Supervision for school staff:

What is valuable about Solution Circles?

Joanna Wood

April 2016

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.

Declaration

I declare that, while registered as a research degree student at UEL, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award at this university or at any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within the thesis.

I declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own and has been generated as a result of my own original research.

Joanna Wood

Signature -- Date: -----------------

Abstract

Group supervision is used for support, education and/or monitoring. Despite the potential value of these elements for school staff, it is rarely practised. This mixed methods research, from a critical realist perspective, explored the use of Solution Circles to structure staff supervision groups in three schools. Five circles were run in each school, involving thirty-one participants, eighteen of whom contributed data. Thirteen staff trained as facilitators. The self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels of the staff taking part were not found to be significantly different as a result of the intervention. However, a small effect size was noted for self-efficacy, perhaps worthy of further investigation in the context of the small sample size.

Thematic analysis of participant feedback (gathered during the last circle, which ran as a Focus Group) indicated the following mechanisms as affecting the value of Solution Circles for staff supervision groups: the structure of the sessions; aspects linked to the groups meeting a 'need to talk'; elements which helped participants to 'feel like a team'; and, school context factors. Semi-structured interview data from six facilitators indicated that the structure of the circles, individual characteristics of facilitators, the provision of support for facilitators, and elements of the wider school context, were all mechanisms which affected the facilitation of the programme. Further research might implement elements of these mechanisms and measure their impact.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

List of Abbreviations

ATL: Association of Teachers and Lecturers

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

COA: Circle of Adults

DfE(E): Department for Education (and Employment)

ELSA: Emotional Literacy Support Assistant

(T)EP: (Trainee) Educational Psychologist

EY: Early Years

PRU: Pupil Referral Unit

PGCE: Post Graduate Certificate in Education

QC: Quality Circle

R: Resilience

RQ: Research Question

SA: State Anxiety

SC: Solution Circle

SE: Self-efficacy

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SENCo: SEN Co-ordinator

SLD: Severe Learning Difficulties

SSS: Staff Sharing Scheme

SFV: Staff Facilitator Volunteer

TAMHS: Targeted Mental Health in Schools

TA: Trait Anxiety

TST: Teacher Support Team

WDG: Work Discussion Group

WOWW: Working on What Works

Section One: Introduction

The 2016 education budget stands at £102 billion for the year 2016-17 (HM Treasury, 2016). This is a significant public investment in education and the people delivering it. British schools employ over a million staff, including teachers, teaching assistants and support staff. The research was concerned with supporting this group of people ('school staff') through one approach to group supervision. For the purposes of the thesis 'school staff' will mean adults working directly with children and young people in schools, including, but not limited to, teachers. The characteristics and actions of this group link significantly to children's outcomes (Rockoff, 2004) suggesting that supporting them is an effective means of supporting children. At the same time, research has documented rising expectations of staff performance and high stress levels in teachers (Tang, Leka, & MacLennan, 2013), and has evidenced concerns regarding how school staff can best be retained and supported in order to meet the wide ranging needs of the children and young people in their care (Roffey, 2012). This research explored the use of a problem solving tool for group supervision (Solution Circles, Forest & Pearpoint, 1996; see Appendix One).

This section sets out the researcher's position within the project. It places the research in context, by exploring the current educational landscape for school staff and the Educational Psychologists (EPs) working with them. This includes an overview of methods used to support them, in particular group supervision. Solution Circles (SCs) will be introduced as a group supervision model to support school staff within the current educational context. 'Group Supervision' is proposed to be the structured meeting of three or more professionals with the goal of discussing and improving their work.

1.1: Researcher's position

I am an Educational Psychologist in my third year of training at the University of East London. Before embarking on the Educational Psychology doctorate and undertaking this piece of research, I worked for nineteen years as a science teacher and Head of Science in state maintained schools in South London. I have also worked as a teaching assistant. My experience over these years shaped my decision to undertake this research and my approach to it.

The majority of my work in schools was in large secondary comprehensive schools, including at two of the largest in the country. I also worked as a supply teacher, initially on daily supply, before accepting a short term contract teaching Design Technology (mostly cooking) in a school under new management as a result of an Ofsted 'Special Measures' judgement. This experience led to my subsequently accepting a post as Head of Science at another 'improving school' under a new head. In this case the school challenged Ofsted's judgement in court and won. My most recent job before training as an EP was three years' work as Head of Science in a South London secondary Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) working primarily with pupils permanently excluded from mainstream schools. In each setting I noticed the influence of peer support and collaboration on my experience of the work.

I enjoyed, indeed sought out, the excitement, challenge and interest of working in these environments, many of which could be described as demanding for their intensity and lack of predictability or reflective space. In my judgement the camaraderie and teamwork in each job contributed significantly to my ability to keep going and thrive in my work. Having worked in many different schools, and in a range of roles, I came to believe in the importance of this 'collective resilience' and wondered if formalising peer support in some way might be helpful to staff, or at least to some staff in some

schools. Solution Circles appealed as a possible model because of its clear structure, positivity and brevity – characteristics, in my view, most welcome in busy and emotionally demanding contexts.

Recognising (and successfully managing) the emotional side of working with children and young people can be argued to be a key marker of staff resilience. I believe it should not be a solitary enterprise. One of my roles in schools, particularly as a manager, was supporting, in psychological terms, 'containing', staff in my team, teaching and non-teaching staff alike. This included attempts to encourage teamwork, honest discussion of practice, and mechanisms of peer support. My work as a school based tutor for PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) students and as a fieldwork tutor for the 'Teach First' scheme over a number of years contributed to this belief. These roles showed me anew, and up close, that teaching can be stressful, but that frank and supportive discussion of daily work can reduce this stress and improve practice. When I began training as an EP I connected this to formal supervision, the provision of which is integral to the professional practice of EPs (Atkinson & Woods, 2007). It was interesting to me that, in contrast to EPs and other professionals such as social workers, supervision is almost entirely absent for school staff, who have countless interactions over a school day, and make countless decisions, most of which they have little time to discuss or reflect on.

It may be that many staff would welcome structured opportunities for peer support and group supervision around their work. I believe that provision of good supervision is likely to improve their professional confidence and the quality of their daily work. These beliefs stem from my personal experience in schools, but also my professional experience supporting school staff. The current research grew from a desire to begin

exploring how best to provide this support, and what 'good' group supervision might look like.

1.2: The current educational landscape

Roffey (2015) stated that: 'there are multiple indications that teachers are overworked, undervalued and highly stressed' (p26). At the same time, the DfE 'getintoteaching' website uses the following quotation to promote the profession: 'even when you get home and you have had a tough day there will be something that has happened that will make you smile' hinting at tension between the inherent stresses and rewards of the job. In fact, a 2013 online survey of teachers cited in the Times Educational Supplement (McKeown, 2014) reported 76% of their 700 respondents to have declared their health adversely affected by work stress. Recent figures from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL, 2015) recorded that 40% of teachers leave the profession within two years of entering it, a figure that could be interpreted as indicating that the work is stressful.

As demonstrated, narratives around the 'stress' of working in schools are easy to locate (e.g. Galton & McBeath, 2008). However, it is worth asking what exactly 'stress' is and what evidence there is for high levels of stress in school staff. Stress can be defined as: 'a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). It can be argued that staff in British schools have come under increasing pressure in recent years as a result of raised scrutiny around performance and high levels of organisational change, for example the academies and free schools programmes and curriculum reforms (Morgan, 2016). However, some caution is needed before accepting that staff stress has risen in recent years. Britain's educational landscape has changed radically over time, not just recently, and concerns about the stress of school staff have been reported across time

and by a range of sources (e.g. The Elton Report, 1989; Roffey, 2015). It is difficult to find reliable data on stress in school staff, or the arguably related measures of attrition and absence, due to varying definitions, data collection methods, and political agendas. Regardless, it is difficult to evidence low stress levels in school staff from the sources of information currently available including the Times Educational Supplement, Department for Education, and academic research.

