AN EVALUATION OF THE USE OF A PYRAMID CLUB TO SUPPORT SHY AND WITHDRAWN CHILDREN’S TRANSITION TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities

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Contents

Contents.........................................................................................................................2
List of Tables..................................................................................................................7
List of Figures................................................................................................................8
List of Appendices ........................................................................................................9
Abstract........................................................................................................................10
Declaration.....................................................................................................................11
Copyright Statement ....................................................................................................12
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................13
List of Acronyms ...........................................................................................................14
Introduction ..................................................................................................................15

Chapter 1: Literature Review ......................................................................................19
  1.1 Section outline .......................................................................................................19
  1.2 Literature search ...................................................................................................19
  1.3 School transition ..................................................................................................20
  1.4 Pyramid Clubs .....................................................................................................35
  1.5 The educational psychologist’s role and evaluation research .........................51
  1.6 Summary of the literature and rationale .............................................................58
  1.7 Expected contribution to knowledge and research aims ....................................59
  1.8 Research Questions (RQ) ...................................................................................60

Chapter 2: Methodology ..............................................................................................61
  2.1 Section outline .....................................................................................................61
  2.2 Research design ...................................................................................................62
    2.2.1 Case study research .......................................................................................63
    2.2.2 Mixed methodology ......................................................................................64
    2.2.3 Axiological position ......................................................................................68
    2.2.4 Triangulation within findings .......................................................................70
  2.3 Sampling and participant recruitment ..................................................................71
  2.4 Data gathering methods .......................................................................................71
    2.4.1 Quantitative data collection .........................................................................71
2.4.2 Qualitative data collection ......................................................... 74

2.5 Data analysis methods ............................................................... 77
  2.5.1 Quantitative data analysis .................................................... 77
  2.5.2 Qualitative data analysis ..................................................... 78
  2.5.2.1 Partial transcription ....................................................... 78
  2.5.2.2 Thematic analysis .......................................................... 79
  2.5.2.3: Thematic analysis: the process ....................................... 81
  2.5.2.4 Thematic networks ......................................................... 83
  2.5.2.5 Triangulation within data analysis .................................... 85

2.6 Critique of method ................................................................... 85

2.7 Ethical principles and considerations ......................................... 86

2.8 Time-line, time-budget and risk Analysis ................................... 89

Chapter 3: Results .......................................................................... 93
  3.1 Section outline .......................................................................... 93
  3.2. Intervention delivery and data collection .................................. 93
  3.3. Participant information ............................................................ 96
  3.4. Attendance rates ..................................................................... 97
  3.5 Quantitative analysis ............................................................... 98
    3.5.1. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) .................. 98
    3.5.2 Social Competence Inventory (SCI) ..................................... 105
    3.5.3 Quantitative data from the focus groups and interviews ........ 112
  3.6. Qualitative analysis .............................................................. 115
    3.6.1. Data collection ............................................................... 116
  3.7. Thematic analysis of the focus group, interview and observation
data ............................................................................. 116
  3.8 Thematic Network for Pre-transition concerns ......................... 119
    3.8.1 Organising Theme: Worries about transition ..................... 119
      3.8.1.1 Basic Theme: Significance of the change ...................... 119
      3.8.1.2 Basic Theme: No worries about transition ................. 120
      3.8.1.3 Basic Theme: The new social context and bullying ....... 120
      3.8.1.4 Basic Theme: Getting lost ......................................... 121
      3.8.1.5 Basic Theme: Academic concerns ............................... 121
  3.9 Thematic Network for Positive outcomes and experiences ....... 121
    3.9.1: Organising Theme: Effectiveness ..................................... 122
3.9.1 Basic Theme: Supported transition.............................................................. 122
3.9.1.1 Basic Theme: Supported transition.............................................................. 122
3.9.1.2 Basic Theme: Relieved worries................................................................. 124

3.9.2 Organising Theme: Social-emotional gains............................................. 125
  3.9.2.1 Basic Theme: Confidence.............................................................................. 125
  3.9.2.2 Basic Theme: Friendships............................................................................. 127
  3.9.2.3 Basic Theme: Home-school links.............................................................. 130

3.9.3 Organising Theme: Assessment of need and further support................ 132
  3.9.3.1 Basic Theme: Assessment in context.......................................................... 132
  3.9.3.2 Basic Theme: Follow up support............................................................... 133

3.9.4 Organising Theme: Positive experiences............................................... 134
  3.9.4.1 Basic Theme: Enjoyment.............................................................................. 134
  3.9.4.2 Basic Theme: Happy and fun....................................................................... 135
  3.9.4.3 Basic Theme: Feeling special and proud...................................................... 136

3.10 Thematic Network for Proceedings......................................................... 136
  3.10.1 Organising Theme: Snack time............................................................... 138
    3.10.1.1 Basic Theme: Meeting basic needs......................................................... 138
    3.10.1.2 Basic Theme: Developing skills and independence.................................. 139

  3.10.2 Organising Theme: Familiarisation...................................................... 140
    3.10.2.1 Basic Theme: Familiarity of the building................................................. 140
    3.10.2.2 Basic Theme: Familiarity of people........................................................ 142

  3.10.3 Organising Theme: Constancy............................................................... 143
    3.10.3.1 Basic Theme: Continuation of the club post transition.......................... 143
    3.10.3.2 Basic Theme: Continuation of circle time activities.............................. 144

  3.10.4 Organising Theme: Group experience............................................... 144
    3.10.4.1 Basic Theme: Small Group..................................................................... 145
    3.10.4.2 Basic Theme: Group composition and dynamics..................................... 146

  3.10.5 Organising Theme: Leader style and skills........................................... 147
    3.10.5.1 Basic Theme: Training and previous experience....................................... 148
    3.10.5.2 Basic Theme: Providing enjoyable activities............................................. 149
    3.10.5.3 Basic Theme: Tailoring activities and resources....................................... 150
    3.10.5.4 Basic Theme: Helping the children feel safe in the secondary school....... 151
    3.10.5.5 Basic Theme: Getting to know the children and developing relationships.................................................................................................................. 152
    3.10.5.6 Basic Theme: Praise, encouragement and responding to need...... 153
3.10.5.7 Basic Theme: Facilitating social interactions ........................................ 154
3.10.5.8 Basic Theme: Managing disruptive behaviour and conflicts .......... 155

3.11 Thematic network for Extra Pyramid factors ........................................ 155

3.11.1 Organising Theme: Additional supporting factors .............. 156
  3.11.1.1 Basic Theme: Feeling more grown up ...................................... 156
  3.11.1.2 Basic Theme: Tutor groups and sports clubs .................... 158

3.12 Thematic Network for Recommendations for future use .......... 158

3.12.1 Organising Theme: No recommendations .................. 159
  3.12.1.1 Basic Theme: Good as it is ............................................. 159

3.12.2 Organising Theme: Timing of sessions .......................... 160
  3.12.2.1 Basic Theme: Length of meetings ................................ 160
  3.12.2.2 Basic Theme: Distribution of meetings pre-/post- transition ... 161

3.12.3 Organising Theme: Include more feeder schools ............ 162
  3.12.3.1 Basic Theme: Invite more feeder schools to participate ........ 163

3.12.4 Organising Theme: Organisation and planning .............. 163
  3.12.4.1 Basic Theme: More time for planning and preparation .......... 164

3.13 Summary of results ................................................................. 165

Chapter 4: Discussion ........................................................................ 168

4.1 Section outline ............................................................................ 168

4.2 Study aims and research questions ............................................ 168

4.3 Research Question 1 (RQ1) ....................................................... 169
  4.3.1 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) ..................... 169
  4.3.2 Social Competence Inventory (SCI) ..................................... 173
  4.3.3: Focus group and interview data ........................................ 175

4.4 Research Question 2 (RQ2) ....................................................... 179
  4.4.1. Difficulties at transition .................................................. 180
  4.4.2. Resilience: a proposed theoretical framework for understanding how Pyramid Club supports the transition to secondary school .......... 181
  4.4.2.1 Significance of self esteem to resilience ......................... 185
  4.4.2.2 Significance of self efficacy to resilience ....................... 189
  4.4.2.3 Significance of attachment to resilience ....................... 191
  4.4.3: Core elements and intervention implementation .......... 197

4.5 Research Question 3 (RQ3) ....................................................... 203

4.6 Implications of findings and future research ....................... 207
List of Tables

Chapter 1

Table 1.1: Five ‘Transition Bridges’..............................................................................................26
Table 1.2: The ‘Key Ingredients’ for a successful Pyramid club..............................................41
Table 1.3: Summary of Pyramid Club evaluation literature..................................................45

Chapter 2

Table 2.1: Data Collection and Analysis Method for each RQ.............................................62
Table 2.2: Time-line and Time-budget.........................................................................................90
Table 2.3: Risk Analysis...............................................................................................................92

Chapter 3

Table 3.1: Collected and missing club member data.................................................................95
Table 3.2: Collected and missing club leader data .................................................................95
Table 3.3: Club leader and club member attendance rates....................................................97
Table 3.4: SDQ UK mean raw score and case bandings.........................................................99
Table 3.5: Pre- and post-intervention SDQ group mean scores (SD)..................................100
Table 3.6: Pre- and post-intervention case banding category...............................................102
Table 3.7: SDQ Raw data...........................................................................................................104
Table 3.8: Pre- and post-intervention SCI individual and group mean scores (SD)...............106
Table 3.9: Pre- and post-intervention Prosocial Orientation subscale individual and group mean scores (SD).................................................................108
Table 3.10: Pre- and post-intervention Social Initiative subscale individual and group mean scores (SD).................................................................110

Chapter 4

Table 4.1: Hierarchy of Needs and themes to illustrate how the Pyramid Club experience met those needs.............................................................................................188
Table 4.2: The development of attachment............................................................................192
List of Figures

Chapter 1
Figure 1.1: The Three Phases of Transition..............................................................28
Figure 1.2: The Pyramid Model..................................................................................37
Figure 1.3: Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) and how the Pyramid club
experience meets these needs.................................................................................40
Figure 1.4: The modern Scientist-Practitioner..........................................................56

Chapter 2
Figure 2.1: Structure of a Thematic Network............................................................84

Chapter 3
Figure 3.1: Pre- and post- intervention SDQ scores (group mean).........................101
Figure 3.2: Pre- and post- intervention Total and subscale scores (group means).................................................................................................................................112
Figure 3.3: Club leader ratings (effectiveness of club at supporting transition).................................................................................................................................113
Figure 3.4: Parent ratings (effectiveness of club at supporting transition)..............114
Figure 3.5: Club member ratings (enjoyment).............................................................115
Figure 3.6: Thematic Networks representing five Global Themes, 15
Organising Themes and 38 Basic Themes...............................................................118
Figure 3.7: Thematic Network for ‘Pre-transition concerns’....................................119
Figure 3.8: Thematic network for ‘Positive outcomes and experiences’..............112
Figure 3.9: Thematic network for ‘Proceedings’.........................................................137
Figure 3.10: Thematic network representing ‘Extra Pyramid factors’....................156
Figure 3.11: Thematic network for ‘Recommendations for future use’..............159

Chapter 4
Figure 4.1: Three ‘building blocks of resilience’.....................................................185
Figure 4.2: A proposed theoretical framework for understanding how Pyramid
Club supported transition to secondary school......................................................195
Figure 4.3: Core elements of a Transition Pyramid Club........................................200
## List of Appendices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pyramid Club Overview</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The 'Key Ingredients' for a successful Pyramid Club</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Proposed Model of Support</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Social Competence Inventory (SCI)</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Focus Group Prompts (Club Member)</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Focus Group Prompts (Club Leaders)</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Parent Telephone Interview Prompts</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Observation Record (adapted from Atkinson, 2005)</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thematic Analysis Stages</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Participant Information Sheet</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Consent Form for inclusion in Research Project</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The University of Manchester

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Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

‘An evaluation of the use of a Pyramid Club to support shy and withdrawn children’s transition to secondary school’

2011

The transition from primary to secondary school is regarded as one of the most difficult in children’s educational careers and the negative academic, social and emotional effects of an unsuccessful transition have been widely documented, with many practitioners identifying the transition to secondary school as a key intervention point (Galton, Morrison and Pell, 2000, Turnbull, 2006). Shy and socially withdrawn children are particularly vulnerable at this time. Pyramid Clubs, a short-term selective and preventative therapeutic group intervention offer a promising model of support, but a robust evidence-base is currently lacking (Munoz, Mrazek, and Haggerty, 1999; Shepherd and Roker, 2005).

This study evaluated the use of a Pyramid Club to provide a ‘bridge’ of support before, during and following nine children’s transition to secondary school. The study was conducted from a critical realist stance and quantitative and qualitative methodology were adopted within an embedded single-case study design. The study had two aims; to evaluate the effectiveness of the club; and to explore the process, in order to understand the club’s mechanism of effect. Pre-and post-intervention teacher report data were collected in conjunction with club leader, club member and parents’ perspectives, obtained though focus groups and individual interviews. The researcher also observed each club meeting.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings indicate the club offers an effective method of support. The children enjoyed the club experience and a range of social-emotional gains were reported. The findings were used to propose a theoretical framework based on the concept of resilience, to explain how Pyramid Clubs can be successfully used to support vulnerable children’s transition to secondary school. Core elements, which were considered to be essential components of the intervention, were identified to aid future implementation and evaluation of Transition Pyramid Clubs.

Keywords: transition, Pyramid club, peer support, group intervention, evaluation, scientist-practitioner, critical realism, thematic analysis, resilience
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Firstly I would like to thank the staff and pupils involved in this study, without whom this project would not have been possible. I appreciate their willingness to assist with data collection and for allowing me to observe their ‘club’. I hope they enjoyed the experience as much as I did.

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Finally I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering encouragement, support and sense of humour.
List of Acronyms

DCSF Department for Children Schools and Families
DfES Department for Education and Skills
ECM Every Child Matters
EP Educational Psychologist
EPS Educational Psychology Service
HPC Health Professions Council
LA Local Authority
NPT National Pyramid Trust
OFSTED Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills
PEP Principal Educational Psychologist
RQ Research Question
SCI Social Competence Inventory
SD Standard Deviation
SDQ Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEN Special Educational Needs
SENCO Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
TaMHS Targeted Mental Health in Schools Project
TD Total Difficulties scale
TEP Trainee Educational Psychologist
UN United Nations
UK United Kingdom
The impetus for this study arose from the involvement of the Local Authority (LA), in which the researcher is based, in the current Targeted Mental Health in Schools Project (TaMHS; Department for Children Schools and Families; DCSF, 2008). TaMHS, a DCSF funded action research project, aims to transform the way in which mental health support is delivered to children aged 5 to 13. The aim is to improve the mental well-being of children and young people by identifying and tackling potential difficulties earlier, though whole school, small group and individual support intervention. This is to ensure all children are provided with the opportunity to achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes (being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being) which define England’s national policy for children and young people (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). There is a strong emphasis on using the opportunity and funding provided by the TaMHS project to develop creative and innovative interventions with built in evaluation, to ensure long-term sustainability.

The decision to focus on supporting transition from primary school to secondary school was based on practitioner knowledge of the vulnerability of some children at this important stage, and the long term implications this had for their mental health, well-being and academic attainment. Part of the funding was used to commission the charity Pyramid, to develop and extend their Transition Pyramid Clubs to provide support for a group of shy and withdrawn children during their transition to secondary school. Providing a detailed evaluation of the intervention will facilitate future use and development of the clubs within the LA and strengthen the evidence-base of this form of intervention.

The remainder of this introduction provides an overview of each chapter.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

This chapter contains a review and analysis of the literature in relation to school transition, Pyramid Clubs and the role of the educational psychologist (EP) in evaluation research. The difficulties associated with the transition to secondary school are first explored, vulnerable groups are identified and universal and targeted support interventions are described. The identification of friendship as an important form of transition support and the vulnerability of children who are socially shy or withdrawn leads to a review of social and peer support interventions. The literature in relation to Pyramid Clubs, which mostly exists within the ‘grey’ literature, is explored and the theoretical basis of the Pyramid model and previous evaluation findings are considered and critically evaluated. This highlights a potential gap in the current knowledge base, in relation to the club’s mechanism of effect. The final section of the chapter addresses the importance of evaluation research and the suitability of EPs to undertake this type of work. Conceptualising the EP role as that of a ‘scientist-practitioner’ (Lane and Corrie, 2006) is presented as a useful framework to reconcile the difficulties associated with conducting research in a real life context. To fully comprehend the dual role of the scientist-practitioner, the researcher grappled with understanding the complexities of philosophical debate in order to identify what type of ‘scientist’ she is. Thus, epistemological debates are explored in this chapter and the central role of critical realism in educational psychology is argued. The researcher’s ontology, epistemology and axiology are then further detailed in Chapter 2. Chapter 1 concludes with the aims of the study and the research questions are stated:

1. How effective is the Pyramid Club intervention?

2. What are the difficulties at transition identified by the children and how can the intervention support these?
3. What barriers were encountered in the running of the club and how do they impact on the perceived effectiveness of the intervention?

Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter details the research design adopted, an embedded single-case study, and the researchers’ ontological, epistemological and axiological positions. The critical realist stance of the researcher leads to the adoption of a mixed-methods design where both quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analysis methods are employed. Sampling and participant recruitment are detailed and a chronology of data collection for each research question is described. A critique of the chosen method is provided and ethical principles are considered. The chapter concludes with a time-line, time-budget and risk analysis.

Chapter 3: Results

This chapter begins by detailing the changes that occurred during the course of the study and the implications for data collection. Participant information and attendance rates are reported and the results of the study are then presented in two parts. The first reports the findings from the quantitative analysis of the pre- and post-intervention teacher report questionnaires (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, Goodman, 2001; Social Competence Inventory, Rydell, Hagekull and Bohlin 1997) using descriptive statistics. The second part reports the findings from the thematic analysis of focus group, interview and observation data. Thematic networks and excerpts from the data are included to illustrate the process of analysis and the identified themes. The chapter concluded with a summary of the results.

Chapter 4: Discussion

This chapter opens with a reiteration of the research aims and research questions. The findings in relation to each research question are discussed
and considered in relation to previous literature and research findings. The chapter includes an evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention and presents a theoretical framework for understanding how the Pyramid Club process supports transition to secondary school. Core elements, which are considered to be essential components of the intervention, are identified and intervention implementation is discussed. The chapter concludes with a consideration of the possible implications of this research and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 Section outline

This chapter aims to review and analyse the literature in relation to school transition, Pyramid Clubs and the role of the educational psychologist in evaluation research. The section begins with an outline of the literature search employed by the researcher, followed by the literature review. This includes an exploration of the difficulties associated with transition and the types of intervention that are recommended to support the move to secondary school. A detailed review of the literature in relation to Pyramid Club, an intervention developed to support shy and withdrawn children at Key Stage 2 transition points, then follows and previous evaluation findings are appraised and potential gaps in the literature are identified. The final part of the literature review explores the role of the educational psychologist in evaluation research and the practical and philosophical challenges this type of work presents. The section concludes with a summary of the literature review, after which the research aims, research questions and expected contribution to knowledge are stated.

1.2 Literature search

A number of data bases with full-text holdings (PsychInfo; Science Direct; ERIC; Ovid; SAGE; EBSCO and Web of Knowledge) were searched to identify and locate journal articles to gain an understanding of current theory, research and practice in relation to: school transition from primary to secondary school; Pyramid Clubs, and evaluation research. An initial search was completed between January and May 2010, with subsequent smaller scale follow-up searches conducted in October 2010 and May 2011.

The literature search strategy involved using keywords and phrases related to each of the literature review areas. Terms were truncated and combined with the Boolean operator ‘AND’. The following search terms
were used when searching for evaluation research literature:

- Evaluation research
- Program* effectiveness
- Effectiveness and intervention
- Educational psychology evaluation
- Educational psychol* AND evaluation
- Effect* AND educational psychol*

Articles were considered if they were undertaken in the English language and were from peer reviewed journals. Recent studies (2000 onwards), published in the UK were preferred, however it was necessary to include older studies and international research. Ancestral searches in the reference lists of key articles were also undertaken. To supplement the academic journal searches, relevant unpublished dissertations and thesis abstracts were reviewed. The internet was also searched, this included the following search engines and websites:

- Google
- Google Scholar
- The Department for Education (http://www.education.gov.uk/),
- TES Connect (http://www.tes.co.uk)
- ContinYou (http://www.continyou.org.uk/)

This provided a good source of governmental guidance publications, unpublished transition support materials and unpublished evaluations of Pyramid Clubs. However, as these sources are not regulated to peer review standards, careful consideration of the content was required before inclusion in the review.

1.3 School transition

The concept of school transition is a relatively new phenomenon. It was not until the Education Act of 1944, and the enforced separation of education
into the primary (5 to 11 years) and secondary (11 to 15 years) stages, that a move between schools became part of a child’s educational career (Horobin, 2009). Transition was not highlighted as being potentially problematic until the 1960s; consequently it is a relatively new field for researchers. Despite this a large body of literature exploring school transition has since emerged, a substantial proportion of which is international, most significantly from the United States of America. Due to space constraints, a detailed account of the transition literature will not be provided, as this is comprehensively covered elsewhere (see Galton, Morrison and Pell 2000; Horobin, 2009; Turnbull, 2006).

The difficulties associated with school transition will first be considered, followed by a review of current good practice guidance in relation to universal transition support. The vulnerability of particular groups during the move to secondary school will then be explored and the need for, and availability of, evidence-based targeted interventions for these groups will be considered.

**Difficulties associated with school transition**

Transition from primary to secondary school occurs in England when most children are 11 or 12 years of age\(^1\). It is regarded as one of the most difficult in children’s educational careers (Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband and Lindsay, 2003) and is perceived to be an important life experience (Brown, Kendall, Teeman and Ridley 2004). It has been found to be a stressful event (Simmons, Burgeson, Carlton-Ford and Blyth, 1987), with over two thirds of students expressing anxiety about the change (Spelman, 1978). As Galton et al., (2000) argue: school transition is ‘a process that research suggests, at best causes slight apprehension, while at worst, deep felt anxiety’ (p.341).

\(^1\) Transition in the UK is complicated by the fact that both two tier and three tier (which include middle schools) systems exist. The LA involved in this study employs a two tier system and for this reason the literature relating to the move from primary to secondary school at Year 6 (when children are 11 to 12 years of age) is referred to. The study of three tier systems was considered to be beyond the scope of this research project.
In a recent replication of a previous longitudinal study, Hargreaves and Galton (2002) found that although children’s transition to secondary school has improved over the last 20 years, there are still outstanding problems. The negative academic, social and emotional effects of an unsuccessful transition have been widely documented (Anderson, Jacobs, Schramm, and Splittberger 2000; Demetriou, Goalen and Ruddock 2000; Galton et al., 2000; Qualter, Whitely, Hutchinson and Pope, 2007), with difficulties at transition linked to achievement loss or hiatus in academic attainment (Alspaugh, 1998; Galton et al., 2000; Hargreaves and Galton, 2002; Whitby, Lord, O’Donnell and Grayson 2006), reduced academic self concept and motivation to learn (Anderson et al., 2000; Lenga and Ogden, 2000; Wigfield, Eccles, Maclver, Reuman and Midgley, 1991) and threats to self esteem, peer relationships and emotional well-being (Garcia, Antonakos and Ronis, 1998; Horobin, 2009; Lord, Eccles and McCarthy, 1994). Consequently many practitioners identify the transition to secondary school as a key intervention point, with links to later risk taking, school disaffection and exclusions (Turnbull, 2006).

However, most studies agree that the initial anxiety and negative effects associated with transition do not last for the majority of the population (Anderson et al., 2000; Galton et al., 2000; Lucey and Reay, 2000; Qualter et al., 2007). Studies over the past 40 years indicate that around three quarters of children settle in well at secondary school (Evangelou, Taggart, Sylva, Melhuish, Sammon and Siraj-Blatchford 2008; Nisbett and Entwistle, 1969). However, persistent and increasing problems following transition have been highlighted as affecting 10% of children (Chedzoy and Burden, 2005) and a number of vulnerable groups are identified within the literature. The literature in relation to these groups will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter.

Teasing out what it is that makes transition problematic has been challenging. Partly because it is an area that has proved difficult to study, mainly due to the complexity of the issues involved, as a number of processes and changes are occurring at the same time, for example the developmental
transition from childhood to adolescence. In addition consistent methodological approaches have not been used (Tobbell, 2003) and longitudinal research in the UK is particularly scarce. Consequently ‘

sound evidence relating to the effects of school transfer and transition is not as plentiful as the importance of the topic might suggest’ (Galton, 2000, p.323). There is a strong professional opinion among teachers that pupil’s experiences of transition can make a difference to their learning and progress, but there is little evidence of a systematic kind (Galton, Gray and Rudduck, 1999).

Some authors attribute difficulties to a ‘development mismatch’ between the needs of the young adolescent and the secondary school environment (Eccles and Midgley, 1989; Symonds, 2009), arguing that schools need to adapt their systems and practice to better complement adolescent traits (e.g. Autonomy, decision-making, peer-orientation). Anderson et al’s. (2000) analysis of the findings from a number of studies pointed to the organisational and social discontinuities the children faced. Organisational discontinuities referred to changes in the school environment, ethos and differing expectations of work standards. Social discontinuities were those related to changes in friendship groups, diversity of students, status within the school and the differing teacher-pupil relationship. Discontinuities in curriculum and teaching style are frequently referred to within the literature to account for the hiatus in progress that is observed following the move between schools (Galton et al., 2000; Tobbell, 2003). Nicholls and Gardner (1999) highlight that some discontinuity with primary school has its merits (e.g. it is an important part of growing up, marking the change from childhood to adolescence) arguing that what is required is a distinction between planned and unplanned discontinuity.

Support at transition
Given the recognised difficulties detailed above, comprehensive, universal approaches to transition are advocated within the literature (Evangelou et al., 2008; Brown et al., 2004), with the main aims being to reduce anxiety and
avoid an academic hiatus (Galton et al., 2000). The importance of: ensuring high levels of communication between schools, parents and children (Akos and Galassi, 2004; Catterall, 1998; Falbo, Lein and Amador, 2001; Feiner, Ginter and Primavera 1982; Isakson and Jarvis, 1999); reducing discontinuities (Evangelou et al., 2008; Ofsted, 2002); and preparing children for change (Anderson et al., 2000; Lahelma and Gordon, 1997; Smith, Akos, Lim and Wiley, 2008) are well recognised and common recommendations. Although there has been some debate as to whether it is more effective to skill up individuals or make environmental changes (e.g. Feiner et al., 1982), the need for a multi-faceted approach is clearly emphasised and can be concisely understood in terms of five key ‘transition bridges’ (Fuller, Thomas, Horswell, 2005).

Michael Barber (1999) developed the bridge analogy to describe the support children require to cross the ‘muddy and wide river’ between primary and secondary school (p.5). He based the idea around the five pivotal areas of action outlined by Galton et al. (1999). The Department for Education and Skills funded Transition Project (Fuller, Thomas and Horswell, 2005) developed this into an evaluation tool to facilitate the sharing of good practice and strategies across London boroughs. A summary of the ‘transition bridges’ described in the project can be found in Table 1.1 below.

The project found many of the schools were addressing the curricular and pedagogical aspects of transition, and networks developed between schools and teachers enabled them to share good practice. However, they found there were rarely mechanisms to support the implementation and ensure follow-through. Furthermore, pupils were often viewed as ‘passive players’ in the process, with limited opportunity to address their role as active and autonomous managers of their learning (DfES, 2005, p.13). This is incongruent with the recognised developmental need for children to feel they have some control over their environment at this age (Symonds, 2010) and the effectiveness of empowerment and student voice (Deuchar, 2009; Lenga and Ogden, 1999; Pointon, 2000). The need for pupils to become a
‘professional student; to be aware of and manage the differences between the two school stages’ (Galton et al., 2000) is thought to be weakness in most transition programmes (Morrision, 2000). Indeed the authors of the London Transition Project were surprised to find how little the pupils believed they were prepared for secondary school by their teachers (Fuller et al., 2005, p.16).
Table 1.1: Five ‘Transition Bridges’ (adapted from Fuller et al., 2005, p.4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition Bridge</th>
<th>Characteristics of good practice</th>
<th>Examples of what this could include</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Effective and robust administrative arrangements to support transition, e.g. pupil records transfer including performance data management, administrative meetings between key school staff, common procedures.</td>
<td>A transition policy, with clear roles and responsibilities; a transition ‘champion’; Ongoing feedback and evaluation; arrangements tailored to the needs of specific groups of pupils.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Personal</td>
<td>Improving primary pupils’ and their parents’ familiarity with the school layout and atmosphere. This bridge also ensures that effective pastoral support is in place.</td>
<td>Induction days; open evenings; joint social events between Y6 and Y7; pupil peer mentoring; parent and pupil guide books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Improving continuity in the curriculum between Year 6 and Year 7 to ensure secondary school teachers build on the curriculum covered to date and seek to teach to pupils’ strengths.</td>
<td>Effective sharing of data, pupil tracking and monitoring of progress; common understanding of progress expected; joint teaching and cross-phases activities; summer schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Improving continuity in teaching and classroom practice between Year 6 and Year 7. Countering stereotypes held by teachers in each phase and encouraging cross-phase professional support and dialogue.</td>
<td>A common language; teacher exchange between primary and secondary schools; joint training programmes; active preparation of pupils to meet new ways of working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy and managing learning</td>
<td>Ensuring that pupils are seen as active participants in the transition process and in their own learning.</td>
<td>Actively encouraging pupils to become ‘professional’ learners; develop a portfolio of work; quality information given to parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other evaluations of ‘good practice’ (Evangelous et al., 2008) highlight the focus of school based programmes on supporting the organisational, rather than the social, discontinuities. Most initiatives are short-term and framed around curricular, administrative and behavioural issues (Galton and Morisson, 2000; Horobin, 2009; Zeedyk et al., 2003). This is in contrast to the concerns of pupils and their parents, who prioritise social aspects such as the making and breaking of friendships, greater parental involvement and longer-term support (Pratt and George, 2005; Zeedyk et al., 2003). This may be a reflection of the importance attached to academic progress within UK schools, due to the pressures of national targets, SATs and school performance tables. However, as Horobin (2009) asserts social-emotional health impacts on school performance and as such greater emphasis should be placed on supporting the social, as well as organisational, discontinuities experienced at transition.

This mismatch between what is provided and what is known to be required, maybe a result of limited evaluation evidence as to how best to support children during transition. Although the majority of schools have a transition support programme in place, little information is shared between Local Authorities or professional organisations (Zeedyk et al., 2003). Most Local Authorities do not provide funding to assist the transition (Mann, 1997) and there is a paucity of research evaluating support programmes or projects, with the majority of UK published transition literature being descriptive rather than explanatory (Tobbell, 2003). Turnbull (2006) argues this is due to a lack of adequate resources to fund thorough evaluations. Shepherd and Roker (2003) found that projects to support transition were often started with little opportunity to build on the learning from existing projects, so there was considerable ‘re-invention of the wheel’. Highlighting the need for rigorous research and firm evaluation data in order to explore how and what works to make the move to secondary school smoother for children.

Furthermore, the period of transition needs to be given sufficient priority and attention by schools (Ofsted, 2002). Transition is about what happens ‘before
the transfer, during the transfer and following the transfer’ (Fuller et al., 2005, p.17), not just at points of entry and exit (Demetriou et al., 2000). Most transition programmes are largely preparatory, where as transition should be seen as a process, rather than a one off event, with ongoing support in place to help the children adjust to secondary school. (Turnbull, 2006). This is consistent with the literature in relation to change management, which highlights three distinct phases of transition (see Figure 1.1). Support through all of these phases is essential and especially important for those children who are identified as being within a vulnerable or at risk group.

Figure 1.1: The Three Phases of Transition (JISC, 2009)

The Three Phases of Transition

- **Endings**: People discover they have to let go of what was normal, predictable and comfortable environments. They feel a loss of control. There are those who may be genuinely optimistic. It is important to ensure people respect each other’s perspectives.
- **Neutral Zone**: As people go through the process, some feel stuck and become anxious. People can feel uncertain, lost, afraid, ‘in limbo’ or make unusual outbursts of frustration or anxiety. The key here is to be patient. Focus on moving forward, not on the past. As with endings, those who are optimistic should continue to be encouraged.
- **New Beginnings**: People have chosen to commit and participate in building the new processes within the new environment. Now they are more comfortable with the transition, they can become impatient for progress and may be hopeful about building new ties, relationships and achievements.

Identity: Have to let go of who we were in the old

Identity: Not who we were - Not yet who we will be

Identity: Begin to identify with the new ways
Vulnerable groups

For most children a universal transition support intervention does suffice (Evangelou et al., 2008), with some authors arguing that transition can be a positive experience that provides opportunity alongside challenge (Lucey and Reay, 2000; Stradling and MacNeil, 2000). This may explain the increase in self-esteem found by some studies following transition (Proctor and Choi, 1994). However, as mentioned earlier, there is small percentage of children for whom persistent and increasing problems following transition have been highlighted (Chedzoy and Burden, 2005). These children are particularly vulnerable during transition and may need additional, targeted support, above and beyond what is offered at a universal level, for; ‘the greater the need, the greater the importance of good transition practices across all bridges....this is particularly true with regard to the social/ pastoral bridge’ (Fuller et al., 2005, p.15).

A number of vulnerable groups are identified within the literature, such as children with Special Educational Needs (SEN; Feeney and Best, 1997; Galton et al., 2000; Graham and Hill, 2003), children of an ethnic minority (Fase, 1994; Graham and Hill, 2003), of low socio-economic status (Evangelou et al., 2008; Galton and Morrison, 2000) and those who are socially young or immature.

