

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

Introduction:

School interventions are targeted learning activities that aim to support specific areas of a child's learning needs, now increasingly implemented in primary schools to help close learning gaps earlier (Anilkumar, 2024). I will be critically evaluating how an intervention can be used with a Key Stage 2 pupil to support their learning and development. Throughout, I have given the child I'm focusing on a pseudo name, Idris, to maintain their anonymity in accordance with the British Educational Research Association Guidelines (BERA, 2024).

Idris is a nine-year-old boy in a year 4 class, in a primary school in Wales (see Appendix 1 for pupil profile). Idris dislikes class work such as maths, reading and writing, struggling to maintain concentration for prolonged periods of time, especially when reading or writing. However, Idris is more engaged when completing classroom activities digitally. Though, if unable to do so his temperament can shift and lead to him becoming withdrawn, in which case he asks for permission to leave the classroom for quiet time. Idris enjoys practical activities and sports lessons, particularly when there is an opportunity to go outside. He has well developed gross motor skills, and an interest in football, though he prefers to kick a ball independently on the yard rather than playing as a team or with others. Despite this, Idris is respectful to those around him and eager to please adults. He likes to help his teacher with class chores and watering the school garden, having existing experience in gardening from helping his mother maintain their home garden.

Possibly, to promote further emotional development, Idris may benefit from ELSA Intervention. This school-based intervention can be used to promote emotional and social well-being in pupils and teach effective and appropriate management of emotions (McEwen, 2019). An ELSA is an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant, who is trained in supporting children's emotional development to help them succeed academically and develop emotional literacy (ELSA Support, n.d). Emotional literacy is a widely used term in educational settings and can be defined as the ability to effectively identify, comprehend, manage, and communicate emotions (Weare & Gray, 2003). Positive emotional literacy can be a beneficial tool in supporting an individual's overall wellbeing, contribute towards

positive learning outcomes and social development (Silver, Emanuel & Jones, 2024). Therefore, to support Idris' further learning and development, ELSA Intervention could help promote his self-esteem, growth mindset and coping mechanisms for emotions.

Main Body:

Emotions can be identified as feelings generated in response to triggers which can create fluidity in a person's mood, often varying in complexity and occasionally merging (Castle & Buckler, 2021). This merging of emotions is demonstrated in Plutchik's emotional wheel (see Appendix 2). Plutchik's emotional wheel categorises eight basic emotions and eight complex emotions, which are created by combining two emotions. Each emotion is represented in the wheel using a colour, and when these colours are mixed new emotions are generated. According to Plutchik, emotions further apart on the wheel the less likely they are to combine, a process which involves cognitive action, with contradictory emotions like fear and happiness being less likely to transform into each other as easily (Janocha et al., 2018). Plutchik's emotional wheel can provide a deeper understanding of the evolution of Idris' emotional responses to triggers. For instance, when Idris finds tasks challenging or gets answers wrong his disappointment may originate from more basic emotions like sadness or anger, which may result in a more complex response like becoming withdrawn. Pupil's emotional well-being shapes all areas of their daily school life, educators who are attentive and caring towards pupil's emotional needs can play a powerful role in increasing and promoting a broad range of ways for pupils to be successful (McLaughlin, 2008). Thus, using Plutchik's emotional wheel could be a valuable tool in understanding Idris' emotions to promote emotional awareness and support.

However, the reliability and effectiveness of Plutchik's emotional wheel can be questioned. Some research argues that for children with emotional difficulties, emotional responses cannot be organised as they act on a continuum, and an individual child could experience multiple complex emotions simultaneously (Greenhalgh, 1994). This can be even more the

case for children with additional learning needs (ALN), such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), which can impact social and emotional interactions with others and a person's ability to communicate their emotional state (Castle & Buckler, 2021). While Idris' profile does not explicitly state that he has been diagnosed with any ALN, it could be argued that aspects of his profile align with some of the general indicators of ASD, like preferring solitary tasks, getting upset when disallowed to work digitally and struggling to maintain concentration when reading or writing (NHS, 2022). Although, it is important to remain aware a learner's personality will shape the way that they behave, learn and retain knowledge (Castle & Buckler, 2021). In addition to this, it is not the role of the teacher to diagnose any ALN but to document and describe any concerns, and pass them on to the relevant agencies for any further assessment and diagnosis (Welsh Government, 2021).