Levels of teacher stress have been linked to pupil outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), making it reasonable to seek means of reducing them. However, almost no academic research or commentary has explored the stress of non-teaching staff in schools, despite their frequent interaction and collaboration with teachers and pupils. In contrast, as stated, research and commentary around teachers' stress is extensive. Although there is little consensus about how best to reduce stress, various routes have been proposed, e.g. Dunham's (1983) list of the following 'antidotes to teacher stress': strong staff teamwork; discussion of problems in a secure setting; effective meetings; and the use of facilitators.

Complementing research on stress, theory and research around teacher 'well-being' is a relatively recent initiative, possibly stemming from current government emphasis on children's mental health (e.g. DfEE, 2001). 'Well-being' can be defined as the absence of stress, or: 'the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). Thus, it is proposed that the constructs of 'well-being' and 'stress' are interrelated.

1.3: Promoting the well-being of school staff

A wide range of evidence has now accumulated on teacher well-being, with the following identified as routes to promoting it:

- Enhanced communication between staff (Hanko, 2002)

- Increased peer support (Salter-Jones, 2012)

- Reduced workload (Dick & Wagner, 2001)

- Increased support to manage pupils' behaviour (Ogden, 2001)

Although likely to differ in non-teaching staff (who have different working patterns and responsibilities) interventions targeting these are suggested to be a valid means of increasing staff well-being. Promoting peer support within schools may be a cost effective and naturalistic means of targeting the themes above.

Many staff report seeking out peers for support and informal discussion of their work, especially those new to the profession (Hsu, 2005). Some commentators suggest that the changing landscape of education has reduced opportunities for peer supervision: schools have got bigger, undirected time has reduced, staff turnover has increased, and curriculum demands have risen (Wilson, 2004). Arguably, many schools have filled this proposed 'support gap' by increasing access to in-service training and by introducing formal professional development structures. However, these provisions may focus on monitoring and education at the expense of support, and could lack interpersonal meaning for staff. Providing structured opportunities for collaboration and interaction is proposed capable of improving staff well-being. Theory and research around the related construct of 'resilience' lends further support to this proposition.

1.4: Enhancing the resilience of school staff: why it's important and how it's possible

The concept of 'Resilience' is drawn on extensively in research (e.g. Rutter, 1987) and can be defined as: 'a measure of stress coping ability' (Connor & Davidson, 2003, p76) or 'positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity' (Gillespie, Chaboyer & Wallis, 2007, p125). It is debatable whether direct work with children and young people represents 'significant adversity'. Nonetheless, a body of research exists on teacher resilience [very little is identifiable with non-teaching staff], with many studies linking it to improved performance and well-being, and capable of alteration through interaction with colleagues. For example, Gu and Day (2013) in their three year qualitative study reported that:

> For teachers, resilience is much more than the capacity to survive and thrive in adversity… not a static state, but influenced, individually and in combination, by the strength of their vocational selves, the commitment of those whom they meet as part of their daily work and the quality of leadership support… (p40).

Numerous models of resilience exist, from medical to social, and spanning a range of disciplines. Many of them link the following to increased resilience: social support; shared goals; and, orientation towards action (e.g. Rutter, 1985; Grafton, Gillespie & Henderson, 2010). Group supervision based on social support seems to offer opportunities to develop all of these protective factors.

As previously stated, 'Group Supervision' is proposed to be the structured meeting of three or more professionals with the goal of discussing and improving their work. However, it is a broad term in need of clarification and further exploration in the context of this piece of research.

1.5: Group Supervision

Hawkins and Shohet (2007) define supervision as:

> …a joint endeavour, in which a practitioner, with the help of a supervisor, attends to their clients, themselves as part of their client practitioner relationships and the wider systemic context, and by so doing improves the quality of their work, transforms their client relationships, continuously develops themselves, their practice and the wider profession (p60)

The current study concerned *group* supervision, because of its potential to encourage collaboration within tight time constraints. Caffrey et al defined group supervision as: '…a group of like-minded people coming together for a shared purpose, which should enhance their performance, growth and understanding' (in Soni, 2015, p67)

Taken together, these definitions reference individual learning as well as interaction with a range of stakeholders. They hint at the systemic potential of the supervision process and its ability to act over many levels, including the supervisee, client, organisation and profession. Any group process or tool meeting the definitions above was considered to be group supervision, and therefore of relevance to the current research.

The purpose of supervision is broadly accepted to fulfil one or more of the following functions and it is argued that an activity is only supervision if it does so (Hawkins & Shohet, 2007):

1. Support
2. Education
3. Quality control

Different models, philosophies of, and approaches to, supervision prioritise these functions differently. Solution Circles is proposed to be a model of group supervision that provides support, but, through its problem solving framework, can be seen as having an education function too. It is non-directive and focused on the resources within the peer group and therefore quality control is not one of its functions. In common with many other models discussed here it was not originally conceived of, or described as, a 'model of group supervision'. It has, for example, been described and used as a 'problem solving tool' or a 'process to promote inclusion' (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996). This is recognised, but the research defines/positions Solution Circles as a model of group supervision as defined at the start of this section.

Although rarely practised, numerous individual and group models of supervision exist that are accessible to school staff, including Solution Circles. They vary in purpose, structure, theoretical underpinning and practical details. The following subsections will briefly outline the history of group supervision for staff in schools, including models of practice. As discussed, any process meeting the defining features outlined at the start of this section was considered to be 'group supervision' and therefore of relevance to the current study.

1.5.1 Psychodynamic Influences: Many supervision models stem from, or owe some recognition to, psychoanalytic approaches and ideas. For example, the influential concepts of Transference (attaching feelings originating in past experience to the analyst) and Countertransference (the feelings Transference causes in the analyst) (Freud, 1900, 1917). The psychodynamic concept of Containment (see Bion, 1985; Winnicott, 2012) is also a key influence on supervision. It asserts that without support from others to 'contain' our emotional reactions to events, emotional growth and genuine learning are impossible. Thus, a parent is able to support a child only if his or

her own emotions are 'contained' by another, perhaps a partner, friend, or therapist. By extension, it can be argued that staff in schools may only adequately support the pupils they work with if they themselves are able to discuss emotional issues and have them 'contained' by others, e.g. the supervision group or facilitator. Interventions based on these principles (e.g. Work Discussion Groups) are reported to increase staff well-being and improve their work (Jackson, 2002). Staff consistently report disruptive pupil behaviour as causing them stress and strong emotional responses (e.g. Ogden, 2001). It is surely reasonable to hypothesise that providing opportunities to adequately 'contain' (perhaps understand) these emotional responses could lead to more effective working for staff and pupils. This theory also indicates that caution should be exercised to support those being required to 'contain' others. Facilitators, and arguably all participants, need to be supervised, supported and contained beyond the group supervision context.

1.5.2: Caplan and mental health consultation: Gerald Caplan can be credited as the originator of formal mental health consultation. Through his work in Israel, supporting displaced and traumatised children after World War Two, he pioneered the principle that supportive, indirect supervision work with professionals can be a powerful means of effecting change (Caplan, 1963, 1970). Although Caplan did not work with school staff, it can be argued that his principle of indirect working has been influential within Educational Psychology, for example through the use of Consultation as a framework for practice (see Wagner, 2008). Caplan proposed group settings for supervision to be an efficient way to emotionally and practically support participants (Caplan, 1963). In contrast to psychodynamic approaches, Caplan's supervision model places participants' work (rather than their inner lives or past experiences) as central. Caplan summed this

up as a focus on: 'the problem of the client and the professional task of dealing with it' (Caplan, 1970, p25)

1.5.3 Hanko and consultation: Gerda Hanko is cited in almost every paper on group supervision in schools, and is unquestionably one of the biggest influences in this area. Her background is psychodynamic, and her work, which includes training and numerous commentary papers regarding supervision for school staff, has inspired a range of supervision models centred on Consultation (e.g. see Hanko, 1985, 1995, 1999). It was itself influenced by the work of Caplan (section 1.5.2). Hanko describes Consultation as an indirect group process, but does not define it, because: '…there are as many interpretations of the term consultation as there are contexts in which it is useful "to consider jointly" and "to take counsel"' (Stringer et al, 1992, p88). However, she does assert the importance of indirect collaborative working and the need for an outside professional, such as an Educational Psychologist, to facilitate a supervision group. She also proposed a three step group supervision structure as follows:

1. A group member presents a case.

2. Other group members question and clarify.

3. The whole group explore the case.

1.5.4: Group Supervision Models: From these origins a range of group supervision models, tools and approaches have developed for use with school staff. These vary across many dimensions, and have a range of theoretical underpinnings. Some approaches are eclectic and defy neat categorisation and definition. Table 1.5.4.1 summarises specific models identified that have been the subject of academic research. The evidence base underpinning these models, as well as more general supervision approaches, will be examined in the Literature Review (Section 2).