For children identified as having SEN the importance of tailoring transition support to meet their needs is recognised and recommended (DfES, 2005). Feeney and Best (1997) found research into transition perceptions and practices for student’s with SEN was lacking. Their study highlighted the children’s concerns and anxieties prior to the move were similar to those held by children without SEN, but hypothesised that the difficulties and adjustments needed to make the transition would be more challenging. For example, Knesting, Hokanson and Waldron (2008) found children with learning difficulties generally required a longer time than their peers to learn about and become comfortable with their school routines. Langshaw, Marinelli, Maroney, Muller, Newell and Tan (2009) found transition
programmes varied considerably across schools and there were a limited number of readily available resources specifically targeted for children with learning or language difficulties in the transition process. In response, they developed their own resource, Step Up (Langshaw et al., 2009). This advocates effective communication between schools, raising teacher awareness, careful monitoring of progress and including parents to help with homework. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to find any evaluation information in relation to the Step Up materials. Preparing students via additional visits and providing support, via learning mentors, are further recommendations advocated within the literature to help children with SEN get to grip with the new expectations and environment of secondary school. (Feeney and Best, 1997).

A number of studies have highlighted the increased vulnerability for children of an ethnic minority (Fase, 1994; Graham and Hill, 2003). However this is not a consistent finding, as others have found a positive effect of ethnic origin (Nuttall, 1990; Sammons, 1995). This highlights the complexity of ethnic origin, which appears to be entwined with socio-economic status (Hustinx, 2002). For improving the educational outcomes of children from minority groups, Hustinx (2002) suggests raising educational aspirations and expectations. Graham and Hill (2003) propose increased communication around the different viewpoints held on the role of school, the child and family are needed to help manage differences in background, religion, language and values positively. Further recommending that instances of discrimination needed to be tackled through robust anti-bullying policies.

A more consistent finding is the vulnerability of the socially young or immature. Nisbet and Entwistle (1969) found this in their early study, and Spelman (1979) found confident and socially mature children were more likely to do well following the move. Galton et al., (2000) in a summary of the literature identified the ‘younger, less mature, less confident pupils’ (p.346) as most at risk for experiencing persistent difficulties. For this group, the potential lack of a strong supportive peer group leaves them particularly
vulnerable, for there is wealth of evidence to suggest the importance of peers and friendships during transition. Developmentally, peers become increasingly important and influential during adolescence (Gillison, Standage, and Skevington, 2008) and studies of children and parent views indicate that social concerns around friendship are paramount (Smith et al., 2008). Pratt and George (2005) claim their study on the importance of friendships during school transfers:

‘... draws attention to the practices of teachers and school administrators and their distance from children’s feelings and experiences of friendships, and in particular their anticipation or fear and loneliness in the transition stage’ (p. 25).

Furthermore, studies suggest that peer support can be a protective factor during transition (Akos and Galassi, 2004; Aitkins, Bierman and Parker, 2005; Hirsch and Dubios, 1992; Tobbell, 2003). Friends may provide support in dealing with new school requirements and provide a source of comfort in the face of stressful experiences related to transition (Cantin and Boivin, 2004). As Weller (2007) argues, children’s social networks often provide important but under-researched resources which aid their progress through the transition.

Friendship is an area of children’s learning that is rarely explicitly taught, as it is often assumed that friendships will develop naturally. Children need relationships and friendships to develop social skills and to provide the context for social, emotional and cognitive development (Lally, 2010, p.91), as learning about social relationships needs to occur in the context of a relationship to ensure skill practice and generalisation (Houck and Stember, 2000). Increasingly social and emotional competences are considered by some as more influential than cognitive abilities for personal, career and scholastic success (Goleman, 1996). Consequently, there is a growing recognition that schools have an important role to play in supporting the
social and emotional development and well-being of children and young people (Horobin, 2009; Lally, 2010).

**Social support interventions at transition**

There is a substantial body of evidence in relation to social skills interventions (e.g. Erwin, 1994), however, little in the context of transition. Gresham, Sugai and Horner (2001) argue a one-size-fits-all approach cannot be applied. Based on a meta-analysis of the literature, Gresham et al. (2001) found social skill deficits could be categorised into four areas: *acquisition deficits* (absence of knowledge of how to execute a particular social skills); *performance deficits* (presence of social skills, but failure to perform them in certain situations); *fluency deficits* (stemming from insufficient practice or rehearsal of particular social skills); and *acquisition deficits with interfering problem behaviours* (presence of interfering behaviour preventing acquisition of particular social skills). The authors stress the importance of ensuring intervention objectives meet and promote competence in the area(s) of identified need (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan and Tribe, 2006, p.35).

In a study of the social cognitions of socially withdrawn children, Wichmann, Coplan and Daniels (2004) found the children often displayed a ‘performance deficit’ rather than a ‘knowledge deficit’ (p.386) and may have difficulty acting in a manner consistent with their knowledge due to social fears or anxieties. Furthermore, the children demonstrated biases in their causal attributions, blaming themselves more for social failures. The authors interpreted this finding as being a result of previous negative experience; as the withdrawn children perceived themselves to have failed in social situations more often that other children (p.388). Consequently, they argue that children displaying these types of difficulties would benefit from skill practice with peers (rather than teaching) via confidence building games, ideally in a small group environment.
Peer support interventions

Finding evaluations of studies that have utilised such an approach is challenging. Two small scale interventions reported within the literature appear provide the type of intervention Wichmann et al. (2004) advocate. Houck and Stember (2002) describe an American project which provided a small group experience for five socially withdrawn school-aged girls. Weekly meetings, co-ordinated by the school nurse, provided a social situation in which conversations could occur around a shared snack and craft project. Houck (2002) purports this provided an opportunity to express prosocial behaviours in a socially safe environment, which promoted social problem solving and friendships that lasted beyond the intervention (p. 206). In the UK, Sellman (2000) reports an initiative developed by a secondary school in Stafford to co-ordinate a training programme in self-confidence and conflict resolution to prepare pupils for transition to secondary school. This involved six, two hour sessions focused on developing self-confidence though games and activities aimed to make the pupils feel good about themselves and each other. The author reports positive feedback, however a key issue with the study was that it took place out of context (i.e. not in the secondary school), thus there were potential difficulties with application and generalisation. Both studies are interesting and report encouraging findings; however they lack robust evaluation evidence. Sellman (2000) only makes reference to ‘positive informal feedback’ and Houck’s (2002) study did not include a pre-intervention measure, making it difficult to draw clear conclusions.

With the exception of peer tutoring (a form of peer support which primarily focuses on academic, rather than social, enhancement; Kaye and Webb, 1996), there is a lack of large-scale studies evaluating the effectiveness of peer support interventions (Ellis, Marsh and Craven, 2009) and there has been limited effort to systematically utilise classroom social networks in social intervention research (Farmer, Pearl and Van Acker, 1996). Consequently, it is an area in need of rigorous research, particularly in relation to discovering ‘more precisely the outcomes for users’ (Cowie, Naylor, Talamelli, Chauhan and Smith, 2002, p.465).
In a recent systematic review of the peer intervention support literature, Lally (2010) reviewed two approaches: Circle of Friends and Pyramid Club. The Circle of Friends approach is a form of peer counselling that has gained popularity in the UK over the past decade. It aims to establish a supportive network of friends around a particular child (‘the focus child’; Newton and Wilson, 1998). Rather than focusing solely on ‘within-child’ factors, the approach takes account of situational factors and peer responses (Frederickson and Turner, 2003) and is concerned with the ‘sociology of acceptance’ and how this can be fostered in groups of children (Newton, Taylor and Wilson, 1996, p.42). Newton et al. (1996) argue this approach provides a powerful ‘real world’ alternative to social skills training. Barratt and Randall (2004) also support this point, arguing that interventions to tackle social isolation must provide opportunities for ‘real’ friendships to develop, rather than a lesson on how to be congenial. In this way the child is able to enhance their social repertoire and enjoy a greater sense of control and choice in social situations (Barratt and Randall, 2004, p.355).

Newton et al. (1996) have made a number of claims as to the wide benefits this approach can offer to a child who is experiencing some degree of isolation from their classmates and a number of adapted versions, aimed at targeting different needs, have been reported within the literature (e.g. Shotton, 1998). However, this approach is mainly aimed at supporting children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties or those who are isolated due to peer rejection, rather than socially shy or withdrawn children. Furthermore, as Lally’s (2010) study highlights, although there is a small accumulation of evidence in relation to the effectiveness of promoting peer acceptance, no evidence has pointed to intrinsic change of social, emotional or behavioural functioning within the focus child in terms of developing social competence or confidence (p.54). Lally (2010) found greater evidence in favour of the Pyramid Club approach and the following section will describe and critically evaluate the literature in relation to this intervention.
1.4 Pyramid Clubs

Pyramid Clubs provide a short-term, selective and preventative (Munoz, Mrazek, and Haggerty, 1999), therapeutic group intervention for children identified as being vulnerable at the transition points of Key Stage 2 (Year 3 and Year 6), and are one of the longest established primary school-based social-emotional interventions in the UK (Ohl, Mitchell, Cassidy and Fox, 2008). The Pyramid Club intervention consists of a 10 session after-school activity club programme that runs once a week for one and a half hours. An overview can be found in Appendix 1. This section will describe the development of the Pyramid Club model, explore its theoretical basis, and evaluate the existing Pyramid Club literature.

*Development of the Pyramid Club model*

The Pyramid Club model was born out of an action research project, run between 1978 and 1982 in the London borough of Hounslow, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. Using an experimental design across three junior schools, the project sought to test out procedures for identifying vulnerable children, and to develop an effective system that could be implemented in schools to ‘promote readiness for secondary school’ (Fitzherbert, 1993, p.81).

A whole class health screen was developed to ‘trigger appropriate preventative action’ and identify those children who at 8 or 9 years old looked as though they may not survive either the educational or social challenges of secondary school. This initial screen was followed by a multidisciplinary meeting to discuss children who raised concerns. Fitzherbert (1997) found the children most commonly raised were those who did not currently have identifiable needs, but were evidently at risk of later difficulties. They were the ‘social isolates, grossly under functioning or just miserable...for whom it was clear that if they were to achieve readiness for school, they would need ‘something extra’ (Fitzherbert, 1993, p.82). Finding there was little in the way to support them, she set out to find a solution.
Kolvin et al.’s large scale evaluation of school-based interventions highlighted the potential of small therapy groups, by demonstrating that a 10 session ‘play group’ intervention had a positive effect, with little ‘wash out’. In fact, the benefits actually appeared to increase with time; three years following the intervention 78% of the children were no longer judged to be ‘at risk of maladjustment’, compared to 44% of children in the untreated control group (Kolvin, Garside, Nichol, MacMillan, Wolstenholme and Leitch 1981). Fitzherbert and her colleagues developed their own ‘activity group’ intervention (Muppet Clubs, later to be renamed Pyramid Clubs), finding similar results. Furthermore, they were able to achieve this result using volunteers, rather than employing professional mental health workers to run the clubs (Fitzherbert, 1983 in 1993).

The success of the Hounslow pilots enabled the scheme to continue running and in 1993 the National Pyramid Trust (NPT), was established to promote the model in other geographical areas (Fitzherbert, 1997). A small central organisation structure was chosen, which focused on developing the model and providing the materials (Pyramid Club Leader Training Manual, 2007, p.10). Consequently, the intervention became manualised, and a three day training programme was established for volunteers, accredited by the Council for Awards in Children’s Care and Education. Continyou, took over sponsorship of the charity in 2007 (from herein referred to as Pyramid). Pyramid Clubs are now run in 42 Local Authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with approximately 10,000 children having passed through the Pyramid process (Hughes, 2005). The current Pyramid model is described in Figure 1.2 below.

In 2003 Pyramid began pilot work on the transition from primary to secondary school. The Pyramid Transition Clubs follow a similar model to the clubs used at Year 3, but include more direct teaching and discussion of topics related to the move to secondary school. Nine schemes currently run Transition Pyramid Clubs across the UK.
Figure 1.2: The Pyramid Model

Theoretical basis of the Pyramid Model

The practitioner-driven nature of the clubs has resulted in an eclectic theoretical underpinning. Following the success of the group work, Fitzherbert (1997) looked to the literature for an explanation; theory followed practice, rather than vice versa. This is in contrast to other social and emotional interventions, such as FRIENDS (Stallard, Simpson, Anderson, Hibbert and Osborn, 2007) which is firmly grounded within the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy theory and literature.

The most detailed current theoretical basis of the model is found within the Pyramid Club Leader Training Manual (Training Manual, 2007), developed by Pyramid following expansion of the model. It presents as quite a ‘mixed-bag’ of theoretical perspectives, explanations and frameworks. Emphasis is
on making the intervention ‘work’ in real life. Given the audience and purpose of the material, this is wholly appropriate and not unsurprising. However, it makes it difficult to establish a coherent theoretically driven argument. In a very pragmatic manner, the ‘best bits’ appear to have been adopted from the literature and incorporated. The researcher looked to both Fitzherbert’s work and the manual content in an attempt to identify the underlying theory to the clubs.

In her earlier writings Fitzherbert (1997; 1993) endorsed the need for preventative intervention by framing exclusion as a mental health issue. Confusingly, this at times led her to focus on the behaviours and needs of ‘acting out’ children, rather than withdrawn children who are the target population for this intervention. Citing literature describing a rise in mental health issues in children and young people, the crux of her argument was that children who failed at school often did so because their low self esteem needs were not being recognised. Slow and ineffective procedures for identifying children with social emotional needs meant potentially minor problems, left untreated, were manifesting in behaviours that led to their social exclusion, with lifelong implications (see Fitzherbert, 1997, p.30-31). Referencing Losel’s (1994) work on resilience, which he defined as ‘good outcomes despite high risk status’, and the finding that it was a quality that was not fixed, but instead could be developed, Fitzherbert argued that an intervention to develop self esteem and resilience skills were just what the children she worked with required, and exactly what the Pyramid clubs offered.

In accordance with this, the overriding message within the Training Manual (2007) is that the clubs aim to build self esteem and resilience:

‘The aim of the Pyramid Club is to build the child’s self-esteem and resilience; to help them find their own voice, which is often easier to do in a small group; to help them to make friendships that will support them in school and outside of school; and to give them an optimism and hope
derived from a totally enjoyable experience that they can treasure for years to come’ (p.5).

Resilience is conceptualised as incorporating self esteem, self confidence, self efficacy and problem solving skills. In addressing these, literature is cited from a range of sources, such as emotional literacy research (Goleman, 1996); practitioner based resources (Weare, 2000), large scale evaluation studies (Weare and Gray, 2003) and Department for Education and Skills (2004) materials. Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs is drawn upon to explain how the clubs support the development of the children’s self esteem and confidence (see Figure 1.3, following page). A snack and drink when the children first arrive at the club meets their basic physiological needs. Safety needs are met through the safe and predictable routine of the club. Their love and belongingness needs are met through the experience of being in a group and others’ appreciation of them. Esteem needs are met through developing their confidence in activities (e.g. crafts) and new experiences and friendships.
Figure 1.3: Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) and how the Pyramid Club experience meets these needs

Essentially self-esteem and resilience are thought to develop as a result of the ‘club ethos’ creating a safe and supportive group environment. Within the manual the provision of four ‘key ingredients’ is described as enabling the clubs to develop this ‘ethos’, namely: praise and recognition; love and security; new experiences; and responsibility (see Table 1.2 below). The club leaders are trained in basic behavioural techniques (e.g. reward positive behaviour, proximal praise) and activities are centred around the sharing of food and drink, circle time activities and physical and creative play to support the development of the ‘club ethos’ (Appendix 2 for further detail).
Table 1.2: The ‘Key Ingredients’ for a successful Pyramid club (Training Manual, 2007, p7)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Ingredient:</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Praise and Recognition</strong></td>
<td>To help the children feel good about themselves and make them feel special by providing activities that aim to ensure success and that recognise their unique value as individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love and Security</strong></td>
<td>To provide opportunities for the children to express and communicate feelings and to develop positive relationships within an environment that is safe, supportive, non-stigmatising, non-authoritarian, non-discriminatory, reliable and stress free; to encourage risk taking within the safety of the club and in an ethos of unconditional positive regard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Experiences</strong></td>
<td>To provide opportunities for the children to develop skills in relationship building and other age appropriate practical, physical and creative skills through a range of fun activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>To help the children to experience a sense of ownership and a sense of belonging by maximising opportunities for them to influence and control their club environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Searching for an explanation for the long term effectiveness of the relatively short, low key and low cost intervention she was developing, Fitzherbert (1997; 1993) found the work of American Psychologist, Mortimer Schiffer resonated most strongly with what she observed in practice. Based on a psychoanalytic framework, Schiffer (1976) claimed that the social nature of human beings, combined with the potency of peer influence at this stage of social development, meant that any social or learning experience in that context creates a unique ‘synergy’. He argued that this is what made small group work with children so effective, as it ‘flows with the tide’ of maturational drives, heightens awareness, and consequently has maximum impact.
Interestingly, although Fitzherbert makes explicit and detailed reference to the work of Schiffer and Kolvin (1997; 1993), the Training Manual (2007) mentions their names only briefly. Instead a number of different sources are cited in relation to the group work approach, indicating a broadening of the theoretical frameworks and principles underpinning the model and a move away from the earlier emphasis on psychodynamic theory. For example, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning cycle is described as providing the ‘basis of the Pyramid club’ experience and to explain the way in which life experiences can be used to develop social and emotional competences and support generalisation once the children’s basic needs have been met. The ‘forming, norming, storming’ work of Tuckman and Jensen (1977) is used to illustrate the stages a new group may go through as it develops, and how this may impact on group dynamics and the work of Geldard and Geldard (2001) is drawn upon to provide practical guidance as to how the process can be supported by the club leaders.

Despite the wealth of information in the Training manual and clear attempts by Fitzherbert (1997) to identify a theoretical explanation for her findings, previous evaluation studies make little explicit reference to theoretical mechanisms. Instead, focus is on the general literature around social and emotional intervention programmes and a description of the club format and activities (e.g. Goodwin, 2009; Ohl et al., 2008). This possibly indicates that the theory underpinning the model is not that robust, not a defining feature of the model, or both. It is debateable as to whether this is a strength or weakness. Arguably, it has resulted in a potential gap within the literature in understanding how the clubs work, as it is not currently clear which skills or abilities are developed by this intervention a wide range of outcome measures have been employed. Nor is it currently clear which elements of the club model are most effective (Lally, 2010). However, this does afford the model theoretical freedom, as it is not grounded in one body of thought. In fact Ohl et al., (2008) make reference to the theoretical flexibility of Pyramid, noting that the training programme for volunteer leaders is ‘regularly updated to reflect current policy and best practice’ (p.117). This enables the model to
evolve, and as Hughes (2005) has highlighted, remain ‘current’ by allowing it to be aligned to the priorities of governmental agendas and initiatives (see Hughes, 2008). Consequently, making it more appealing to schools and more likely to be allocated funding; possibly more of a priority to Pyramid if the clubs are already believed to be effective.

**Effectiveness of Pyramid Clubs; previous evaluation findings**

The necessity to evaluate mental health programmes and interventions has been strongly argued elsewhere (Stallard et al., 2007; Weare and Gray, 2003) and will be considered in greater detail in section 1.5. This section will critically evaluate findings from the current Pyramid Club literature and identify areas for future development.

Pyramid conduct their own small-scale evaluation of each club that is run. Pre- and post-intervention SDQ data and, for the Transition Pyramid Clubs pre- and post- questionnaires completed by the children, are compared to assess how effective the clubs have been in improving the children’s social-emotional health (SDQ) and preparing them for secondary school (questionnaire). However, this data is not reported and the bulk of studies relating to Pyramid exist within the ‘grey’ literature.

These small, unpublished studies have provided preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of the Year 3 Pyramid Clubs (a summary of the studies can be found in table 1.3) and indicate a beneficial effect on club members that might not be attributable to normal developmental progress alone (Ohl et al., 2008). These studies suggest the clubs lead to improvements in members: emotional well-being (Cooper, 2001; Davies, 1999; Goodwin, 2009; Lally, 2010; Skinner, 1996; Wells, 2000); self ratings of happiness and enjoyment of the clubs (Fox, Ohl, Hughes, Haye, Mitchell and Graham, 2006; Skinner, 1996; Wells, 2000); teacher ratings (Cooper, 2001; Davies, 1996; Wells, 2000); academic attainment (Davies, 1999; Wells, 2000) and a reduction in peer difficulties (Gregor and Post, 2005). It is notable that the majority of these studies measured the short term effectiveness of the club, despite the
expectation of Fitzherbert (1997) that the effects of the club experience were likely to increase over time. The two studies which have adopted a longitudinal design (Cooper, 2001 and Goodwin, 2009) do indicate long term effects. However, neither of these studies compared pre- and post- data immediately following the intervention with later follow up data, to assess if any immediate effects did increase over time. Furthermore, as highlighted in Table 1.3 there are a number of methodological and reporting limitations to all the studies, such as small sample sizes and a lack of appropriate control groups, weakening the strength of the findings. Moore’s (2003) review conducted for the Evidence Network, led her to conclude that from the studies available (Cooper, 2001; Davies, 1999; Wells, 2000) it was not possible to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the clubs, but that there were encouraging findings in terms of participants’ enjoyment of the clubs.

Ohl et al., (2008), the only published study to date, provides a more robust evaluation of the effectiveness of the club in improving the social-emotional health of club members, as measured by pre- post- SDQ scores (Goodman, 2001). The authors found that two weeks following the intervention, both the club members and the control group mean SDQ Total Difficulty scores had significantly decreased, however the effect size was much stronger for the club members (r = .71) than the control group (r = .44). They interpreted this finding as indicating the intervention was effective in improving vulnerable children’s social-emotional health, and running a selective intervention did not have a negative impact on the children who were not included.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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| Skinner (1996)        | Evaluated Pyramid clubs at 16 schools across a four month period. | • Significantly greater improvement in depressive symptoms, social withdrawal and immaturity in children who had attended a Pyramid club than those who had not.  
• The children rated themselves as more popular and happier after attending the club than before. | • Insufficient information about the comparison group.  
• Insufficient information about effect sizes. |
| Davies (1999)         | Evaluated Pyramid clubs at 3 schools.        | • Teachers rated children who attended the club as showing greater improvements than non-attendees in relation to emotional problems and peer problems.  
• Story content and sentence generation task indicated the club attendees writing ability improved more than non-attendees.  
• Improvements in story content highly correlated with improvement in assessed social and emotional skills. | • Small sample size.  
• Due to sample size restrictions assessment results compared to non-comparison group.  
• Insufficient information about effect sizes.  
• Incomplete data. |
| Wells (2000)          | 32 children, across 2 primary schools, identified as having similar needs. Half the sample had attended a Pyramid club, other half acted as a control group. Teachers interviewed and children tested (self esteem; locus of control; reading accuracy and comprehension; maths scores). | • Mean scores for self esteem increased for both groups. More so for the Pyramid group, but the difference was not statistically significant.  
• Improvement in locus of control measure scores for Pyramid group.  
• Improved mean score for reading accuracy and comprehension; higher for Pyramid group than control but not statistically significant.  
• Statistically significant improvement in maths scores for Pyramid group. | • Quantitative data must be interpreted with caution  
• Allocation to groups was not random .Composition of the groups changed during the course of the study  
• Access to simultaneous interventions was not controlled for  
• Small sample sizes  
• Author does not specify |
<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Cooper (2001)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Unpublished MSc dissertation,&lt;br&gt;University of East London</th>
<th>Control; reading ability; mathematical ability) 2 weeks prior to intervention (pre) and 2 weeks after completion (post).&lt;br&gt;Author reported that the Pyramid group children appeared more confident, more willing to try difficult problems and used more diverse problem solving methods after the intervention.&lt;br&gt;Pyramid group children reported enjoying the club.&lt;br&gt;Positive teacher reports. Children who had attended the club believed to have higher self esteem and confidence.</th>
<th>Whether assessments were blind</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gregor and Post (2005)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Unpublished Local Authority report</td>
<td>Group screen, one half allocated to Pyramid group. Five year follow up to assess long-term benefits of attending the club.&lt;br&gt;Children interviewed; most said they enjoyed the clubs and liked the adults.&lt;br&gt;5 out of 11 children said attendance had changed them 'quite a bit', compared to only 2 children in control group who said they had changed 'quite a bit' in the past 5 years.&lt;br&gt;Pyramid members rated themselves more highly on their self esteem than control children.&lt;br&gt;Overall teacher ratings more positive for Pyramid Club members.&lt;br&gt;Pyramid members rated as being more confident and having good relationships with adults.</td>
<td>Small sample size.&lt;br&gt;Author recommends replication with a larger sample.&lt;br&gt;Difficulties associated with asking children to compare how they have changed over a five year period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDQ data collected between 2002-2005 from clubs run in 15 Buckinghamshire schools (n=239).&lt;br&gt;Pyramid Club members were reported as having significantly less peer difficulties, increased pro-social skills and reduced emotional difficulties following inclusion in the club.</td>
<td>No control group; authors acknowledge that the reported findings could be due to developmental factors or the Hawthorne effect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Authors</td>
<td>Study Type</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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| Ohl et al., (2008)  | Published peer-reviewed study   | Evaluated Pyramid clubs across 4 schools. Pre-post intervention design. Compared Pyramid group to a non-comparison control. | - Both groups showed a significant decrease in SDQ Total Difficulty scores  
- The Pyramid group effect size was significantly stronger than the non-problem comparison group effect size  
- Children reported positively about the clubs (Fox, et al., 2006)  
- Compared against non-problem group.  
- Relatively small sample.  
- Based on teacher report alone.  
- No follow up. |
| Goodwin (2009)      | Unpublished dissertation, University of Manchester | Evaluated Pyramid clubs across five primary schools. One year follow up. | - SDQ scores did not improve, but did prevent further decline for Pyramid group.  
- Control group SDQs did show a decline.  
- Unable to control for confounding variables. |
| Lally (2010)        | Unpublished thesis, University College London | Evaluated eight clubs across eight schools. Non-randomised waitlist control design. Experimental Group (n=33), matched (non active) waitlist control group (n=39). Pre and post measures. | - Adapted version of the Pyramid Club model used, involved year group in supporting the intervention (via circle time activities and displays in class).  
- Positive impact on social emotional difficulties, significantly reduced the loneliness and social dissatisfaction experienced by club members.  
- Teachers perceived the intervention to have positive impact on emotional expression, hyperactivity and to a lesser extent peer problems.  
- No significant changes in club members’ self esteem, inclusion or cohesion of the class.  
- Methodological problems associated with use of quasi-experimental research design.  
- Groups not randomised; unable to control for confounding variables.  
- Difficulties experiences in ensuring intervention fidelity across the clubs.  
- Some children had difficulty accessing the self report measures. |
Transition Pyramid Clubs

The Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA), commissioned by the Department of Health in 2004, evaluated the Transition Pyramid Club pilot study, which took place in two London Boroughs and involved 80 children, across eight primary schools. The clubs ran for 10 weeks over the summer term and continued in some of the secondary schools after the summer break. Only qualitative data was collected (focus groups, interviews and questionnaires), but information was gathered from a range of sources (club members, teachers, parents and club leaders). Due to time pressures it was not possible to collect data from the control group. The results indicated that being part of the club had a positive impact on a number of factors, in particular reducing the children’s fears about secondary school and increasing their confidence. All the children reported positively, as did their parents and other key adults involved in the setting up and running of the clubs, indicating the potential of this form of support (Shepherd and Roker, 2005). However, a number of methodological recommendations were made by the authors. For example, only qualitative was collected and the need for more rigorous pre- and post- data was highlighted. The practical difficulties encountered following the children’s move to secondary school led the authors to suggest three alternative models of transition support (Shepherd and Roker, 2005, p.71) The second model suggests using the club as a ‘bridge’ of support: extending the clubs so they run before (in the primary school), during (over the summer holidays) and after (at secondary school) the move, which fits particularly well the type of support identified as being required within the transition literature (see section 1.3; Figure 1.1).

One secondary school in Lancashire (the largest in the county) has been using Transition Pyramid Clubs in this way since 2008 (Strouther, 2010). The clubs are run using volunteers from the community and the club members are selected from across the school’s seven feeder primaries to form four Pyramid Clubs. The sessions begin before the summer holidays, are held in the secondary school and continue after the transition, with one club meeting over the summer holiday. The intervention has been awarded a Lancashire Learning Excellence Award and feedback from parents and club members,
gathered via pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, has been consistently positive. However, more robust evaluation of the study is required. Pre- and post-intervention SDQ data are only available for 2008, this was self-rated by the children and showed a reduction in the Emotional Difficulties scale score post-intervention, however all other difficulties scale scores (Peer, Conduct, Hyperactivity) showed an increase post-intervention (Strouther, 2010, unpublished, information is available from the Learning Excellence Award website and school Pyramid co-ordinator upon request). It is possible the lower ratings post-intervention were due to data being gathered immediately after the end of the intervention (two weeks into the new school term). Further replication is required to identify whether this is a consistent finding, and it would be interesting to establish whether ratings were still lower later on in the term.

Two main themes can be drawn from the Pyramid literature. Firstly more robust replication of the findings in relation to the effectiveness of the intervention is required. All the studies indicate the benefits of Pyramid Clubs for vulnerable children at transition points. In particular the promising results of the Transition Pyramid Clubs in London and Lancashire need further attention. As highlighted in the previous section, support interventions of this kind are required and the model suggested by Shepherd and Roker (2003) and used in Lancashire warrants further development and dissemination. Furthermore, multiple post-measures would help establish whether the effects of the club do increase over time (Fitzherbert, 1997).

Secondly, the mechanisms of effect need further investigation (Ohl et al., 2008). As Hughes (2000) argues, even when an intervention has been shown to work it is necessary to know how it works. Understanding the theoretical mechanisms responsible for effecting change is essential for practitioners to be able to judge the applicability of the intervention and intelligently tailor it to the needs of different groups in different settings (Frederickson, 2002). As discussed above, no one particular skill or ability has been consistently targeted for measurement across the studies and little
reference is made to the theory underpinning the Pyramid model in the existing evaluation literature. Due to the increasingly broad theoretical base underpinning the model, a fuller understanding and clarification of the underlying theoretical elements responsible for change is required (Lally, 2010, p.205). In order to achieve this, Lally (2010) recommends the use of smaller scale evaluations (e.g. case studies) to develop understanding of the benefit of individual components for differing pupils.

Short and long term improvements to self esteem have been found within the literature (Cooper, 2001; Wells, 2000) and this could provide an interesting concept to explore, given that the Training Manual (2007) explicitly states development of self esteem as an aim of the club. However, there is little agreement about how to measure self esteem. Part of the difficulty is the lack of a single definition and a further problem is that given its subjective nature, it can only really be measured using self report (Horobin, 2009, p.132). As detailed in the following chapter, the researcher believes the use of self report measures has ethical implications. A teacher report format that measured the aspects of social skills and competencies thought to underlie social outcomes, rather than the products of competent social functioning (viz. self esteem; Frederickon, Dunsmuir and Baxter, 2009) could provide a possible solution.

A further possibility would be to examine one club in greater detail and identify any potential facilitators or barriers to the successful running of it, and how this impacts on effectiveness, as the majority of the previous studies have compared a number of clubs across schools. This would also meet increasing pressure for Local Authorities to 'know their own' (Fallon, Woods and Rooney, 2010) and develop practice-based evidence (Simmons, Kushner, Jones and James, 2003), which is discussed in further detail in the following section.
1.5 The educational psychologist’s role and evaluation research

Evaluation in the educational psychologists (EP) role
Evaluating outcomes is a key requirement of accountable and ethical professional practice in educational psychology (Frederickson, 2002). This is reflected in the inclusion of evaluation stages in all frameworks of professional practice for trainee EPs (TEPs) and practitioners (British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology, 1999; Gameson, Rhydderch, Ellis and Carroll, 2005; Monsen, Graham, Frederickson, and Cameron, 1998; Woolfson, Whaling, Steward, and Monsen, 2003) stages which EPs rate as ‘essential’ (Kelly, 2006). Thus a process of evaluation is arguably a core skill which EPs inherently employ during their day to day practice, as a function of their training and the competency expectations of their professional bodies (Association of Educational Psychologists; British Psychological Society; Health Care Professionals) and employers.

Development of the EP role in evaluation research
The demands of evidence-based practice, increasingly seen across all areas of social policy since the mid 1990s (Norwich 2005), and the wide scale work force reform necessitated by The Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda (ECM; DfES, 2004) and its legislative foundation, The Children Act 2004, dramatically changed the social and political context of public services in which EPs work. It challenged the professional identity and confidence of EPs (Ashton and Roberts 2006; Cameron, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006; Gaskell and Leadbetter, 2009), as the profession was required to find its place and ‘distinct contribution’ (Ashton and Roberts 2006; Cameron, 2006; Farrell, Woods, Rooney, Squires, and O’Connor 2006; Gaskell and Leadbetter, 2009) within the broader, multi-disciplinary, integrated and locally-orientated context of Children’s Services (Fallon, Woods and Rooney, 2010).

What became evident from the ensuing debate, was that the future of the profession lay in research (MacKay, 2002). EPs, it was claimed, occupy a
distinct position as both consumers and producers of research, and have the specific knowledge and skills in research design and analysis required to produce thorough evaluations of interventions, which can be reported within the academic and practitioner journals and communities (Cameron, 2006; Frederickson, 2002; Greig, 2001; Robson, 1993). Utilising these skills was recognised as being essential to meet the increased accountability placed upon services in light of the ECM agenda (DfES, 2004; Baxter and Frederickson, 2005), and to meet the demands of working as an evidence-based practitioner (Frederickson, 2002): ‘Practitioners can no longer assume offering something is useful...practitioners must be committed to evaluation of practice’ (Stoiber and Kratochwill, 2000, p.1). Furthermore, as Fallon et al., (2010) predict, the clear national drive for LAs to ‘know their own’ and be responsive to local context rather than rely on a ‘one-size fits all approach’ will essentially develop the role of LAs as strategic commissioners, rather than deliverers of service. Consequently, it will become increasingly essential for EPs to ensure they can provide automatic mechanisms for evaluating the work in which they are engaged.