Developing emotionally is an ongoing and widely individual process shaped by contexts, experiences, and interpretations, which can influence how we comprehend emotions being felt and the action-based responses that follow (LoBue, Pérez-Edgar & Buss, 2019). For example, in Idris' case, when he is unable to complete class work digitally, he may sulk and take himself out of the classroom to a quiet space. Emotions accompany cognition, expression, and consequential behaviour, contributing to how perceptions of the world around us vary individually (Janocha et al., 2018). They play a significant role in learning as they help us refine our attention, motivate, and comprehend the importance and relevance of information (Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016). Neurologist Antonio Damasio claims that without emotional expression memory formation is impossible, with emotions acting as the guiding force behind rational behaviour (Damasio, 1994). The emotional brain is fundamental in regulating social, behavioural, and emotional reactions, contributing to physiological responses like nervous system regulation (Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016). A person's ability to regulate emotions can be influenced by their cognitive and physiological awareness, but also social norms regarding displays of emotion (Hay, 2019). Some developmental physiologists argue that this ability can change over time due to individual differences in understanding of how these elements of regulation are comprehended and applied (Hay, 2019). Therefore, it could be argued that Idris' emotional regulation appears to be developing, as he is able to identify when he needs quiet time to manage his feelings.

Arnold Gesell's maturational theory argues that all children develop in similar stages, but at their own pace, fluctuating between states of equilibrium and disequilibrium in response to struggles like behaving appropriately or responding to others (Gesell Institute of Human Development, n.d.). Gesell suggests that emotions cannot be labelled or classified due to their infinite variations, identifying emotions as a dynamic experience that can unfold over time rather than being fixed states (Gesell, Ilg & Ames, 1977). According to Gesell's maturational timetable, Idris is displaying characteristics ranging from age two to eight years old, such as self-criticism, emotional insecurity and becoming withdrawn (Bates, 2023). However, Gesell supports this as typical child development arguing that development occurs at different rates due to individual biological and genetic make-up, believing that learning environments should be adapted accordingly to reduce anxieties, encourage emotional expression and support overall emotional development (Bates, 2023). Gesell also highlights this individuality in the development of the mind as crucial in informing a child's behaviour and interactions, stating that this is why children cannot be rushed into maturity or forced to change the way they express themselves (Gesell Institute of Human Development, n.d.).

ELSA interventions are carried out by learning support assistants (LSAs), who have undergone six days of training with an educational psychologist exploring emotional development, including areas like self-esteem and friendship skills (McEwen, 2019). ELSAs are also trained in creating therapeutic and safe spaces, where children feel able to express their emotions so that they can be understood and managed, and promote their emotional literacy (Wong et al, 2020). The intervention was created to improve schools' ability to cater to student's emotional needs using their existing resources, training LSAs to provide pupils with individualised scaffolding to help them progress emotionally and within their learning (ELSA Network, n.d.). The ELSA intervention is intended to be short term, though the duration and frequency of sessions can vary in response to the individual needs of pupils (Hill, O'Hare & Weidberg, 2013).

The ELSA intervention may have a positive impact on Idris and help develop skills such as emotional literacy, which could help him in other areas of development and learning. ELSAs use a variety of practical resources to encourage pupils to engage with emotional literacy

