitable intervention could be for him to attend sessions with the in-school ELSA. This will give Max the opportunity to work on specific skills identified using small, measurable, achievable,

realistic and time-limited (SMART) targets (ELSA, 2009), which are a key aspect of ELSA sessions, and allow for both the ELSA and pupil to identify the direction that sessions will take and identify when the programme is complete (ELSA, 2009). By pinpointing specific aspects of Max's social and emotional skills that can be worked on and improved, Max will have the opportunity to receive targeted support and specialised input in developing coping strategies to help not only within school but in other out of school environments. A 2009 study conducted in Bournemouth showed that across fourteen different schools, 76% of Head Teachers felt that having ELSAs within their schools had had a positive impact on individual students improving their relationships as well as behaviour, and 88% felt that they had seen a positive impact on individual pupil's emotional wellbeing (Bravery & Harris). The study also showed that having ELSAs within the school had also had a noticeable positive impact within schools, with 41% of Headteachers stating that they felt there had been a positive impact on behaviour across the whole school and 53% of Headteachers stating they felt there had been a positive impact on the improvement of relationships within the school due to having an ELSA (Bravery & Harris). These statistics demonstrate that attending ELSA sessions could be a very effective way of helping Max develop and grow his social and emotional skills, as the desired impacts of implementing an intervention for Max have been demonstrated across several schools using ELSAs or similar interventions, for example, another study conducted by Estyn in 2019 found that an intervention program, which used principles similar to ELSA programs to help target social and emotional development of children within a pupil referral unit, resulted in increased attendance and improved engagement and progress in lessons, with most pupils also developing better self-regulating skills. The study also found wider positive impacts within the school in terms of pupil's "increased constructive and collaborative relationships between peers, including emerging skills in managing unsupported play with peers, as well as more appropriate communication with staff" (Estyn, 2021). This study shows that by helping pupils to grow and develop their social and emotional skills it not only positively affects their health and wellbeing, but their academic progress, behaviour and engagement within school, resulting in an overall positive knock-on effect for not only individual pupils but for other pupils and staff within schools. Whilst ELSA sessions within school are proven to be highly effective through many studies, like all interventions, they are not without fault. For example, for ELSA sessions to be fully effective, there must be communication between other adults working with the child, for example, class teachers and parents. This ensures that coping strategies and tools pupils have learnt during ELSA sessions can be practiced and applied to other situations the child may experience to improve their effectiveness, with support from other adults. However, it is often the case that due to the nature of a school environment, ELSAs and class teachers are unable to find the time and resources for effective handovers to take place after ELSA sessions or to ensure full communication with parents and educators. This can result in learnt skills not being enforced or practiced, making ELSA sessions less effective than they would be if skills and

approaches were implemented within class and home environments consistently. If there is, however, effective communication and handovers between sessions, the intervention impact ELSA sessions can have on both teaching and learning can be extremely positive, for example, children who had completed ELSA sessions felt that the relationship they had built with their ELSA had "made them feel happier, more trusting and less alone" (Peters, 2020, pg. 3). Children who feel more trusting towards others are more likely to seek help and guidance from their teacher and others when required, which in turn means they are likely to receive the necessary support from

455

Conclusion

Overall, learning and developing social and emotional skills in particular are an essential part of children's development and progression, as without these skills, children are at risk of falling behind in comparison their peers, which may lead to other challenges such as struggling to form or maintain relationships, remain engaged within the classroom and effectively manage emotions. This is why interventions for pupils are so essential within schools as they can provide students with the opportunity for additional support that may be required for them in order to thrive and even excel within school alongside their peers. The benefits of interventions such as ELSA have also been shown across whole school environments as shown in the 2009 Bravery and Harris study on the impact of ELSAs within school. Whilst ELSA sessions are primarily designed to be carried out with individual pupils such as Max and within small groups, there could be benefits in introducing whole class sessions with the in-school ELSA across the school. Whilst whole class sessions are likely to present an added workload and include potential challenges such as being unable to fully cater sessions sue to the volume of pupils, providing all learners, not just individual pupils such as Max with the basic skills to resolve conflicts independently with minimal adult intervention, identify emotions and use coping skills, and use the necessary social skills in order to make and maintain friendships means that there is the potential for all pupils to receive a direct positive impact from the in school ELSA, even if they do not necessarily require more catered individual or smaller group sessions to help them progress their social and emotional skills to a level where they are able to feel more confident and successfully thrive within a number of environments. With a whole school awareness of the importance of social and emotional development and coping skills, this will not only benefit pupils such as Max, but other learners within the school as well as staff members.

References

Ameri, M., 2020. 'Criticism of the sociocultural theory'. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal* (BIRCI-Journal), 3(3), pp.1530-1540.

Bandura (1973) *Aggression*: *A Social Learning Analysis*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Bandura (1977) *Social Learning Theory.* New York: General Learning Press

BERA (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, fourth edition. Available at: Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition (2018) | BERA (Accessed 18th March 2024)

Bravery, K and Harris, L (2009) *Emotional Literacy Support Assistants in Bournemouth: Impact and Outcomes* Available at: https://www.elsanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ELSA-in-Bournemouth-Impact-and-Outcomes.pdf (Accessed 28th March 2024)

Decamp, W., Ferguson, C. J. (2016) 'The Impact of Degree of Exposure to Violent Video Games, Family Background, and Other Factors on Youth Violence' *Springer,* 46(2), pp. 388-400. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0561-8.

ELSA (2009) *Code of Practice - Programme and session planning – guidance for ELSAs*. Available at: https://www.elsanetwork.org/about/code-of-practice/ (Accessed 4th April 2024)

ELSA (2017) *ELSA Leaflet*. Available at: https://www.elsanetwork.org/free_resource/elsa-leaflet/ (Accessed 27th March 2024)

ELSA (2024) *What is ELSA? Leaflet for Parents*. Available at: https://www.elsa-support.co.uk/what-is-elsa-leaflet-for-parents/ (Accessed 29th March 2024)

Estyn (2021) *Developing pupils' social and emotional skills*. Available at: https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/developing-pupils-social-and-emotional-skills#whatimpacthasthisworkhadonprovisionandlearners%E2%80%99standards? (Accessed 29th March 2024)

McLeod, S (2024) *Vygotsky's Theory Of Cognitive Development*. Available at: https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html (Accessed 7th April 2024)

Peters, S. (2020) Exploring the experience for young people of the Emotional Literacy Support assistant (ELSA) intervention: Case studies in secondary schools, UCL Discovery - UCL Discovery. Available at: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10101254/ (Accessed: 08 April 2024)

Twinkl (2024) *What are Progression steps?* Available at: https://www.twinkl.co.uk/teaching-wiki/progression-steps (Accessed 8th April 2024)

University of Manchester (2024) *Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory*. Available at: http://www.ceebl.manchester.ac.uk/events/archive/aligningcollaborativelearning/Vygotsky.pdf (Accessed 7th April 2024)

Welsh Government, (2019) *Health and Wellbeing: Descriptions of Learning.* Available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/health-and-well-being/descriptions-of-learning/ (Accessed 8th April 2024)

Welsh Government (2020) *Introduction to Curriculum for Wales guidance*. Available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/introduction-to-curriculum-for-wales-guidance/ (Accessed 8th April 2024)

Whitted, K. S. (2011) 'Understanding How Social and Emotional Skill Deficits Contribute to School Failure', Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 55(1), pp. 10–16. doi: 10.1080/10459880903286755.