In a recent article exploring the EP role and evaluation, Eodanable and Lauchlan (2009) identify research and evaluation as core skills of the profession that are central to professional identity (Gersch, 2001; MacKay, 2002). The profession has been driven towards instigating a training shift, from a one year Masters degree to a three year Doctorate, in the development of its research role (Frederickson, 2002; Greig 2001). Furthermore, they argue, these skills can actively support all clients through wider consultation in research to produce more effective policy, legislation and EP practice to ensure positive outcomes for young people. The argument for EPs as evaluation researchers is robust. However, some query the practical application in ‘real life’ (Eodanable and Lauchlan, 2009; Greig, 2001).
The EP researcher in practice

Greig’s (2001) questioning of the reality of EP research in practice is not unfounded. Recent reviews of EP practice have indicated that minimal time is allocated to this function (Farrell et al., 2006; SEED, 2002;), and schools tend not to frequently associate research with the role (Ashton and Roberts, 2006).

There is a tension between the time allocation given to research and evaluation work, and the value placed on such work by LAs. Some argue this could partly be due to the effects of the 1981 and 1993 Education Acts; which by placing EPs at the centre of LA statutory assessment processes effectively restricted and distorted the role, to one inexplicably entwined with psychological assessment, Special Educational Needs and the allocation of resources (Fallon et al., 2010; Miller and Frederickson, 2006). Furthermore, LAs may not be aware of, or value EP research. A small-scale study of EP views by Eodanable (2005) highlighted the perceived ‘preference’ the LA attached to external university based evaluations over EP research. In an already time short profession, assessment and intervention may be prioritised over evaluation work. Miller (2007) implicates the change to the training route as having the potential to address this, as the research capacity and time allocation of trainees in years two and three will provide an opportunity to produce research studies that can address LA needs and further develop a professional evidence base. Although this will no doubt raise the profile of EPs as researchers in LAs, Eodanable’s (2005) small-scale study highlighted the range of evaluation work that qualified EPs are already involved in. Eodanable and Lauchlan, (2009) argue that the picture is not as bleak as has been painted previously, instead suggesting that the way in which research has been conceptualised and defined in the past has led to an underestimation of the research capacity of EPs.

Reber (1995, p.662) defines research as: ‘Any honest attempt to study a problem systematically or add to our knowledge of a problem’. However, in reality it is not as simple as this definition suggests; bridging the academic
and EP practices of research is challenging. Eodanable and Lauchlan (2009) critique two previous reviews of EP research (Webster and Beveridge, 1997; Stoke and Figg, 1998) which considered only a very narrow band of EP research, published articles. Instead they employ Burden’s (1998) ‘illuminative evaluation’ paradigm. This offers a broader concept of research, evaluation and reflection on practice, which better encompassed the many research activities the EPs reported as being engaged in: reviews of support services in the LA, user surveys, literature reviews, EP participation in Continuinig Professional Development Programmes and the frequent reading of research publications (Eodanable, 2005, p.116).

The growing popularity of practice-based evidence (Simmons et al., 2003) may lead to increased recognition of these types of research. Defined as ‘evidence from the real world’ and based on service user and practitioner experiences in relation to measureable outcomes, it is a form of evaluation research most EPs would readily recognise. Strongly emphasised within the TaMHS literature (DCSF, 2008) as an important means of developing an evidence base that is specific and responsive to the local context, it reflects the national emphases on evaluating practice and for LAs to ‘know their own’, as discussed above.

**The Educational Psychologist as a ‘scientist-practitioner’**

The adoption of a dual role, being both a practitioner working in a real life context and a scientist conducting research is a further tension and challenge within the EP researcher role (Miller and Frederickson, 2006). The relationship between science and practice has been widely and passionately debated. Applying science to human problems has been questioned, and many have argued that the discipline of science has proved insufficient to illuminate realities of problems encountered in the ‘real’ world (Lane and Corrie, 2006).

However, as applied psychologists, it has been essential for the profession to find a mid-point between the purely pragmatic and the experimentally
rigorous. Growing emphasis on evidence-based practice and accountability, and dissatisfaction and role confusion within the profession as a result of the adoption of a humanist and pragmatic approach to knowledge, instead of a scientific and epistemological one (Norwich, 2000, cited in Fallon et al., 2010), has resulted in an explicit move in recent years by EPs towards a reciprocal reconciliation between science and practice, by conceptualising the role as that of a ‘scientist-practitioner’ (Lane and Corrie, 2006; Fallon et al., 2010, p.3).

Lane and Corrie (2006) claim the scientist-practitioner framework offers a more liberal, flexible and stakeholder focused approach to science (p.22). One that does not attempt to ‘glue together’ science and practice in some counterintuitive way, but instead provides an approach to professional practice that encompasses rigour, science, artistry and ingenuity (p.3). Lane and Corrie consider the skills required of the applied psychologist can be understood as falling within four main interconnected themes (see Figure 1.4 below), which they propose can be used as framework for understanding the scientist-practitioner role. Emphasis is placed on the application of scientific principals, methods and skills within the context of practice to promote a mutually informative relationship between science and practice, in order to extend the generalisable knowledge base of the profession (Miller and Frederickson, 2006; Fallon et al., 2010).

Lane and Corrie (2006) recognise the diversity among applied psychologists and thus do not propose a definitive model, but instead promote idiosyncratic definitions and operations of the model. What they propose it offers, is an opportunity for professionals to define the skills that underpin their work and identify them within a substantive framework that enables reflection, critique and refinement in a systematic way. In this sense it offers EPs an identity with strong scientific foundations, which are flexible enough to allow for creative and innovative responses to real life contexts, in order to effect positive change.
The notion of the ‘scientist-practitioner’ resonates strongly with the author, and will provide a guiding framework for both practice and research during the completion of this research project.

Lane and Corrie (2006) emphasise the need for the scientist-practitioner to first understand what type of scientist they are, and thus consider their epistemological stance. The authors, in an attempt to provide as flexible a framework as possible, have been careful not to align the model with any particular perspective. However, it does complement the critical realist position of the researcher, and although Lane and Corrie acknowledge that critical realism has not been addressed substantially within the scientist-practitioner debate as yet, they recognise its potential (p.85).

In identifying her epistemological perspective, the researcher has grappled with understanding the complexities of philosophical debate. This is not to be
unexpected; the arguments are philosophically rather than professionally driven, which gives the literature an abstract feel (Lane and Corrie, 2006). Furthermore, the profession as a whole has struggled to systematically address this topic, which some suggest has contributed to the role confusion and identity crisis discussed previously. For this reason, the researcher's broad philosophical position is briefly considered at this point in the context of her role as a research-practitioner trainee educational psychologist.

The perspective of the researcher has been heavily influenced by the writings of Kelly (2008), who argues persuasively for the central role of critical realism in educational psychology. Critical realism represents an integration of positivist and relativist positions and is a relatively recent development in scientific thinking. As an approach it combines the objectivity of positivism and subjectivity of relativism, to offer significant resolution of the difficulties presented by either stance alone (Bhasker, 1986). Using qualitative and quantitative approaches alongside each other, the approaches agree (Robson, 2002):

- on the role of values in enquiry
- on the theoretical nature of facts
- that reality is complex, multiple and constructed, and
- that any particular set of data is explicable by more than one theory

The strength of this perspective lies in its ability to consider realities that exist beyond those that have been socially constructed, but prevents over confidence that any knowledge gained can be directly translated into generalisable laws (Trierweiler and Stricker, 1998, as cited in Lane and Corrie, 2006, p.85). In this way, critical realism provides a model of scientific explanation relevant to the social sciences, and offers a robust and appropriate methodology for practice- and value-based professions such as educational psychology (Kelly, 2008; Robson, 2002). This provides an overarching theoretical model by which to create and evaluate practice,
which can be done with confidence, by drawing on extended philosophical and social-scientific theory. As Kelly (2008) argues:

‘The relevance of critical realism for the educational psychologist is in providing the wider theoretical framework and the practice rationale for analysing and acting in the complexity of social and educational contexts. In highlighting the study of the impact of values and beliefs, and in including ethics, welfare and emancipation in the equation, critical realism guides and facilitates highly reasoned, reflective and coherent actions in bringing about positive change.’ (p. 25)

There is a robust rationale for an EP role in evaluation research; to develop the profession’s evidence-base, improve local knowledge and ensure the best outcomes are being achieved for children and young people. However, reconciling science and practice is challenging. In recent years EPs have attempted to address this long standing tension by conceptualising their role as that of a ‘scientist-practitioner’. Developed by Lane and Corrie (2006), it provides a flexible framework for applying scientific principals, methods and skills in the context of practice. The critical realist epistemology of the researcher complements the ‘scientist-practitioner’ role, and both will influence the methodology to be adopted in the study, as discussed in the following chapter.

1.6 Summary of the literature and rationale

The transition from primary to secondary school is regarded as one of the most difficult in children’s educational careers (Zeedyk et al., 2003). For most children this transition is successful. However, for a minority of children it is not, and has been found to have a number of negative implications for their future well-being and capacity to enjoy and achieve (Galton et al., 1999; Slater and McKeown, 2004; Turnbull, 2006). Consequently, transition is a key issue for researchers, practitioners and policy makers (Turnbell, 2006). Yet, as the literature highlighted, there is limited research evaluating support
programmes or projects, especially in relation to supporting shy, socially unconfident children (Weller 2007; Shepherd and Roker, 2003). Transition Pyramid Clubs offer a model of support for these children. However, more robust replication of the findings in relation to the effectiveness of the intervention is required (Moore, 2003; Ohl et al., 2008; Shepherd and Roker, 2005). Furthermore, detailed study of a club in action is needed, as the mechanisms of effect need investigation to understand how and why the clubs work (Hughes, 2000; Lally, 2010). Educational psychologists are ideally positioned to evaluate interventions of this kind and there is a strong impetus to do so (Eodanable and Lauchlan, 2009; Fallon et al., 2010). However, conducting research in a real life context is challenging (Robson, 2002), the adoption of the ‘scientist-practitioner’ framework (Lane and Corrie, 2006) will help guide the researcher during the research process.

1.7 Expected contribution to knowledge and research aims

This thesis aims to build on the second model of support suggested by Shepherd and Roker (2005, p.6) and being used in Lancashire (Strouther, 2010). The notion of the Pyramid Club beginning in the summer holidays and continuing into the first term, to act as a ‘bridge’ will be developed further, such that the support (via the club) will be available before, during and following the transfer (see Appendix 3 for a diagram). Selecting children across three feeder primary schools and running the club within the secondary school will provide the children with an opportunity to meet new peers and become familiar with the new school setting. Furthermore, involving the child’s family in the summer activity days will address recommendations to develop ways in which to better involve parents (Shepherd and Roker, 2005).

The researcher is unaware of any reported study that has rigorously evaluated Pyramid Clubs to support transition at Year 6 in this manner. Combining quantitative and qualitative methodology will provide: 1) a robust evaluation of the effectiveness of this model of support, and 2) a detailed
‘rich’ picture, enabling a greater understanding of how the clubs work and the identification of any potential barriers and facilitators, which can be used to develop the programme for future use across the LA.

This thesis sets out to evaluate:

- **Effectiveness**: How successfully the Pyramid Club intervention supports vulnerable children’s transition to secondary school.
- **Process**: Identification of facilitators and barriers to aid future use and development of this model of support within the LA.

### 1.8 Research Questions (RQ)

In order to achieve this, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. How effective is the Pyramid Club intervention?
2. What are the difficulties at transition identified by the children and how can the intervention support these?
3. What barriers were encountered in the running of the club and how do they impact on the perceived effectiveness of the intervention?
Chapter 2: Methodology

Two main themes were drawn from the existing Pyramid Club literature: robust replication of findings in relation to the effectiveness of this intervention is required; and a detailed study of a club in action is needed, as the mechanisms of effect need further investigation to understand how and why the clubs work.

This thesis aims to evaluate:

- **Effectiveness**: How successfully the Pyramid Club intervention supports vulnerable children’s transition to secondary school.
- **Process**: Identification of facilitators and barriers to aid future use and development of this model of support within the LA.

In order to achieve this, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How effective is the Pyramid Club intervention?
2. What are the difficulties at transition identified by the children and how can the intervention support these?
3. What barriers were encountered in the running of the club and how do they impact on the perceived effectiveness of the intervention?

2.1 Section outline

This section will detail the research design, participant sampling and recruitment, data collection and data analysis methods employed in this study. The researchers’ ontological, epistemological and axiological positions are described and a critique of the chosen method is provided. Ethical principles are considered and the chapter concludes with a detailed time-line, time-budget and risk analysis.
2.2 Research design

This research project will adopt an embedded (multiple units of analysis) single-case study design (Yin, 2009, p.46). Quantitative methodology will be employed to address Research Question (RQ) 1 and provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention. Qualitative methodology will be employed to triangulate the quantitative data for RQ 1, (further clarification in relation to triangulation is provided in sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.4) and enable a detailed ‘rich’ picture of the process to be generated, in order to address RQ 2 and RQ 3. A tabular view of the data to be collected and analysed in order to address each RQ can be found in table 2.1 below.

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<tr>
<th>RQ</th>
<th>Data Collection Method (and date of collection)</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (June, October and December, 2010)</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
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<td>• The Social Competence Inventory (June, October and December, 2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focus group with club members (October and December 2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Telephone interviews with club members’ parents (December 2010)</td>
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2.2.1 Case study research

Yin (2009) argues the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. He claims the strength of the case study design is the ability it affords to researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Thus case study designs are widely employed where the aim of the research is to discover and explore significant patterns and themes (Stake, 1995), providing a recognised and effective method for applying a focus on, and understanding the dynamics present within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies can have a range of purposes, but arguably hold a distinctive place in evaluation research; providing a design that can be applied to explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009, p.13) asserts that case studies are the preferred methodology when:

- Asking ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions
- The investigator has little control over events, and
- The focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context.

The aim of this research project is to evaluate how or why the Pyramid club intervention does (or does not) effectively support the children’s transfer to secondary school. There will be little control over events, as although the researcher will be observing sessions, there will be no control over the content or form of the intervention. Furthermore, control over the wider context will not be possible, for example the ethos of the receiving secondary school, or the children’s wider social context within the family or community. Thus the proposed focus of this research project on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context, addressing ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions, makes the case study design highly suitable.
An embedded single-case design

As only one Pyramid club is to be studied, the research will adopt a single-case design. However, to fully address the research questions, data will need to be collected at both the individual level (e.g. SDQ scores for an individual) and at the level of the intervention programme as a whole (e.g. club leaders perspectives on the effectiveness of the intervention). Units of analysis relate to the way in which initial research questions are defined, such that each unit of analysis and its related questions call for slightly different research design and data collection strategies (Yin, 2009, p.30). The units of analysis in this study relate to transition support (e.g. perspectives on effectiveness), social competency and confidence (SCI) and social emotional health (SDQ). Consequently, a range of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods will be required, resulting in an ‘embedded’ design, incorporating multiple units of data to be analysed, rather than a ‘holistic’ single case design (Yin, 2009), which would be appropriate if there was only a single level of analysis.

2.2.2 Mixed methodology

Researchers within psychology, and other related social science fields, have long been engaged in a debate about the use of qualitative as opposed to quantitative approaches to research. The heart of the debate lies in the two methodologies’ fundamentally different philosophies, or ontologies (Abusabha and Woelfel, 2003). Broadly speaking, the main tenet of positivist or quantitative philosophy is objectivity; knowledge is gained through hypothesis testing to measure and establish cause and effect. The aim is to classify features, count them, and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed (Neill, 2007). Essentially, positivist epistemology adopts experimental methods to look for the existence of a constant relationship between events or ‘variables’ (Robson, 2002, p.21).

In contrast, advocates of the constructivist or qualitative philosophy, disagree with the notion of an objective reality which can be known, instead arguing
that the task of the researcher is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Robson, 2002). Qualitative epistemologies premise that the best way to understand a phenomenon is to study it in context (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), thus employ more flexible and naturalistic methods of data collection, such as informal interviews and accounts, and because there are multiple realities, hypotheses cannot be fully established and ‘tested’. Instead qualitative research aims to gain an in-depth and detailed understanding and description of events (Neill, 2007).

For researchers working in the applied fields, such as educational psychology, a pluralistic approach, which does not automatically privilege any research method over any other, can prove more helpful than rigid adherence to either a quantitative or qualitative approach. The critical realist position, set out in Chapter 1, leads to considerable flexibility in the choice of theories and methods (Modell, 2009) and advocates the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches alongside each other (Kelly, 2006; Robson, 2002).

A critical realist epistemology leads to the adoption of a mix-method design, where both quantitative and qualitative approaches are adopted. Although more costly in terms of time and resources, using multiple methods can have substantial advantages. For example, rather than focusing on a single, specific research question, multiple methods may be used to address different but complementary questions. This can also help to improve interpretability and reduce inappropriate certainty (Robson, 2002). Abusabha and Woelfel (2003) argue that researchers who study human behaviour must be open to all methods, avenues, and possibilities to fully understand the question(s) at hand.

The adoption of mixed-methods in this study allows the exploration of two complementary aims; effectiveness and process. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods will provide information that adherence to one approach would not reveal. The use of a quantitative method will
provide a powerful evidence base for the effectiveness of the group work activities on outcome (existence of a relationship between events). This can be used to provide support for the wider use of Pyramid clubs at transition within the Local Authority (LA). The use of qualitative methods, to explore and gain an understanding of the participant’s perception of the intervention and the transfer to secondary school, will enabled a more detailed and ‘richer’ understanding of the events. Furthermore, using mixed-methods will enable the researcher to triangulate the data, improving the methodological rigour of the study.

Within the mixed-methods literature much attention has been paid to the issue of typology and classification of mixed-method designs, in an attempt to ensure to quantitative and qualitative research are integrated effectively and rigorously. A number of criteria have emerged in an effort to define different mixed-methods designs (please see Plano Clark and Creswell (2008) for a more comprehensive account of this literature), and when working with mixed-methods Creswell has argued the need to distinguish between triangulation, embedded, explanatory and exploratory methodological designs, each of which is summarised below (Creswell and Clark, 2007):

- A **triangulation** design is when a researcher uses two different methods in an attempt to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a single study.

- **Explanatory**; the purpose of this design is typically to use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a primarily quantitative study.

- **Exploratory**; this design is characterised by an initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis followed by a phase of quantitative data collection and analysis. The purpose is to use quantitative data to assist in the interpretation of qualitative findings
and explore a phenomenon, unlike the explanatory design which is better suited to explaining and interpreting relationships.

- *Embedded* designs have a predominant method that guides the project; one method is nested within the other and given less priority. This may mean that the embedded method addresses a question different from that addressed by the dominant method. The data are collected and analysed simultaneously in this design.

The case study literature does not appear to have engaged with the complexities of research design that are inherent within the mixed-methods literature. Instead many different research designs appear to be subsumed under what is termed an ‘embedded’ design (but this does not have the same features as the type described above). The focus within the case study literature appears to centre on ensuring a mixed-method approach is used to facilitate a ‘convergence of evidence’, through a process of triangulation and corroboration, to essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon in order to ensure accurate and convincing findings are reported (Yin, 2009, p.117). Therefore the study design advocated within the case study literature do not ‘fit’ neatly into the design typology of the mixed-methods literature.

A further area of debate within the mixed-methods literature is in relation to the use of the term ‘triangulation’. Whereas Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann and Hanson (2003) state a concurrent triangulation design can be used as a means to offset the weaknesses inherent within one method with the strengths of the other method (p.183). Morse (1991) argues simultaneous methodological triangulation is not the same technique as concurrent validation. Stating that although the same strategies might be used, they are implemented in a study for different reasons; the purpose of concurrent validation is to ascertain whether the results of two methods measuring the same concept are equivalent. The purpose of simultaneous triangulation is to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic, rather than to
replicate results. Thus Morse (1991) argues ‘methodological triangulation is not a matter of maximising the strengths and minimising the weakness of each [method]’ (p.122).

This may be a reflection of the ongoing debate within the mixed-methods literature. As Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib and Rupert (2007) comment; ‘there is as of yet no discrete list of mixed methods design options, and so researchers should plan to develop a design that answers their own research questions within the constraints and boundaries of the study context’ (p.20). Therefore given the ongoing debates, the breadth of which are beyond the scope of this study, a pragmatic approach was adopted by the researcher and Yin’s (2009) case study design methodology was adhered to.

Consequently the embedded single case study design (Yin, 2009) adopted in this study primarily reflects a concurrent (quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously) triangulation design, whereby the focus group, interview and observation data will be used to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings from the SDQ and SCI data (concurrent validation). However, there are also elements of an explanatory design, as the qualitative findings will also address RQ 2 and 3, to assist in understanding and interpreting the findings from RQ1 and provide complementary data on the Pyramid Club process (simultaneous triangulation). As advocated by Yin (2009, p. 116) Patton’s description of the types of triangulation in evaluation research is referred to, and the use of triangulation in this study is further detailed in section 2.2.4.

2.2.3 Axiological position
Axiology concerns the role of values in research; essentially how a researcher’s values shape the way in which research is conducted, findings are interpreted and conclusions are reported. It is therefore important a researcher acknowledges and is explicit about his or her underlying beliefs, assumptions and preconceptions. In the previous section the epistemological and ontological stance adopted by the researcher and the influence a critical
realist position had on the adoption of a mixed-methods design was explained. In this section I will outline my axiological position in relation to this particular research area, in order to be clear about how my own motives and beliefs have influenced the development of this research project.

The following five values underpin this work:

- Every child has the right to achieve the 5 outcome as set out in the The Every Child Matters agenda (ECM; DfES, 2004): being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being.
- All children have the right to feel included in their school community.
- All children have the right to be heard; their thoughts and views should be respected and valued.
- Parents’ views in relation to their child’s education and social-emotional health should be solicited wherever possible and considered.
- Educational psychologists should be involved in and support the dissemination of work to help vulnerable children make a successful transition to secondary school.

One way in which I feel my axiological position has impacted on my research design is the collection of the club members’ views. The qualitative strand to this study is included not just because of my epistemological stance (more robust findings), but because I believe children’s views and thoughts should be respected and valued. It was therefore important to me that the children’s perspective on the intervention was given the same weighting as the other qualitative stands in this study (parent and club leader views). My belief that educational psychologists have an important role to play in developing and sharing processes for supporting vulnerable children’s transition to secondary school drove my motivation for this study.
2.2.4 Triangulation within findings

Triangulation is a process of checking one’s findings by using several points of reference (Burton and Bartlett, 2005). Patton (2002) describes four types of triangulation: data triangulation; investigator triangulation; theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. This study will aim to strengthen the construct validity and reliability of the research findings by using data, theory and methodological triangulation.

This research project will use methodological triangulation by employing mixed-methods in order to gain a greater understanding of the effectiveness and the underlying processes involved in the use of an extended Pyramid club to support the children’s transition to secondary school. Yin (2009, p.116) asserts that a researcher will have established data triangulation when the events or facts of the case study have been supported by more than one source of evidence. The researcher will attempt to do this by collecting pre- and post-data at three different time points. This data will be ‘checked’ with reference to participant perspectives: the club members’; parents’; club leaders’ and those of the researcher, in the form of an observation record.

The researcher will employ theory triangulation when interpreting the findings; by making reference to the academic literature in Chapter 1, and employing the reflective skills required of a scientist-practitioner (e.g. exploring rival theories - Lane and Corrie, 2006). Due to the scope of the study it will not be possible to employ investigator triangulation. The researcher will however, have access to both academic and professional supervision, to question and challenge assumptions, throughout the duration of the study.

Furthermore, in addition to triangulation, the researcher will attempt to strengthen the rigour of the case study evidence by planning and implementing the research design in accordance with the procedures and principals advocated by Yin (2009). This will involve the creation of case
study data base of the raw data, and the maintenance of a clear, coherent chain of evidence.

2.3 Sampling and participant recruitment

The research will take place within one geographical area, of low socio-economic status, in a LA in the Northwest of England. One secondary school and three feeder primary schools, currently involved in the LA’s TaMHS\(^2\) project, have been invited to be part of this research project.

Three children from each Year 6 class of the three primary schools will be selected to form the Transition Pyramid Club. The children will be selected based on the current identification model developed by Pyramid. This is a three step process, involving a whole class screen to assess social-emotional need, followed by a multi-agency meeting, leading to the selection of potential club members (Figure 1.2). The researcher will not be involved in the selection of club members; this will be undertaken by the LA Pyramid Coordinator, in conjunction with school staff.

2.4 Data gathering methods

The methods employed for the quantitative data collection will be detailed first, followed by the qualitative data collection methods.

2.4.1 Quantitative data collection

Quantitative pre- and post- data will be gathered to address RQ1. This data will be gathered at three time points: Prior to the intervention (June 2010), immediately following the end of the intervention (October 2010) and at the end of the children’s first term at secondary school (December 2010). The following measures will be administered at each of the time points.

\(^2\) All the schools have agreed to involvement in this research as part of the overarching TaMHS project.
**Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ T4-16; Goodman, 2001)**

A brief behavioural screening questionnaire, consisting of 25 items, divided across 5 scales (emotional difficulties, conduct difficulties, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship difficulties, prosocial behaviour). An example can be found in Appendix 4. The SDQs form part of the standard Transition Pyramid Club process (see Figure 1.2). The SDQs are completed by the class teacher. They will be administered and collated by the club leaders, and the researcher will have access to this data as part of the LA’s TaMHS project.

The SDQ is widely used and has been standardised in six different countries. The psychometric properties reported are based on a large British sample (n= 10,438; Goodman, 2001). Reliability is generally satisfactory as measured by internal consistency (mean Cronbach’s alpha: 0.73) and retest stability after 4-6 months (mean: 0.62). Cross-informant agreement (mean: 0.34) and high correlation with Acenbach’s (1991) Child Behaviour Checklist (> .80; Goodman and Scott, 1999) and the Rutter Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997) support its validity. Furthermore, SDQ scores above the 90th centile predicted a substantially raised probability of independently diagnosed psychiatric disorders (mean odds ratio: 15.2 for teacher scales; Goodman, 2001).

**The Social Competence Inventory (SCI; Rydell, Hagekull and Bohlin, 1997)**

A paper and pencil teacher questionnaire developed in Sweden for use with primary-aged children, it consists of 25 items, across 2 scales (Prosocial Orientation and Social Initiative). The scales examine the degree to which children relate positively to people and their general willingness to do so. An example can be found in Appendix 5. By measuring the skills and competencies thought to underlie positive social outcomes (e.g. self esteem, peer status) it provides a valuable instrument for evaluating small group interventions and is a useful assessment for children who are socially isolated (Frederickson, Dunsmuir and Baxter, 2009).
The SCI has good psychometric qualities of reliability and validity. Rydell et al. (1997) report good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of .94 for teacher reports of Prosocial Orientation and .91 for teacher reports of Social Initiative. Test-retest reliability following a one year gap showed statistically significant correlation (at the p < .001 level) for both scales and for both teachers and parents. A high level of agreement between teachers and parents (and within parents) is reported for the Social Initiative scale (r = .37 - .44, p < .001), slightly less agreement was found on the Prosocial Orientation scale (r = .17 - .35, p < .005). Good comparisions between scores on the SCI with concurrent observations of peer behaviours in the classroom (both scales showed correlations of .29, significant at p < .01) further support the validity of this test (Frederickson et al., 2009, p.13).

This data will only be gathered for the children who comprise the Pyramid club (club members). All the measures will be completed by the class teacher, rather than the children themselves. Asking the children to consider the very skills the club will be targeting to develop, before they start the intervention, could be anxiety inducing and potentially harmful to their wellbeing. Furthermore, pre-consideration of the targeted skills could potentially interfere with the outcome of the intervention (as this would not form part of the standard procedure). Thus, although it would be desirable to gather the children’s perception directly, within this ‘real world research’ context (Robson, 2002) the potential risk to both the participants and the study’s fidelity, would make doing so unethical. Consequently, the children’s views will be gathered retrospectively (see section 2.4.2).

The pre- intervention measures will be completed by the child’s primary class teacher, the post- measures by the Head of Year at the secondary school. This may be interpreted as a weakness of the design. However, Moore (2003) cites teacher involvement in both the screening and progress assessments as a criticism of previous studies. She suggested that independent assessors would produce more reliable results, but also acknowledged the counter-argument that teachers are best placed to assess the children, as they know
their skills and abilities in the school environment. Having two different teachers provide the pre- and post-assessments appears to be a reasonable and practical compromise.

2.4.2 Qualitative data collection

Three qualitative methods will also be employed to supplement the quantitative data for RQ1, and to address RQs 2 and 3.

Focus Groups
Four focus groups will be conducted, two with the Pyramid club leaders and two with club members. These will be run by the researcher and be conducted at the secondary school at two time points. The first groups will be conducted following the completion of the club (October 2010), with a focus on process evaluation. The second, at the end of the children’s first term at the secondary school (December 2010), with a focus on evaluating outcome. The proposed topics to be covered can be found in Appendix 6.

Focus groups are a popular form of qualitative data collection and may be defined as a particular form of group interview intended to exploit group dynamics (Freeman, 2006). They consist of a group of individuals selected and assembled to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (Powell and Single, 1996, p.499). Particular importance is placed on the interaction of participants in this form of interview (Kitzinger, 1995), as self-disclosure is promoted by explicitly capitalising on group dynamics in a discussion to encourage the group members to question each other’s responses (Freeman, 2006, p.492). Group processes can help people explore and clarify their views and attitudes efficiently, and encourages participation from those who feel they have little to say (Kitzinger, 1995). Consequently they can provide a rich body of data expressed in the respondents own words and context (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990, p.12). Furthermore, group interviews of this kind can be
used for triangulation, in conjunction with other data gathering techniques (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

In the event that any of the children drop out before completion of the club, the researcher will invite the child to attend an individual interview. This will ensure the child’s views are not lost and will help highlight if drop out was due to a dislike of the club process, or a more positive reason (e.g. no longer feeling the support was required). The interview will be semi-structured and the same prompts as to be used in the focus groups will be employed, with an additional prompt to elicit exploration of why the child decided to leave the club. Using a less structured format such as this does mean some degree of comparability will be lost for the sake of personal relevance (Breakwell, 2000, p.240). However, the flexibility will enable each child to tell their own individual ‘story’. This will provide greater depth in relation to how the club meets (or does not meet) individual needs.

**Semi-structured Telephone Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews with the club members’ parents will be conducted over the phone in December 2010, to triangulate the data gathered from the club members and leaders. Consent will be obtained at the parent information session prior to the intervention beginning, and a convenient time and date will be set. Parents will be requested to decide whether it is the child’s father or mother who completes the interview. Only one parent of each child will be interviewed to prevent the over representation of one child’s experience.

Telephone interviews will be conducted as they provide a quick and inexpensive method of gaining information. Furthermore, telephone interviews are less obtrusive but have been found to yield similar data to face-to-face interviews (Breakwell, 2000). It is hoped that this method will reduce interviewer effects and response bias, by making the interviews less threatening, enabling the parents to feel less awkward or embarrassed about their responses. This will be particularly important if the parent wishes to
provide negative feedback, as they will have met the researcher on a number of occasions (at the parent information sessions, at the summer activity days).

The researcher will adhere to guidance in conducting this form of data collection (Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Schaw, 2000). The interviews will take no longer than 15 minutes to complete, and the proposed interview questions can be found in Appendix 7.

Observation
Direct Observation of each club meeting by the researcher will provide contextual information (e.g. group dynamics) and enable an ongoing process evaluation. The researcher will not disrupt the activity the participants are engaged in during the observation and notes will be made on an observation record immediately following the observation (the format can be found in Appendix 8).

Direct observation is an important research tool in psychology (Wilkinson, 2000), and is often the assessment of choice in the evaluation of behavioural training, for example in areas such as parenting (Danforth, 1998). The observation method in this research project will take more of an ethnographic approach (Breakwell et al., 2000); as observation will be employed as one of a range of methods of collecting and analysing data. The observation records will take the form of ‘fieldnotes’, with the aim being to present a sequence of action and interaction, with more of a focus on interpreting aspects of the situation which are of particular interest to the researcher, rather than a description of events (Wilkinson, 2000, p.233). This will influence the subject of subsequent observations, and will need to be taken into consideration by the researcher. In line with the critical realist stance set out in Chapter 1, the researcher will accept that there is no such thing as a ‘theory-free’ observation, the ‘truth’ of a particular interpretation is an attribute of the theory informing it rather than a universally valid statement about the real world (Modell, 2009). Consequently, as the researcher will be the sole
observer, there is a risk to reliability, as events may unwittingly be interpreted that conform to the researchers ‘theory’ and others that do not may be missed. This is particularly pertinent given the data collected will be qualitative, and subject to interpretation. This will require an ongoing process of scientist- practitioner reflection by the researcher (thinking, reasoning, exploring rival explanations; Lane and Corrie, 2006), as discussed in Chapter 1.

Another factor to consider will be the impact of observer effect or reactivity; the fact that someone knows they are being observed can affect the way in which they would normally behave, as this can present a threat to the validity of the data (Wilkinson, 2000). The researcher will attempt to reduce this effect, by limiting the amount of information given to the participants in terms of what is to be observed and why. Furthermore, as the researcher will be known to the participants, it is anticipated that they will quickly habituate to the researcher’s presence, ultimately reducing reactivity. It has been found that the initial observation is subject to greater observer effect than subsequent observations (Gittelsohn Shankar, West, Ram and Gnywali, 1997). This will be taken into consideration when analysing the observation records.

2.5 Data analysis methods

Quantitative data analysis methods will first be detailed in section 2.5.1, followed by qualitative data analysis methods in section 2.5.2.

2.5.1 Quantitative data analysis

Due to the small sample size descriptive statistics were employed to explore trends in absolute raw scores and standard deviation changes across the pre- and post-intervention SDQ and SCI data. Individual and summary trends across the data set will be reported.
Absolute raw scores and standard deviation changes for each participant will be reported, identifying positive and negative trends through the course of this study. In addition a summary of trends across the sample will also be provided.