skills, such as playing games, gardening, and crafts (Wong et al, 2020). This hands-on approach to developing emotional literacy skills could support Idris with his emotional development, due to his preference for hands on activities, especially gardening which he has a personal interest in. This may make the process of emotional development more enjoyable. Vygotsky argues a child's needs and desires influences the advancement through developmental stages, impacting a child's motivation, stressing that we must understand a child's incentives to act to understand their progression (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Emotionally deficient pupils can struggle to engage with learning and may appear frozen or seem stuck, like Idris' daydreaming, as their fluctuating emotional states may facilitate or restrict their learning and development (Greenhalgh, 1994). ELSA intervention can help with this, refining pupils' emotional literacy to promote holistic development and learning, using approaches reinforced by research and background theory (Dodds & Blake, 2015). This includes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which advocates the necessity of children feeling secure in their environment to encourage self-appreciation, which can increase pupils' ability to accomplish (Pichère & Cadiat, 2015). This theory can be supported by reactions to ELSA interventions in schools. For example, an Estyn case study exploring the effectiveness of support networks in a Welsh school found that their ELSA program successfully engaged and promoted positive learning attitudes in pupils, by making them feel more supported and understood, allowing them to progress in their learning and improve attendance (Estyn, 2019). In addition, a 2020 study regarding pupil's experiences and opinions of ELSA support in England, children expressed how their ELSA assisted them with identifying emotions and strategies to stay calm, enabling pupils to remain in class during lessons (Wong et al, 2020). Dr. John Gottman's emotion coaching supports this ELSA approach, emphasising the value of teaching children how to understand their emotions, their causes and react to them (The Gottman Institute, 2024). However, behaviourists may dispute this approach, as the core goal of behaviourism is to alter undesirable behaviour and mutate it into something more desirable, without strictly understanding the process behind it (Baulo & Nabua, 2019). Skinner argued that behaviour and reactions to a stimulus can be manipulated using positive and negative reinforcement, where behaviours deemed as positive are rewarded and negatives are met consequences (Skinner, 1956).

On the other hand, while the ELSA intervention has great potential to make Idris feel supported in school, supporting his emotional development and academic achievement, there are also some potential challenges linking to the implementation of ELSA. Arguably, the most significant factor is funding. Schools in Wales are facing budget cuts that are putting the jobs of LSAs and teaching staff at risk, meaning that pupils with more complex learning needs opportunities for success may be reduced by less support (NEU, 2025). Since the pandemic teachers in the UK, in an NEU survey, have reported a 72% decrease in the amount of support staff in schools (NEU, 2023). This reduction in support staff in schools could have a negative impact on the school's ability to provide ELSA intervention to pupils in need, as there would be less staff able to take the session or able to step away from the classes they support. While on placement in two primary schools in South Wales teaching staff explained how the amount of support staff is being directly impacted by a lack of support staff in schools. In both schools, they offered ELSA intervention, but the most common theme regarding implementation issues was staffing. For example, if an ELSA was not present as they were ill or had to cover in another class, there would be no one to take ELSA sessions with pupils and children would miss sessions. When headteachers were approached in 2019 for a study exploring experiences regarding ELSA one explained how it can be a struggle to resource ELSA interventions but also allocate the time for it due to increasing demand (McEwen, 2019). Furthermore, some ELSAs reported feeling that they were not skilled enough or as if they did not have enough knowledge to support complex needs and were concerned that they would not be able to help some children to the extent they require during their limited time together (McEwen, 2019). Perhaps, a solution to this could be a more comprehensive training process or even having more specialised additional training into more complex needs and how they can be supported. Though, this once again is restricted by time constraints for staff training and funding issues. This demonstrates the importance of schools being appropriately funded to provide all pupils with the appropriate foundations to learn and develop, particularly those who may require more resources to support them (NEU, 2025).

The Curriculum for Wales recognises the value of learning about mental health in education, as it is encompassed in one of the statements of what matters, which are compulsory features of every curriculum in all Welsh schools (Welsh Government, 2021). The statement

for what matters in the health and well-being area of learning and experience outlines how learners should explore the fluctuating nature of emotions and how they link to experiences, to help pupils develop confidence, self-worth, and motivation (Welsh Government, 2022). In addition to this, one of the four purposes of the curriculum is to promote “healthy and confident individuals,” so that pupils have the emotional capacity to form positive relationships to help them navigate their learning and any challenges they may face in the future (Welsh Government, 2020). Estyn recommends that school interventions and environments are nurturing of student's health and well-being, as well as highlighting the value of strong pupil and staff relationships (Estyn, 2019). The ELSA intervention links strongly with these recommendations by creating positive and judgement free spaces, where pupils feel safe discussing their feelings with a trusted member of staff, promoting overall pupil well-being. The Children’s Commissioner for Wales agrees that it’s imperative pupils have the space and time to delve into their emotions and be listened to so that they can develop in accordance with their rights (The Children’s Commissioner for Wales, n.d).

