The Impact of a Group-Based Intervention on the Social and Emotional Competencies of Young People in Early Secondary Education: A Pilot Study

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Background & rationale

➤ Poor social skills in adolescence are related to a range of negative outcomes including lack of school adjustment, poor academic performance and mental health issues (Segrin and Flora, 2000; Masten et al, 2005).

➤ Research suggests pupils with good socio-emotional skills are more accepted by their peers, less anxious and more likely to perform well in school (Bijstra, 1998; Caprara et al, 2000).

➤Previous studies have demonstrated the impact of a group-based socio-emotional intervention (Pyramid club) in primary schools, improving vulnerable children's social and emotional well-being (Ohl et al, 2008; Ohl et al, 2012).

➤ Pyramid clubs provide an experiential model of learning in a supportive group environment (www.uwl.ac.uk/pyramid/how-it-helps).

➤Schools have a duty to support young people develop social and emotional competencies, nourish emotional well-being and nurture resilience (Chief Medical Officer's Report, 2013).
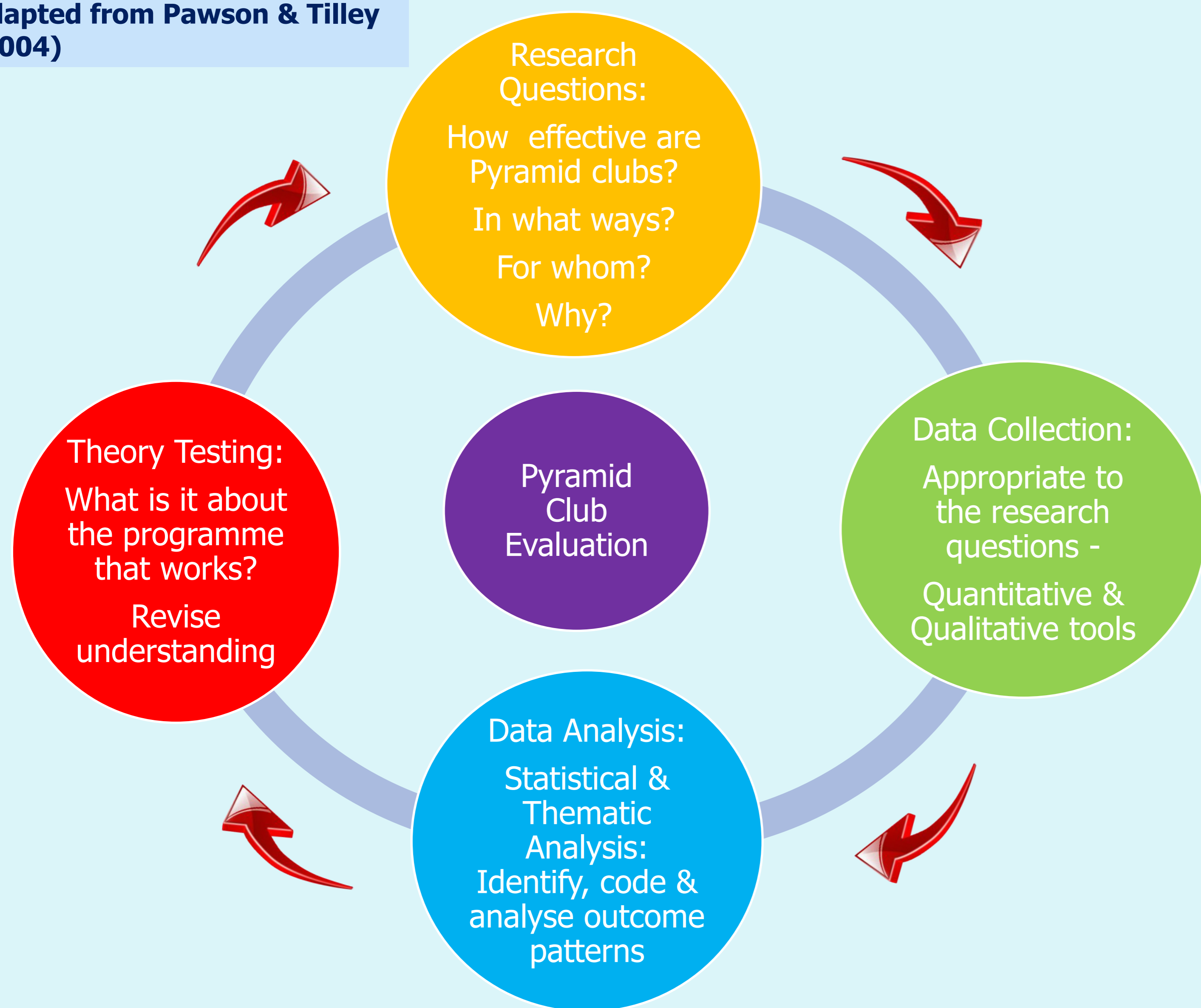
Aims of the study