2.5.2 Qualitative data analysis

The interview and focus group recordings will be partially transcribed, and a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) will be conducted to identify and organise participant views on the successes and barriers encountered during the intervention. The focus group participants will be asked to identify what they thought the main ‘themes’ of the discussion were at the end of the session (Ashton, 2009). This process will be repeated in the second round of focus groups in December 2010, to verify the themes identified in the earlier (October 2010) focus groups. This will provide the participants with greater opportunity for involvement in the interpretation of the data, which should in turn reduce the possibility of the data being interpreted solely in accordance with the researcher’s views and beliefs (Atkinson, 2005). Observation data will also be organised into themes and will be used to contextualise and triangulate the participant’s data.

2.5.2.1 Partial transcription

A number of conventions exist for transforming spoken language into written text. Thematic analysis does not require the level of detail in the transcript as other forms of analysis (e.g. content or narrative) and as such there is no one set of guidelines to follow when producing a transcript for this form of analysis. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that what is important is that the transcript retains the information you need, in a way which is ‘true’ to its original nature. Furthermore, that the transcription convention employed is practically suited to the purpose of analysis (Edwards, 1993, cited in Brawn and Clark, 2006, p.88). For some analyses it may not be necessary to transcribe an entire interview; as ultimately the transcript is a tool that helps
the qualitative researcher make sense of and understand interviewees’ experiences and perceptions (McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig, 2003, p.74).

During supervision transcription of the focus group and interview data was discussed at length and the literature was consulted in relation to the benefits and validity of partial transcription (McLellan et al., 2003). The rationale behind this was twofold: partial transcription would make management of the data easier, but no less valid; as transcription would be completed by the researcher, this in itself would begin the ‘continuous process between transcription and data interpretation’ (McLellan et al., 2003, p.70). The impossibility of textual data fully encompassing all that takes place in an interview is recognised within the literature (e.g. Kvale, 1996; Poland and Pederson, 1998) and as such, the first step in data reduction is taken when the researcher decides what will be transcribed and what will be left out (e.g. non-verbal information, intonations etc; Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). As I find it easier to remember, assimilate and construct meaning from verbal rather than visual prose, repeated listening to the audio material provided the logical first step in initially coding the data. Listening to the recordings numerous times enabled me to gain a better understanding of the participants’ views and perceptions than repeated reading of a written transcript would have, as I find reading more distracting and fatiguing compared to audio. From these repeated listening I was able to select and transcribe the sentences and paragraphs most relevant to the research questions. If I had a preference for written material then a full transcription would have been appropriate.

2.5.2.2 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting, allowing for the organisation and description of collated data in rich detail (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.79). A ‘theme’ is defined as capturing something important about the data in relation to the RQ, and represents some form of patterned response or meaning within the data set. Braun and Clark (2006)
argue the strength of thematic analysis lies in its theoretical freedom; it is not tied to any particular philosophical or theoretical underpinning, and thus fits well with the critical realist epistemology leading to a pragmatist methodology adopted in this research study.

Although widely used, thematic analysis has been subject to criticism within the literature. Braun and Clark (2006) suggest this has been due to limited guidance as to how to conduct and report this form of analysis, which has led to poor standards and a lack of rigour. The authors purport that qualitative psychologists need to be clear about what they are doing and why, and to include the often omitted ‘how’ they did their analysis in their reports, to enable research to be effectively evaluated and compared or synthesised with other studies on the topic (p.79-80).

It is essential for researchers applying this method to make their underlying assumptions explicit (Holloway and Todres, 2003) as ‘data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum’ (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.84). There are no hard and fast rules when identifying themes; researcher judgement is necessary and flexibility is advocated, thus it is important that the active role of the researcher in identifying, selecting and reporting themes of interest is acknowledged (Taylor and Usher, 2001). My theoretical interests and assumptions have already been detailed (see sections 1.5, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3) and influenced the analysis in this study. A theory-driven form of thematic analysis was adopted, in which data were coded with specific research questions in mind. Thus it was explicitly analyst-driven. This is in contrast to an inductive or ‘bottom up’ approach, in which the research questions may evolve through the coding process.

A semantic approach to the analysis was employed, such that themes were identified within the explicit or surface meaning of the data. Organisation of patterns/themes are described and summarised in Chapter 3, leading to an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 1990) in Chapter 4. In contrast, a
thematic analysis at the latent level would seek to examine the underlying assumptions and ideologies that are thought to shape the semantic content of the data. This latter form of analysis tends to come from a constructionist paradigm and has overlaps with discourse analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.84). A semantic approach was adopted as it is more in line with the researcher’s critical realist approach to research.

Braun and Clark (2006) provide comprehensive guidelines for conducting a thematic analysis, which were adhered to and are detailed in the following section.

2.5.2.3: Thematic analysis: the process

The process I used to analyse the qualitative data is outlined below and follows the guidelines provided by Braun and Clark (2006).

1. Familiarisation with the data
   - Repeated listening of the audio recorded focus groups and interviews.
   - Partial transcription of audio records.
   - Repeated re-reading of transcripts and notes from telephone interviews and observation records.
   - Listing initial ideas and thoughts.

2. Generation of initial codes
   - With the research questions in mind I systematically worked through the entire data set, identifying interesting issues and topics that could form the basis of repeated patterns (themes). These formed the list of initial codes.
   - Initial codes were applied to the data set manually, by highlighting lines, paragraphs or sections using a colour coding system. I purposefully kept the analysis broad at this stage, coding for as many potential themes as possible.
I was then able to reduce the data set into manageable and meaningful sections by copying the name of each code and a description of it onto post-it notes.

A photograph of the initial codes collated on post-it notes can be found in Appendix 9.

3. Searching for a theme

Once the entire data set was coded, I began to sort the codes into potential themes.

Codes were grouped by considering how different codes may combine together within one (or more) overarching pattern or theme. The post-it notes were arranged into theme piles (see Appendix 9).

Relevant data extracts for each potential theme were then collated.

4. Reviewing themes

This step involved re-visiting the entire data set to ensure:

- The collated extracts within each theme were grouped meaningfully together
- The potential themes accurately reflected the meanings evident in the data set as a whole
- No data that could be incorporated had been missed

Identified themes were further refined to ensure each was specific enough to be discrete from the other themes, but broad enough to capture all the codes contained within it.

5. Defining and naming themes

This involved a process of ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme. This was done by considering the individual ‘story’ each theme told and how this fitted within the broader overall ‘story’ of the data in relation to the research questions.

Each theme was given a name thought to capture its overall ‘essence’.

Discussions with a co-analyst (professional colleague) led to revision and renaming of some of the themes (see Appendix 9).
6. Producing the report

- The final opportunity for analysis.
- Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples to support each theme (Chapter 3).
- Final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the research questions and literature (Chapter 4).

2.5.2.4 Thematic networks

Thematic networks are a way of illustrating a thematic analysis of qualitative data.

Applying thematic networks is simply a way of organizing a thematic analysis; they are a tool for analysis, rather than being the analysis itself (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Thematic networks are web-like illustrations (networks) that summarise the main themes constituting a piece of text (p.386). Attride-Stirling (2001) proposes that thematic networks offer an organizing principle and a representational means, which make explicit the procedures employed when going from text to interpretation (p.388). Thus they provide a robust technique and a highly sensitive tool for the systematisation and presentation of qualitative analyses (p.385). Attride-Stirling (2001) emphasises that thematic networks are not a new method, but one that shares the key features of any hermeneutic analysis (p.388). Thematic networks were used in this study as a tool to aid presentation of the analysis, with the view to enhancing the understanding for the reader.

The structure of a thematic network is illustrated in Figure 2.1, below. Thematic networks depict themes at three different levels and demonstrate the relationships between these themes (Stainsby, 2010, p.111):

**Basic themes** are the lowest-order themes derived from textual data. Taken in isolation, a basic theme will tell the reader very little. Basic themes need to
be read in the context of other basic themes which when taken together represent an organising theme.

**Organising themes** are middle-order themes that organise basic themes into clusters of similar issues. Organising themes represent the main components of the superordinate theme from the text as a whole. A group of organising themes form a global theme.

**Global themes** are the core part of a thematic network and represent the main ideas and metaphors in the data as a whole.

**Figure 2.1: Structure of a thematic network**
2.5.2.5 Triangulation within data analysis

As stated in section 2.2.4, it was not possible in this study to employ investigator triangulation. Ideally, a co-analyst (such as a research or professional colleague) would have coded a sample of the data set to enable comparison and reflection on how I initially coded, identified and organised potential themes. Consequently, I conducted the coding and thematic analysis for the whole data set. However some validity checks were undertaken: I had frequent supervision during the coding process; and a professional colleague (an educational psychologist working in the same LA, with experience of this form of analysis) was invited to discuss and reflect on the thematic networks I produced. As a result of this collaboration, some themes were collapsed into a larger group and names were revised for clarity and to ensure sufficient discriminate validity between the themes. These changes are detailed in Appendix 9.

2.6 Critique of method

A number of limitations can be identified in relation to the design and methodology employed in this research project. For example, a control group is not being used. However, the use of an embedded single-case design with multiple units of analysis will enable triangulation of the data (Yin, 2009) and strengthen the reliability and validity the findings from the study. As only one secondary school will be involved, the ethos, behavioural policy and pastoral support networks available in the school will have an impact upon the successfulness of the children's transfer and will need to be considered, as they will not be directly controlled or measured. This is part of the rationale of using a case study design (see section 2.2.1).

A further limitation is that the sample size may be too small for the findings to be considered generalisable. However, the individual nature of transition experiences (Tobbell, 2003) need to be considered in this area of research.
Furthermore, the qualitative data will provide information on process as well as outcome, which will help develop future use of the intervention in the LA.

The researcher will be known to the schools involved in the project. It is hoped that by building rapport and explaining the benefit of elucidating both the strengths and limitations of the current intervention design for future development purposes, will reduce the risk of socially desirable or biased feedback during the interviews and focus groups. The focus group sessions will be audio taped and partially transcribed. This has a number of weaknesses, which are recognised by the researcher. For example, transcription becomes a record of data, rather than a social encounter, overlooking important contextual information such as non-verbal cues (Cohen, Lawrence and Morrison, 2000). Furthermore, due to confidentiality it will not be possible to ascribe comments to individuals.

A number of limitations are due to time constraints. For example, greater parental involvement would be preferable, as greater involvement of parents has been highlighted as an important element of transition support programmes (Shepherd and Roker, 2005; Turnbull, 2006). It is hoped that a parent’s information meeting before the club begins, and the activity days over the summer holiday will encourage greater parental involvement and support than a standard club format would enable.

There is the risk of a Hawthorne effect. However, the use of a second post measure should reduce the risk of over estimating any effects of the intervention. A longer follow up study would be preferable, but is not possible in this research project.

**2.7 Ethical principles and considerations**

Throughout the project the researcher will give much consideration, and strictly adhere to, the ethical principles outlined in the British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006) and the Health Professionals
Council Standards of conduct, performance and ethics (2008). All participants will be treated with the respect, and competence will be maintained in accordance with professional practice guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society (Professional Practice Guidelines, 2002) and the Health Professionals Council (HPC, 2000). With regards ethical guidance for researchers, the British Psychological Society (2009) Ethical Principles for conducting research with human participants will be consulted and adhered to, as will the University’s policies (University of Manchester, School of Education Ethical Practice, Policy and Guidance, 2008-09; Code of Practice for safety of researchers).

Informed consent
Informed consent will be obtained directly from the participants, who will be free to withdraw at any time. Informed parental consent will be obtained for all children. There will be three stages of consent; to address the differing levels of involvement (Initial whole class screen; discussion at multi-agency meeting; inclusion in club). Parents will be invited to an information session, during which the purpose and content of the intervention will be explained. The researcher will ensure the children know what will be required of them and are comfortable participating in the activities. Participants will not be coerced into taking part and will be able to withdraw at any point in the study.

Confidentiality
Great care will be taken to ensure all the data collected will be stored confidentially and securely. Parents will be able to access their own child’s SDQ scores and ratings if requested. The participants’ scores and individual views will be anonymised. Any data transcribed from the audio recordings and included in the thesis will not be identifiable to an individual. Feedback will be given to parents, participants and LA, both verbally and in writing. Findings will be reported in an honest and accurate manner.
Research with children

The inclusion of children within this research project is important in order to ascertain their views of the intervention. The importance attached to ascertaining the views of children can be found within both governmental guidance (Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN, 1989; DfES, 2004) and academic literature (Gersch, 2001; Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan and Shaw, 2000), and increasingly the views of children and young people are being valued and included by educational policy makers and researchers (Atkinson, 2005).

Including research with children does however, raise additional ethical considerations. For example, Fox and Rendall (2002) highlight the importance of obtaining the child’s informed consent, not just that of their parents, and the BPS ethical guidelines make specific reference to this (Lindsay, 2000). As mentioned above, the researcher will ensure the children know what will be required of them, and that they will be free to withdraw at any time.

Breakwell (2000) describes types of childrens’ response patterns in interviews that need to be avoided in order to fully ascertain their views. For example, he notes that as children can be unwilling to assert themselves or contradict an adult; there is a strong acquiescence response bias and a tendency to say yes irrespective of the question or what they think about it. Whereas teenagers may relish in the opportunity to contradict adults, which may result in an opposite bias in the information gathered. Beyond the acquiescence response children can exhibit a preference for ‘don’t know’ responses (Breakwell, 2000, p.245) if they feel unsure they can comment, or do not understand the question. A focus group format, rather than individual interviews, should hopefully reduce the possibility of these types of responses. The researcher will aim to establish a level of trust with the children (Cohen et al, 2000), who will have been known to the researcher for a number of months by the time of the interview. The children will be encouraged to give their views, but will not be pressured into doing so. The
group will be assured that there are no right or wrong answers and questions will be posed in such a way as to avoid a yes-no response.

A quiet location, not overlooked, and free of strong emotional connotations will be used. Verbal information will be supported by visual materials if necessary (e.g. cartoons, photos, rating scale) and the children will be given the option to respond visually, rather than verbally if they prefer (e.g. drawing-based activities; Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). To maintain interest and enjoyment in the process, the focus group will be well paced and kept short, approximately 20 to 30 minutes. Individual interviews with the children (if required, see section 2.4.2) will also be completed in this manner, but will be much shorter, approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

The researcher’s proposal for this study was submitted to the University of Manchester’s Ethics committee and granted approval on the 3rd June 2010. An example participant information sheet and the participant consent form can be found in Appendix 10 and 11.

2.8 Time-line, time-budget and risk Analysis

The time-line and time-budget for this research study can be found in table 2.2 below. A completed risk analysis for the study can be found in table 2.3.
Table 2.2 Time-line and Time-budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time budget</th>
<th>Contingency time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 2009</td>
<td>Commissioning meeting with Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and Pyramid Club Manager.</td>
<td>1 hour private study time 20th November 2009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2009</td>
<td>Thesis Tutorial</td>
<td>1 hour private study time 7th December 2009</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>Submit Thesis Plan</td>
<td>8th January 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>Thesis supervision with PEP</td>
<td>1 hour private study time 11th January 2010</td>
<td>14th January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>Meeting with Pyramid Co-ordinator and PEP</td>
<td>1 hour service time 19th January 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2010</td>
<td>Feedback on Thesis Plan/ modifications made if necessary. Preparation for Thesis Panel</td>
<td>Received by email 15th January 2010 1 day private study 16th January 2010</td>
<td>17th January 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>Thesis Panel</td>
<td>22nd February 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2010</td>
<td>Submit Ethics Proposal</td>
<td>22nd February 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February- March 2010</td>
<td>Meet with school staff and TaMHS links to update on research plans</td>
<td>3 hours service time.</td>
<td>Private Study days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March – May 2010</td>
<td>Literature Review and submission of A2 on 12th May 2010</td>
<td>4 Study days (5th, 12th, 19th and 26th March)</td>
<td>2nd and 9th April 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>Planning of group work with schools and club leaders</td>
<td>1 day service time 1 day private study (7th May 2010)</td>
<td>14th May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Activity Description</td>
<td>Dates</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>Screen children for inclusion in Pyramid Group. Selection of children. Request for parental consent</td>
<td>Week beginning 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 2010 1 service day (TBC) 1 private study day (21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; May 2010)</td>
<td>Week beginning 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>Pre-intervention SDQs administered</td>
<td>Week beginning 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 2010 1 day (half service day, half private study day)</td>
<td>Week beginning 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2010</td>
<td>Begin group work</td>
<td>Beginning of Summer term (7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; June)</td>
<td>Week beginning 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; June 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July/August 2010</td>
<td>2 group activity days over the summer holiday</td>
<td>TBC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September-October 2010</td>
<td>Resume group work</td>
<td>Beginning of Autumn term (School term dates for 2010/11 TBC)</td>
<td>Second week of new term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>Conduct Focus groups</td>
<td>Week following completion of club 1 service day</td>
<td>Private study day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2010</td>
<td>Post-intervention SDQs administered</td>
<td>End of first half term 1 Study day</td>
<td>First week back following October half term break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October-November 2010</td>
<td>Write literature review section</td>
<td>2 study days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November-December 2010</td>
<td>Write Method section</td>
<td>3 study days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>Conduct Focus groups</td>
<td>End of School term 1 service day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2010</td>
<td>Conduct semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>2 private study days</td>
<td>Private study days in January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January-March 2011</td>
<td>Complete data analysis and begin write up</td>
<td>Study days and 4 days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March-April 2011</td>
<td>Write Discussion section</td>
<td>Study days in March and April</td>
<td>Weekends and study days in May 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>Submit Thesis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Participant Feedback</td>
<td>Study days in July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2.3 Risk Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Contingency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with participant recruitment (children to form club)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Identify more than 3 children per school to be considered part of the Pyramid Club.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Consent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Identify more than 3 children per school to be considered part of the Pyramid Club.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant absence</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>If known in advance attempt to re-arrange Club meetings where possible. Keep an attendance record to acknowledge any missed sessions in write up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyramid Leader absence</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Discuss contingency plans for absence during planning and development of the club programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key staff member absence</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Liaise with other TaMHS link or Head Teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher illness</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Use contingency time. Request an extension. Reduce amount of post-measure data to be collected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor participant involvement during summer holiday</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Offer a number of alternative dates. Report attendance and involvement in write up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor participant involvement following transition</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Individual interviews with the children. Consider the use of form time to collect additional qualitative data on reasons for poor participation. Use contingency time or reduce amount of quantitative data to be collected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3: Results

3.1 Section outline

This section will begin with a description of the changes that occurred during the course of this study and the implications for data collection. Participant information and attendance over the intervention period is reported. The results are then presented in two parts. The first reports the findings from quantitative analysis of the pre- and post-intervention Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Social Competence Inventory (SCI). Also included in this first section is quantitative data collected through the focus groups and individual interviews (scaling questions). The second part reports the findings from the qualitative analysis of the focus group, interview and observation data. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the results.

3.2. Intervention delivery and data collection

A number of changes occurred over the course of the intervention which impacted the delivery of the intervention and data collection. Due to the ‘real life’ nature of the study this was not to be unexpected and was beyond the researcher’s control (Robson, 2002).

Shortly before the intervention commenced in June 2010, the Pyramid Club coordinator left the LA and responsibility for overseeing the club passed to one of the club leaders. Due to time constraints and unfamiliarity with this role, data were not collected at agreed time points and the two club meetings planned for over the summer break were not arranged. A further change was the inclusion of two Year 8 females from the secondary school. They were selected by the club leaders and attended the club meetings, taking on the role of ‘learning mentors’. The rationale was to provide the group with a ‘friendly face’ in the secondary school who club members could approach with confidence for guidance and reassurance. The implications of the
changes to the running of the club (missed summer sessions) will be explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

As stated in Chapter 2, section 2.4.1, the SDQ data should have been collected as part of the usual Pyramid Club process. However, due to the changes described above this did not occur. This had two implications, firstly pre-SDQ data for three of the children could not be located, and secondly data immediately following the intervention (mid SDQ and SCI data; October 2010) were lost. The researcher attempted on a number of occasions to recover the completed questionnaires. However, this was not possible and in January 2011 the decision was taken to abandon this data. This decision was made for two reasons: asking the Head of Year to complete the questionnaires in retrospect (three months later) would not have provided an accurate report; furthermore, the researcher was at this time still trying to locate the post-intervention data which should have been completed in December 2010. It was felt that asking the Head of Year to complete the mid- and post- data at the same time had the potential to compromise the accuracy of the post- data. Consequently only pre- and post- intervention SDQ and SCI scores can be reported. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 provide a summary of the data set. Qualitative data are also missing; this will be addressed in section 3.6, preceding the qualitative data analysis.
Table 3.1: Collected and missing club member data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club member*</th>
<th>Pre-intervention SDQ</th>
<th>Post-intervention SDQ</th>
<th>Pre-intervention SCI</th>
<th>Post-intervention SCI</th>
<th>October Focus groups/individual interviews</th>
<th>December Focus group</th>
<th>Parent Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Annie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Laura</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Wayne</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Carrie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Gary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Stuart</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 James</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Carly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Ben</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: Collected and missing club leader data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club Leader*</th>
<th>October Focus group</th>
<th>December Focus group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Sarah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Christine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Karen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
- Data collected
- Data missing

* Not real names, pseudonyms are used.
3.3. Participant information

To maintain confidentiality, all name references are pseudonyms.

Club members
Nine children were selected across three feeder primary schools for inclusion in the Transition Pyramid Club. Selection was based on the current identification model developed by Pyramid (see figure 1.2). The researcher was not involved in the selection of club members; this was undertaken by the LA Pyramid coordinator, in conjunction with school staff. The group was comprised of five males and four females, with an age range of 10-11 years at the start of the intervention (June 2010). Annie, Carly and Ben transferred from Primary one, Laura, Stuart and James transferred from Primary two and Carrie, Wayne and Gary, Primary three. Parental permission was not withdrawn for any of the children once the study had begun.

Club leaders
Three female, experienced Higher Level Teaching Assistants were selected as Club Leaders by the secondary school. Two of the Club Leaders (Sarah and Christine) had previous experience of working within the feeder primary schools to support transition and had experience of delivering small group work interventions. Karen had less experience, but worked with young people as a learning mentor within the secondary school. The LA Pyramid coordinator provided training for the three Club Leaders on delivering the intervention.

Learning Mentors
The Club Leaders selected two female Year 8 students to adopt the role of 'learning mentors' and attend the club meetings. They attended meetings one to five, but did not attend the club post transition. As this was a late adaptation, the learning mentors’ views were not included in this study.
3.4. Attendance rates

Full attendance at the club meetings was not achieved. Table 3.3 outlines attendance by club leaders and members over the course of the intervention.

Table 3.3: Club leader and club member attendance rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting number</th>
<th>Date of meeting</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Club leaders</th>
<th>Club members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.06.10</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 out of 9 (Gary did not attend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.06.10</td>
<td>2 out of 3</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Christine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>missing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>05.07.10</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.07.10</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.07.10</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>8 out of 9 (Stuart did not attend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SUMMER HOLIDAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>08.09.10</td>
<td>2 out of 3</td>
<td>4 out of 9 (Wayne,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Karen missing)</td>
<td>Gary, Carrie and Laura attended)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.09.10</td>
<td>2 out of 3</td>
<td>3 out of 9 (Stuart,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Karen missing)</td>
<td>Wayne and Carrie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>attended)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.09.10</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td>5 out of 9 (Stuart,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gary, Wayne, Carrie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Laura attended)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.09.10</td>
<td>Full attendance</td>
<td>5 out of 9 (Stuart,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wayne, Carrie, Laura</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Annie attended).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents also attended.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Club leader full attendance was achieved for 6 out of the 9 meetings. Sarah attended all the meetings. Christine and Karen missed meetings 2, 6 and 7 due to other commitments within the school.
Not all the meetings were attended by the club members. Attendance was high prior to transition (the children were collected from their primary schools and taken by the club leaders to the secondary school), Gary and Stuart’s non-attendance was due to sickness. Following transition to secondary school attendance was much lower (meetings 6 to 9). Meeting 6 was the first after the summer break and club members reported not being aware the club had started again. Meeting 7 was the lowest attended. Over half the children attended the final two meetings, the last was a celebration and parents attended with club members.

3.5 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative data gathered from the pre- and post-intervention Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Social Competence Inventory (SCI) and the scaling questions asked during the focus groups/ interviews were analysed to provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the intervention, in order to address the first research question (RQ1):

1. How effective is the Pyramid Club intervention?

Due to the small sample size descriptive statistics were employed (means and standard deviations; Hinton, 2004). Group data were first explored, followed by closer analysis at participant level.

3.5.1. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that provides a measure of social-emotional health (an example can be found in Appendix 4). It exists in several versions, the questionnaire for completion by teachers of 4-16 year olds (SDQ T4-16; Goodman, 2001) was used in this study. The SDQ is comprised of 25 attributes, some positive and some negative. A three-
point likert scale is used to indicate the degree to which each attribute applies to the child (not true, somewhat true, certainly true). The 25 attributes are divided across five subscales. Four scales measure potential ‘difficulties’: Emotional difficulties, (five items) relate to levels of worry and anxiety; Conduct difficulties (five items) refer to behavioural difficulties such as lying, cheating and fighting; Hyperactivity/ inattention (five items) refers to levels of physical activity, attention span and concentration; Peer relationship difficulties (five items) refers to friendships and relationships with other children. Each scale has a scoring range of 0-10. Together these 20 items generate a Total Difficulties (TD) score, with a range of 0-40. A higher score indicates greater difficulty. The fifth scale measures Prosocial behaviour (five items), a potential ‘strength’, it contains items that measure how kind and considerate a child is to others. This scale has a range of 0-10 and a higher score indicates greater prosocial behaviour.

A scoring range is available to classify scores as normal, borderline or abnormal, to identify likely ‘cases’ with mental health disorders. SDQ norms for British community samples show that 80%, 10% and 10% of children score within the normal, borderline and abnormal categories respectively (Meltzer, Gatward, Goodman and Ford, 2000). The case bandings for the SDQ T4-16 are outlined in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4: SDQ UK mean raw score and case bandings (adapted from Meltzer et al., 2000)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>UK mean raw score (n =8208)</th>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Borderline</th>
<th>Abnormal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Difficulties</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>0 - 11</td>
<td>12 – 15</td>
<td>16 - 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional difficulties</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Problems</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0 - 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity/ inattention</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0 - 5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationship</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0 - 3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial behaviour</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6 -10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0 - 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group data (mean score and case banding) were examined before analysis at the individual level.
**Pre- and Post- intervention SDQ Group Means**

The pre- and post-intervention mean scale scores and standard deviations are provided in table 3.5. The difference in point score between the pre and post measure is also included, with the direction of movement indicated ( - for reduction in score, + for an increase). This information is also displayed in graphically (Figure 3.1).

**Table 3:5: Pre-and post-intervention SDQ group mean scores (Standard Deviation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Pre-intervention Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Post-intervention Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Difference between pre/post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Difficulties</td>
<td>18.67 (8.34)</td>
<td>9.11 (3.45)</td>
<td>-9.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>4.67 (3.82)</td>
<td>3 (5.11)</td>
<td>-1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>2.67 (3.35)</td>
<td>0.89 (0.99)</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity/ inattention</td>
<td>6.83 (3.80)</td>
<td>2.44 (1.71)</td>
<td>-4.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationship</td>
<td>4.50 (3.5)</td>
<td>2.78 (1.55)</td>
<td>-1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial behavior</td>
<td>4.67 (3.09)</td>
<td>8.22 (2.20)</td>
<td>+3.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 shows there was an SDQ TD reduction from pre- to post- intervention of 9.56 scale points, suggesting the group as a whole had fewer social-emotional difficulties following their inclusion in the Pyramid Club, as measured by teacher rating. Group mean scores across all the potential difficulties scales (emotional difficulties, conduct, hyperactivity/ inattention and peer difficulties) decreased. Hyperactivity/ inattention decreased by over 4 mean points, the other scale scores decreased by under 2 points. Indicating the greatest reduction in difficulties related to hyperactive, inattentive behaviours. Prosocial behaviour showed an increase 3.5 points at post-intervention, signifying the children displayed more kind and considerate behaviours towards those around them following inclusion in the Pyramid Club.
The impact of the Pyramid Club on the members' social-emotional health was assessed by comparing group mean pre- and post-intervention case banding categories across the SDQ scales. Case banding is represented in Table 3.6. Scores that fell within the Normal range (80% of children in a community sample) were coloured green, scores within the borderline range (10% of children in a community sample) were coloured yellow and scores that fell within the abnormal range (10%) were coloured red.
**Table 3.6: Pre- and post-intervention case banding category (group mean)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Pre-intervention (mean) n = 6</th>
<th>Post-intervention (mean) n = 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Difficulties</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td>9.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperactivity/inattention</td>
<td>6.83</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer relationship</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial behaviour</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>8.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**

Normal  | Borderline  | Abnormal

Pre-intervention norm comparisons showed a higher prevalence of abnormal and borderline scores. Only two of the groups’ mean SDQ scale scores fell within the normal case band (emotional and conduct difficulties), indicating the group members did not have difficulties with these types of behaviour prior to the intervention. Borderline difficulties were present in relation to hyperactivity/inattention and peer relationships. Group scores on the ‘strength’ scale, Prosocial behaviour, were low enough to fall within the abnormal banding. Overall the group TD score (mean 18.67) was within the abnormal case banding range. The post-intervention shifts in SDQ banding brought all the group mean SDQ bandings in line with SDQ community norms. This suggests the Pyramid Club was effective at supporting the children’s social-emotional health during transition to secondary school.

*Individual*

The impact of Pyramid on the club members was also assessed on an individual basis by comparing pre-intervention and post-intervention SDQ case banding category. It was not possible to do this for the three children for whom pre-data are missing (Annie, Carly and Ben). Table 3.7
contains all the SDQ raw data. Pre-intervention, four children’s total difficulties (TD) scores were within the abnormal range, one borderline and one normal (three children’s data were missing). Post-intervention, seven of the children’s scores were in the normal band and two fell in the borderline banding. Only one of the children’s SDQ TD scores increased following the intervention (Laura), however the score remained within normal limits. Of the three children in the abnormal band pre-intervention, post-intervention banding showed one shift to the normal range (Carrie) and two shifts to the borderline range (Wayne and Stuart).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club Member</th>
<th>Total Difficulties</th>
<th>Emotional Difficulties</th>
<th>Conduct Difficulties</th>
<th>Hyperactivity/Inattention</th>
<th>Peer Difficulties</th>
<th>Prosocial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Annie</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Laura</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Wayne</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-12</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Carrie</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Gary</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Stuart</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 James</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-6</td>
<td>-7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 Carly</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9 Ben</strong></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POST</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of SDQ results

The club members mean SDQ TD score decreased post-intervention; indicating the group as a whole had fewer social-emotional difficulties following their inclusion in the Pyramid Club, as measured by teacher rating. Group means across all the potential difficulties scales decreased, with the hyperactivity/ inattention scale mean score showing the largest reduction. Mean scores on the prosocial behaviour scale increased, indicating the children showed more kind and considerate behaviours towards those around them following inclusion in the club. The scale score differences were large enough to result in case banding shifts; post- intervention all group mean scores were within SDQ community norms. At an individual level, only one of the children’s SDQ TD scores increased following the intervention and it remained within normal limits. This suggests the Pyramid Club was effective at supporting the children’s social- emotional health during transition to secondary school.

3.5.2 Social Competence Inventory (SCI)

The SCI investigates adaptive behaviours in social contexts rather than maladaptive or problem behaviours (Rydel et al., 1997). The SCI is a 25 item questionnaire and each item has five possible scores (one to five) with five indicating a strong presence of a socially competent behaviour (6 items are reversed; please see Appendix 5). An overall indication of an individual’s social competence can be generated by finding the mean of all 25 items (Frederickson et al., 2009). A higher score is indicative of greater social competency.

Individual and group mean pre- and post- intervention overall social competence scores and standard deviations can be found in Table 3.8 below. This table also provides the pre-post intervention difference in mean for each club member.
Table 3.8: Pre- and post-intervention SCI group and individual mean scores (Standard Deviation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club member</th>
<th>SOCIAL COMPETENCE Mean total</th>
<th>Pre-Post Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>POST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group (SD)</td>
<td>2.66 (0.49)</td>
<td>3.46 (0.70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the club member’s SCI scores increased post-intervention; indicating the club members’ overall social and interpersonal functioning improved following inclusion in the Pyramid Club. For some individuals there was a greater increase than others, for example Wayne made the most improvement with a pre-post mean difference of two score points. Carrie’s total score increased the least, indicating a very slight change in teacher perception of her social competency following the intervention.

The behaviours measured by the SCI can be distinguished along two dimensions; Prosocial Orientation and Social Initiative, to provide two subscales. 17 items contribute to the Prosocial Orientation subscale and include co-operative behaviours, such as empathy, helpfulness, generosity and handling conflict. ‘Social Initiative’ subscale behaviours include those which indicate a willingness and ability to participate, such as suggesting activities and being a leader in play. Eight items contribute to this subscale. The SCI measures both the existence of prosocially orientated competencies
and also the degree to which the child is able to initiate social interactions (Frederickson et al., 2009, p.11).

Gallagher (2003 as cited in Frederickson et al., 2009, p.12) provides means and standard deviations for each of these subscales, derived from teacher completion of the SCI for children aged 9-10 years in the USA. These norms were applied to further analyse the club member's SCI scores. However, as the norms are based on a younger population of a different nationality, they are only intended as a guide and the results should therefore be interpreted with caution.

**Prosocial Orientation subscale**

Gallagher (2003 as cited in Frederickson et al., 2009, p.12) reports a mean score of 3.39 and standard deviation (SD) of 0.70 for this subscale, with a higher score reflecting greater prosocial orientation. Scores one SD below the mean are indicative of problems and scores two SD below the mean are reported as atypical.