Table 1.5.4.1: Models of group supervision which have been used with school staff

Model	Date*	Outline
Quality Circles (QC)	1990	A QC is a structured model of group supervision involving 3-10 people who problem solve work issues. The idea originated in industry, to 'step back from the pressures of the 'production line' and begin to make improvements' (Fox, Pratt & Roberts, 1990, p168).
Teacher Support Teams (TST)	1993	A TST is a trained team of 3-4 advisors to whom staff bring work concerns, particularly those around behaviour. TSTs are voluntary, informal, teacher led groups involving: 'a sharing of expertise between colleagues, rather than some teachers acting as experts to others' (p308, Creese, Norwich & Daniels, 2000)
Circles of Adults (CoA)	1995	CoA are voluntary, Hanko inspired, consultation groups within which staff discuss and support one another around challenging pupil behaviour. Sessions are around 90 minutes long, expert facilitated and include 10 steps.
Staff Sharing Scheme (SSS)	1995	The SSS originated in New Zealand (Gill, 1986), and is behaviour focused. It came to Britain in 1991. The scheme involves three initial phases, then a series of groups involving teachers and other staff. **Phases**: 1. A 'needs analysis' questionnaire is given to staff about how behaviour is currently addressed; 2. Ten two hour sessions of training are given by an EP to the group on analysis of behaviour ; 3. A problem analysis framework is introduced by an EP for use during groups.
Work Discussion Groups (WDG)	1999	WDGs are psychodynamically underpinned groups which were first developed at The Tavistock Centre in the 1960s, integrated into their child psychotherapy training. WDGs usually run for long periods, with each session over an hour. McCloughlin (2010) described them as a method for reflecting on the emotional impact of participants' work.
Solution Circles (SCs)	2012	Forest & Pearpoint (1996) originated these solution oriented, structured supervision sessions, describing a SC as a 'creative problem solving tool' to support inclusion. Please see Appendix 1 for an outline of a SC.

*Date first paper published meeting Literature Search criteria (see section 2.2)

1.6 Rationale for researching Solution Circles

As discussed in the preceding sections, enhancing staff well-being seems to affect the learning and well-being of the children and young people with whom they have daily contact (e.g. Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Rockoff, 2004). It is therefore worth reflecting on how to do it. Clearly there are many potential ways, for example, well-being programmes such as 'i.matter' (2015), or initiatives around reducing workload. As discussed, psychological theory and research indicate that group supervision is a potentially effective one because it can instigate:

- High levels of social support;
- Opportunities for collaboration and developing shared goals;
- Good communication;
- Orientation towards action.

These have all been linked to staff well-being in research, suggesting that research exploring how best to operationalise group supervision in school environments is worthwhile.

I chose to explore Solution Circles as a model for group supervision in schools for three reasons. Firstly, because of their action focus. Solution Circles are distinctive compared to other supervision models in their strong 'orientation towards action', a process linked to resilience. Orientation towards action is built into SC structure through: the identification of a 'problem owner'; the control this person takes during Step 3; and the inclusion of Step 4 (The First Step) which explicitly encourages decision making and action (see Appendix 1). Secondly, soft data (e.g. doctoral training curricula and publicity material produced by Educational Psychology Services) indicates that Solution Circles are used by many EPs. However, only two papers have been published which explore their use. There is therefore a gap in the evidence base regarding how

this model might be useful. Finally, Solution Circles are suggested to be worthy of broader investigation because they are brief. The research base (see Section Two) indicates that most staff who take part in supervision groups value participating and feel it positively affects their work. However, they often feel constrained by the time needed to participate. Solution Circles are the least demanding time-wise of all models and may therefore be a good match to school environments.

Section Two: Literature Review

This section will examine the evidence base underpinning Solution Circles. Theoretical foundations will be evaluated, followed by an analysis of the published research on group supervision with school staff.

2.1 Theoretical underpinning

Theoretical and conceptual model of Solution Circles

The psychological processes underlying Solution Circles are sufficiently complex and interactive that a wide range of theories and frameworks can be argued as relevant. Solution Circles (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996) were conceived of originally as problem solving tools to support inclusion in mainstream schools. In this research they were used to structure staff supervision (see section 1.5). In common with other group supervision and circle models, Forest and Pearpoint sum up the key belief behind their intervention as: 'together we're better' (p1). They emphasise team working and co-operation, and describe Solution Circles as: 'tools of "community capacity"', commenting that a Solution Circle: 'assumes and demonstrates that nearby people - in any community or work place have the capacity to help - if asked' (p1). Forest and Pearpoint do not specifically reference psychological theory, and a range of frameworks can be drawn on to understand the psychological processes at work during problem solving and collaborative work. Social constructivism (see Gergen 1985) for example, brings some understanding of the power of social interaction to build meaning, and the possibility that this meaning can be harnessed to solve problems.

The one piece of published research (Brown & Henderson, 2012) that uses the Solution Circles model in its pure form (as used here) does not explicitly link it to a theoretical framework. However, Solution Circles can be seen as underpinned by Solution

Oriented thinking and Solution Focused work (see Section 2.1.1 below). Solution

Oriented work as applied to problem solving, is concerned with identifying what is

going well and doing more of it. Step Three of a Solution Circle, (which involves

dialogue around what can be done about the problem) links to the 'identification'

element of this principle; Step Four (First Step) links to the 'doing' element of it. The

importance of the link between problem solving and Solution Oriented work is

acknowledged in Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015) use of Rees' adapted model for

their research [Rees (2009) extended the problem solving process by including extra

circle stages focused on clarification and more in-depth discussion, e.g. asking the

problem owner to focus on a particular area of the problem]. However, as stated, SCs

are also underpinned by a belief in collaboration.

Newton's commentary on group supervision states that at its heart is the belief that:

'groups can change individuals' behaviour' (Newton, 1995, p8). If we accept this

proposal, and its connection to supervision groups, it is worth exploring psychological

theories and approaches that explain why this might be. Two key areas of Psychology

are proposed as fundamentally important here, and will be examined in more detail:

Solution Oriented Thinking and Self-Efficacy Theory.

2.1.1 Solution Oriented Thinking: As stated, SCs are underpinned by ideas from

Solution Oriented work. The Solution Oriented approach can be summed up as:

'looking for solutions' rather than 'looking *at* problems' (Ajmal, 2001, p11).

Techniques and interventions meeting this description have been increasingly applied

in educational settings, but stem from the fields of Family Therapy and Mental Health.

A Solution Oriented approach can perhaps be best understood as a practical philosophy

rather than a theory, and originated in the work of Steve De Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg

at the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Centre (see De Shazer 1982, 1985). This is a

future-orientated and empowering approach, centred on the belief that people are the experts in their own lives. Solution Oriented work focuses on resources rather than deficits. These ideas have been applied across a range of contexts, including to supervision. Wetchler (1990) for example, proposed that the traditional focus on problems during supervision was confusing and unhelpful. He recommended instead: 'a model of supervision that focuses on supervisee strengths and solutions rather than on problems and mistakes' (p129). These ideas are appealing, but are they underpinned by an evidence base?