Conclusion:

To conclude, emotional development is a long-term process, as we are constantly expressing, recognising, and trying to make sense of emotions, as individuals and of others, which directs the way we think, behave and decisions we make (Beer, 2023). Emotional regulation can be a crucial skill in promoting academic success in children, making higher-order cognitive processes more accessible, including attention span and working memory (Graziano et al, 2007). How individuals develop emotional skills, like regulation, varies depending on prior experiences, learning and how the different emotions are interpreted cognitively (LoBue, Pérez-Edgar & Buss, 2019). The way in which the ELSA intervention is implemented recognises this individuality in emotional development, providing pupils with sessions that directly reflect their needs (ELSA network, n.d). ELSA sessions could also be used to set reasonable targets reflective of specific children’s learning and development, and to relay a deeper understanding of how to better support the pupil in class. For example, in Idris’ case a target could be working towards staying in class and working through his emotions when he is frustrated. In an ELSA session, he could express how he finds the classroom environment too noisy and overstimulating when he is angry, using this information his class teacher can then make appropriate adjustments in the classroom

environment to make it more accessible to Idris. This could include adding a box of ear defenders to the class which he could use to help him emotionally regulate in class.

Discussion between pupil's parents/carers and their ELSA can also be beneficial in providing a more comprehensive overview of things the child struggles with, and work done during intervention may be translated into home life, overall ensuring the child is more supported (ELSA network, n.d). While there are some obstacles that may hinder the implementation of the ELSA intervention, such as funding, it is vital to remain aware of how significantly it can benefit pupils. In accordance with Article 3 of the UNCRC Children's Rights of the Child, the best interests of the child should be a key factor in the education and support they receive, to ensure pupil development and well-being (UNICEF, n.d).

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Appendix:

Appendix 1: Idris' Pupil Profile



Pupil Profile

This is Idris. Idris is 9 years old and is a year 4 pupil. He has one sister called Ella who is in Reception class at the same school.

Idris doesn't enjoy class work, apart from the physical and sports lessons. He hates reading, writing and maths, but is happy to complete activities on a tablet or a computer. If he isn't allowed to do this, Idris sometimes sulks and is in a bad mood. Then, he asks Mrs James, the class teacher, for permission to go out of the classroom to have some quiet time for himself.

Mrs James is concerned that Idris's academic work is not of the same standard as that of his peers. However, he clearly enjoys practical activities, especially if there is an opportunity to go outside. He loves helping Mrs James with tasks such as tidying up the classroom, photocopying work or watering the flowers in the school garden. He is used to helping his mother look after the garden at home.

When Idris refuses to complete his work, he doesn't interrupt the class, he just sits quietly dreaming of his favourite football team. He likes watching football matches on TV at weekends, but prefers kicking a ball alone on the yard rather than playing with someone else or as a member of a team.

While reflecting on how she can support Idris to develop further, Mrs James considers some of his main characteristics which include:

Physical Development

- Well developed gross motor skills e.g. jump, turn, perform tasks in physical lessons
- Prints when writing rather than using joined-up handwriting
- Dresses himself after swimming and sports lessons

Cognitive Development

- Recognizes time on the hour, quarter past and half past on an analogue clock
- Finds it hard to concentrate for long periods of time

Emotional Development

- Shows disappointment if he fails to perform tasks or gets wrong answers
- Is keen to please adults