Table 3.9 contains each club members mean pre- and post-intervention score for the Prosocial Orientation subscale. Items on this subscale include co-operative behaviours, such as empathy, helpfulness and ability to give and take in social interactions. Individual scores were banded and coloured, in line with the norms reported above. Scores within the average range (score of 2.69 to 4.09; within one SD either side of the mean) were coloured green, scores one SD below the mean (2.68 to 1.99) were coloured yellow to indicate a cause for concern, and scores two SD below the mean (1.98 and below) were coloured red to indicate atypical scores. Scores above the average range (one SD above the mean; 4.10 and above) were coloured blue.
Table 3.9: Pre- and post-intervention Prosocial Orientation subscale individual and group mean scores (Standard Deviation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club member</th>
<th>PROSOCIAL ORIENTATION Mean</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>4.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>4.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>4.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Mean (SD)</td>
<td>2.65 (0.63)</td>
<td>3.86 (0.69)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
- Above Average (mean score of 4.10 and above)
- Average (mean: 2.69 to 4.09)
- Indicative of problems (mean: 2.68 to 1.99)
- Atypical (mean: 1.98 and below)

All the children had higher scores post-intervention, indicating that inclusion in the club was effective at developing the club members’ co-operative behaviours, as measured by teacher rating. The difference was greater for some of the children than others. For example, Annie, Wayne and Carly’s scores increased from being indicative of problems to above average. Stuart’s score moved from being atypical to within the average range. Four children’s scores did not change significantly enough to result in a change of banding; Carrie, James and Ben’s scores remained in the average band, Gary’s score remained low enough to be indicative of problems post-intervention.
Social Initiative subscale
This scale includes behaviours that indicate a willingness and ability to join in. Example items include; often a leader in games, hesitant around adults or peers, easily makes contact with unfamiliar children. Gallagher (2003) reports a mean score of 3.44 (SD of 0.82) with higher scores indicating more social initiative.

Table 3.10 contains each club members mean pre- and post-intervention scores for this subscale. Individual scores were again banded and coloured, in line with the norms reported above. Scores within the average range (score of 2.62 to 4.26; within one SD either side of the mean) were coloured green, scores one SD below the mean (2.61 to 1.8) were coloured yellow to indicate a cause for concern, and scores two SD below the mean (1.79 and below) were coloured red to indicate atypical scores. Scores above the average range (one SD above the mean; 4.27 and above) were coloured blue.
Table 3.10: Pre- and post-intervention Social Initiative subscale individual and group mean scores (Standard Deviation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Club member</th>
<th>SOCIAL INITIATIVE Mean</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>POST</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Annie</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stuart</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group mean (SD)</td>
<td>2.66 (0.46)</td>
<td>2.80 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key

- **Above average (mean: 4.27 and above)**
- **Average (mean: 2.62 to 4.26)**
- **Indicative of problems (mean: 2.61 to 1.8)**
- **Atypical (mean: 1.79 and below)**

The results for this subscale were more mixed. Not all of the children had higher scores post-intervention and over half of the children’s scores still fell one SD below the average range post-intervention. As a group, pre-intervention scores were just within the average range and little improvement in social initiative, as measured by teacher rating was made following inclusion in the Pyramid Club. Five of the children’s scores did improve post-intervention, for example Wayne and James’ scores moved from the indicative of problems to average range and Laura’s score moved from average to above average. Annie, Carrie and Ben’s scores remained in the same bands, however, Carrie and Ben’s scores both showed slight decline.
Carly and Stuart's scores resulted in a movement to lower band, post-intervention. This indicates that club members displayed greater problems with behaviours relating to willingness and ability to join in that were not effectively reduced through inclusion in the Pyramid Club.

**Summary of SCI results**
The club member's SCI total scores all increased over time; indicating the club members' overall social and interpersonal functioning improved following the Pyramid Club intervention. For some children pronounced gains were made (e.g. Annie, Wayne), for others change between pre-and post-scores was slight (e.g. Carrie). Pre-intervention, club member's displayed similar levels of difficulty across the two subscales (four children within the 'green' banding, four in the 'yellow' and one in 'red'). However, analysis of scores highlight greater improvement on the Prosocial Orientation subscale scores post-intervention with less improvement on the Social Initiative subscale. Some of the children's scores decreased post-intervention, indicating greater difficulty. This suggests that generally, the Pyramid Club intervention was more effective at supporting the development of prosocially orientated competencies (e.g. empathy, helpfulness) than ability and confidence to initiate social interactions (e.g. easily makes contact with unfamiliar children, is hesitant with peers). Given the intervention population (socially shy/withdrawn children) it is perhaps not unsurprising that greater difficulties with the latter subscale would have been experienced. The group means for each subscale and the overall total social competence score at both time points is represented visually below (Figure 3.2).
Figure 3.2: Pre- and post- intervention Social Competence total and subscale scores (group means)

3.5.3 Quantitative data from the focus groups and interviews

Participants were asked the following scaling questions as part of their focus group or individual interview, a visual picture of the scale was presented concurrently during the focus groups/ interviews with the club members and leaders. This was not possible during the parent interviews as they were conducted over the telephone.

Club leaders

During the second focus group (December 2010) club leaders were asked:

“On scale of 0 to 10, how effectively do you think the Pyramid Club supported the children’s transition to secondary school, where 0 represents no support at all and 10 shows perfect support?”

The club leaders rated the intervention very highly in terms of effectiveness at supporting the children’s transition (see Figure 3.3.). Sarah and Karen rated it at an 8, Christine rated it at 9 (mean rating 8.3).
Parents

During the telephone interviews the club members’ parents were asked:

“On scale of 0 to 10, how effectively do you think the Pyramid Club supported your child's transition to secondary school, where 0 represents no support at all and 10 shows perfect support?”

Five out of the seven parents interviewed rated the club at 10 out of 10 in supporting their child’s transition. Carly’s parent rated it at 9 out of 10, Wayne’s parent rated it the lowest at 8 out of 10 (Ben and James’ parents were not interviewed). This is presented in Figure 3.4 below. The mean rating for parents was 9.5, indicating the club member’s parents believed the club was very effective in supporting their child’s transition.
Figure 3.4: Parent ratings (effectiveness of club at supporting transition)

Club members

During the second focus group (December 2010) club members were asked:

“On scale of 0 to 10, how much did you enjoy the Pyramid Club, where 0 represents not at all and 10 represents the best time ever?”

The club members' rated their experience of being in the club fairly highly, the mean rating was 7.7, indicating the children enjoyed being a club member (see Figure 3.5). Laura and Stuart both rated their enjoyment as 10 out of 10. James' rating was the lowest, at 4. Gary and Annie did not attend the focus group.
Figure 3.5: Club member ratings (enjoyment)

The club members’ views as to how they felt the club supported their transition will be explored section 3.6, Qualitative analysis.

3.6. Qualitative analysis

Data gathered during the focus groups, individual interviews and researcher observations were analysed using thematic analysis. This analysis was completed to: supplement the quantitative data gathered for RQ 1; and provide an evaluation of the process in order to explore the mechanisms of effect (Ohl et al., 2008; Lally, 2010) and address RQ 2 and RQ 3:

2. What are the difficulties at transition identified by the children and how can the intervention support these?

3. What barriers were encountered in the running of the club and how do they impact on the perceived effectiveness of the intervention?
3.6.1. Data collection

As is illustrated in Table 3.1 qualitative data are missing. A number of attempts were made to hold a focus group with the club members in October 2010 however, full attendance could not be obtained. Consequently individual interviews were completed, with the exception of Laura and Stuart who were interviewed together. Due to school absence it was not possible to obtain Wayne, Carrie or Gary’s views in October. The December 2010 focus group proceeded as planned, however Annie was absent due to sickness and Gary was on holiday, thus it was not possible to obtain Gary’s views at either time point. Gary’s Mum provided her views, as did the majority of parents via a telephone interview with the researcher. These interviews took place between the end of December 2010 and the beginning of January 2011. It was not possible to contact James or Ben’s parents, despite a number of attempts. A complete data set were obtained for the club leader focus groups.

The focus groups and interviews were held at the secondary school and audio recorded. Notes were made during the telephone interview by the researcher as it was not possible to record these conversations. All the club meetings were attended by the researcher and observations notes were made during and immediately following the session on a prepared observation record (the format can be found in Appendix 8).

3.7. Thematic analysis of the focus group, interview and observation data

This section will describe and explore each theme identified using the guidelines detailed in Chapter 2. Text segments from the original transcripts, interview and summaries from the observation notes will be provided to support these descriptions.
The initial codes derived from the data were organised into 38 Basic Themes. These were arranged into clusters, thought to represent similar ideas/patterns, resulting in 15 Organising Themes. These were further grouped and organised into five Global Themes. Thematic networks were used to illustrate the organisation of the themes, across the data set. All five thematic networks are displayed in Figure 3.6. Each Thematic network will be represented before supporting data is provided.

Figure 3.6: Thematic Networks representing five Global Themes, 15 Organising Themes and 38 Basic Themes (see following page)
3.8 Thematic Network for Pre-transition concerns

This thematic network consists of one Organising Theme and five Basic Themes. This network represents club members’ and their parents’ responses to a direct, retrospective question asking if they had any worries about the transition to secondary school.

Figure 3.7: Thematic Network for ‘Pre-transition concerns’

3.8.1 Organising Theme: Worries about transition

In order to address RQ2, club members were asked if they had any worries about coming to secondary school, the response was a mixture of excitement and anxiety and only three children articulated worries. Parental responses indicated a greater level of worry than the children perhaps recalled (as they were asked post transition) or were willing to disclose. The discussions highlighted the children and their parents were worried about both the social and practical aspects, and in one case the academic challenges.

3.8.1.1 Basic Theme: Significance of the change

For several parents the significance of the change was not lost on them:
‘It is a big transition, they move from being a big fish in a little pond....it's a big change, everything was going to be different’ (Annie’s Mum)

This perhaps indicates why the parents articulated more concerns than their children.

3.8.1.2 Basic Theme: No worries about transition
Most of the children reported having no worries about coming to secondary school when asked directly, including for example, Stuart:

‘I was never scared about it’ (December)

James and Annie reported feeling excited about secondary school.

3.8.1.3 Basic Theme: The new social context and bullying
For others, worries were focused around the new social context they would be entering:

‘I thought that I’d never fit in’ (Carrie)

‘I was scared about coming here ‘cos of all the new people.....all the Year 11s and that’ (Laura)

‘Well when I was in primary I thought that when I was going into high school that I would be bullied all the time’ (Wayne)

Bullying was something Wayne’s Mum, and many of the parents, were concerned about:

‘I was worried about secondary school, being teased and bullied, as I knew he was teased a lot at primary’ (Wayne’s Mum)
‘I was concerned [about transition] as he was bullied a lot in primary, and I was worried it would carry on and be worse in secondary’
(Gary’s Mum)

3.8.1.4 Basic Theme: Getting lost
The size of the building was a concern for most parents and getting lost was something many reported they felt their children were apprehensive about:

‘He was excited, no major concerns, just about getting lost as it’s a great big building with lots of new people you have never seen before….it’s daunting’ (Stuart’s Mum)

3.8.1.5 Basic Theme: Academic concerns
Carly’s Mum was the only respondent to raise academic challenges. She said Carly had expressed concerns about being able to ‘cope’ at secondary as she had struggled academically at primary school.

3.9 Thematic Network for Positive outcomes and experiences

Discussions with club leaders, club members and their parents following completion of the club focused predominantly on the positive outcomes for the club members. These discussions highlighted that inclusion in the club was a positive, enjoyable and supportive experience for the children involved. This network consists of four Organising Themes and ten Basic Themes. Figure 3.8 illustrates the main themes on which Positive outcomes and experiences is based: effectiveness; social-emotional gains, assessment of need and follow up support, and positive experiences. Each theme will be explored individually, supported with extracts from the focus groups and interviews and reflections from the researcher’s observation records.
3.9.1: Organising Theme: Effectiveness

This theme relates to the effectiveness of the intervention in supporting the children’s transition to secondary school, supplementing the quantitative findings reported earlier in the chapter. This Organising Theme is based on two Basic Themes: supported transition and relieved worries.

3.9.1.1 Basic Theme: Supported transition

The club leaders and the children’s parents rated the club highly in terms of how effectively it supported the children’s transition (section 3.5.3). These ratings were supported by comments made during the focus group in December:

‘He’s [Wayne] got so many friends, he just seems really happy...I think they all are actually’ (Sarah)
‘Yeah, they have blossomed, it’s lovely’ (Christine)

Parents were also enthusiastic about its effectiveness:

‘Definitely a good experience and it helped at transition...It’s a positive thing [and] should be run again’ (Wayne’s Mum)

‘It helped with transition’ (Annie’s Mum)

‘It’s a fantastic idea, not much you could do to make it better. He has settled in really well and made new friends’ (Stuart’s Mum)

‘Everything was great, I would recommend it to others....it benefited them all’ (Carrie’s Mum)

The club members also thought it helped them:

‘......people who are struggling in school they need it, they also need to find a way to make new friends and if they are scared of going to secondary school that’s the club for them’ (Carrie, December)

Based on the perceived effectiveness, the club leaders said they planned to run it again:

Christine:  Yeah definitely going to do it again....we are already thinking about the process and how it’s going to work and that sort of thing

Sarah:  It’s worked well so why not do it? If something works well why not do it again?

Christine:  We’ve seen the benefits you know
3.9.1.2 Basic Theme: Relieved worries

Club members and their parents were asked directly if they felt the Pyramid Club helped relieve their worries about secondary school during a discussion around pre-transition concerns (see section 3.8). All responded positively, indicating inclusion in the club relieved the worries of parents and club members about the transition to secondary school. When asked what helped them feel less worried, knowing their way around the school and having myths debunked were common response from the members:

‘Cos they liked showed you around the school and said that like, Sarah said that there were rumours going round that you might get your head flushed down the toilet but like then she said that it’s not true’  
(Laura, October)

‘Because half of the stuff that people had told us isn’t true’  
(Annie, October)

‘Yeah ‘cos it [Pyramid Club] tells you where all the rooms are so you won’t get mixed up’ (Ben, October)

Meeting new people, developing friendships and for parents, meeting staff also helped relieve concerns about transition. These factors are explored in more detail in the following Organising Theme 3.9.2: Social-emotional gains.

The club leaders changed the day of the first club meeting following the summer break (week 6) to ensure the club meeting coincided with the children’s first day at secondary school. During the October focus group Christine explained the reasoning behind this was to alleviate any concerns the children may have had:

‘That was the main purpose.... because if anything was worrying them we didn’t want them to come back on the second day thinking ‘oh I’m petrified about that’, so it was a good opportunity....we were talking
about PE kits and some of them haven’t got them and we said don’t worry about it, just bring a pair of shorts and a t-shirt and show an interest and you won’t get into trouble, and that kind of laid them fears down...so it was good, I enjoyed that’

3.9.2 Organising Theme: Social- emotional gains

Social and emotional development following inclusion in the club was evident from the focus group/interview data referring to the children’s increased confidence and new friendships. Many of the club members were reported to have settled in well at secondary school and the club members themselves talked about liking their new school. Home-school links were important to the club leaders and the club was thought to foster these.

3.9.2.1 Basic Theme: Confidence

An increase in club members’ confidence following inclusion in the club was reported by the club leaders, the club members and their parents. Observation notes also referred to a growing social confidence among members of the group as the weeks progressed.

The club leaders felt the evident increase in members’ confidence was a strong indication of the effectiveness of the club:

‘When I see the children now and what they have achieved and how they have developed and grown in their confidence, that’s enough for me. That shows me that what we did, we did it right’ (Sarah, October)

‘I think they are bubbling with confidence’ (Christine, December)

This included children who didn’t attend all nine club sessions (James and Ben):
Sarah: I’d definitely say Carrie has come out of her shell quite a lot...and she’s a lot, a lot more confident than she was

Christine: I think they all are actually

Sarah: Yeah I think they are...I mean I know like James didn’t continue it but I even think he’s come out of his shell as well

Karen: Yeah I’ve noticed that with him, just through seeing him in corridors, the way that he’s chatting with friends and stuff, ‘cos he was very, very quiet wasn’t he

Christine: Very quiet, yeah, so even though he didn’t do the whole thing it’s benefited him as well.

Sarah: And Ben is doing really, really well

Christine: Yeah he has come on

Sarah: I think with Ben he has learnt to be a little bit more assertive, because he was really quite quiet (December)

Club members themselves made reference to feeling more confident when asked if they felt the club had helped them:

‘Yep [I feel] a lot more confident’ (Stuart, October)

‘....When I came to the club it boosted me confidence’
(Wayne, December)

‘I would say that it was always building your confidence’
(Carrie, December)
Laura, Carrie, Stuart and Carly’s Mums all made reference to an increase in their children’s confidence following inclusion in the club:

‘[Laura] feels a lot more confident as she is a shy girl’ (Laura’s Mum)

‘[Carly] was quite nervous, quite a quiet child...I can’t believe the difference, she has come on leaps and bounds....she was more confident in going to secondary school’ (Carly’s Mum)

Researcher observation records make reference to an increase in group members’ confidence during weeks six, eight and nine (all post transfer). Notes refer to growing confidence within the school environment and during interactions with club leaders and other members, this was especially so for Wayne, Laura and Stuart who appeared to benefit from the smaller group numbers following transition. During the last session the club members confidently delivered speeches to the other members, leaders and parents about their time in the club.

3.9.2.2 Basic Theme: Friendships
Many of the children were selected due to difficulties at primary school with peer relationships and making and sustaining friendships. Thus providing opportunities to meet peers from other schools and develop friendships was a key aim of the club. It was a topic that featured frequently in the feedback from parents, members and leaders.

Several of the club members reported that the club helped them make friends:

‘I was afraid of making new friends, cos of my old friends... I thought I were gonna have hardly any [friends] in my lessons, but because of Pyramid helping me find all these new people to be friends with, and most of them are in my lessons, I can get used to school knowing that I’ve got friends by my side....I loved making new friends’
(Carrie, December)

‘It just like made me feel that I’ve got friends and I won’t get bullied properly like in my primary’ (Wayne, December)

This was comforting for parents too; Carrie and Gary’s Mum reported being pleased their child would get a chance to mix with children from different primary schools prior to the start of the year:

‘[Carrie] tried hard to make friends at primary but it was difficult, but at Pyramid she met children from other schools that she could relate to ....so she had a bit of a bond when she started’ (Carrie’s Mum)

‘[Gary] always had lots of problems with mixing, so it’s been really good for him, he’s a bit of a loner, so it was good that he was mixing with other children and there were those who took him under their wing’

(Gary’s Mum)

The majority of parents felt the club facilitated the making of new friendships:

‘Stuart made some friends [and] got to know people prior to starting. He’s settled in really well and made new friends’ (Stuart’s Mum)

‘She got to know people and she made one really good friend...she has made a few new friends’ (Laura’s Mum)

The club leaders also described the development of new friendships and how this linked to the children settling in well at secondary school:

‘Laura seems to have just settled in really, really well.... her parents are pleased with her, she’s got loads of friends’ (Sarah, December)

‘Carly’s got lots of friends, she’s settled in really well’ (Karen, December)
The opportunity to make friends via Pyramid Club was mentioned by several club members too, for example:

[I liked] meeting the different people from the other schools.....’cos I’m friends with the other kids and now I’ve just met up with people that are their friends (Annie, October)

When asked how often the club members saw each other after the end of the intervention the response was varied. Some of the children (Ben, Wayne, Stuart and Laura) shared a number of lessons and accessed ongoing support from the club leaders. For others, although they saw each other around school, they had made friendships beyond the Pyramid group through their tutor groupings and classes and did not often see the club members.

Not all club members found meeting peers through Pyramid a positive experience. James said he did not really enjoy meeting the other children and did not often see them around school. Instead he described friendships made through sports clubs and tutor groups. This is explored further in section 3.11 Extra Pyramid Factors.

The observation records highlight that the children tended to remain within their school groupings initially. This gradually changed to single sex groupings over the following weeks, mostly as a result of the activities selected, as the boys tended to choose the computer games, where as the girls remained with the arts and crafts activities. Wayne and Ben appeared to strike up a friendship around the third session. Following transition, the smaller group appeared to support the development of Laura, Carrie, Stuart and Wayne’s friendship. It was notable that within this smaller group environment Laura and Stuart became more central to the group.
During the first club meeting post transition (meeting 6) the club leaders discussed friendships with the club members, normalising initial difficulties around making friends in the first week and remembering names.

3.9.2.3 Basic Theme: Home-school links

The club leaders reported passionately about the importance of developing good home-school links and described how the club facilitated this; through conversations with parents when they came to collect their children, and the two occasions when parents were invited to the club meetings (meeting 4, when parents joined in with parachute games in the hall and meeting 9, the final party).

The leaders recognised the transition to secondary school was a change not just the child, but also the wider family:

‘It’s not just transition for the child, its transition for the family... if you have got children, as within our group, who haven’t got older siblings then it is a new experience for the parents as well so it is important that they are engaged...and I think they did open up to us a bit more in the car park when they were picking them up...at first ‘Hi how’s he been’ but after that the banter really started didn’t it ...so that was good’
(Christine, October)

The party was seen as an effective way in which to engage the parents and develop supportive links between parents:

‘Not all of them came [to the party], but the ones that did come really enjoyed it and got loads out of it...it’s great for the parents because it gives the parents the opportunity to get together as well, ‘cos that’s something they don’t have when they come to high school...that goes completely... from having that play ground ‘chit chat’ and finding out about what each others’ children are doing and all the rest of it, to
absolutely nothing...and y’know its really, really difficult as a parent I think, speaking from my own experience being a parent’
(Sarah, October)

During parent interviews all those who attended the party mentioned it and talked about it positively. The taking home of things made during the club was also raised by several parents. It was evident that this provided a source of pride for the club members and facilitated conversations around what they had done in the sessions:

‘Laura liked making things and bringing them home and she’d tell me what she had done’ (Laura’s Mum)

For Wayne’s Mum, meeting school staff in advance helped relieve her concerns around transition. However, Gary’s Mum reported that following the end of the club, the home-school links weakened and this left her feeling unsure who to contact and she felt her ongoing concerns went unheard. The club leaders confirmed this at the December focus group:

Sarah: We’ve not really been in contact with parents...

Christine: No not see them since, if we see them out and about its you know ‘ Hi’, but no not really had much contact since

However, they did recognise this was something they could address in the future:

Sarah: There has been a parents evening... but that wasn’t a main parents evening, that was just a meet your form tutor type evening, but maybe that’s something we could do at the main Year 7 parents evening

Christine: Yeah good idea
3.9.3 Organising Theme: Assessment of need and further support

During discussion with club leaders, the possibility that getting to know the children (via the club process) provided an informal assessment of the children’s needs was explored. The additional support the children accessed following completion of the club was also discussed with the club leaders.

3.9.3.1 Basic Theme: Assessment in context

The leaders felt the club helped them get a better understanding of the members, which enabled them to plan individually tailored support.

Sarah:  *Cos you can kinda work out, especially for example Stuart, we know that we’ve got to wrap him up in cotton wool really ‘cos that’s the type of person that he is, but I think we sort of knew that from him coming to the Pyramid Club and that’s the sort of person that he was, he was quite unique in a way wasn't he?*

Christine: Yes

Sarah:  *And that doesn’t sort of bode well in a school like this, do you know what I mean? So therefore we knew that we had to keep a special eye on Stuart*

In this sense, involvement in the club offered a form of assessment in context that informed future support; staff were aware of the children’s needs and consequently were aware which children required additional support:

*‘We were able to say to the Year 7 Key Stage manager ‘Well we know about this child, because they’ve done the Pyramid Club...so everyone is kind of well informed’ (Sarah, December)*

Furthermore, the children knew where to go to access this support:
‘Yeah they just turn up because they know it’s a safe place to be...’
(Sarah, December)

3.9.3.2 Basic Theme: Follow up support
Following the end of the intervention the club leaders reported seeing the club members around school and many of them still accessed support from staff in the learning support unit (RAC; the room in which the Pyramid Club was held) before school and in the mornings:

Researcher: How much do you see the children outside club?

Sarah: I see them every dinner time, they come to the RAC every dinner time, and in the morning usually as well for breakfast club

Christine: I see them a lot round school as well, bobbing into class rooms, saying ‘Hi’ on the corridor and things like that

During the December focus group the leader’s reported that they were still in contact with the club members and some of them were accessing further support via a small group intervention based on an Australian Cognitive Behavioural Therapy intervention (FRIENDS; Stallard et al., 2007). For some of the club members longer term support was anticipated:

Christine: If they came in Year 8 they would still be able to come if they wanted to

Researcher: So you could imagine being involved with some of the [Pyramid Club] members long term?

Sarah: Yes

Christine: Definitely, yes
However, for Gary’s Mum follow up support following the end of the intervention was, from her perspective, lacking:

‘Couldn’t fault it [Pyramid Club], it was a nice way of easing him in slowly, but when it comes to the real hardship the support wasn’t there, Gary is an individual who needs a bit extra than others...he needs support for the rest of school’

3.9.4 Organising Theme: Positive experiences

The positive outcomes reported by the majority of participants’ appeared to be based on the positive experiences inclusion in the club provided. The club members enjoyed being part of the intervention as they enjoyed the sessions, which were fun. Furthermore, for some children, being selected to be part of the club made them feel quite proud and special.

3.9.4.1 Basic Theme: Enjoyment

Enjoyment of the club appeared to be a significant factor in supporting its effectiveness. The majority of club members rated highly their enjoyment of the club (quantitative results, section 3.5.3) and several made comments to support this, for example:

‘Well I did really enjoy it and I was actually a little bit sad that it finished a couple of weeks ago’ (Stuart, October)

‘It was super, massive, awesome!’ (Carrie, December)

Frequent observation notes refer to how enjoyable the sessions were. The club members evidently enjoyed the meetings and researcher noted that she was often smiling whilst observing.

Following this conversation the researcher agreed to pass on her concerns to the secondary school’s allocated Educational Psychologist.
During the telephone interviews parents were asked if they thought their child liked being in the club. All the parents reported positively about the experience, as the following comments illustrate:

‘He loved it - I think he enjoyed the whole thing’ (Stuart’s Mum)

‘She loved it…I think she benefited from it, I know she enjoyed it’ (Laura’s Mum)

The club leaders also felt the club members enjoyed themselves:

‘The feeling I get from them is that they really enjoyed it’
(Christine, October)

Furthermore, the leaders enjoyed running the sessions:

‘I’ve got nothing negative to say about it to be honest as I really enjoyed it’ (Sarah, October)

3.9.4.2 Basic Theme: Happy and fun
The feedback from club members highlighted the experience was a fun one:

‘It’s dead fun’ (Carly, October)

‘Laura for example… another child near her said ‘What is this Pyramid Club? What do you do?’ And I said ‘Laura, what do we do?’ And she said ‘have fun!’…..And I said ‘we certainly do!’ (Christine, October)

Parents also reported that the sessions were fun, happy experiences for the club members:

‘It was fun!’ (Laura’s Mum).
‘He seemed happy when I picked him up, he did enjoy it; he always had a smile on his face...it seemed a happy atmosphere...focused on fun’
(Wayne’s Mum)

3.9.4.3 Basic Theme: Feeling special and proud
Stuart’s Mum reported a feeling of ‘they have chosen me’ meant he felt quite ‘special’ at having been invited to be part of the club. The opportunity to make things that he could take home added to this:

‘He felt proud he could present me with little gifts...it made him feel quite important’

The researcher observed that the club leaders often used the craft activities as an opportunity to praise the club members and would highlight members work to others. For example, Gary proudly showed off a pencil case during week eight after it was positively commented upon by Christine.

3.10 Thematic Network for Proceedings

*Proceedings: ‘Method of doing or producing something’*

This network represents an exploration of the participants’ and researchers’ thoughts and ideas as to how the club meetings supported the children’s transition to secondary school. The network consists of five Organising Themes and 16 Basic Themes. Figure 3.9 illustrates the main themes on which this thematic network is based: snack time; familiarisation; constancy; group experience; leader style and skills.
Figure 3.9: Thematic Network for ‘Proceedings’
3.10.1 Organising Theme: Snack time

The children had a drink and a snack at the start of every club meeting. This is a planned feature of every Pyramid Club, intended to meet the children’s basic physiological needs (see Figure 1.3). Observation notes and discussions with club members highlight snack time as a welcomed and enjoyable experience. The club leaders also used this time to provide the children with new experiences and to develop skills and independence, increasingly so following the move to secondary school.

3.10.1.1 Basic Theme: Meeting basic needs

Observation notes from each week make reference to the snack experience; the children often arrived ready to eat after a full day at school and it was evident that having something to eat at this time followed the normal flow of the children’s day. Discussions with the club members also highlighted that this was appreciated by the members:

Researcher: *What else did you like [about Pyramid Club]?*

**Annie:** *The food!*

As the club meetings were long (1.5 hours), not providing food would have left children and staff hungry and thirsty, which probably would have led to individuals bringing their own snack. Having the time planned within the session ensured it was a communal and social activity; the group sat in a circle and often chatted about the school day, incorporating circle time activities. For example, during week one the club name was discussed whilst the children ate. Feedback on what they had learnt about each other/ the group included comments on food likes and dislikes observed during snack time. This provided a non-threatening and fun ice breaker to support the initial stages of group formation. Researcher observation notes also comment on how the club leader’s were careful to ensure all club members
were included and encouraged the children to sit together, such as in week two when Stuart initially sat away from the others.

3.10.1.2 Basic Theme: Developing skills and independence
Discussion with the club leaders highlighted how snack time was purposefully used to provide the children with new experiences and skills, such as trying new food and preparing their own sandwiches, with the aim to develop greater independence following the move to secondary school:

Sarah: Letting them be independent really, especially towards the end when we just gave them the freedom to make their own food, like the sandwiches and not mollycoddling them as much. Although it may have looked like we were taking a step back that was because we did want them to become more independent, which I think worked well

Christine: Being organised as well...I know it was only making sandwiches but that could show at home that they could make their sandwiches for school maybe, ‘cos I know for some of them they looked unfamiliar with just buttering bread, so we were able to just guide them

Sarah: It was something new they had never done before, it's something Mum and Dad had always done ...

Christine: That’s it, and it’s another important step just as much as it is coming to school, is being prepared to come into school

As the weeks progressed researcher observation notes highlight the increasing responsibility that was passed to the club members in not only preparing the snack, but also tidying and clearing up afterwards. This was especially evident from week six onwards, following the move to secondary school.
During week three, the club members were presented with new foods and were encouraged to try them (e.g. hummus). This provided opportunities for praise. The club leaders also invited the children to make a shopping list of things they would like to try in the following weeks.

3.10.2 Organising Theme: Familiarisation

The tour of the school was one of the most popular activities reported by the club members. Each week a section of the school was visited, providing the club members with opportunities to visit classrooms and meet staff. This was an adaptation to the intervention, added by the club leaders. Discussions with parents also highlighted the perceived importance of meeting and getting to know other children and the club leaders prior to transition and the support familiarisation of the building, peers and staff provided.

3.10.2.1 Basic Theme: Familiarity of the building

The club members spoke positively about the tour of the school:

‘I liked the tour around the school...you could see all the classes and like what they’d done in the classes ‘cos they had like posters up and that around the school’ (Carly, October)

‘I enjoyed the tour....I liked looking at the science labs, meeting all the science teachers and having a look in the new rooms’ (Stuart, October)

The club leaders reflected on how this was an addition to the manualised programme, but an effective way in which to develop familiarity and ownership of the school building:

‘They are in awe of the buildings at first, wondering where they are, but eventually they are ‘oh we go this way don’t we’ and ‘oh we go this way’ and it became their ground then not just our school, but theirs’ (Christine, October)
They were able to visualise where they were going rather than just rely on a room number ‘cos they had been there before’ (Sarah, October)

As explored in the Basic Theme: Relieved worries (3.9.2) knowing their way around the school was raised by a few of the club members. Stuart reported that this helped develop his confidence when he started at the secondary school:

Researcher: What do you think it was about the club that made you feel more confident?

Stuart: Well because I now know my way around the school

The children’s parents were also very positive about the tour and this featured frequently during discussions around their thoughts as to how they felt the club supported their child’s transition:

‘Going to the school and visiting it, giving them that familiarity before they started’ (Wayne’s Mum)

‘Being there and being shown around, she felt a bit more grown up and was more confident in going to secondary school, she knew her way around so it was less intimidating’ (Carly’s Mum)

‘Finding his way around wasn’t such a scary thing, ‘cos it is a great big building with lots of new people never seen before...It’s easier to ask people questions when it’s not such a big shock to the system, it helped knowing his way around the school’ (Stuart’s Mum)

It also enabled the children to show others where to go and knowing their way around provided a sense of confidence and achievement:
‘It helped his confidence; he could show his mates where to go’ (Stuart’s Mum)

‘I’ve only lost my way once, and that was when they swapped our Design and Technology rooms over’ (Annie, October)

3.10.2.2 Basic Theme: Familiarity of people
Getting to know staff members and other children was viewed as an important supportive factor by many of the parents:

‘He got on with the leaders and made some friends, getting to know people prior to starting really helped’ (Stuart’s Mum)

‘She enjoyed the staff there and getting involved with one another...She feels more comfortable as she can go to them as they are still around the school and room’ (Carrie’s Mum)

‘[Pyramid Club] relieved her fears about the school building and showed her the people are not that scary as she got to see it...[Pyramid Club] keeps them informed that there are people there to support her and where to go if she did need help’ (Annie’s Mum)

The club leaders also felt the tour provided an ideal opportunity to meet staff members and get to know their new teachers:

Sarah: I think as well it gave them a bit of an advantage because they had met quite a lot of the teachers while they were walking around the school, so the teachers knew them by their first names, ‘cos you know if you imagine 30 children in a class and the teacher still doesn’t know who some of the kids are, whereas if it’s just them [club members], they can say ‘Oh hello, what’s your name? Come in’, so they know their names already and it’s more personal
Christine:  *It was nice ‘cos it was after class and they were just tidying up maybe the teachers were just relaxed themselves...so it was a good situation*

The club leaders were asked if they would prioritise familiarisation of the building or meeting staff/peers (i.e. would they prioritise practical over social support), their response indicated that both were felt to be equally important:

Sarah:  *I think it’s all of it, the whole package, they are both quite equal I suppose...*

Christine:  *Yes a balance, yes they are [both important]*

3.10.3 Organising Theme: Constancy

The continuation of the club following the move to secondary school was highlighted by the parents as an important supportive factor. The club leaders also felt the use of circle time activities helped provide a further constancy between the primary and secondary school settings.