Literature searches of 'Solution Oriented' and 'Solution Focused Brief Therapy' yielded hundreds of papers, most in the area of health, and reporting positive results. However, only two pieces of empirical research in this field could be identified involving group supervision with school staff (Medina & Beyebach, 2014; Bozic, 2004). Neither applied Solution Oriented principles directly with school staff groups. It seems that most published accounts of Solution Oriented work in schools involve direct intervention with children and individual supervision of adults, rather than group supervision with staff. One example is the Working On What Works initiative (WOWW, Berg & Shilts, 2005) which involves teacher coaching.

2.1.2 Self-Efficacy Theory: In his seminal paper 'Towards a unifying theory of behavioural change' Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as: 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (p3). Thus, boosting the self-efficacy beliefs of school staff about their ability to work effectively with children and young people should increase their competence to do so. Self-efficacy is a construct that has been shown changeable in response to circumstance (Choi, Price & Vinokur, 2003) with high levels of self-efficacy associated with persistence, interest and commitment (Bandura, Barbaranelli,

Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996), as well as effective teaching (Caprara, Babaranelli, Steca & Malone, 2006). The theory proposes that self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by: 1. Performance accomplishments, 2. Vicarious experience, 3. Verbal persuasion, and 4. Physiological states.

Group supervision offers the opportunity to boost self-efficacy via routes two and three. Mutual encouragement and the sharing of successes during group supervision may boost self-efficacy. However, this theory also indicates that discussion should be solution oriented and action biased (as it is intended to be during Solution Circles) for self-efficacy to be raised, rather than intensely problem focused. Vicarious experience of an unsuccessful lesson, for example, would predict lowered self-efficacy. This has implications for the kind of issues that are likely to be most suitable for discussion during group supervision: ones on which you feel you can progress. With this in mind, Solution Circles are theoretically effective, but how much empirical research is there to support this idea?

2.2: Systematic Literature Search

To identify and evaluate the evidence base underpinning Solution Circles a literature search was conducted on the following databases: PsychInfo, Education Research Complete, Academic Research Complete, Education Resource Information Centre (ERIC), and British Education Index. These were selected because they comprise the most commonly used Educational Psychology databases published in the English language. A number of searches were conducted in an attempt to identify all relevant research. Inclusion criteria were consistent for each search and are explained in Table 2.2.1 overleaf.

Table 2.2.1: Inclusion criteria for the literature search

Research must have been empirical and published in a peer reviewed journal, so as to identify rigorous, scrutinised and valid studies only.
Research participants must have worked directly with children and young people in school settings at the time of the research. Research with university students was not included.
Only British research published in the English language was included, in an effort to identify research of relevance to the current educational context.
Research must have involved a GROUP model of supervision (i.e. three or more peers)
Research must have been investigating supervision as the main purpose of the study as defined in section 1.5 of this thesis.
Research must have been published in 1980 or later, in an attempt to identify research relevant to the current educational environment.
Snowballing of all reference lists was conducted to identify any papers of relevance not identified by search terms.

Three searches were conducted, using the following search terms:

- **Search One (specific)**: 'Solution Circles'

- **Search Two (generic)**: 'group supervision'; "group supervision" **and** teachers'; 'group supervision in school'; "consultative collaboration"; "collaborative consultation"; 'staff consultation'

- **Search Three (specific)**: "Teacher Support Teams"; "Staff Sharing Scheme"; "Work Discussion Groups"; "Circles of Adults"; "collaborative problem solving groups"; "Quality Circles"; "Peer Support Groups"

Search One identified two papers, which clearly does not comprise an evidence base. Published literature was therefore sought, through Searches Two and Three, on group supervision generally, and on particular models (see Section 1.5). This revealed a body

of relevant research with school staff, which is proposed to form the evidence base underpinning Solution Circles.

Search Two yielded four relevant articles. These articles, and the 'snowballing' of their reference lists, were used to identify specific group supervision models of relevance. Relevance was assumed if research on the model met the criteria in Table Two. Searches were then conducted on these specific models (Search Three) using the search criteria outlined above. This resulted in the identification of twenty-four papers in total that met the search criteria (see Appendix 2). Two could not be obtained. Of the remainder, fourteen involved a specific named group supervision model; eight did not. As stated, two concerned SCs. Five were identified through the snowballing of reference lists; seventeen through original searches.

2.3: The Evidence Base

Both pieces of research identified on SCs were exploratory and not explicitly aligned to a particular philosophical position or approach. Methodology varied between the studies, e.g. number of circles run. However, both adopted a purely qualitative methodology, choosing to analyse participants' verbal feedback and questionnaire responses to gain insight into the intervention. Both tentatively proposed general mechanisms or 'rules' as a result of their findings. The current research mirrored this qualitative emphasis and the search for features of value within the SC intervention. However, it specifically explored SCs as a model of group supervision rather than as stand-alone problem solving tools. In addition, the research design included a subsidiary quantitative component, and the exploration of facilitator training.

Research on Solution Circles: Brown and Henderson (2012) trialled three Solution Circles in a primary school, and one Solution Circle in a secondary school. All research was conducted in Aberdeen with teaching staff. In the case of the secondary school,

participants were probationary teachers. Each circle focused on identifying strategies to include a specific child or children. The primary school circles concerned pupils with Dyslexia diagnoses; the secondary school circle concerned a pupil deemed to show 'challenging behaviour'. Efficacy was judged through verbal participant feedback and questionnaire data, with responses described as very positive in both schools. The secondary school expressed a wish to incorporate SCs into their behaviour management policy.

Features of the SC model identified as particular strengths included the provision of a reflective space, and the strict structure of the model. Its Solution Oriented slant and the incorporation of a record of ideas were also praised. Many staff commented on the supportive and collaborative possibilities opened up by the circles and the range of ideas generated by a varied group working together. This research discussed the key importance of the facilitator role to support and guide the group without imposing ideas. It commented on the difficulty of the recorder forming part of the group. The planning, training and supporting of these roles is clearly an important aspect to be considered when running circles, along with other administrative challenges such as securing time to run them. One other challenge discussed was the: 'forced nature of identifying a problem to discuss' (p183) and the possibility that staff may feel vulnerable if they bring a 'problem' to the group. This suggests that establishing shared trust and stability is important. It may be that facilitating these conditions is a key part of the facilitator role, though not one discussed in any detail in this paper.

This was a small scale study with few participants and only involved three SCs. The authors' suggestions for future research included: the evaluation of the intervention in different settings, and the adoption of multiple approaches to data collection. They also

raised the possibility of extending SCs to other contexts, for example with groups of pupils, or as tools for organisational change.

Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) conducted exploratory research in Surrey on both Solution Circles and Circles of Adults (CoA), with some attempt to compare them. In total ten SCs were facilitated either during Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) supervision or staff meetings. Unlike Brown and Henderson's study, or the current study, Grahamslaw and Henson's research used an adapted SC model proposed by Rees (2009) which includes additional stages for clarification and focused discussion of 'the problem'. The use of a different model means that caution is needed when comparing findings with Brown and Henderson's work. However, there are many similarities between the models, most importantly the use of a 'circle', a step by step structure and the solution orientation. Thematic analysis of the questionnaire responses of the sixty-two participants indicated that the non-hierarchical, collaborative nature of the intervention was valued by participants and that they found it supportive and useful. The solution orientation was considered an important influence on perceived success. One interesting finding was that, compared to CoA, the authors found SCs to work well as short, in-house, idea generating sessions, rather than in-depth, expert-led analyses. This is clearly relevant to the current research which extends SCs from one-off tools to vehicles for longer term group supervision.