➤ To evaluate the impact of Pyramid club on a cohort of pupils in early secondary education.

➤ To explore the theory underpinning Pyramid and identify how interventions bring about change.

Figure 1: The Research Process Adapted from Pawson & Tilley (2004)

Method

Design: Mixed methods.

Participants: 7 Pupils (5 boys, 2 girls) were in the intervention group (mean age 12.1 years).

Measures: Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Informant version (Goodman, 1997); SDQ Self-rated version (Goodman,1998).

Procedure: Baseline SDQ data was collected prior to the first Pyramid club from the intervention group and a matched comparison group. After the 10-week programme the same measures were repeated. Quantitative data was statistically analysed.

The researcher facilitated 2 focus groups (1 with Pyramid club attendees; 1 with group leaders). Data was transcribed and a deductive, thematic analysis was undertaken.

Results

➤ Teacher assessment (TA) SDQ results from pre to post club indicated an improvement in socio-emotional wellbeing (SEWB).

➤ Self-report SDQ scores demonstrated lower identified needs pre-club and less change post-club.

➤ Data collected from both focus groups supported the findings from the TA SDQs which indicated improvements in SEWB.

➤ Two of the main themes to emerge from the thematic analysis were "facilitators and barriers" and "Pyramid legacy."

➤ Factors which facilitated the success of Pyramid club included: a relaxed, 'safe' environment; a structured but flexible programme; small group size and high adult to child ratio.

➤ Legacy sub-themes included: attendees' sense of achievement and self-development and group leaders' learning experiences.

Preliminary findings & Implications for further research

➤ Early indicators suggest the positive impact of Pyramid club on vulnerable young people's socio-emotional well-being (SEWB) and the appropriateness of the Pyramid model for pupils in early secondary education.

➤ The discrepancies in cross-informant SDQ results may be due to a number of factors (including individual and situational factors) but warrant further attention.

➤ A thematic analysis of the qualitative data enabled a preliminary exploration of the Pyramid model's underlying mechanisms which bring about change.

➤ Further analysis is needed to extrapolate how these mechanisms are embedded in the psychological theory which underpins the Pyramid model of change.

➤ Longer-term follow up (12-months post-club) is required to assess the sustainability of the improvements demonstrated in SEWB.

➤ This pilot supports extending the research to a larger cohort and examining the impact on academic performance.

➤ Findings from this pilot study will contribute to the main research project and will help to refine and guide the research process.

Table 1: Teacher Assessment SDQ group mean scores

Key: "Caseness" bands
Normal
Borderline
Abnormal

Scale	Base-line Mean (SD)	Post-Club Mean (SD)	Difference: Baseline to post
Emotional difficulties	7.67 (1.5)	4.17 (.98)	-3.5
Peer difficulties	5.67 (3.78)	2.83 (2.48)	-2.84
Conduct difficulties	.67 (.82)	.67 (.82)	0
Hyperactivity difficulties	3.83 (2.04)	3.67 (2.58)	-0.16
Total Difficulties	17.83 (4.79)	11.33 (5.28)	-6.5
Pro-social (strength)	6.5 (1.87)	6.83 (1.94)	0.33

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