3.10.3.1 Basic Theme: Continuation of the club post transition

A number of parents made reference to the supportive nature of continued club meetings following the move to secondary school, highlighting the importance of providing support before, during and following the move to secondary school:

‘*It makes fitting in a bit easier in the first few weeks as it continues the settling in period. When you’re head is full of goodness knows what, like where to go, meeting new friends and new teachers, it helped*’

(Stuart’s mum)
'It was good that it was consistent and didn’t cut off [after the move to secondary school]. It was something familiar in a strange environment’ (Wayne’s Mum)

‘I do think it was a good idea to carry it on, to see how they are getting on’ (Annie’s Mum)

Researcher observation notes also highlight how continued meetings enabled concerns or new experiences to be safely addressed and explored during the club meetings. For example, during week seven, Carrie described how she got lost; ‘it was like a stampede’. Sharing this with the club leaders and other members enabled the experience to be normalised and guidance was offered as to what to do in the future in a similar situation.

3.10.3.2 Basic Theme: Continuation of circle time activities
In the December focus group, during a discussion about adaptations the club leaders would make to the running of future clubs, Sarah and Christine reflected on the strengths of the circle time component and how this provided a strand of continuity between the primary and secondary school settings:

Sarah:  
*I think circle time will definitely stay because that’s something that is really important and the kids do it anyway at primary school*

Christine:  
*That is an important link isn’t it*

3.10.4 Organising Theme: Group experience

The club leaders and one of the club members raised group size during discussions around how they felt the club experience supported transition. For the club leaders the small group size was essential. The group became smaller following transition, when attendance was much lower; this altered
the group composition and dynamics, which appeared to benefit some of the group members.

3.10.4.1 Basic Theme: Small Group

The club leaders reported the small group format was an effective and essential feature of the intervention:

Sarah:  
*I think the small group worked well, definitely.... I do think that having a small group is important*  

Christine:  
*Sometimes you know like once you get placed into a class you can have 25 children in there, it becomes overwhelming for them, so to actually half that and be able to put them in a smaller group and a recognisable environment they are happy with*  

During the December focus group the club leaders highlighted the support that could be offered within a small group, that perhaps would not be possible in a whole class setting:

Sarah:  
*It wasn’t as intimidating for the children as a big group would have been I don’t think*  

Christine:  
*I think being in a small group, not being in a class size has given them the ability to open up and chat and you know...*  

Sarah:  
*Be who they want to be really...and say what their fears are without you know someone judging them on what they say really*  

The small group size and high children to staff ratio did facilitate a high level of adult guidance and support during interactions. Interestingly it is noted in the observation records that as the group became smaller (following the
transition) the remaining club members appeared to develop a stronger relationship with each other. Within this smaller group a couple of the children, such as Laura, appeared more confident within the group, initiating more interactions with the other members and leaders.

Contrastingly, Stuart expressed the view that a bigger, not smaller group would be preferable:

‘I’d want more people in it, a bigger one’ (Stuart, December)

3.10.4.2 Basic Theme: Group composition and dynamics

As described in Chapter 1, Pyramid Club is an intervention specifically designed for children who are quite, shy, withdrawn or finding it difficult to make friends and a three stage process has been developed to identify club members (see Figure 1.2). The selective appropriateness of the intervention was highlighted by Carly’s Mum during her telephone interview:

‘It’s not right for all children, it’s better for the quieter ones with less confidence...it was great for Carly’

The group as a whole did not ‘gel’ as tightly as perhaps would have been envisaged based on the careful selection procedure. For example, James did not appear to identify with the other children. However, some friendships did appear to form, for example between Stuart, Wayne and Ben.

The group dynamics evolved over the weeks, particularly following the reduction in group numbers from week six onwards. This appeared to concern some of the remaining attendees, as noted in the researcher’s observation notes for weeks seven and eight:

Carrie:  I can’t believe there are only three of us...

Stuart:  I don’t think the others are allowed to come
Laura: *How come not as many people are coming?*

Sarah: *Because it’s near the end Sweet*

Stuart also raised the topic during the October interview:

Stuart: *I think Carrie likes it and Wayne and Gary enjoyed it, but I think people who left like James and Ben didn’t like it as much*

Laura: *James told me that he just couldn’t come*

Stuart: *Hmm, yeah but then it kept carrying on. When it carried on for the extra weeks he didn’t come, I just started to think he didn’t like it*

However, the smaller group composition appeared to benefit some of the club members, such as Laura, and feedback from parents was positive even for those who left early, indicating the club members who remained benefited from the more targeted support following transition.

As the impact of early leavers appeared to affect some club members, this perhaps could be planned for and explained to remaining club members in the future, to reduce any potential feelings of dislike or rejection.

### 3.10.5 Organising Theme: Leader style and skills

The children’s parents were very positive about the club leaders and frequent reference is made to the club leaders’ style and skills during their interactions with the children in the researcher’s observation notes. The club leaders themselves also reflected on their relationship with the children and how their previous experiences helped them run the club.
3.10.5.1 Basic Theme: Training and previous experience

Pyramid Club leaders usually attend a three day training course in preparation for running a club (section 1.4). However, as the Pyramid Club coordinator left the LA shortly before the intervention began, the club leaders only had access to half a day’s training. The club leaders reflected on how this was initially confusing:

‘Yeah, it was all a bit fast...she just sort of left everything and we weren’t sure about stuff, whether we were to give it back or what we could do with it, so I think in that respect that was a bit confusing at times’ (Sarah, October)

However, Sarah and Christine’s previous experience supported Karen’s relative inexperience:

Sarah:  
*I think it was probably harder for Karen as you hadn’t done that sort of thing before, had you?*

Karen:  
*No, no*

Sarah:  
*It probably came a little bit easier to Christine and I ‘cos we are from a primary school background...we haven’t done anything like Pyramid Club before but we knew how children work and what they like and don’t like*

Sarah and Christine’s knowledge of the feeder primary schools and their skill and ability to effectively run a small group intervention was evident during observation. The benefit of working within the secondary school (rather than being external volunteers) also meant they could facilitate access to further support.
3.10.5.2 Basic Theme: Providing enjoyable activities

During discussion with the club members the arts and crafts activities were frequently mentioned and provided the most common response when the children were asked what they liked about being in the club:

‘Doing all the little activities together’ (Annie, October)

‘We done good activities’ (Wayne, December)

‘It was fun with the activities and that’ (Carly, October)

‘I liked making things’ (Laura, October)

Many of the parents also commented on the activities during discussion about what they thought their child liked about being in the club:

‘Laura enjoyed doing everything especially when she made different items each week’ (Laura’s Mum)

‘[The] interesting activities that the children liked’ (Annie’s Mum)

The club leaders also felt the crafts were enjoyed by the club members:

‘All the craft stuff; they loved doing all the craft’ (Sarah, October)

However, the emphasis on creative activities was not to every member’s taste. For James the physical activities were more enjoyable and he found the club less appealing due to the large arts and craft component:

Researcher: What did you like about the club?

James: Some of the things, like, when we did the parachute
Researcher: Were there any other things you liked?
James: No I don’t think so….I didn’t really like them ‘cos I don’t like art

3.10.5.3 Basic Theme: Tailoring activities and resources
The club leaders were given a pre-prepared pack of resources and suggested activities from Pyramid. However, they commented on the suitability of some of them during the October focus group:

Christine: ‘Some of the resources that we were given…seemed a little bit young for them’

Sarah: ‘Yeah too babyish’

Christine: There were some good ideas in there but there were some we adapted slightly I think…..

Sarah: Yeah as we did feel like we had to stick to the planning each week, but we wanted to go against that because there were things that we felt were more suitable, like the tour of the school.

Towards the end of the intervention the sessions became much less structured and the children were given more free choice. During the December focus group the club leaders explained the rationale behind this decision:

Sarah: It was about asking the children what they want…as it’s all about them, it’s all about making them feel comfortable…you know a couple of them said ‘oh we want to have a look around the school’ so why not have a look around the school? Why do you have to stick to some regimented piece of paper that says
that day you’ve got to do that? So we kind of broke the rules really didn’t we?

Christine:  We did! We’d give them the activities but then if they you know took it into a new, different way, we straight away said ok we’ll do it that way.... and we’d ask them ‘What would you like to do?’ And it developed from there

Researcher: So that’s what’s important in terms of being a club leader, the experience of working with children and gauging what they like?

Sarah: Yeah absolutely and allowing the children to have the freedom to do what they want to do for a short time, ‘cos not every child wants to do the same thing

The child-led nature of the sessions was also commented upon by Wayne’s Mum during a discussion about the strengths of the club:

‘They listened to the kids’

3.10.5.4 Basic Theme: Helping the children feel safe in the secondary school

Although the meetings became more fluid towards the end, snack and circle time were consistent features. The routine helped foster a safe atmosphere and the children were frequently remind that the room was their space, which they could always return to, even after the intervention ended.

During the first meeting the club members made posters with their names on, these were displayed on the wall for the remainder of the club. The club leaders reflected that developing ownership of the space was important in helping the children feel settled and safe. The party at the end was planned
and organised by the children as the leaders were keen to emphasise that it was their party to celebrate their success:

Christine:  
> You know that’s why I said to them, ‘serve your guests the drinks’, otherwise I was just taking over again but it's not my party, it’s their party

Sarah:  
> It’s about giving them ownership isn’t it

When asked how she would describe the club, Carrie made reference to the safe space the leaders had helped create:

> ‘Fun, caring, safety and happiness, I would use all those words to describe it’ (Carrie, December)

### 3.10.5.5 Basic Theme: Getting to know the children and developing relationships

The club leaders’ knew some of the members from their work in the feeder primary schools and earlier visits to the Year 6 classes:

> ‘I think it helped already knowing some of the children as well, from visiting the primary schools...I think that helped, so I’d quite like to do that again, you know do some primary school visits’ (Sarah, December).

Observation records highlight the club leaders’ effectiveness at getting to know the children individually, as they were very good at initiating conversation with each club member, taking an interest in each child and following their lead during games and activities.

Building relationships with the children was important to the club leaders and they felt this fostered feelings of safety in the new school environment:

> ‘It’s [about] building that relationship with them’ (Sarah, October)
Researcher: What helps them feel more comfortable do you think?

Sarah: I think it’s because they kinda know that we are Mums and we get them, we know where they are coming from and we can understand that you know if they are feeling a bit uneasy that it’s ok to feel like that and I think they know that and I think they find all of us really quite approachable don’t they?

Christine: Yes

Sarah: And they know that they can come to us and we won’t tell them off, we are not seen as being like you know.....

Christine: ...the teachers....

Sarah: No, you know the big bad wolf of school or anything like that...so maybe that’s it?

Researcher: Developing relationships and being approachable?

Christine: Yeah it is, that’s right

Sarah: I was quite sad when it came to an end really, as you kind of almost adopt them really don’t you for a while

3.10.5.6 Basic Theme: Praise, encouragement and responding to need
Observation records highlight the frequent and genuine use of praise by the club leaders. This was provided at both an individual and group level. During activities the leaders often moved around, commenting on the children’s work, recognising effort and providing encouragement and support where needed.
Club leaders often used specific praise to boost and reinforce club members’ confidence, highlighting when they had done something well, for example when Gary decorated a pencil case in week eight, or had tried something new, such as when Laura auditioned for the school play.

The club leaders were skilled at recognising individual needs and subtly meeting them, whether this was encouragement to provide answers during the circle time activities, support during craft activities or initiating social interactions.

3.10.5.7 Basic Theme: Facilitating social interactions
The club leaders modelled good social skills throughout the meetings. The club members’ generally got on with each other without a high level of support. However, where necessary the club leaders supported the members. For example, during week one Stuart did not automatically join in with the other members, noticing this Karen provided him with a prompt which enabled him to join in with what the others were doing.

It was also noted that ‘jobs’ or little responsibilities were used by the club leaders to include children who appeared at a bit of a loss, or needed a little help to re-integrate into the group. For example, when Annie when returned for the final club meeting (having missed week six to eight) Christine supported her return in this way.

However, it was noted on week four that James was very quiet and on week five he appeared to remain on the periphery of the group. This may have been intentional; as he reported not getting on with many of the club members or enjoying the majority of activities. Alternatively, his low enjoyment of the club could have been result of finding it difficult to establish himself in the group.
3.10.5.8 Basic Theme: Managing disruptive behaviour and conflicts

The club members were polite, well mannered and co-operative for the majority of the intervention. However, around week five observations notes refer to incidences of low level disruption and non-compliance. A couple of the children, perhaps more confident in the new environment appeared to be testing the boundaries. This was not a common occurrence, but something that was picked up by Carrie in the December focus group:

‘Helpful, kind, generous, gentle, enthusiastic....all those good words and positive thoughts, the only thing that could be negative is when some people didn’t behave’

The club leaders used low level approaches, such as proximal praise during week two when some of the children found it difficult to wait their turn during circle time. Rather than being told they couldn’t do something, the club members were given a choice or reassured they could return to something later on, for example when Gary wanted to read a book, Christine reassured him that he could do it later. This helped foster a calm atmosphere in which rules and boundaries were clear.

There was very little conflict or disagreement between the members. The only incident recorded in the observation notes is during week four; Carrie complained that the other children had copied her pattern (during a paper weaving activity). Christine positively reframed her concerns, suggesting the others had followed her lead because they liked her design.

3.11 Thematic network for Extra Pyramid factors

This network is based on one Organising Theme: Additional supporting factors and two Basic Themes: Feeling grown up, and tutor groups and sports club. This network is illustrated in Figure 3.10.
3.11.1 Organising Theme: Additional supporting factors

Discussions with club leaders, members and their parents’ around what helped the children at transition highlighted a couple of supportive factors which did not appear to be a direct result of involvement in the Pyramid Club. These included developmental differences following the summer break and support gained through tutor groups and extra-curricular clubs.

3.11.1.1 Basic Theme: Feeling more grown up

Club leaders and parents reflected on developmental differences following the summer holidays. For example, during the October focus group Christine commented on how more ‘grown up’ the children appeared in September, compared to July:

‘I did notice that they had actually grown up a little bit over the summer, in themselves’

The age at which transition occurs (10-11 years) is a period of developmental transition from childhood to adolescence. This has biological and social significance. Neurologically, adolescence is a period of large physical change to the brain, with a rapid increase of neurons in the frontal cortex between the ages of 10 and 12 (Morgan, 2007) and the onset of puberty for most children. The social expectation to be more ‘grown’ up in
Year 7 compared to Year 6 is also implicit in most transition support programmes and was evident during many of the conversations observed at the club meetings.

Towards the end of the summer term, increasing reference was made to secondary school and the expectation that the children would be more independent and have more responsibility. This was couched in a positive manner and appeared to be an element of secondary school the children were looking forward to.

The idea of being more ‘grown up’ at secondary school is very much part of school culture in the UK, the role secondary school teachers expect the students to play is different to primary school (Tobell, 2003). Whether biological changes occurred over the transition period or not, the notion of ‘feeling’ more grown up, through the social expectations of others, was felt to be supportive. For example, Wayne attributed his improved listening skills to his status as a secondary school pupil:

Sarah (to Wayne and Carrie): You listened really well to Stuart then, you would have found that hard a few weeks ago.

Wayne: ‘That’s ‘cos I’m in high school now’

(Observation record, week 7)

Carly’s Mum also made reference to this during her interview, noting that Carly seemed ‘much more grown up and independent’ since starting at secondary school. She felt this had been an important factor in smoothing her transition to secondary school.

Interestingly this theme did not emerge during the discussions with the club members. However, it was not asked explicitly and on reflection it would have been valuable to have checked this out with the club members at the December focus group.
3.11.1.2 Basic Theme: Tutor groups and sports clubs
The significant support friendship can offer during transition was explored in detail in Chapter 1 and provides part of the rationale for running a peer support intervention such as Pyramid Club. As reported in Thematic network 3.9: Positive Outcomes and Experiences, the club facilitated the building of friendships within the group and arguably also supported the children’s ability to initiate and develop friendships among their peer group.

However, this did not represent all of the club members’ experiences. As described earlier, James did not appear to strike up friendships with the other club members. His friendship network developed from involvement in sports clubs and through his tutor group:

‘There are some people from my rugby team that I already knew and some that already come to this high school...and in my form’

(James, October)

Discussions with club leaders and members highlighted that tutor groups were a rich source of social support and friendship opportunities. The club leaders explained that the tutor groupings had been decided before the club members were selected, so the children could not be grouped in this way. However, it was evident from discussions with the club members that they were paired with other children from their primary school so pre-existing social networks were supported.

3.12 Thematic Network for Recommendations for future use
This thematic network represents an exploration of the way in which the club intervention could be developed further for future use. Club members and parents were asked directly during the interviews and focus groups how they thought the club could be improved. The club leaders’ recommendations were explored within the broader context of the intervention’s effectiveness and plans for its future use.
Four Organising Themes contribute to ‘Recommendations for future use: no recommendations; timing of sessions; include more feeder schools, and organisation and planning. These are based on five Basic Themes, as illustrated in Figure 3.11

**Figure 3.11: Thematic network for ‘Recommendations for future use’**

3.12.1 Organising Theme: No recommendations

All the parents were asked if there were any recommendations or changes they would make to the club, many parents felt none were needed.

3.12.1.1 Basic Theme: Good as it is

The majority of parents were very happy with the intervention as it stood and did not feel any changes or adaptations were needed:

‘*Wasn’t anything I would change, nothing needs to be improved*’

(Wayne’s Mum)

‘*Nothing to improve, I’m happy with it*’ (Laura’s Mum)
‘Everything was ideal’ (Annie’s Mum)

No recommendations...it was great’ (Carly’s Mum).

‘Not much you could do to make it better, it’s great’ (Stuart’s Mum)

3.12.2 Organising Theme: Timing of sessions

The length of the meetings and the distribution of the club meetings pre-/post-transition were two issues raised by the club leaders and some of the club members.

3.12.2.1 Basic Theme: Length of meetings

The club ran for 1.5 hours after school. During the first focus group with the club leaders (October) they described how fitting everything in to this time was tight, but sufficient:

‘Yeah, at first I felt a bit rushed and we’ve got lots to pack in, but over the weeks it kinda settled down and it was enough’ (Sarah)

Observation notes from the first couple of weeks highlight how quickly the time passed, but the sessions were well paced. A range of activities were offered each week and the children never appeared rushed, nor lacking in something to do.

Interestingly, Annie said she would have liked the meetings to have lasted longer:

Researcher: Can you think of anything that could make it better?

Annie: To make it a tiny bit longer, so we can put more stuff in....maybe half an hour longer
However, during the December focus group the leaders described shorter individual sessions over a longer period of time:

‘Because some of the them maybe did find it hard going home at 4.30 to 5pm, maybe we would pick them up a little bit earlier.... just do from 3pm to 4.15pm but over a longer period of time and do it like that, so shorter sessions but over a longer period of time of support’ (Sarah)

Starting the sessions earlier would also have reduced some of the logistical difficulties encountered in the first five weeks, during which the children were collected by taxi from their primary schools and brought to the secondary school. Carrie’s Mum commented that this was a good system that she valued, and it did ensure high attendance for the first five sessions. However, the club leaders highlighted the travel difficulties associated with having a number of primary schools in one area:

‘I suppose it’s not a negative a such but I found that perhaps going in the taxi was a rush sometimes...you know picking them up and it being busy around the roads near the primary schools’ (Christine, October).

It was observed on weeks three and four that the club started later than planned due to delays getting back from the primary schools and it often meant the children’s arrival was staggered, as each school trio arrived separately.

3.12.2.2 Basic Theme: Distribution of meetings pre-/post- transition

The notion of additional sessions, over a longer period of time was also raised by several club members during the focus group. Ben said he would have liked more meetings a week, as he felt it was a long time between meetings. Carly said she would have liked the sessions to have started earlier, so they had more whilst they were still at primary school. The club leaders also discussed starting the intervention earlier in the school year:
Christine: ‘I’d have liked to perhaps start it a bit earlier

Sarah: Yeah definitely, we did say that didn’t we, spread it out

Christine: I know we said starting it in June, but maybe a little bit earlier than that, spread it out a bit more

The pre-transition sessions were better attended by members and the leaders discussed the possibility of having more sessions before the summer holiday:

‘I wouldn’t have five sessions after the holidays, definitely not, I’d probably just have maybe seven before and three after, or maybe eight before and two after. I think that having that time before is more valuable to be honest, cos once they are in school it becomes a bit uncool to come to Pyramid Club.....probably, secretly they did want to carry on. In fact they did because one or two of them did say, we are going home with their friend and what will it look like to their friend if they stayed for Pyramid? So from that perspective really I just think that I’d change it’ (Sarah, October)

However, for Stuart ongoing support within secondary was important to him and he would have preferred it to have lasted longer:

‘I was actually a bit sad that it finished a couple of weeks ago, as I thought it was going to keep on’ (October)

‘I would like it to start again’ (December)

3.12.3 Organising Theme: Include more feeder schools

The idea of extending the intervention to other primary schools was a topic raised by the club leaders and one of the members.
3.12.3.1 Basic Theme: Invite more feeder schools to participate

Stuart suggested inviting more schools during a conversation in October about what could make the club better:

“I know what we could do, you know Pyramid Club? We could also put it, make it go into other schools’

The club leaders discussed this during the October focus group within the broader context of including more children in the club:

Christine:   *Four [children] from each school would be better*

Sarah:      *Yeah maybe four from each school rather than three would be fine, or maybe we could add a couple of schools as well, so maybe we did it not just three schools but maybe the whole six feeder schools, with maybe two children from each school to make it 12*

During the December focus group the leaders indicated their intention to follow up on this idea:

*‘We are going to get all 6 [feeder primary schools involved], we need to liaise with transition co-ordinator about that but I am sure she won’t mind and will be up for that’* (Sarah)

3.12.4 Organising Theme: Organisation and planning

When asked if there were barriers to the future running of the club the leaders highlighted practical and logistical difficulties; such as the difficulty navigating busy roads in taxis as discussed above. The need for more time to plan and prepare the sessions was also raised.
3.12.4.1 Basic Theme: More time for planning and preparation

The amount of organisation, planning and preparation involved was highlighted by the club leaders during the focus group discussions:

Researcher: *Anything else to help improve the clubs?*

Sarah: *I think having planning time*

Christine: *Yeah ‘cos you have to squeeze it in don’t we, but yeah that’s just for us the way we work*

The leaders discussions highlighted the amount of time needed for to plan and prepare each session and how this was organised between the three of them:

Researcher: *It required a lot of preparation?*

Christine: *Yeah it did really….like getting the food together because we had to go off site*

Sarah: *Sometimes that’s difficult to do*

Researcher: *And planning activities?*

Christine: *Yeah but we worked it well between the three of us*

Sarah: *Yeah we did, we did it, it wasn’t an issue really, it was just…*

Christine: *A struggle at times wasn’t it?*

However, the club leaders felt that having had the experience of running the club, they were more prepared for what was involved and they did not feel this would prevent future use:
Sarah: *If we were to do it again, it wouldn’t put us off doing it*

Christine: *We just know what’s involved and to adjust ourselves around*

### 3.13 Summary of results

Overall the results were very positive, indicating the club was an effective intervention. The members’ mean SDQ TD score decreased post-intervention and the pattern of results within the scales (decreased difficulty scale scores, increased prosocial behaviour scores) indicate the group as a whole had fewer social-emotional difficulties following their inclusion in the Pyramid Club. The scale score differences were large enough to result in case banding shifts and post-intervention all group mean scores were within SDQ community norms. At an individual level, only one of the children’s TD scores increased post-intervention but it remained within normal limits, suggesting the Pyramid Club was effective at supporting the children’s social-emotional health during transition to secondary school.

In terms of social competence, the club member’s SCI total scores all increased over time; indicating the club members’ overall social and interpersonal functioning improved following the Pyramid Club intervention. For some children pronounced gains were made (e.g. Annie, Wayne), for others change between pre-and post-scores was slight (e.g. Carrie). Greater improvement was found on the Prosocial Orientation subscale, suggesting the Pyramid Club intervention was more effective at supporting the development of prosocially orientated competencies (e.g. empathy, helpfulness) than ability and confidence to initiate social interactions (e.g. easily makes contact with unfamiliar children, is hesitant with peers). The quantitative findings were supported by the club leaders and parent ratings of the club, who all rated it very highly in terms of effectiveness at supporting transition.
The club members rated the intervention highly for enjoyment and the Global Theme 3.9: Positive outcomes and experiences highlighted enjoyment of the club as a significant factor in supporting the effectiveness of the club. Interview/ focus group data revealed the members and their parents were worried about both the social and practical aspects of high school (Global Theme 3.8: Pre-transition concerns) and inclusion in the club did appear to alleviate these. A number of social-emotional gains were reported by the all participants, such as increased confidence, development of new friendships and stronger home-school links. Additionally, the club provided an ‘assessment of need in context’, which enabled targeted ongoing support for some of the children. In establishing how the club supported the children’s transition, a number of themes emerged (Global Theme 3.10: Proceedings) such as; familiarisation of the building and familiarity of staff and peers, a small group setting, fun activities and the skills of the club leaders. Snack time was also an important feature of each meeting, enabling basic needs to be met and opportunities for new skills to be learnt and practiced.

A couple of themes highlighted there were factors beyond the club that supported transition (Global Theme 3.11: Extra Pyramid factors), such as the social opportunities provided by form groups and sports clubs. Overall, the qualitative data indicated the majority of club members enjoyed and benefited from the intervention. However attendance did drop following the transition to secondary school and the heavy emphasis on arts and crafts activities was not to one members taste. Most of the parents were unable to name anything they would recommend to improve the clubs for future use, as they felt it worked well (Global Theme 3.12: Recommendations for future use). The club leaders did raise some practical and organisational difficulties associated with planning and running the sessions, and the possibility of extending the clubs to include more schools and changing the timing of meetings were also explored as potential adaptations for future use.
The following chapter will discuss these findings in relation to each research question and reflect on how this research fits within and contributes to the existing literature outlined in Chapter 1.
Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Section outline

This chapter will summarise and discuss the research findings in relation to each research question. The effectiveness of the intervention will be evaluated and the findings will be considered in relation to previous research. A theoretical framework for understanding how the Pyramid Club process supports transition to secondary school is proposed. Intervention implementation is discussed and core elements, considered to be essential components of the intervention, are identified. The chapter will conclude by considering the implications of this study for future research.

4.2 Study aims and research questions

This study aimed to evaluate:

- **Effectiveness**: How successfully the Pyramid Club intervention supports vulnerable children’s transition to secondary school.
- **Process**: Identification of facilitators and barriers to aid future use and development of this model of support within the LA.

In order to achieve this, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

4. How effective is the Pyramid Club intervention?
5. What are the difficulties at transition identified by the children and how can the intervention support these?
6. What barriers were encountered in the running of the club and how do they impact on the perceived effectiveness of the intervention?
4.3 Research Question 1 (RQ1)

- How effective is the Pyramid Club intervention?

Quantitative pre- and post-data were gathered at two time points to address RQ1. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 2001) and the Social Competence Inventory (Rydell et al., 1997) were completed by the club members’ Year 6 class teacher in June 2010 and the Year 7 Head of Year in January 2011. Qualitative methods were employed to supplement the quantitative data, and findings from the focus groups and interviews held in October and December 2010 also addressed this research question.

4.3.1 Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The club members’ mean SDQ Total Difficulties (TD) scores all decreased post-intervention; indicating the group as a whole had fewer social-emotional difficulties following their inclusion in the Pyramid Club, as measured by teacher rating. Group means across all the potential difficulties scales decreased, with the hyperactivity/inattention mean score showing the largest reduction. Mean scores on the prosocial behaviour scale increased, indicating the children showed more kind and considerate behaviours towards those around them following inclusion in the club. The scale score differences were large enough to result in case banding shifts; post-intervention all group mean scores were within SDQ community norms. At an individual level, only one of the children’s TD scores increased post-intervention but it remained within normal limits, suggesting the Pyramid Club was effective at supporting the children’s social-emotional health during transition to secondary school.

The SDQ results from this study are in line with findings from previous evaluations of Year 3 Pyramid Clubs. Both Lally (2010) and Ohl et al., (2008) found a significant decrease in children’s TD scores post-intervention, compared to a waitlist control group. Leading the authors to conclude that
inclusion in a Year 3 Pyramid Club improves children’s social-emotional health above that which may possibly be explained by developmental changes. Both Davies (1999) and Lally (2010) found greater reduction in club members emotional difficulties and peer relationship scale scores post-intervention, compared to a control group. This was also the pattern of findings in the Buckinghamshire evaluation (Gregor and Post, 2005), which additionally found increased prosocial scale scores for club members. These three scales (emotional difficulties, peer relationships, prosocial behaviour) reflect the main difficulties the Pyramid Club aims to alleviate (Goodwin, 2009), indicating it is an effective intervention for use at Key Stage 2 transition points, as measured by teacher rating.

Lally (2010) found a significant reduction in club members’ hyperactivity/inattention scale score post-intervention. This result was unexpected as the intervention does not specifically aim to target these difficulties (items on this scale include: Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long; Constantly fidgeting or squirming; Easily distracted, concentration wanders; Thinks things out before acting; Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span). Interestingly, a similar finding was observed in this study; the greatest difference in pre-/post-intervention scores were found for the hyperactivity/inattention scale (see Table 3.5). Lally (2010, p.183) suggests the structure and content of the club sessions encouraged the use and development of these skills through circle time activities and co-operative interactions with peers, and the club members were able to generalise and apply these skills to areas of their school life outside of the club. It is possible there was a similar effect in this study, as reported in Basic Theme 3.11.1.1: Feeling more grown up, the club leaders did comment on improved listening skills. However, unlike Lally’s (2010) study, in which pre- and post-intervention SDQs were completed by the children’s class teacher, the secondary school Head of Year completed the post-intervention SDQs. It is possible that she may not have had as much knowledge about the children’s attention and focusing behaviours in class/group learning situations as their Year 6 class teacher, and this may explain the large difference found.
The only other SDQ findings for Year 6 Transition Pyramid Clubs are provided by the Lancashire secondary school’s evaluation of their 2008 club (Strouther, 2010). Pre-and post-intervention data were collected for 24 club members. Self report (rather than teacher report) was used and group means for each scale were compared (a TD score is not reported). A reduction in difficulties was found for the emotional difficulties scale, however all the other difficulty scale scores increased post-intervention, and prosocial behaviour scale scores decreased. These findings are therefore less positive, which is interesting given they are self report. Parent/ carer questionnaires were also used in Lancashire, these included items such as: ‘looking forward to high school’; ‘finds it easy to make new friends’; ‘confident talking in front of others’, which were rated on a four point scale from ‘Very true’ to ‘Not true at all’. The questionnaires were completed pre-/post-intervention and provided a more positive appraisal of the club, with a higher number of ‘Very True’ responses for 8 out of 10 items post-intervention (Strouther, 2010). It is possible that teacher report would also have also been more positive. Given self report has not been used previously, it is not possible to establish whether the children in previous studies would have provided similar evaluations; indicating a discrepancy between the children’s experiences and the perceptions of those around them. Or, whether the same results would have been found later on in the school term. The Lancashire children completed the SDQs not long after starting at their new school (Strouther, 2010), consequently they may have still been moving through the ‘neutral’ zone of the transition process (see Figure 1.1) and thus some ambiguous feelings about the school they had left and the new environment they were in may have been present. The perceptions of the young people involved are clearly important and warrant further investigation. Comparing self report SDQs immediately following the end of the club and then again at the end of the children’s first term could be one method for obtaining further insight into their experiences of the club and the transition process. In this study the club members’ views were ascertained qualitatively, via focus groups and interviews. This qualitative data supports the positive SDQ findings found in this study, as discussed in more detail later in the chapter.
This study did aim to include mid-intervention data. However, due to the difficulties described in Chapter 3, this had to be abandoned. This was unfortunate, as described in Chapter 1, Fitzherbert (1997) makes clear the effects of the intervention are not expected to be immediate, but to increase over time. Despite this, only a couple of studies have adopted a longitudinal design (Cooper, 2001; Goodwin, 2009). Goodwin (2009) collected teacher report SDQ data immediately following, and one year after the club intervention, which was compared to a non-matched control group. Although the club members’ SDQ scores did not decrease over time, Goodwin found post-intervention SDQ scores were maintained, indicating no further difficulties. In comparison, the control group’s scores showed a significant increase, indicating greater difficulties one year later. Goodwin (2009) argues that while this may suggest the Pyramid Club does not enhance social-emotional wellbeing, it does act a protective ‘buffer’ (p.19), consequently she recommends all children would benefit from attending a Pyramid Club. The identification and selection of group members, and how this potentially impacts on effectiveness, will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

The SDQ findings indicate the club was effective at supporting transition; the children had fewer social-emotional difficulties and displayed more prosocial behaviours following inclusion in the club, as measured by teacher report. The strength of these findings alone are limited to due the small sample size and the lack of a control group. However, as detailed in Chapter 2, data triangulation was employed to address this. Yin (2009, p.116) asserts that a researcher will have established data triangulation when the events or facts of the case study have been supported by more than one source of evidence. The SDQ results were supported by the SCI findings and the qualitative data gathered during the focus groups and interviews. These will be discussed in the following sections.
4.3.2 Social Competence Inventory (SCI)

The club members’ SCI total scores all increased over time; indicating the club members’ overall social and interpersonal functioning improved following the Pyramid Club intervention. For some children pronounced gains were made (e.g. Annie, Wayne), for others changes between pre- and post-scores were slight (e.g. Carrie; see Table 3.8). Overall, the results suggest the Pyramid club was effective at developing the children’s Social Competence, as measured by teacher rating.