The Rest of the Evidence Base: Twenty other studies were identified that investigated group supervision with school staff. Although it is impossible to separate models and approaches strictly, certain overlapping 'areas' of group supervision can be loosely defined and will be used to structure the remainder of this section. In reality, most models developed in parallel, meaning that area by area exploration, rather than strict

exploration by chronological evolution, has been chosen to communicate the evidence base.

Areas identified were as follows:

- **Area 1: Group supervision with psychodynamic underpinning;**
- **Area 2: Group supervision in the 'consultation' and support tradition;**
- **Area 3: Group supervision within a problem solving model;**
- **Area 4: Group supervision as a means of managing referrals.**

The research evidence contributing to each area will be discussed in turn, as relevant to the use of Solution Circles with school staff. The connections between areas, themes running across them, and key outcomes from the analysis of the evidence base, will be discussed in the conclusion.

2.3.1: Area 1: Group supervision with psychodynamic underpinning

As discussed in Section One, a Work Discussion Group (WDG) is a psycho-dynamically underpinned model of group supervision, intended to 'contain' participants' work concerns. In common with SCs, WDGs have been used to support staff in schools: 'to create a space outside the classroom setting for teachers to reflect on their work with pupils' (Jackson, 2002, p131). In a WDG members are encouraged to apply ideas from psychodynamic theory to pupil and adult behaviour, including their own. They are informally 'trained' to observe closely, and to hypothesise. This, theory driven, approach to group supervision gives WDGs a particular flavour that sets them apart from other models. Three pieces of research, that met the search criteria, trialled WDGs with school staff, all case studies. They largely explain the experience of the WDG from the point of view of the author, rather than collecting data directly from those participating, making it difficult to compare them with research that does not. These studies will be discussed in turn.

Emanuel (1999) described setting up and running WDGs in a primary special school for physically handicapped children. The initial group ran for two years, meeting every fortnight. A different 'focus' child was discussed at each group, for example a child who was 'self-mutilating'. In Emanuel's view behaviours of this sort happen because 'disturbed relations' between handicapped children and their mothers lead to 'defences' in the child. She comments that the parents of handicapped children frequently project disappointment into the child, affecting the behaviour of the child, which is transferred in turn to the staff taking care of that child. The role of the WDG is proposed to be to raise awareness of the impact of these defences on group members and the children in their care.

Thus, one characteristic of WDGs is the use of psychodynamic formulation to interpret behaviour. In contrast to some other models of group supervision, WDGs involve the development of participants' expert knowledge, perhaps explaining their long life cycles. In order to develop this expert knowledge an expert facilitator is required to help 'decode' the behaviours under discussion. The following quotation illustrates this idea - that a key purpose of a WDG is *educating* staff to interpret behaviour:

> Apparently incomprehensible behavior began to make sense as staff recognized through discussion that events and details that may be considered irrelevant or unimportant are often imbued with meaning. (Emanuel, 1999, p189)

This research, in keeping with the WDG model, measured success in part through the author's interpretation of how well participants learnt to apply psychodynamic theory to their daily work.

Emanuel's research also gives insight into two considerations for all supervision groups, and discussed across the evidence base - who should be in a group, and who

should decide. In this case, after two years, conflict about these questions brought the WDG to a close, suggesting that they are important ones. This WDG is reported to have ended because teachers would not accept the inclusion of classroom assistants in the groups, a change proposed for psychodynamic reasons. It could be argued that adherence to a theory driven expert model led to the demise of the group. It may also be that those in the group sought more control of it. The subjective nature of this research makes it difficult to determine the views of the participants themselves. They are not reported; Emanuel's personal interpretations and formulations are the data.

Despite reported conflict, this piece of research proposed that the WDG fulfilled a need in staff and helped them cope and develop as practitioners: 'The teachers were clearly communicating that, unless they felt supported and understood, they could not attend to the needy and disturbed children in their care.' (Emanuel, 1999, p192). Following the breakdown of the first WDG, Emanuel persuaded senior leaders in this school to provide 'institutional containment' for their staff in the form of a subsequent WDG comprised of both teachers and classroom assistants. Administrative support (for example protected time) was secured and Emanuel reported the group highly successful. Success is judged here via observation over time of children brought to the group as case studies, and through improved observational and inferential capacity on the part of staff, as judged by Emanuel. These subjective measures clearly make replication, comparison and generalisation to other groups impossible. However, these were not the aims of the research.

McLoughlin's (2010) work was more extensive and more recent. It consisted of case studies of fortnightly WDGs in four Inner London Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) spanning five years. These groups were part of a broader psychodynamic intervention run by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The importance of a

'containing space', which begins to feel safe and private over subsequent sessions, was raised in this study. McLoughlin observed that offering a consistently containing space in a PRU setting was difficult, and very different from the classic containing space in therapy. This clearly has implications for running supervision groups in busy school settings.

McLoughlin expressed interest in possible links between WDG participation and improved retention and attendance rates of staff, although no data on these seems to have been collected. As in Emanuel's work, success is credited to participants learning to apply psychodynamic principles to their work: 'Bringing the complex dynamics between staff and children into consciousness in an empathetic way makes staff work discussion groups a powerful intervention' (p232). Another psychodynamic idea (echoing Emanuel's concern about who is suitable for a group) is that people's own early experiences of emotional containment influence their subsequent ability to learn and develop. It could be argued that WDGs are only valuable to individuals receptive to psychodynamic ideas (or possibly *new* ideas), a hypothesis relevant to setting up supervision groups of any nature.

De Rementaria's (2011) case study outlining her experience as an Early Years (EY) teacher struggling to deal with 'infantile projections' lends some support to this hypothesis. She describes feeling ill-equipped by her training because of its lack of focus on the emotional side of teaching: 'My teacher–training tutor offered me a stark choice: deny my difficult feelings, or abandon my wish to work with children.' (p53) This conflict led De Rementaria to run WDGs in a Sure Start Children's Centre as a means of supporting staff. As in previous WDG research cited, a key element of successfully working with children is declared here to be an ability to apply psychodynamic ideas to behaviours in the classroom. Understanding the processes of

'transference' and 'countertransference' (see section 1.5.1) is suggested to enhance teaching practice, with the WDG proposed as a forum to develop this understanding. The facilitator of the group seems at times to play the role of 'teacher' of psychodynamic principles to those present, a situation likely to require sensitivity by the 'teacher' and openness to these ideas on the part of the 'learners'.

Thus, De Rementaria claims that for WDGs to be successful they must be voluntary, a theme discussed by Jackson (2005) and explored across the evidence base. It is suggested that genuine team working is only achieved when participants are volunteers with a high level of motivation to sustain participation in the WDG over time. Emanuel's proposition that senior management support for groups is necessary for success is not inconsistent with this, but De Rementaria urges caution around senior leaders setting up and directing groups, perhaps because this reduces group 'ownership' by its members. Another concern of De Rementaria's is the role of parents in WDGs. She makes the point that serious consideration should be given to communication with parents about issues and formulations raised in the WDG about their children.

Summary and Conclusion: The research on WDGs consists largely of isolated case studies. Findings are reported subjectively, with no attempt at a 'scientific' evaluation. De Rementaria (2011) laments the rejection of this approach, asking that: 'Subjectivity is viewed as a tool for receiving knowledge, not simply a potential confounding variable.' (p52). The subjective bias exemplified by this attitude means that, although psychodynamic theory is extensively referenced, there is no systematic acknowledgement of relevant research preceding each study. It feels like a series of projects rather than the building up of an evidence base, and it is clearly unwise to generalise from the commentary within. However, what this block of research does offer is depth. Many groups have run over long time frames and the people involved

seem often to have developed intense relationships. A great deal of reflection has been done on the processes influencing WDG success and the resultant ideas are surely worthy of consideration.

Those proposed to make WDGs valuable are: 1. that school staff need emotional support with their daily work and can get it through groups; 2. the fundamental importance of applying psychodynamic ideas to daily working practice and the need to be receptive to these; and, 3. the importance of a knowledgeable facilitator to aid in this process. There is an acknowledged bias towards developing participants' understanding and interpretation in preference to stimulating them into action. However, the supportive power of the group is highlighted in every study.