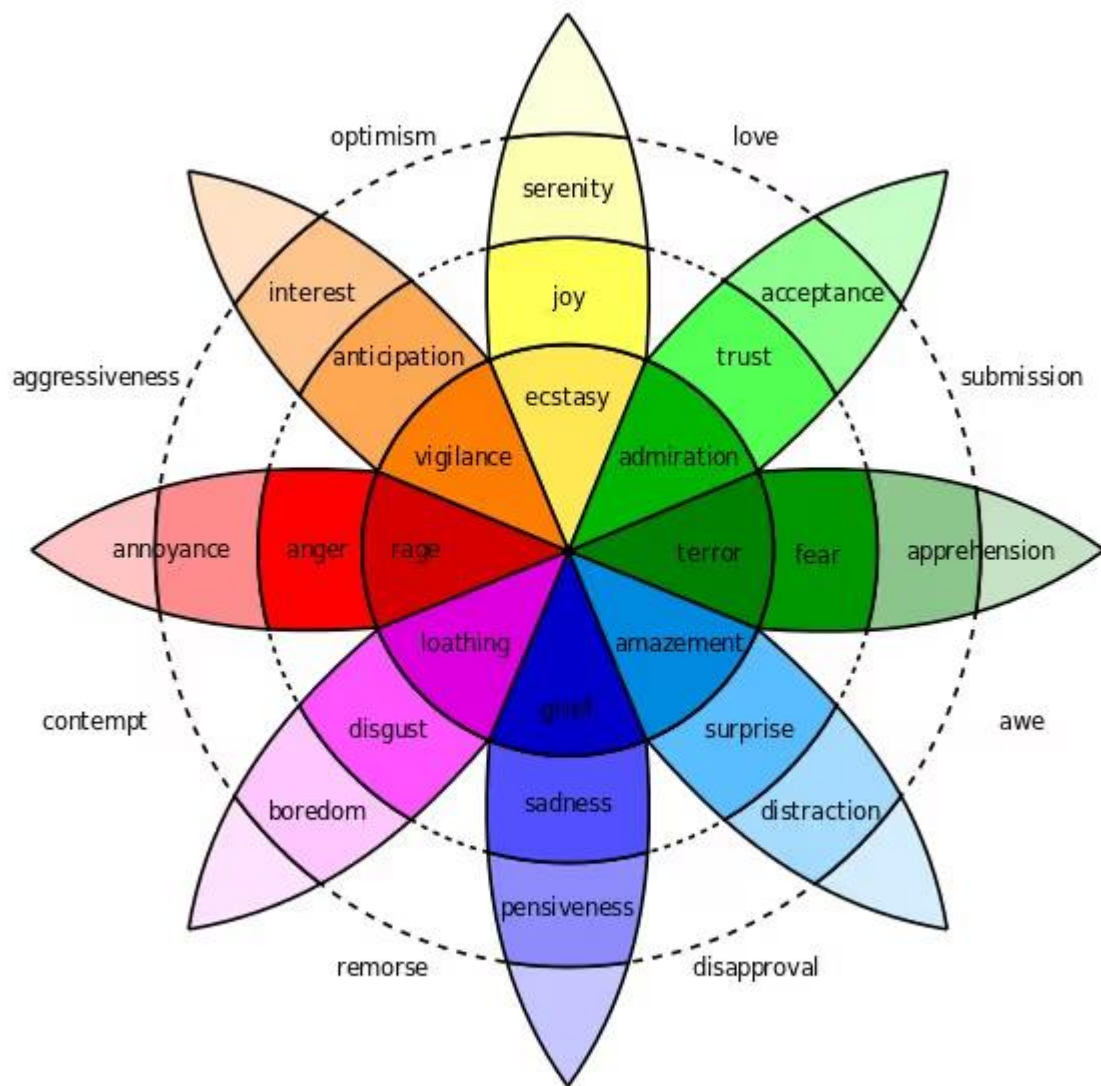
Language Development

- Has a wide spoken vocabulary but has difficulty concentrating when reading and writing
- Begins to understand and use humour orally
- Expresses opinions on likes and dislikes

Social Development

- Is respectful towards other adults and children
- Enjoys working alone rather than with others

Appendix 2: Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions



Source: Interaction Design Foundation - IxDF (2024) 'Putting Some Emotion into Your Design – Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions'. *Interaction Design Foundation - IxDF*. Available at: <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/putting-some-emotion-into-your-design-plutchik-s-wheel-of-emotions> (Accessed: 5 March 2025).