Analysis of subscale scores highlight that pre-intervention the club members’ displayed similar levels of difficulty across the two subscales. However, post-intervention there was a greater improvement on the Prosocial Orientation subscale (see Table 3.9). This supports the SDQ findings, which showed increased Prosocial behaviour scale scores post-intervention. Indicating the Pyramid Club was effective at developing the children’s abilities to relate positively with others. There was less improvement on the Social Initiative subscale and some of the children’s scores decreased post-intervention, indicating greater difficulty (Table 3.10). This suggests the Pyramid Club was more effective at supporting the development of prosocially orientated competences (e.g. empathy, helpfulness) than the children’s confidence to initiate social interactions (e.g. Is often leader in games/activities, is hesitant with peers).

Within the literature there is a distinction between possessing good social skills and being socially competent. Spence (1995, p.7) defines social competence as ‘the consequence or outcomes of a person’s interaction with other people’, thus it is an evaluation of the level of success a child has in interacting socially. Possessing the necessary behavioural social skills will not in itself ensure successful social interaction. An individual must also have: the cognitive ability to regulate his/her emotions and appropriately perceive and respond flexibly to a range of social situations; the confidence to implement these in a social context (Roberts, 2006).
As described in Chapter 1, Wichmann et al., (2004) found socially withdrawn children often displayed a ‘performance’ rather than a ‘knowledge deficit’ (p.386); although they possessed the correct skills and knowledge, they experienced difficulty acting in a manner consistent with their knowledge due to social anxieties or previous negative experiences. Based on their findings Wichmann et al., (2004) recommended shy/withdrawn children would benefit from skill practice with peers rather than being taught social skills. The Pyramid Club aims to develop skills in relationship building and develop social confidence through small group work activities and games. The results suggest the club was not as effective in this latter aim, given only the prosocial scale showed a noticeable increase post-intervention. The items on the prosocial scale indicate the children possessed below average skills and cognitive abilities required to successfully navigate social interactions (e.g. Is able to interpret another child’s feelings; is good at preventing conflicts; plays and co-operates well with peers) and the club helped develop these. However, it was less successful at developing the children’s social confidence (e.g. often a leader in games/activities, easily makes contact with unfamiliar children) and some of the children did go on to access further small group work support (Basic Theme 3.9.3.2: Follow up support).

However, the qualitative data reveals the participants’ believed the club did lead to an improvement in the club members’ confidence (Basic Theme 3.9.2.1: Confidence, explored in more detail in the following section). Indeed the researcher observed the growing social confidence of members towards the end of the intervention. However, this was within the context of the Pyramid Club and perhaps the children’s burgeoning confidence did not extend to the wider school environment, which may indicate why the Head of Year, who was not present at any of the club meetings, did not reflect this in her answers on the SCI. Alternatively, the decline in some of the children’s scores may have been a temporary result of the initial challenges finding a place within the new social context of secondary school presented, rather than attrition of confidence. Furthermore, it should be noted that the group mean score was within the average range at both time points (Gallagher,
2003; the norms should only be used as a guide, see Chapter 3). It is arguable that some of the Social Initiative subscale items perhaps include behaviours that are not in the ‘nature’ of this group of children (e.g. often a leader in games) and reflect a continuum in personality traits rather than a ‘deficit’, in fact some authors refer to the advantage of more introvert personality traits (Laney, 2002).

4.3.3: Focus group and interview data

Discussions with club leaders, club members and their parents following completion of the club focused predominately on the positive outcomes for the club members. These discussions highlighted that inclusion in the club was a positive, enjoyable and supportive experience for the children involved, indicating it was an effective intervention.

During the focus groups and interviews the participants were asked a scaling question to ascertain their views on the effectiveness and enjoyment of the club. Club leaders and the members’ parents both rated it very highly in terms of effectiveness at supporting transition (mean rating 9.5 out of 10 for parents, 8.3 for leaders) and club members gave it a mean rating of 7.7 out of 10 for enjoyment. These ratings and the other qualitative data support the positive findings from the SDQ and SCI. Themes from the Thematic Network 3.9: Positive experiences and outcomes, which addressed RQ1 will be discussed in turn.

The club leaders and the members’ parents were enthusiastic about the club’s effectiveness and the club members themselves made reference to the way in the club supported their transition to secondary school (Basic Theme 3.9.1.2: Supported transition). Based on this perceived effectiveness the club leaders planned to run the club again. In terms of how the club was effective, the discussions highlighted a number of social-emotional gains following inclusion in the club. These are described in Organising Theme
3.9.2: Social-emotional gains, which was split into three Basic Themes; confidence, friendships and home-school links.

An increase in club members’ confidence following inclusion in the club was reported by all participants (Basic Theme 3.9.2.1: Confidence). Observation notes also referred to the members’ growing confidence within the school environment as the weeks progressed. This was especially so for Wayne, Laura and Stuart who appeared to benefit from the smaller group numbers following transition. During the last session the club members confidently delivered speeches to the other members, leaders and parents about their time in the club. The club members themselves made reference to feeling more confident when asked if they felt the club had helped them. The club leaders felt this increase in confidence was a strong indication of the effectiveness of the club and this view was extended to children who didn’t attend all nine club sessions.

Many of the children were selected due to difficulties at primary school with peer relationships and making and sustaining friendships. Thus providing opportunities to meet peers from other schools and develop friendships was a key aim of the club. It was a topic that featured frequently in the feedback from parents, members and leaders (Basic Theme 3.9.2.2: Friendships). Several of the club members reported the club helped them make new friends and the majority of parents also felt the club facilitated the making of new friendships. During the focus groups the club leaders described the development of new friendships and how this linked to the children settling in well at secondary school. The ongoing nature of the these friendships following the end of the club was varied. Some of the children (Ben, Wayne, Stuart and Laura) shared a number of lessons and accessed ongoing support from the club leaders (Basic Theme 3.9.3.2: Follow up support). For others, although they saw each other around school, they had made friendships beyond the Pyramid group through their tutor groupings and classes. For one member, James, meeting peers through Pyramid Club was not as positive a experience and he made new friends outside of the club.
(Basic Theme 3.11.1.2: Tutor groups and sports clubs). However, for the majority of members, the club was effective at supporting new friendships, and arguably developed their confidence in their ability to do so.

The intervention was also reported as being effective in developing closer home-school links; through conversations with parents when they came to collect their children, and the two occasions when parents were invited to the club meetings (Basic Theme 3.9.2.3: Home-school links). This was important to the club leaders, who recognised the transition to secondary school was a change not just the child, but also the wider family. These closer links were valued by the parents, who appreciated meeting staff in advance of the move. However, one member’s Mum reported a weakening of home-school links following the end of the intervention, which left her feeling unsure who to contact in the school. The club leaders recognised this and talked about plans in which to address this in the future.

Previous evaluations of Year 6 Transition Pyramid Clubs have reported similarly encouraging qualitative findings. Shepherd and Roker (2005) reported positive feedback from all the participants: The clubs were enjoyed by the children and most parents felt attendance at the club helped their child settle into secondary school (p.4); increased confidence was cited by the leaders as being the biggest change post-intervention, and as in this study, the club members made reference to improvements in their own confidence (p.5). However, home-school links do not appear to have been as effectively supported, as some parents felt it would have been useful to have received some feedback on their child’s progress during the intervention (Shepherd and Roker, 2005). This was also noted in the qualitative feedback the Lancashire school gathered for their Transition Pyramid Club in 2009 (Strouther, 2010). However, the majority of parental feedback was very positive and again echoed the views reported in this study; it was enjoyed by the children, it was effective at supporting transition and the children felt more confident following inclusion in the club.
Chapter 1 described the ‘good practice’ advocated within the transition literature. Effectiveness of the club can also be considered in terms of how well it met these recommendations. In terms of the five ‘Transition Bridges’ (Fuller et al., 2005; see Table 1.1), Pyramid was effective at supporting the Social and Personal bridge; *Improving primary pupil’s and their parent’s familiarity with the school layout and atmosphere. This bridge also ensures effective pastoral support is in place.* The children gained good familiarity with the school as the club was held in the secondary school and a tour of the school was a feature of the intervention (Organising Theme 3.10.2: Familiarisation). The members’ parents also gained familiarity, as they were invited into the school and met the club leaders both before and following the transition. Good pastoral support was in place, for the intervention provided an form of ‘assessment in context’ (Organising Theme 3.9.3: Assessment of need and further support), which enabled the club leaders to plan individually tailored support and ensure support was in place following the end of the intervention. It is also arguable that the club supported the Autonomy and managing learning bridge; *Ensuring pupils are seen as active participants in the transition process and in their own learning.* Pyramid Club is essentially a social-emotional support intervention and as such there was little emphasis on learning per se. However, the children had an active role in shaping the club experience and the activities that were offered (Basic Theme 3.10.5.3: Tailoring activities and resources). The club leaders used activities such as snack time to develop greater independence and autonomy in preparation for the demands of secondary school (Basic Theme 3.10.1.2: Developing skills and independence). The intervention was child-led and in that sense ensured the children were active participants in the transition process.

Evangelou et al. (2008) identified five aspects of a successful transition in relation to children’s well-being: 1) developing new friendships and improving their self esteem and confidence; 2) Having settled so well in school life they cause no concern to their parents; 3) showing an increasing interest in school and school work; 4) Getting used to their new routine and school organisation with great ease and 5) Experiencing curriculum continuity.
first and second aspect were achieved; this is evident from the quantitative and qualitative findings reported above. The children talked positively about new friendships and how the club developed their confidence. Parental feedback was overwhelmingly positive and only one parent reported ongoing concerns. Getting used to the school routine and organisation (aspect four) were achieved as the children had knowledge of the school in advance. The data gathered does not enable a full appraisal to be made in terms of the third and fifth aspects. However, none of the children’s parents, or the children themselves, made reference to academic concerns or a decline in school interest post-transition. Instead they were very positive about their new school, indicating the club was effective at supporting their transition. This further implies the universal support (provided for all children) was effective at supporting the other ‘bridges’, however this was not directly addressed in this study.

As to why the club was effective, the mechanism of effect, was addressed by Research Question 2, which is explored in the following section.

4.4 Research Question 2 (RQ2)

- **What are the difficulties at transition identified by the children and how can the intervention support these?**

Data gathered during the focus groups, interviews and researcher observations addressed RQ2. This data was organised into the following Global Themes:

- 3.8 Pre-transition concerns
- 3.10 Proceedings
- 3.11 Extra Pyramid factors
- Two Organising Themes also addressed this question: 3.9.3 Assessment of need and ongoing support; 3.9.4 Positive experiences
The difficulties at transition identified by the children will first be discussed, followed by an exploration of how the intervention supported the children’s transition to secondary school.

4.4.1. Difficulties at transition

In order to address RQ2, club members and their parents were asked if they had any worries about secondary school. Responses were organised into one Global Theme 3.8: Pre-transition concerns, which was based on five Basic Themes: significance of the change; no worries about transition; the new social context and bullying; getting lost; and academic concerns. The club members’ responses were a mixture of excitement and anxiety and only three out of the eight children articulated worries (Gary was not interviewed, see Table 3.1). Parental responses indicated a greater level of worry than the children perhaps recalled (as they were asked post-transition) or were willing to disclose. For several parents the significance of the move was not lost on them and it was perceived as a large and important change in their child’s life. The discussions highlighted the children and their parents were worried about both the social aspects, such as making new friends and bullying, and practical aspects, such as getting lost. One parent expressed concerns about academic challenges.

Shepherd and Roker (2005) found the children in their study had a wide range of concerns about the transition to secondary school. These included being bullied, getting lost, leaving old friends behind and making new friends. Having concerns about the move to secondary school is reported as a common feature of transition. A Scottish survey found nine out of 10 pupils had pre-transition concerns, and getting lost, not knowing anyone, getting picked on and having more homework were the most commonly cited (GCCS, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 1, the literature indicates that children’s concerns are overwhelmingly social or non-academic (Turnbull, 2006) and concerns about bullying are a frequent finding across studies (Cowie, 2000; Evangelou et al., 2008; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Thus the
concerns identified in this study were very similar to those reported in the literature. Furthermore, as found by Zeedyk et al. (2003), some of the children did not report any concerns, or reported feeling excited rather than worried about the move to secondary school (Lacey and Reay, 2000).

Although not all the children reported pre-transition concerns, the majority did provide an insight into how they felt the club supported their transition. Discussions with the club members’ parents, club leaders and researcher observation notes provided further insight into how the club was thought to be effective at supporting transition. These qualitative findings will be discussed in the following section in an attempt to understand the club’s mechanisms of effect.

4.4.2. Resilience: a proposed theoretical framework for understanding how Pyramid Club supports the transition to secondary school

The theory underpinning the Pyramid Club intervention was explored in Chapter 1. This highlighted how the practitioner-driven nature of the clubs had resulted in an eclectic theoretical foundation, which combined with a lack of explicit reference to theoretical mechanisms in previous evaluation studies, meant the Pyramid literature did not provide a clear theoretical explanation as to how the clubs help support children’s Key Stage 2 transitions (Lally, 2010; Ohl et al, 2008). Understanding the theoretical mechanisms responsible for effecting change is essential for practitioners to be able to judge the applicability of the intervention and intelligently tailor it to the needs of different groups in different settings (Frederickson, 2002). This section will attempt to address this gap in the literature. The findings from this study will be presented in conjunction with findings from the resilience literature in an attempt to identify a potential theoretical framework to explain how the clubs effect change.

The Pyramid Club Training Manual (2007) claims the clubs are effective because they support the development of children’s self esteem and
resilience. This is explained as occurring as a result of the ‘club ethos’ creating a safe and supportive group environment. Four ‘key ingredients’ are purported as being essential in the creation of this ‘ethos’: praise and recognition, love and security, new experiences, and responsibility (Training Manual, 2007, p.61; see Table 1.2). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954) is employed to explain how self esteem needs are met by the club, and a range of literature is referred to in relation to the effectiveness of small group work at this developmental stage (Kolb, 1984; Kolvin, 1981; Schiffer, 1978). In terms of resilience, Losel’s (1994) definition, ‘good outcomes despite high risk status’, is referred to and resilience is conceptualised as incorporating self esteem, self confidence, self efficacy and problem solving skills (Training Manual, 2007, p.25).

Based on the findings from this study, resilience does appear to be an appropriate psychological construct on which to understand how Pyramid supports the process of transition. However, currently a clear theoretical framework is not provided in relation to how, and this appears to be the missing element to the club’s theoretical foundation. In an attempt to address this, Daniel’s (2010) practitioner friendly framework for understanding resilience will be drawn upon to make more explicit the links between the club process and the reported outcomes.

Luthar (2005, p.6) defines resilience as: ‘A phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite experiences of adversity or trauma’. The concept of resilience appears to be understood cross-culturally as the capacity to resist or “bounce back” (Newham and Blackburn, 2002, p.1). Consequently when the term resilience is used to refer to a process, the experience of significant adversity is a given, and it is this which differentiates resilience from positive or ‘normal’ development (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000).

There has been some debate within the literature as to what constitutes as ‘adversity’. Definitions vary according to who is defining it, for example
researchers, participants or practitioners. Furthermore, it is relative; situations which may be experienced as adverse or negative by some people may be perceived as relatively positive or less challenging for others (Luthar and Latendresse, 2005; Daniel, 2010). As described in Chapter 1, transition to secondary school is an anxiety inducing period (Galton et al., 2000). Although for some it can be a positive experience, providing opportunity for change (Newham, 2004), research shows both positive and negative life events are stressful (Daniel, 2010). The literature in relation to children and young people’s perceptions of stress indicates transition can be appropriately considered as a stress inducing time, related to the concept of resilience (Newham and Blackburn, 2002):

‘The respective dimensions of resilience or vulnerability are primarily related to the accumulation of stressful events over time, their proximity to each other and the longevity of the stressful episodes. It has been argued that greater insight can be achieved into the effect of and adjustment to stress by focusing on “hassles” rather than events that are greater in magnitude but much rarer in frequency. This insight has particular relevance to the study of stress and coping in children. Studies using children as informants have highlighted significant differences in the views of children and adolescents compared to those of adults on the significance of major life stressors. Adults tend to identify acute and major life events as stressful, whereas children emphasise the primacy of daily hassles, for example conflict with peers or transitional events such as changing schools’ (p.6).

As a framework for thinking about resilience and applying it in practice, Daniel’s (2010) refers to three ‘building blocks of resilience’: sense of security and attachment; good self esteem; and self efficacy. Grotberg’s (1995) paradigm of ‘I have, I am, I can’ is employed by Daniel (2010) to summarise these concepts into three sentences a resilient person can claim:
• I HAVE - people I trust and love, attachment figures (external supports and resources)
• I AM - a loveable or likeable person, able to do things (inner personal strengths)
• I CAN - problem solve, cope, find ways through things (social, interpersonal skills)

Thus resilience is not due to just external sources (I have) but also the extent to which the child is able to, or is enabled to, interact with their environment in a way which reduces helplessness and promotes control (Newham and Blackburn, 2002, p.8). Daniel (2010) recognises the three ‘building blocks’ are interlinked and acknowledges the circularity and inter-connectedness. For example, improved self esteem can be described simultaneously as an intended outcome, but also as a route to outcomes. For this reason the three are represented in the form of venn diagram in Figure 4.1:
Each of these ‘building blocks’ will be discussed in relation to the findings from this study in the following order; self esteem, self efficacy, and attachment. Although literature is referred to, a detailed account of each concept will not be provided, as this is considered beyond the scope of the thesis and is comprehensively covered elsewhere (e.g. Bandura, 1997; Newham and Blackburn, 2002; Fahlberg, 1991).

4.4.2.1 Significance of self esteem to resilience

Fitzherbert (1997; 1983) reports the impetus from the clubs arose from her recognition that children’s low self esteem needs were not being recognised early enough to prevent later difficulties. Accordingly the overriding message within the club Training Manual (2007) is that the clubs aim to build self esteem and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954) is drawn upon to explain how the clubs do this (see Figure 1.3).

The concept of self esteem is defined by Lawrence (1988) as an individual’s evaluation of the discrepancy between self image (what a person is) and
ideal self (what a person would like to be). Consequently, self esteem goes beyond self concept to include the evaluations individuals make about themselves and their competence in a range of settings, and thus is concerned with judgements about self worth (Ayres and Prytys, 2002, p.186; Bandura, 1997). Self esteem is not constant and can vary in different situations or settings (Atkinson, 2005, p.47), as it is dependent on self-perceptions of confidence and strengths in different domains and the importance the individual assigns to these domains (Harter, 1998).

Considering self esteem in the context of Pyramid is necessary because low self esteem impacts on successful social interactions (Mecca, Smelser and Vasconcellos, 1989; Roberts, 2006). Wichmann et al. (2004) found socially withdrawn children reported a high frequency of failure in social situations, however as Rubin, Burgess and Coplan (2002) report, socially shy/withdrawn children do not lack the skills or social cognitions required for success. Instead, difficulties acting upon their knowledge and skills in social situations appear to hinder their interactions. Thus it is conceivable that the shy/withdrawn child would have a discrepancy between the importance they attach to effective social interactions and their competence in this domain. In order to achieve high self esteem, individuals must be able to identify their own strengths (Bandura, 1997). This can be developed through; inclusion in an environment that enhances self worth, experiencing achievement, feeling good about oneself and doing things that are enjoyable (Daniel and Wassell, 2002). Miller and Daniel (2007) further highlight the importance of nuanced praise, which shows an interest in the child and is based on honest and specific observations.

Previous evaluations of Pyramid have attempted to measure improvements in self esteem following inclusion in a club, however the findings have been mixed. Lally (2010) found no effect on self rated measure of self esteem immediately following inclusion in the club. Wells (2000) found an increase in members’ mean self esteem which was higher than a control groups, but this did not reach statistical significance. However, in Cooper's (2001)
longitudinal study, club members rated themselves more highly on their self esteem than the control group participants five years after inclusion in the club. Supporting Fitzherbert’s (1997) assertion that the impact of the club is not immediate.

As discussed in Chapter 1, there is some disagreement about how to measure self esteem (Horobin, 2009) and due to ethical considerations self report was not used in this study. Instead teacher report, which measured the aspects of social skills and competencies thought to underlie social outcomes, rather than the products of competent social functioning (viz. self esteem; Frederickson et al., 2009) was used instead, in the form of the Social Competence Inventory (Rydell et al., 1997). This was not ideal, especially given the subjective nature of self esteem (Horobin, 2009). However, the positive SCI findings tentatively suggest that the club was effective. Furthermore, the potential way in which the club supported developments in self esteem can be gleaned from the qualitative strand of the study.

The club leaders use of praise was specific, targeted and based on their understanding of the individual child’s strengths and needs (Basic Theme 3.10.5.6: Praise encouragement and responding to need). The Organising Theme 3.9.4: Positive Experiences, highlights the club was an enjoyable, fun experience that led to participants feeling special and good about themselves; through enjoyment of activities, achievements and celebrated successes in the sessions, and for some through simply being selected to be a member. The positive outcomes reported by participants appeared to be based on the positive experience inclusion in the club provided. This has also been reported in previous evaluations of Pyramid clubs (e.g. Fox et al., 2006; Shepherd and Roker, 2005).

The development of resilience has been closely associated with gains in self esteem (Newman and Blackburn, 2002) and the links to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954; see Figure 1.3) appear to be justifiable based on the data
gathered in this study. Examples of how Basic Themes are linked to each of the 'needs' identified by Maslow (1954) are detailed in Table 4.1:

**Table 4.1: Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954) and themes to illustrate how the Pyramid Club experience met these needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Basic Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic Physiological needs</strong> Snack/ drink when the children first arrive.</td>
<td>Meeting basic needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Security needs</strong> Met through the safe and predictable routine of the club.</td>
<td>Continuation of the club post transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuation of the circle time activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping the children feel safe in the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing disruptive behaviour and conflicts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Love and belonging needs</strong> Met through the experience of being in a group and the others’ appreciation of them.</td>
<td>Small group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting to know the children and developing relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tailoring activities and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling special and proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Esteem needs</strong> Met through developing confidence via activities and new friendships</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing enjoyable activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Praise, encouragement and responding to need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Newman and Blackburn (2002, p.9) state; ‘competence, confidence and self esteem go hand in hand’, thus the concept of self esteem is closely linked to a second ‘building block of resilience’; self efficacy (Daniel, 2010).
**4.4.2.2 Significance of self efficacy to resilience**

Self efficacy is the perception of competence that an individual holds about his or her performance in relation to a specific task. It is not a measure of ability, rather a belief in one’s ability and differs in this respect from self esteem, which is concerned with judgements about self worth (Atkinson, 2005, p.52). As Bandura explains (1997, p.37): ‘Perceived self-efficacy is concerned not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances. Research suggests self efficacy is more significant than actual ability in predicting performance (Pajares and Johnson, 1996). Consequently, even where the individual has the requisite skills, the effects of low self efficacy can lead to the avoidance of tasks which are perceived as being too difficult or overwhelming, which can have long-lasting and detrimental effects on development (Reeves, 2001).

This is an important concept to consider in relation to the type of children the intervention is aimed at supporting. As discussed in section 4.3, social competence involves more than just acquiring a set of skills, it also requires confidence to use them in different contexts. A child’s low self belief in their ability to interact effectively may reduce opportunities to develop peer relationships. As Crick and Dodge (1994) argue, children must *feel* they are able to produce a behaviour before they decide to act. Given the importance attached to friendships at transition (Pratt and George, 2005; Weller, 2007), feeling confident about the new social context and one’s ability to make new friends at secondary school are important supportive factors.

In her evaluation of a Year 3 Pyramid Club, Lally (2010) discussed the concept of self efficacy in relation to the significant reduction in the children’s SDQ score post-intervention: ‘Pyramid club could have led to development of emotional competence by helping children to develop self efficacy as they experience success within a group context’ (p.181). In this study, decreased SDQ TD scores and increased scores on the SCI are also potentially
indicative of improvements in the children’s self efficacy post-intervention. The qualitative data also provides encouraging evidence in terms of reported gains in the children’s confidence (Basic Theme 3.9.2.1: Confidence) and new friendships (Basic Theme 3.9.2.2: Friendship). Furthermore, a number of the themes within Thematic network 3.9: Proceedings highlight the way in which the small encouraging group environment provided safe opportunities for the children to practice and experience positive social interactions, within the secondary school context (e.g. Basic Theme 3.10.5.7: Facilitating social interactions, Basic Theme 3.10.5.3: Tailoring activities and resources).

Daniel and Wassell (2002) emphasise the importance of self-efficacy and a sense of mastery and appropriate autonomy in adolescence. The club leaders provided opportunities for the children to develop new skills during snack time (Basic Theme: Developing skills and independence) and little ‘jobs’ and responsibilities were used to support social interactions and facilitate re-integration into the group (Basic Theme: Facilitating social interactions).

Familiarisation with the school building and meeting members pre-transition, during the tour, were perceived by the club leaders as an important ‘advantage’ awarded to the club members (Organising Theme 3.10.2: Familiarisation). Knowing their way around the school helped reduce concerns (see section 4.3) and furthermore, enabled members to show others where to go in September. Arguably, this familiarisation helped foster a sense of mastery and autonomy within the new school environment. As one of the leaders reported ‘it became their ground then not just our school, but theirs’.

Longitudinal studies have shown the promotion of self efficacy and self esteem, through enabling children to exert agency over their environment, are important factors in developing resilience (Newman and Blackburn, 2002), however a third ‘building block’ is equally important; an inner sense of security and attachment (Daniel, 2010).
4.4.2.3 Significance of attachment to resilience

Attachment has been defined as ‘an affectionate bond between two individuals that endures through space and time and serves to join them emotionally’ (Klaus and Kennell, 1976). Attachment develops in infancy, as an important method of ensuring the survival of a baby who is incapable of meeting his/her own needs:

“The long period of helpless infancy of the human species entails serious risks, so it is of crucial importance to survival, that the child and its mother should become attached.” (Bowlby, 1951)

When children have a strong attachment to a parent, it allows them to develop trust for others and self reliance. Thus these earliest relationships influence both physical and intellectual development as well as forming the foundation for psychological development; for the child’s earliest attachments become the prototype for subsequent interpersonal relationships (Fahlberg, 1991, p.14). It is for this reason that attachment and parenting attitude/behaviour is the most powerful resilience promoting factor, outweighing the effects of all other variables combined (Newman and Blackburn, 2002, p.5). Although attachments form in early infancy, attachments are still very important in adolescence and attachment theory can be used to facilitate relationship building between adults and children beyond infancy.

Fahlberg (1991) describes three ways in which attachments develop: The arousal-relaxation cycle; the positive interaction cycle and positive claiming. These are summarised in the table 4.2.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The arousal-relaxation cycle</td>
<td>This cycle is triggered by a child’s need and completed by the parent responding in a way that meets the need and alleviates discomfort. Repeated successful completion of this cycle enables the child to develop trust and security in the parent. Whilst the child is in discomfort, their ability to perceive what is going on around them is limited, blocking development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The positive interaction cycle</td>
<td>Unlike the arousal-relaxation cycle, which can only be initiated by the child, the positive interaction cycle can be initiated by either the child or the parent. These interactions are pleasurable to both the adult and the child and are thought to contribute more to the development of bonds than the meeting of the child’s physical needs. The more positive interactions a child experiences the more lovable and worthwhile they are likely to feel and consequently this cycle is thought to be key in developing self worth and self esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive claiming</td>
<td>Claiming is the third way to build attachments or bonds. Fahlberg describes claiming behaviours as those which separate the “we’s” and “theys” of the world. Positive claiming behaviours help the child develop a sense of belonging and this interpersonal connectedness allows the child to feel welcomed and wanted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Luthar at al., (2000) found a reoccurring theme across resilience studies was the importance of close relations with supportive adults and connections with competent, prosocial adults. Lally (2010, p.181) refers to the importance of relationships in her evaluation of Pyramid; emphasising it is within supportive, caring and co-operative relationships that self efficacy is developed. The leaders skills and style have already been referred to in the discussions around the development of self efficacy and self esteem and it is for this
reason that the attachment ‘building block’ is explored last. The context (a trusting, caring co-operative and safe relationship) within which the all activities and interactions occurred, was crucial to the success of the intervention.

Building relationships with the members was essential from the perspective of the leaders (Basic Theme 3.10.5.5: Getting to know the children and developing relationships). They spent time getting to know the children, initiating conversations and taking an interest in each child. Frequent interactions between members and leaders were evident during observation and these were clearly enjoyable for both parties. Furthermore, the members’ parents reported their children liked the leaders and they appreciated the fact that the leaders were responsive and listened to their children (Basic Theme 3.10.5.3: Tailoring activities and resources). As described above, engaging in a cycle of positive interactions provided the members with a sense of being ‘liked’ and thus supported the development of their self worth. James engaged with the leaders and other members the least and perhaps the lack of positive interactions was influential in his limited enjoyment of the intervention.

Through getting to know the children the leaders became sensitive to the children’s needs and adept at responding them (arousal-relaxation cycle; Basic Theme 3.10.5.6: Praise, encouragement and responding to need). The importance of ‘school responsiveness’ was found by Catteral (1998) to be an important predictor in determining successful recovery from low academic performance following transition to high school. The club members were made to feel safe within the school, thus reducing any feelings or anxiety or discomfort (Basic Theme 3.10.5.4: Helping the children feel safe in the school), enabling full participation in the activities and social opportunities. In this sense the RAC, where the club was held, became the members’ ‘safe haven’ within the school, which they were able to return to when in need of further support. The small group was noted by the leaders as being key in
this respect, as it was less intimidating, which helped the children to open up
(Basic Theme 3.10.4.1: Small Group).

Positive claiming was also evident; the children were warmly welcomed at
the start of each session and as Sarah said, they ‘adopted’ them for a short
while (Basic Theme 3.10.5.5: Getting to know the children and developing
relationships). A sense of belonging was fostered through snack, as it was a
unique time when the group sat down together as a collective. The children
put up posters with their names on during the first session and frequent
referrals were made about the space belonging to the ‘club’. In the focus
groups, the leaders described this was purposefully done to help the
members develop ‘ownership’ within the school space (Basic Theme
3.10.5.4: Helping the children feel safe in the school). Catteral (1998) found a
sense of belonging, through involvement in school and community activities
was an important factor in ensuring a successful transition. It may be for this
reason that other supportive factors, such as tutor groupings and sports
clubs, were sufficient for some club members once they had started at
secondary school and so attendance at the club was no long necessary
(Global Theme: Extra Pyramid factors).

Example themes from the findings of this study are incorporated into Figure
4.1 to illustrate how the club experience supported each of the ‘building
blocks’ in Daniel's (2010) framework (Figure 4.2). The four ‘ingredients’ of
the club ethos are also included in italics, however as with the three ‘building
blocks’, there is some overlap and interconnectedness, which is represented
by the overlapping circles. Many of the themes relate to one or more of the
‘building blocks’ and for this reason Pyramid could be interpreted as existing
within the middle of the figure, represented by the yellow triangle.
The researcher acknowledges the limitations of this proposed framework; it is based on a small study of one Pyramid Club and much of the evidence is based upon qualitative data derived from a thematic analysis, which may have been interpreted differently by another researcher. However, the researcher provided a detailed account of her ontological, epistemological and axiological positions in Chapter 2 and the process of analysis and supporting data from the focus groups, interviews and observation notes are clearly detailed in Chapters 2 and 3.
The criticisms of resilience as a psychological concept are acknowledged. There is a high degree of interconnectedness between each ‘building block’ and causality is not always clear, for example between competence, confidence and self esteem (Masten and Coatsworth, 1998). The parallels between resilience and attachment theory are noted (Newham and Blackburn, 2002), however the researcher believes the concepts of self esteem and self efficacy are particularly relevant to the period of transition, when a number of behaviours, skills and competencies are required in a new environment. Some authors claim resilience may be a complicated way of describing developmental outcomes, especially given the debate in relation to defining ‘adversity’ (Daniel, 2010). However, literature on resilience is extensive and it is a concept that has been studied internationally (Grotberg, 1997). Even if it is a more complex description of development, the researcher feels the complexity adds insight and thus sheds light on how effective interventions can be developed to support transition.

Furthermore, by presenting a framework based on resilience, the concepts suggested do not deviate from those proposed by the club founder Fitzherbert (1997), or involve psychological concepts that have not been explored in previous Pyramid Club evaluations (Cooper, 2001; Goodwin, 2009; Lally, 2010; Wells, 2000). Instead an attempt has been made to make the links between these theoretical constructs and the club process and outcomes more explicit. In their summary of the resilience literature Newham and Blackburn (2002) report the literature on resilience promotion is empirically based, but actual descriptions of strategies that have been consistently successful in promoting resilience, and which have been validated and replicated, are far fewer in number (p.9). Considering Pyramid as a resilience promoting intervention may help to fill this gap.
4.4.3: Core elements and intervention implementation

Based on the findings of this study and the framework proposed above, the researcher attempted to identify the ‘core elements’ which could be considered essential components of the intervention in effecting change (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). These are presented in Figure 4.3 below. As argued in Chapter 1, the current Pyramid literature does not currently make clear which skills or abilities are developed by the intervention. Nor is it currently clear which elements of the club model are most effective (Lally, 2010). The framework above attempts to address the first point, this section will attempt to address the second.

Identifying the core components of an intervention is important for a number of reasons. Understanding the theoretical mechanisms responsible for effecting change is essential for practitioners to be able to judge the applicability of the intervention and intelligently tailor it to the needs of different groups in different settings (Frederickson, 2002). This has implications for; the selection criteria (to ensure the intervention is appropriate for the child’s needs); the types of adaptations that are made, and the measures used to determine effectiveness. Imprecision in relation to either of these points may lead to an intervention being deemed erroneously effective or ineffective (Durlak and DuPre, 2008).