2.3.2: Area 2: Group supervision in the 'consultation' and support tradition

The research in this area spans a number of different models and approaches. However, all are supervision groups set up primarily to support staff. The research in this section is underpinned by a consultation approach in the Hanko tradition (see Section One). Thus, they involve a facilitator, often an EP, who applies the principles and techniques of consultation to help staff support and learn from one another in a group setting. The precise role of this facilitator, and the extent to which he/she acts as an expert, varies across studies, as do group structure, process, and reason for joining.

Gersch & Rawkins' (1986) research had behaviour as its focus. They evaluated a 'behaviour management support group' set up in one special school for children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD). Video clips were used as stimuli for discussion of topics, rather than individual cases. Consistent with Hanko's ideas about group supervision, the atmosphere of the group was described as: 'supportive, relaxed, free from negative criticism, open, trusting, warm and encouraging.' (p76). The survey data

collected in this study was largely positive; staff taking part reported that they had learned to understand children better and felt supported by the group. These groups ran for two hours a week for a number of years, making their potential impact on people's lives greater than for many groups. The authors identified skilled facilitation and voluntary attendance as key influences on group success over this time, but conceded the difficulty of unpicking the web of interacting variables. There was no attempt to measure impact, for example by tracking teacher attendance. However, these authors make the point that it is not possible to do this reliably, commenting: 'In some ways, perhaps, teachers' perceptions about pupil changes are as important as measurable changes themselves' (p78). They discuss the difference between manifest (intended) and latent (unintended) change, suggesting that their group is likely to have resulted in latent change (feeling supported and listened to) rather than manifest change (an increase in participants' skills).

This study proposed that an expert facilitator (an EP in this case) is vital to group success. This echoes WDG research, but the role of the facilitator appears to be subtly different, with key tasks including pace setting and formulation: 'It is important in an informal setting that someone keeps the discussion relevant and draws out the important points' (p76). Not all group supervision approaches prescribe expert interpretation and guidance, but most, across models examined, do, suggesting that this is an important consideration when setting up a group. A linked issue is the composition of the group itself. Gersch and Rawkins state that the: 'voluntary nature of the group is an essential element to its success' (1986, p80) and discuss the importance of group members being both motivated and empowered, ideas raised in the previous section also.

Gupta (1985) set up support groups specifically for Heads, with three main stated aims: in-service training; information dissemination; and therapeutic support. In common with Gersch and Rawkins' work (1986), these groups were topic based, with subjects suggested by the Heads themselves (for example: managing staff). Feedback from the seven Heads who completed questionnaires was positive, highlighting the reassuring and supportive role of the group as its most important feature. This is perhaps summed up in the response: 'listening to other people's problems was therapeutic'. This supportive purpose echoes previous research. Gupta (1985) also commented on organisational support. All but one Head expressed a desire for the groups to continue. However, this did not happen, reportedly because of the demand on Heads to stay in their schools at a time of considerable unrest in the teaching profession. This raises the importance of both administrative support and political context to the sustainability and success of groups.

Fox, Pratt & Roberts (1990) also discussed administrative/organisational factors, in particular, the investment of time and hard work to set up and maintain the groups. They proposed a model for EPs to work more systemically in schools in Essex. This included the setting up of Quality Circles (see Table 1.5.4.1) in schools. Success of these groups was found to be influenced by trust between group members and willingness to admit failings to the group, as well as openness to change. These factors link to some of the proposed latent changes discussed by Gersch and Rawkins (1986) around support, and are raised also in Stringer et al's (1992) research on teacher support groups in Newcastle.

Stringer et al's work (1992) forms a significant part of the evidence base because of its scale. This scheme, which had been running for five years at the time of publication, involved thirty teacher facilitated support groups whose stated aims were to reduce

isolation, share expertise, and allow reflection, often around pupil behaviour. Most groups ran fortnightly, after school, in teachers' own time. They were described as following a 'teacher consultation' model wherein group members were trained by EPs to become consultants, facilitating their own groups. One proposition of this research was the importance of a set structure. In this case facilitators attended five training workshops teaching this structure and related issues.

The origins of the scheme lie with Hanko (1990) who set up some groups and trained some staff. She is credited with the underpinning idea that interpersonal skills are the foundation of consultation, rather than subject matter (e.g. behaviour, mental health). Groups were intended to support and empower their participants to manage the: 'overwhelming responsibility teachers often feel for problems they can do little to change' (Stringer et al, 1992, p90). This idea of supporting school staff and building capacity echoes Fox, Pratt and Roberts' (1990) challenge to the concept of an EP as a 'specialist adviser'.

These groups were evaluated via pre and post course questionnaires to Heads, teachers trained as facilitators and teacher participants, and included a follow up questionnaire nine months later. Positive findings were reported across all groups, in particular around the element of camaraderie associated with the groups, summed up by one participant as bringing 'support in practical and psychological ways'. In common with all other studies discussed so far, management and administrative support was cited as crucial, with the nine month follow up indicating that organisational factors caused some groups to fold, for example time and provision of a private room. Another theme identified here, as elsewhere in the evidence base, was the: 'enthusiasm and commitment of facilitators and group members' (p95). This study is the first to be discussed that allows comparison across schools. The model of group supervision

seemed to work best in schools with high staff stress and poor communication, implying that supervision groups may play a protective role in challenging working environments.

Newton (1995) proposed Circles of Adults as a group consultation model for schools, acknowledging the findings of the Newcastle study discussed above. Newton also references Hanko, summing up the role of the facilitator during supervision as to ask answerable questions that empower participants to find their own way forward. In this study a group was set up to meet the needs of a group of teachers in an inner city comprehensive school struggling with behaviour. This was arguably a 'challenging working environment' as discussed in the paragraph above. Positive findings, based on questionnaires to participants, were reported, with many participants identifying success via an increased feeling of encouragement and belonging. The benefit of having a forum, with colleagues, to acknowledge the daily challenge of their work was reported. Mechanisms identified by the authors to influence group success were the use of creative questions (e.g. what would it be like if you were on a desert island with her?) and the reliance on an agreed structure which included action planning and follow up. This study therefore supports the value of a 'bias towards action', integral to the SC model.

As discussed earlier, Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) researched Circles of Adults, comparing them to SCs using a qualitative framework (thematic analysis of questionnaire data). In common with Newton's findings, participants reported the supportive, 'open and honest' feeling of the groups to be important to them. The study also highlighted the power of Circles of Adults to help participants feel an empathic understanding of the many interacting elements contributing to each child's needs. CoA, unlike SCs, encourage a deeper, more psychodynamic discussion of the child

within their complex context. The authors linked this depth to the length of the CoA process. It may also illustrate the potential tension between supervision as a provider of reflective space and supervision as a stimulant to action.

Bozic & Carter's groups (2002) were action focussed. They evaluated a series of groups involving EPs and school staff in four schools in a large Shire County. Each group consisted of eight volunteers, not all of them teachers. The philosophy underlying the groups was influenced by Hanko's ideas around consultation, including the importance of voluntary membership, confidentiality and indirect action. The group facilitator, particularly in the early stages of group formation, was proposed to be: 'assisting staff to arrive at their own ways of addressing problems by freeing-up and developing their latent abilities and resources' (p190) an undertaking reminiscent of 'resource activation' in Solution Oriented work (see De Shazer, 1982)

Participants' views of the intervention were collected through postal questionnaires, with 84% agreeing, or strongly agreeing, with the statement: 'participation in the groups has been a good use of my time'. Of the six effects of participation staff were offered, the three most frequently identified were: to think more deeply about how to work with individual children in class, to raise awareness of strategies that could be used in the classroom, and to try something new as a result of being in the group. These seem focused more on action than reflection. Staff also reported that they felt less isolated and that they valued the contribution of an external facilitator. Like many other studies in this area, interpretation stems largely from questionnaire responses. The resultant emphases by the authors on the need for a skilled external facilitator and the importance of organisational support may therefore be archetypes of this process of limited selection by respondents. However, these elements have been identified in

every study so far discussed, regardless of model and methodology, suggesting their validity.

A recent piece of social constructionist research (Bartle & Trevis 2015) extended the evidence base further by using a range of supervision models, including Solution Circles, in a specialist provision. Bartle and Trevis stated that participants had 'opportunities to gain reassurance through sharing experiences' (p85) and that varying the model improved reflective thinking and participants' feeling of ownership around the supervision process.

Summary & Conclusion: The studies in this section differ across a range of variables including educational setting, make-up of the group and structure of each session. However, together they provide an overview of the supportive value of group consultation as a supervision model. The Newcastle study stands out as the longest running, with the largest number of participating schools across primary, secondary and special.

Although a range of data collection techniques were used, qualitative data based on questionnaires and surveys, was dominant. The following were reliably identified across all studies, as influencing group success and sustainability: 1. Provision of a structure for sessions; 2. The importance of participants being enthusiastic volunteers; 3. The need for organisational support. Despite these commonalities, studies varied most noticeably in their specification of session structure and facilitator characteristics. There was little consensus across studies as to the extent and nature of training necessary for facilitators, or the degree of connection they should have to schools. The Newcastle study, for example, endorsed close training of internal facilitators; Bozic and Carter prefer an external facilitator. It is impossible to compare the relative success of

groups, because of contextual and methodological variation, not least the frequency and duration of sessions and programmes. It seems likely, based on the evidence available, that no 'winning formula' as regards structure or facilitator approach exists. Value may simply rest in groups being well organised, with clear aims and plans.

This type of group supervision in the Hanko 'consultation' vein has supporting staff as the stated aim. However, consistent with Hanko's belief in using groups to educate staff, many of the groups discussed in this section seem also to 'skill up' staff. Soni's recent case study (2015) with Learning Mentors is a good example of this, highlighting the educative function of group supervision. Building group members' problem solving ability is one approach to this. Supervision groups with this as their stated primary aim will be discussed in the next section, with the acknowledgement that the distinction between Area two and Area three is not always clear cut.

2.3.3: Area 3: Group supervision within a problem solving model

Tempest, Huxtable & Knapman (1984) piloted and evaluated a new model of service delivery introduced by South Devon Educational Psychology Service. This service model included fourteen 'support and advisory groups' across 120 primaries which had been running for two years at the time of publication. Groups had a number of stated aims, including the provision of support for staff and the sharing of expertise among them. However, overall, the model was intended to increase efficiency: 'the purpose of the initiative was not to establish support groups but to offer a better and co-ordinated service' (p68) The groups were intended to play an educative role in staff development, making schools more autonomous in their management of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). To this end, Educational Psychologists played a key role in establishing the groups: giving advice during sessions, sharing expertise, and training and monitoring staff.

'Support teachers' played an important role in this drive towards autonomy. These were teachers with an interest in SEN, nominated by Heads. They were signed up in each school and trained by EPs: four hours of seminars, twelve hours of instruction, and a number of practical assignments. This extensive training largely involved the teaching of a problem solving model called the 'sequentially selective problem clarification model' for use within group sessions. Support teachers learnt to facilitate groups using this model. The inclusion of staff training was intended eventually to turn the groups into supportive self-sustaining units with decision making power, a goal reported to have been realised to some extent, but with the input of considerable energy and further training.

Buttery & Weller (1988) also sought to educate staff through supervision. They used quantitative data to evaluate a structured 'peer group feedback model of classroom supervision' (p239). This study looked in particular at whether supervision group attendance improved teachers' use of questioning skills. Twenty-four teachers were involved, divided into six groups. All participants did a ten-week training programme on questioning techniques, for example videotape tasks and discussion. The experimental group then had eight sessions of group supervision over ten weeks. In six of these sessions the participant was an observer, in two he or she was the demonstration teacher. Video recordings of the demonstration teacher's questioning in lessons were shared and discussed with the group.

This project involved analysis of teacher questioning quality, judged from audiotaped lesson fragments. Twenty minutes of in-class discussion were recorded at the start and end of the intervention, followed by double blind coding of classroom questioning. Coding was intended to capture the quality of questioning and consisted of a range of measures including the length of pause provided by the teacher after asking the

36

question. Chi squared analysis revealed the experimental group to have improved significantly on ten of the thirteen questioning skill measures; the control group on four.

Although the experimenters make the following claim: 'the positive results of this study show that clinical supervision can provide effective training for teachers' (p242), it is difficult validly to compare the two groups because of the subjective and categorical nature of the data. It may be that improvement in questioning skill resulted from drawing attention to methods of questioning, rather than supervision having a particular impact. It also seems likely that important outcomes of group participation have gone unnoticed. This study is one of the few which attempts to track the influence of supervision on classroom practice, but in doing so perhaps fails to explore the richness of the group supervision experience.

Osborne & Burton (2014) took a less mechanistic approach to investigating group supervision. They evaluated group Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) supervision by EPs in Hampshire by analysing questionnaire responses through Thematic Analysis and descriptive statistics. Findings were positive, but some caution is needed here as over half of the participants did not return their questionnaires (response rate 43%). The importance of the supervisory relationship was one aspect highlighted by this study, i.e. each individual's relationship with the rest of the group, as well as with the EP facilitating it. ELSAs rated their relationships with the rest of the group as positive and important, and as reducing feelings of isolation. The individual nature of much ELSA work was cited as a key reason for this, implying that participants' roles and working patterns influence their experience of supervision. None of the identified research actively seeks to explore this. However, as here, many studies acknowledge the differing supervision needs of different groups. The two purposes of

supervision rated most highly by this group were: receiving advice and new ideas and general support. Many ELSAs in this study also reported increased confidence and status. Consistent with a number of previous studies the main barrier to successful supervision was reported to be lack of time.

The Staff Sharing Scheme (SSS; Gill, 1986)

As outlined in Section One, this structured model of group supervision aimed to train staff to 'systematically clarify problem situations and plan and evaluate interventions' (Gill & Monsen, 1995, p71). Many of these 'problem situations' were particular pupils' behaviours at school. The Staff Sharing Scheme is reported to have been successfully implemented in Kent and Hackney (Gill & Monsen, 1995)

Annan & Moore (2012) evaluated the Staff Sharing Scheme in Hackney. Their work was part of the Targeted Mental Health in Schools project (TAMHS) which ran between 2008 and 2011. The stated aim of SSS groups was to: 'provide staff with a conceptual framework and practical skills to reflect on and plan for children's difficulties' (p94). This study is unusual in that, although outcome data is not detailed, the authors have tracked the groups over a number of years, meaning that 'problems' brought to groups can be tracked over time. Success of the project was judged partly through this tracking. The authors reported that five of the seven children/young people they tracked had progressed, and that qualitative staff feedback for three of these was 'very positive' (p99). Jones, Monsen and Franey's (2013) application of the SSS with teachers in one primary school found that the model facilitated reflection and understanding of the causes of challenging behaviour. However, as in so many studies, time and confidentiality emerged as barriers to group success.

Qualitative data collected by Annan & Moore indicated that finding the time for staff to participate in the groups was challenging, as was sustaining them over time. They suggested that the way to overcome this is to embed the Staff Sharing Scheme into existing school systems used for problem solving. Another suggestion was that the structured problem solving approach on which group members had been trained should be made more explicit, with further training given on (for example) the use of guiding hypotheses. There is the suggestion by the authors that teachers taking part in the groups were prone to 'jumping to conclusions' rather than rational hypothesising, and needed more training. This idea that group members need a level of expertise and training for the groups to be useful is a significant theme in the evidence base, with no research suggesting this element is unimportant. How studies differ is in their specification of the content and quantity of this 'education', and its weight of influence compared to other factors, e.g. motivation. In the case of the SSS extensive training is proposed. In the case of SCs, no training is involved because, consistent with Solution Oriented philosophy, the inner resources of participants are assumed sufficient to make the groups effective.