Currently, Pyramid use the SDQ (Goodman, 2001) as both a selection and evaluation tool. However, as previous studies have highlighted, this has not been reliably sensitive to enable a thorough understanding of the intervention. Furthermore, in this study SDQ scores were not a reliable indicator for selection, for example Laura and Annie’s SDQ scale scores were within the ‘normal’ case banding pre-intervention (see table 3.7) and their inclusion was based upon class teacher concerns rather than an identified ‘need’ based on the initial screen. As John states (2001, p.182): ‘There is no single or ideal measure for every purpose….the choice of instrument should be guided by assessment need’. A more carefully tailored measure may facilitate member
selection and intervention evaluation. As described previously, self esteem has been used in past studies, but it is a tricky concept to measure and the use of self report can have ethical implications in some situations. Using the framework described above, measures sensitive to resilience (e.g. Resiliency scales, 2007) or based on the degree to which the club members agree with Grotberg’s (1997) statements, could be used as alternative or additional measure to the SDQ. Alternatively aspects of self-concept or attachment could be measured. Indeed, the proposed framework needs ‘trying out’ in the ‘real world’ to assess whether it affords any functional advantage. This may highlight that one ‘building block’ is more central to supporting transition than another, which may lead to further refinements in the club process.

Adaptation was evident in this study (e.g. the incorporation of a school tour) and is a feature of most intervention programmes when applied in practice (Durlak and DuPre, 2008) as some measure of adaptation in real life contexts is inevitable (Ringwalt, Ennett, Johnson, Rohrbach, Simons-Rudolph, Vincus et al, 2003). In fact ‘mutual adaption’, whereby; the organisation should adapt to the innovation at the same time as the innovation is adapted to fit the organisation (Berman and McLaughlin, 1976), has been found to be crucial to sustainability of some interventions (Shediac-Rizollah and Bone, 1998). However, research indicates a significant positive relationship between level of implementation fidelity and programme outcomes (Abbott, O’Donnell, Hawkins, Hill, Kosterman and Catalano, 1998). Implementation fidelity is central to understanding the conditions under which change occurred (Lewis-Snyder, Stoiber and Kratochwill, 2002, 2002), as accurate interpretation of outcomes and reliable theoretical testing depends on knowing what aspects of the intervention were delivered. This is because in some cases adaptations can lead to improvements, where as in others may undermine the programme’s success. In either case valid judgements about the original programme would not be possible (Durlak and DuPre, 2008, p.2). Identifying the core components of the Transition Pyramid club may aid further understanding of the club’s effectiveness in future studies.
A last point concerning implementation before the core components are described, is in relation to ‘dosage’. This refers to how much of the original programme has been delivered and has implications for ‘drop out’ and cost-effectiveness. Felner, Favazza, Shim, Brand, Gu and Noonan (2001) found different implementation thresholds may exist for different participants. This is interesting in the context of this study, in which a number of the participants did not have the ‘full dose’ of the intervention due to early drop out. Completing sensitive post-measures at the time of drop out may have highlighted whether the club’s effectiveness had resulted in the post-intervention SDQ and SCI changes, or whether these gains, as measured by teacher rating in January 2011, were actually due to other supportive factors identified by the participants (Global Theme 3.11: Extra Pyramid Factors). Furthermore, knowing the levels of implementation necessary to achieve the best outcomes increases knowledge about the cost-benefit effectiveness of the intervention (Durlak and DuPre, 2008). For example, if most of the significant gains afforded by the club intervention were made by October 2010, ending the club earlier and arranging follow up support for those children who still required it may have been more effective than nine Pyramid Club sessions.

The core elements of a Transition Pyramid Club, identified by this study are presented in Figure 1.4 below. Each element will be discussed in turn and themes identified though the thematic analysis of the qualitative data will be referred to in order to link each element to the findings reported in Chapter 3.

The core elements are presented in a triangle figure to represent a pyramid. This is not intended to represent a hierarchy, as each element is considered to be of equal importance. However, the two bottom sections could be considered the foundations of the club, referring to the process or ‘recipe’. The top section includes three elements; small group experience, familiarisation and snack (which includes circle time, as snack and circle time activities occurred together in this study) and can be considered the ‘ingredients’ necessary for a successful club.
Most features of a traditional Year 3 Pyramid club are included and correlate with the activities proposed in the Manual as supporting the development of the ‘club ethos’ (Training Manual, 2007, p.61; see Appendix 2). Such as, the importance of a small group environment, a shared snack, circle time and enjoyable activities. However, extra emphasis is added to certain features (e.g. club leader style and skills) and adaptations from this study are also included (e.g. Familiarisation gained through the school tour).

**Club leader style and skills**

The significance of the club leader’s style and skills identified by this study (Organising Theme: 3.10.5: Leader style and skills) suggests this element needs emphasis. Club leaders should be carefully selected and well trained before running an intervention of this kind (Basic Theme 3.10.5.1: Training and previous experience). The leaders created a safe, caring and responsive environment which met the children’s self esteem and attachment needs (e.g. Basic Themes 3.10.5.4: Helping the children feel safe in the school; Basic Theme 3.10.5.5: Getting to know the children and developing relationships; Basic Theme 3.10.5.6: Praise, encouragement and responding to need). The
fact that the leaders were secondary school staff also appeared to be important in this study; it ensured familiarity, provided constancy, and facilitated access to ongoing support (Organising Theme 3.10.2: Familiarisation, Organising Theme 3.10.3: Constancy, Organising Theme 3.9.3: Assessment of need and follow up support). Additionally, it may have led to more successful implementation of the intervention as the leaders were comfortable and confident in the secondary school environment and thus better able to manage potential barriers to the running of the club (Organising Theme 3.12.4: Organisation and planning, this is addressed in more detail in the following section). However, in Lancashire, volunteers from the local community run the Transition Pyramid Clubs rather than school staff, and personal correspondence with the school Pyramid co-ordinator indicates this format works well (S. Strouther, personal communication, May 24, 2011). Comparative case studies of the two approaches may be useful.

Activities tailored to meet the children’s needs and interests
The Pyramid literature makes reference to the importance of activities providing a sense of achievement and producing something tangible to take home (Training Manual, 2007). The activities were central to the club members enjoyment and provided a sense of achievement (Basic Theme 3.9.4.3: Feeling special and proud; Basic Theme 3.10.5.2: Providing enjoyable activities) and having something to take home facilitated home-school links in this study (Basic Theme: 3.9.2.3: Home-school links). However, in extension to this the study highlighted the importance of tailoring the activities to meet the children’s needs and using activities to develop independence, responsibility and self efficacy within the school context (Basic Theme 3.10.1.2: Developing skills and independence, Basic Theme 3.10.5.3: Tailoring activities and resources). This may be a result of the children’s developmental stage and the expectation to be more grown up following the move to secondary school (Basic Theme: 3.11.1.1: Feeling grown up). Involving the children in planning the activities and having more freedom over the club experience is congruent with the need to ensure
children are active participants in the transition process (Fuller et al., 2005; Ashton, 2009).

*Familiarisation*

The school tour was an adaption to the Manualised programme, but appeared to be a significant factor in supporting the children’s transition in this study. Familiarisation of the school building reduced worries, provided an enjoyable activity and developed the children’s sense of self efficacy and mastery within the new school setting, providing some with feelings of pride (Basic Theme 3.10.2.1: Familiarity of the building). Familiarisation of people was also important, through meeting the club leaders and members of staff during the tour (Basic Theme 3.10.2.1: Familiarity of the people) . Interestingly the Lancashire school have incorporated a school tour into their Transition Pyramid Club programme and personal correspondence with the school co-ordinator confirmed its perceived importance in supporting the transition process (S. Strouther, personal communication, May 24, 2011).

*Snack*

Snack and circle time are planned features of every Pyramid club and remained a constant feature throughout the intervention, even when the sessions became more fluid towards the end. Circle time was a group experience which provided a strand of continuity between the club meetings and the primary and secondary school settings (Basic Theme 3.10.3.2: Continuation of circle time activities). This component was enjoyed by the club members and enabled individual concerns and successes to be shared. It also provided an opportunity to practice social skills and attention and listening skills (SDQ inattention/ hyperactivity scale findings, see section 4.2.1). As discussed in the previous section, providing food met a basic self esteem need and club leaders also used preparation of food for snack time as an opportunity to develop the members’ skills and independence (Organising Theme 3.10.1: Snack time).
**Small group experience**

The club leaders felt the small group format was an effective and essential feature of the intervention. It was thought this format enabled support to be offered to the members which would not be possible in a larger group (Basic Theme 3.10.4.1: Small group). The small group size and high child to staff ratio facilitated a high level of adult guidance and support during sessions and helped ensure there were frequent positive interactions between the leaders and members, enabling them to get to know and develop relationships with the children (Basic Theme 3.10.5.5: Getting to know the children and developing relationships). The effectiveness of small group work with children of this age is well described in the Pyramid literature, as detailed in Chapter 1, section 1.4.

These core elements are not separate, but integral to the framework proposed in section 4.4.2 and could perhaps be best considered as surrounding the three ‘building blocks’ presented in Figure 4.2. The following section will discuss the third research question.

**4.5 Research Question 3 (RQ3)**

- *What barriers were encountered in the running of the club and how do they impact on the perceived effectiveness of the intervention?*

Although there were barriers encountered in terms of data collection and missed sessions over the summer holidays (see Chapter 3), questions asked in the club leader focus groups to address this RQ did not elicit a lot of information. Indicating the barriers encountered were from a researcher rather than a practitioner perspective. The club leaders were more focused on what had worked, rather than what had not. It was evident from observation that the leaders were flexible and responsive, experienced professionals. Despite some initial confusion following the departure of the LA Pyramid co-ordinator, they felt confident running the intervention and perhaps this enabled them to make things ‘work’ rather than perceive
challenges as barriers. This is reflected in Organising Theme 3.12.4: Organisation and planning; the leaders highlighted the amount of time needed for planning and preparation and how this had been a struggle at times. Yet they ‘squeezed’ it in, commenting ‘that’s just the way they work’ and this would not prevent future use of the club as they would ‘adjust ourselves around it’. This attitude echoes Bandura’s (1997) description of self efficacy, as reported in section 4.4.2.2; ‘Perceived self efficacy is concerned not with the number of skills you have, but what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances’ (p.37). Thus there was a good deal of homology (Reber, 1995) between what the club leaders modelled through their actions, and what the club aims to help the children develop; in this sense the leaders were able to ‘walk the walk as well as talk the talk’.

The majority of parents were happy with the intervention as it stood and did not feel any barriers were encountered or any changes or adaptations were needed (Organising Theme: 3.12.1: No recommendations). Overall the club was perceived as effective. However, a number of ideas were suggested by participants to improve the club for future use. The length of the meetings and the distribution of the club meetings pre-/post-transitions were two issues raised by the club leaders and some of the club members (Organising Theme: 3.12.2: Timing of sessions). During the December focus group the leaders described shorter sessions over a longer period of time. This was suggested in order to reduce some of the difficulties associated with collecting the children from schools at rush hour, and to enable the clubs to start earlier in the year. The club leaders felt the pre-transition sessions were more important in terms of preparing the children for secondary school and a couple of the members said they would have liked the clubs to have started earlier, or to have been more frequent pre-transition. Club meetings after the summer break were attended by fewer members (see Table 3.3). Club leaders reported drop off was perhaps because the members felt attendance would have been ‘uncool’ or may have clashed with other priorities. The club members who left early reported wanting to walk home with their friends, or
attend other after schools clubs. However, one member did report it was because they did not know the sessions were ongoing.

Shepherd and Roker (2005) and the Transition Pyramid Club in Lancashire (Strouther, 2010) found a similar drop off in attendance post-transition when the intervention was first introduced in 2008. In Lancashire parental feedback indicated children were keen to get involved in other activities run in the school, as the Pyramid Club sessions are held on the same evening as other afterschool clubs and activities (Strouther, 2010). As a result, the sessions were restructured; rather than having four sessions post-transition, two meetings are held in the holidays and two in September. The Lancashire school co-ordinator acknowledged there are still some difficulties with this system; attendance during the summer is still lower, as families are away on holiday or children are unable to attend. Consequently the four Pyramid Club groups are collapsed into one, but the children can maintain their individual club identities though the use of club badges or t-shirts (S.Strouther, personal communication, May 24, 2011). This is interesting as it is very similar to the model of support that was proposed at the start of this research project (see Appendix 3). Unfortunately the summer sessions were not arranged (see section 3.2) and this topic did not feature in discussions with the participants, probably because it had been negotiated with the Pyramid co-ordinator before the intervention began. The summer sessions were intended to be ‘family days’ to develop home-school links (unlike the Lancashire model, in which sessions are only for club members; S. Strouther, personal communication, May 24, 2011). Good home-school links were reported by participants in this study (Basic Theme: 3.9.2.3: Home-school links), however there was a loosening of these links once the club finished. It is not clear whether summer sessions would strengthen or ensure longevity of home-school links once the intervention ended, but given the positive reports from Lancashire (Strouther, 2010; S. Strouther, personal communication, May 24, 2011), summer club meetings may be a useful avenue to explore in the LA in which this study took place.
However, it should be noted that for some of the members, ongoing support following the move to secondary was important and valued. Wayne, Stuart, Laura and Carrie were regular attendees throughout the intervention and as noted earlier in this chapter, benefited from the smaller group context post-transition. As the Organising Theme 3.9.3: Assessment of need and further support highlighted, getting to know the children via the club facilitated a process of informal assessment that enabled future support to be planned as necessary. The leaders reported having ongoing contact with the members, as the club was held in the Year 7 learning support area, which many of the children continued to access before/after school. For some members long term support was envisaged, consequently some members continued to access small group interventions run by the leaders after the Pyramid Club had finished.

Thus there appeared to be two ‘paths’ for the members post-transition: Some managed the process without the need for ongoing support, or found support in other forms (e.g. involvement in sport clubs) and so chose not to attend the club at secondary school; Others found the ongoing support valuable and continued to attend. Consequently, a model similar to the one used in Lancashire (Strouther, 2010) could provide a template for the LA in which this study took place, as long as support is in place and accessible for those who do require it post-transition. This latter point is important given Gary’s Mums concerns that he did not receive as much support as she had hoped post-transition.

A further recommendation by the club leaders and one of the members was to extend the intervention to all the feeder primaries (Organising Theme 3.12.3: Include more feeder schools). Personal correspondence with the co-ordinator in Lancashire indicates that this is what they have done and consequently four clubs are run concurrently each year (S. Strouther, personal communication, May 24, 2011). This has the benefit of widening the children’s potential social circle pre-intervention, enabling familiarisation with a greater number of their Year 7 cohort in advance. However, this would
have implications for selection criteria and subsequent evaluation of outcomes, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

4.6 Implications of findings and future research

This study indicates Transition Pyramid Clubs are an effective intervention to support shy and withdrawn children’s transition to secondary school. The club was an enjoyable experience for the members and a number of social-emotional gains were reported. This adds to the small, but growing, evidence base for Pyramid Clubs reported in Chapter 1. Based on the perceived effectiveness, the club leaders talked of their plans to run the intervention again. This is encouraging and suggests the adaptability of the model to the secondary school's systems was important in ensuring sustainability (Berman and McLaughlin, 1976; Shediac-Rizollah and Bone, 1998). An aim of the TaMHS project (which this study was part of) is to develop creative and innovative interventions with built in evaluation to ensure long term sustainability (see Introduction) and this project appears to have been a successful in achieving that.

There is a robust rationale for an EP role in evaluation research; to develop the professions evidence-base, improve local knowledge and ensure the best outcomes are achieved for children and young people (DCSF, 2008; Fallon et al, 2010, see Chapter 1). Pyramid Clubs are regularly run within schools across the LA in which this study took place, with popularity of the intervention mostly mainly based on anecdotal, rather than evaluation evidence. As exploration of the Pyramid Club literature highlighted, the clubs have evolved over the years, as the training manual is regularly updated to reflect current policy and best practice (Ohl et al, 2008). Thus current clubs are quite different in content and structure to the ‘play groups’ (Kolvin et al, 1981), on which they were originally based. This study provides evaluation evidence to support the continued use of this intervention in the LA, in its modified form, which compliments the drive for LAs to ‘know their own’ and
be responsive to local context rather than rely on a ‘one size fits all’ approach’ (Fallon et al., 2010).

Using a mixed-methods approach enabled a detailed ‘rich’ picture of a club in action to be obtained. This facilitated a greater understanding of how the clubs work in practice and led to the development of a proposed theoretical model based on resilience. This has a number of potential implications. For example, more sensitive measures for member selection and evaluation of effectiveness could be developed based on one, or a combination, of the three ‘building blocks’ of resilience (Daniel, 2010). The identification of ‘core elements’ provides guidance for planning club sessions and a tool for evaluation and monitoring of intervention fidelity. For no matter how effective an intervention strategy is, it is unable to have its desire effect unless it is implemented properly (Gupta and Coxhead, 1996).

Using the theoretical framework as an evaluation tool meets the need for EPs to ensure they can provide automatic mechanisms for evaluating the work in which they are engaged (Stroiber and Kratochwill, 2000; Fallon et al, 2010). Evaluating outcomes is a key requirement of accountable and ethical professional practice in educational psychology (Frederickson, 2002). The results of this study will be shared with the participants, the EPS team and other relevant professionals, such as school Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo). It is hoped this will pave the way for further use and small scale evaluations of Transition Pyramid Clubs within the LA.

The identification of the theoretical mechanisms responsible for effecting change allows applicability and modification to be more intelligently tailored to the needs of a group. The recommendations identified by the participants in this study are worthy of exploration and the sharing of practice between the school in Lancashire running a similar intervention (Strouther, 2010) and the school in this study could be of mutual benefit. The proposed framework may provide a useful vehicle for evaluating and comparing Pyramid Clubs. This may help to resolve difficulties encountered in this study, such as
whether ‘drop out’ following transition was related to dosage (i.e. the club had had its effect by this point), provision of alternative methods of support (e.g. school sports clubs), or whether the ‘two paths’ for club members post-transition represents a heterogeneous set of needs not identified by the selection criteria. Use of the framework and core elements in this way would also enable the framework to be ‘tested’ in real life to assess whether it affords any functional advantage.

Although it would be unfeasible for the researcher to be as involved with each club to the same degree as in this study, a supervisory role could be envisaged for the researcher and/ or other interested EPS team members to monitor delivery and implementation. EPs have a distinct contribution within LA Children’s Services based on their the knowledge and creative application of psychology (Cameron, 2006). Given the club is based on psychological concepts (e.g. self esteem and resilience, Training Manual, 2007) supervision of club leaders, who do not have a psychological background, could be an interesting and potentially important implication of this study, especially given the reported significance of the leader style and skills in ensuring positive outcomes.

Furthermore, it is hoped that sharing the findings of this study with EPS and school colleagues will raise and reinforce awareness about the difficulties children experience at transition and the need for support throughout the process of transition (Galton et al., 2000; Turnbull, 2006). Many of the foundational core elements (e.g. club leader style and skills) could be applied to a range of small group work interventions, thus could provide the basis for the development and evaluation of other interventions, conscientiously tailored to meet specific needs of other groups of children identified within the literature as being particularly vulnerable at this time, such as children with SEN, of an ethnic minority or low socio-economic status (Evangelou et al, 2008; Galton et al., 2000; Graham and Hill, 2003)
4.7 Limitations

This section will explicitly address the limitations of this study.

Firstly the small sample size should be noted; only one Transition Pyramid Club, comprised of nine children was evaluated, thus generalisability of findings is limited. A larger sample size would have increased the external validity of the study and minimised the effect of context-specific influences. However, the study of one club in detail did allow a better understanding of theoretical underpinnings of Pyramid Club. Furthermore it will facilitate future use of this intervention within the LA. The core elements identified in section 4.4.3 may be useful in assisting comparison between different clubs in future.

As detailed in section 3.2, a number of changes occurred over the course of the study which impacted on intervention delivery and data collection, reflecting the challenges inherent in conducting ‘real world’ practice-based research within school settings (Robson, 2002). Secondary schools are complex organisations (CITE), the intervention was not led by the researcher (whose role was one of evaluation) and as a result when the Pyramid coordinator left the LA a number of difficulties were encountered. For example: the planned summer club sessions did not occur, reducing the parental involvement element of the study; there were difficulties organising the focus group with the club members in October, which meant a number of individual interviews had to be conducted instead; and pre-intervention SDQ data was lost for three children.

The loss of the mid data is perhaps the most significant limitation. As a result it was not possible to compare two post-intervention measures to eliminate a potential Hawthorne effect. However, the qualitative strand of the study (focus groups and interviews in October and December) did not highlight a marked difference in response from the participants. It would be interesting to compare information collected immediately following the intervention with information collected at the end of the children’s first term and first year at
secondary school (December and July). This would have the benefit of assessing if effects remained over time, and may also provide greater insight into the children's experience of transition as a process rather than a one-off event, which may involve low as well as high measurements (see Figure 1.1, Chapter 1).

Comparison of the pre-intervention Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) data highlights variation across the scores, which appear to be a function of their Primary school. For example, Wayne, Carrie and Gary transferred from Primary 3 and all had 'abnormal' pre-intervention SDQ Total Difficulties scores and 'abnormal' Hyperactivity/Inattention scale scores. James, Stuart and Laura, who transferred from Primary 2, showed greater variation across their pre-intervention SDQ scale scores. This indicates potential differences in the rating styles of their Year 6 class teachers and may account for the unexpectedly high group mean hyperactivity/inattention scale score pre-intervention, which was not evident post-intervention. It could also be a further indication of the heterogeneity of the group, which may have resulted in the 'two paths' for members post-transition (see section 4.5). Having the same person complete the pre-intervention measure would have reduced this problem; however this was not possible because the children were selected from across different primary schools. Therefore, it may have been beneficial to have had researcher involvement at the screening and selection stage, to assess whether differences in teacher rating were a function of questionnaire interpretation, or a reflection of varying difficulties. Ideally the measures would have been completed by the club members themselves, but as stated in section 2.6 the researcher did not believe this would have been ethical. This perhaps highlights the wider difficulty of using quantitative measures in an intervention of this kind and the need to combine quantitative and qualitative research. The SDQ is used by Pyramid for the informal evaluation of each study and is the most consistently used measure within the literature, facilitating comparison between studies. However, as a tool for the purposes of measuring this intervention, it is perhaps not sufficiently sensitive (see section 4.4.3) and the importance of ensuring the
children’s views are ascertained, through carefully developed tools or qualitative methods, should be an important component of any future study.
References


Davies, J. H. (1999). *Children’s writing improvements following participation in the Pyramid Scheme.* Unpublished manuscript, University of Surrey, UK.


Glasgow Centre for the Child and Society (GCCS; 2004). Transition to secondary school. Glasgow: University of Glasgow, UK.


Appendix
Appendix 1: Pyramid Club Overview (Pyramid Club Leader Training Manual, 2007, p.15)

What is a Pyramid Club?

- Pyramid Clubs are usually run on school premises, but could take place in other community venues.
- They run for 10 weeks.
- The clubs are usually run immediately after school for about one and a half hours.
- There are about 10 children in each club who have been specially selected because they are quiet, shy, withdrawn, anxious or finding it difficult to make friends.
- The children are usually aged 7-9 years old (Transition club children are 10 and 11 years old).
- Clubs are run by 3 or 4 club leaders from inside and/or outside of the school.
- Club leaders work as a team to plan and deliver activities that help to build the children’s confidence.
- The children do not pay to come to the club.
- The clubs follow a similar format each week:
  - Sharing food and drink;
  - Circle time;
  - Art and crafts activity;
  - Physical activity or game;
  - Closing circle time.

A typical club might include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.30pm</td>
<td>Meet the children, welcoming and register</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared drink and snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle time</td>
<td>Pass the squeeze/ ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art and craft activity</td>
<td>I like.../ I don’t like....Find someone else who...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td>Making bird boxes or decorating pencil cases or food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free play or choice</td>
<td>Parachute games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing circle time</td>
<td>Imaginative play/ more arts and crafts or board games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endings and preparation for following week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>Home-time; Parents/ carers collect children from school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2: Activities to support the Pyramid ‘Club Ethos’ (Training Manual, 2007, p.61)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of activity</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared snack</strong></td>
<td>A fundamentally nurturing experience; a chance to share a cultural experience; an opportunity to learn how to serve/share/take turns; a chance to develop social and friendship skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circle time</strong></td>
<td>A chance to express needs/thoughts and feelings and listen to the thoughts of others to support the development of what is important to them and their friends; the non-judgemental principles of the circle help to build trust and feelings of confidence and mutual understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Art activity</strong></td>
<td>To have fun and relax; gain a sense of achievement from finishing a task; have something tangible to take home/show to others; opportunity to work with others; encourages creativity and expression of feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical activity</strong></td>
<td>Chance to let off steam, to energise, uplift and have fun; to learn to play/join in playground type activities in a safe and controlled manner; a chance to co-operate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closing circle time</strong></td>
<td>An opportunity to discuss the weeks session and plan for the next one. To remind children how many sessions are left, so they are aware they are time limited.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Proposed model of support

Two Pyramid Club activity days over the summer break. Family of club members also invited. Club members encouraged to keep in contact during the break.

Pyramid Club begins in last half of summer term
5 x weekly after school meetings at the secondary school.

Primary school 1
Primary school 2
Primary school 3

Secondary school

SDQ Screen Parent info session

TRANSITION FROM PRIMARY SCHOOL TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Post SDQ 1 Recruit parents for interview

Post SDQ 2 Focus Groups Telephone Interviews
Appendix 4: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months or this school year.

Child's Name ..............................................................................................

Date of Birth............................................................ Male/Female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not True</th>
<th>Somewhat True</th>
<th>Certainly True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considerate of other people's feelings</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather solitary, tends to play alone</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally obedient, usually does what adults request</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many worries, often seems worried</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantly fidgeting or squirming</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has at least one good friend</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often fights with other children or bullies them</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally liked by other children</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easily distracted, concentration wanders</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often lies or cheats</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picked on or bullied by other children</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinks things out before acting</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steals from home, school or elsewhere</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets on better with adults than with other children</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many fears, easily scared</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signature ..............................................................

Date ........................................................................................................

Parent/Teacher/Other (please specify:)

Thank you very much for your help

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Appendix 5: Social Competence Inventory (SCI)

THE SOCIAL COMPETENCE INVENTORY

When responding to each statement, we would like you to consider the behaviour of the child in question during the past three months. When reading ‘adults’ or ‘other children/peers’ in the statements below, we ask you to refer to adults and children outside of the child’s family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Does not apply (1)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Applies very well (5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tries to comfort a peer who is upset, not feeling well, or has been hurt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Often suggests activities and games to play with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Is withdrawn with peers (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Is able to interpret (‘decode’) another child’s feelings, if she/he is happy, angry or sad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Is hesitant with peers (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Is more often a spectator than an participant while others play (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Is good at preventing conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Is shy/hesitant with unfamiliar adults (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is able to give and take in social interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Tends to be dominated by peers (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Often helps peers (to clean up, search for lost items, or fix something that is broken)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Is often able to find solutions or compromises when involved in a conflict</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Is often leader in games/ activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Gives compliments to peers (on their idea, appearance and actions)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Is able to sympathise with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Usually shares/ lends his or her belongings (sweets, toys)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Tries to intervene in peers’ quarrels/ conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Invited shy children to participate in play</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Shows generosity towards peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Is easily influenced by and shares peer’s happiness and good mood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Demonstrates helpfulness/ altruism towards others, both children and adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Often criticises peers (R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Is helpful towards adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Easily makes contact with unfamiliar children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Plays and cooperates well with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scales items that contribute to the social initiative subscale are italicised

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Appendix 6a: Focus Group prompts (club members)

Equipment
- Participant information sheets
- Flip chart paper and pens
- Digital recorder
- Prompts (for researcher)
- Laminated prompts (for participants)
- Visual picture of scale

Introduction and purpose
Explain my role as a TEP; thank members for agreeing to take part; explain there are no right or wrong answers and that their views are important; explain the session will be audio recorded; reminder about consent and re- emphasise ethical considerations including confidentiality and anonimisation (refer to participant information sheets). Check everyone is ok with recording/participating.

Explain purpose is to gather their views about the transition to secondary school and their experience of being in the Pyramid Club.

Prompts(printed and laminated)
- Scaling question - how much did they enjoy being in the club?
- Likes/dislikes about being a club member – activities likes best
- Any worries about moving to secondary school?
  o model an example answer if needed/ give examples
- Did the club help?
  o Were there other things that helped transition?
- Things I liked about the club...
- Do you still see the other club members/ leaders around school?
- How would you describe the club?
- Would you recommend it?
- Things I liked less/ disliked...
- How to improve the club for next time?
- What could have been better?
- Early leavers
  o Explore reasons for non-attendance

Summarise key points discussed and check for agreement with notes made during the focus group. Ask if there are any further comments they would like to add.
October only: explain there will be a further focus group in December.
Thanks.
Appendix 6b: Focus Group prompts (club leaders)

**Equipment**
- Participant information sheets
- Flip chart paper and pens
- Digital recorder
- Prompts (for researcher)
- Visual picture of scale

**Introduction and purpose (December focus group only: reflection on themes/discussion points from October).**
Same as Club member focus group (see Appendix 6a)

Explain purpose is to gather their views about the club members’ transition to secondary school and their experience of running the Pyramid Club.

**Prompts:**
- Scaling question - effectiveness
- Club leader experience - likes/ dislikes
- Successes
  - What worked well?
  - Why did it work well?
- How do they think the club supported did/ didn’t the children
  - Practical/ social support
  - Prioritise one over the other?
  - Follow up support
- What difference did they think it made
  - To the young person/ wider family/ school staff/ systems
  - How? Why?
- Barriers
  - Any challenges?
  - What didn’t work well
  - Did this impact on the running of the club
  - Anything they would do differently?
- Could the barriers be overcome? How?
  - What would support future use of the club
- Intend to run something similar?
  - Would they make any adaptations?
- December: Ongoing contact with/ support for members or parents?

**Summarise key points discussed and check for agreement with notes made. Ask if there are any further comments they would like to add.**

*October only: explain there will be a further focus group in December.*

Thanks.
Appendix 7: Parent Telephone Interview Prompts

**Equipment:**
- Prompts
- Notepad and pen

**Introduction and purpose**
Explain my role as a TEP and university requirements; thank parent for agreeing to take part; explain there are no right or wrong answers and that their views are important; reminder about consent and re-emphasise ethical considerations including confidentiality and anonimisation.

Explain purpose is to gather their views about their child’s transition to secondary school and experience of being in the Pyramid Club.

**Prompts**
- How had your child been feeling about the transition to secondary school?
- Did you have concerns?
  - What were they?
- Do you think your child liked the club? –
  - What did they like most/ least?
- Did it help support your/ their concerns?
- Did you think your child has changed/ developed as a result of the club?
- What do you think you/ your child got out of inclusion in the club?
- Would you recommend Pyramid clubs?
- What didn’t work so well?
  - Do you think this affected the effectiveness?
- What could be done to improve the clubs?

*Summarise key points discussed and check for agreement with notes made. Ask if there are any further comments they would like to add. Thank you.*
Appendix 8: Observation Record (adapted from Atkinson, 2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record of session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. attending</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observational notes**

Engagement

Behaviour of the Group

Participation club members

Additional factors

Leader involvement/ skills

**Pupil comments (verbal)**

**Process and Practice Issues**

Other
Appendix 9: Thematic Analysis stages

Picture 1: Initial codes collated on post-its

Key: Pink - club leaders; Yellow - club members; Orange - observation notes; Green - parents

Picture 2: Initial codes organised into potential themes
Appendix 9: Thematic Analysis stages (continued)

Picture 3: Example of potential theme derived from initial codes

Picture 4: Example of potential theme derived from initial codes
Appendix 9: Thematic Analysis stages (continued)

Picture 4: Initial thematic networks (with revisions detailed in black pen)
Appendix 10: Participant Information Sheet (Club Member)

Evaluation of the use of a Pyramid Club to support children’s transition to secondary school.

Participant Information Sheet

Hello, my name is Rachel Lyons and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist studying at the University of Manchester. I also work for Salford Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am required to complete a research project in Salford.

You are invited to take part in my research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?
Rachel Lyons
School of Education,
Ellen Wilkinson Building
The University of Manchester
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL

Title of the Research
An evaluation of the use of a Pyramid Club to support children’s transition to secondary school

What is the aim of the research?
The aim of the research is to look at how the Pyramid Club helps during children’s move to secondary school. This will help to make the club even better in the future.
Appendix 10: Participant Information Sheet (continued)

Why have I been chosen?
You have been selected to be a member of the Pyramid Club.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
I hope to get your views on how you felt the club supported your move to secondary school. This will take place in a group discussion with me and the other club members, after the clubs finish and then again at the end of your first term at secondary school. This will take about 30 minutes.

What happens to the data collected?
The discussion will be tape recorded and anonymised. The findings of my research will be written up in full for my thesis (research project), which will be submitted to the University of Manchester. A one page written summary of these findings will be provided for all the people who were involved in the research project. You and the schools involved will not be named at any point.

How is confidentiality maintained?
It will not be possible to identify anyone involved, as ID numbers and fake names will be used instead. All the data will be stored securely. Your views will remain confidential throughout. All data will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act (HM Parliament, 1998)—United Kingdom Parliament (1998) Data Protection Act. London: HMSO.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form, to say you agree to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw (no longer be involved in the project) at any time and you would not have to give a reason.

What is the duration of the research?
Two group discussions, one in October and one in December 2010, lasting about 30 minutes each.

Where will the research be conducted?
The discussion will take place in a private room at the secondary school.
Appendix 10: Participant Information Sheet (continued)

Criminal Records Check
The researcher has enhanced clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). This certificate will be available to inspect on request.

Contact for further information
Dr Kevin Woods,
Course Director,
School of Education
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
University of Manchester,
Oxford Road, Manchester,
M13 9PL.

What if something goes wrong?
If you want to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you can contact the Head of the Research Office, Christine Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.
Appendix 11: Consent form for inclusion in Research Project

Evaluation of the use of a Pyramid Club to support children’s transition to secondary school

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please initial the boxes and sign the consent form below

Please Initial Box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I agree that any data collected may be passed anonymously to other researchers or supervisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant  
_________________________________  Date __________________________

Signature____________________________________________________

Name of person taking consent  Rachel Lyons  

Date __________________________

Signature____________________________________________________