Summary & Conclusion

This section contains a wide range of participant groups, models and research approaches. However, all research supports the idea that group supervision could be used to develop participants' skills, for example in problem solving. Of course, Area Two groups also require a level of facilitator expertise and training, and it is contrived to style these as distinct 'families'. It is also impossible to compare the success of these subtly different philosophies because data collection and context vary from study to study, and because long term follow up of groups is rare. However, regardless of

approach, staff commented that group membership means they feel less isolated and more supported.

2.3.4: Area 4: Group supervision as a means of managing referrals.

The potential of staff supervision groups to manage school issues and cases internally (rather than referring them to outside agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service) has been raised in previous sections. Area Four research, most on Teacher Support Teams (TSTs), was not considered to be central in the evidence base because of its concern with referral management over support [Please see Appendix 3 for further discussion].

<u>2.4: Overall Conclusion</u>

'Groups can and do make a difference to us all' (Newton, 1995, p8).

This belief underpins the current study, the focus being group supervision. As stated, only two papers exist specifically on Solution Circles. Neither applied them explicitly to group supervision. For this reason, the evidence base underpinning group supervision generally, including studies on specific models, was explored. Three core areas of group supervision were identified as relevant to the current study. Each area differed in the stated primary aims. There is also little consensus around who should join a group, how the facilitator should behave, or what structure a group should follow. Some researchers advocate an 'expert' theory driven approach (e.g. WDG); some favour a more participant-led approach (e.g. COA). These differences illustrate considerable variation in underpinning philosophies and aims. There is no evidence that supports one model as superior and it is inappropriate to compare them, because of differing aims and methodologies.

However, regardless of model, certain themes pervade. These are:

- Most group participants report feeling better for being group members – more supported and more able to feel successful in their daily work with children and young people. It may be that this is the greatest value of group supervision, possibly indicating increased resilience and self-efficacy.

- Administrative and organisational support is an important influence on the reported success of supervision groups. For example, the provision of protected time or a secluded environment. These factors may be markers of other variables such as school ethos, or the level of interest and support from Heads and senior leaders.

- The majority of issues brought to school staff supervision groups concern challenging behaviour by pupils.

- Although research varies as regards detail, the importance of having a skilled facilitator following a structure of some sort during sessions is commonly acknowledged as a factor contributing to group success.

- Many studies conclude that group member characteristics are a key influence on group success, in particular their levels of enthusiasm and motivation to be in the group.

The evidence base outlined above spans over three decades and encompasses a range of philosophical and methodological approaches. The majority of research has collected qualitative data via interviews and questionnaires to staff and has made little attempt to track the influence of supervision groups into the classroom. This decision seems sensible given the range of variables likely to be active, and thus the difficulty in identifying exactly what difference a supervision group may make. In fact, those

studies which have attempted to track these changes have not generated compelling

evidence of particular patterns of change.

Section Three: Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Overview

Five Solution Circles were run in each of three schools. Each circle involved a group of around eight people discussing a focus issue brought to the group by a participant, and generating possible solutions. Circles had four steps of six minutes each and involved a problem presenter (focus person); time keeper; recorder; and the brainstorm team. Please see Appendix 1 and section 3.5.4 for further detail. Staff self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety were measured before and after the intervention using self-report scales. Participants' views and experiences of the programme were explored during the fifth Solution Circle. Staff Facilitator Volunteers (SFVs) were trained to facilitate circles in their schools and their views of the programme were sought, through individual semi-structured interviews with the researcher.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The research was exploratory. It was built from a 'critical realist' perspective within a predominantly qualitative framework. This was chosen as a good match to the challenge of developing an evidence base within the social, 'messy' world of educational psychology practice. Although many definitions and interpretations of critical realism exist (e.g. Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Robson 2002; Bhaskar, 2013) certain common threads represent the critical realist stance taken here. These are: 1. the acknowledgement of both realism and relativism; 2. the use of open, 'real' settings for data collection over artificial closed ones within which variables are controlled; and, 3. the importance of researching explanatory mechanisms. These principles as applied to this research will be discussed below.

This research was exploratory because there has been little research on Solution Circles. The research set out to extend understanding of an under-researched area by beginning to identify mechanisms affecting Solution Circles. The intention was not to judge the value of the intervention or to compare schools. Nor was it to evaluate the programme by testing mechanisms and measuring resultant outcomes. It was simply to identify which processes occurring during the SC programme worked well, so as to hypothesise mechanisms. 'Mechanism' in this research means any feature of the SC intervention that helped to explain why it worked in context. The idea of mechanisms is a challenge to the deterministic idea of causality (i.e. A directly causes B) because it rejects the idea of a direct relationship between cause and effect. Critical realists do not believe that A simply causes B (e.g. a reading intervention causes a child to learn to read). They propose that, between A and B, a range of mechanisms support or hinder the intervention (e.g. the child's self-concept, phonological skills or interaction/relationship with the teacher during the intervention) and that they act in context. Critical realist research looks for these mechanisms to explain, for example, why children respond differently to reading interventions – some improve, some do not. In this research the mechanisms being sought are those which seem to affect the success of the SC programme.

Thus comes the idea of perusing mechanisms contextually to see what works for whom and in which circumstances. This can be done through Realist Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Pawson and Tilley highlighted the importance of identifying the key processes within an intervention that make it work (e.g. group interaction). These are mechanisms. However, they recognise that interventions are, necessarily, embedded in 'messy' contexts and that participants interact actively with these processes, through thinking and reasoning. People do not passively 'get affected' by mechanisms any more

than they are passively affected by interventions. With this in mind, Bozic and Crossland (2012) describe mechanisms as: '…the very structures of sense making that participants are bringing to their understanding of a programme' (p9). Interventions do not work in the same way for all participants. The intervention provides the opportunity, the mechanism and context explain the change. For clarity, some examples of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes within this tradition are shown in Table 3.2.1

Table 3.2.1: Examples of mechanisms, contexts and outcomes in the Realist tradition

Input	Mechanism	Context	Outcome
Literacy intervention	Ex prisoner teaches reading	Low local unemployment rate	Released prisoners get jobs
Communication intervention for council employees	Balance of gender and experience in the group.	Supportive work environment	Increased staff expertise
School visits by EPs	Strong relationship between SENCo and EP	Management supported regular school visits by EPs	Reduced exclusion rate
Multi-media functional skills course for Year 11 pupils	Status given to pupils on the course	Family support	Increased school attendance

Clearly, mechanisms and contexts are complex, interacting concepts that can be considered over many levels. This research sought only to begin identifying possible mechanisms, not to test them or develop them into theory. It was exploratory rather than evaluative. However, consideration of the goals/outcomes that the programme was designed to support is necessary, and this has been done with reference to the research done on group supervision, Solution Circles in particular. These outcomes are suggested to be:

- Increased staff problem solving ability;
- Increased staff well-being;
- Increased feeling of competence.

Many possible processes (mechanisms) could drive these outcomes, such as elements of the model, characteristics of facilitators, or elements of group interaction. The research was designed to begin identifying what these might be. It was underpinned by a belief that broadly generalizable truths are discoverable within the complex real world, but only if research is conducted within this real world context (see Matthews, 2003).

As stated, the main aim of the study was to explore mechanisms affecting the value of the supervision groups: mechanisms that would indicate broadly generalizable truths regarding how to run successful Solution Circles. However, the research is critical (not naïve) realist. It acknowledges the relativist view that there are multiple subjective 'realities' about the SC programme, rather than being underpinned by a naïve belief in absolute objective truth (positivism). It also recognises that interaction between participants, and with the researcher, influenced their experience and perceived value. These beliefs are the reason that a predominantly qualitative framework was selected. Qualitative investigation of participants' interpretations and experiences was believed the most trustworthy means of identifying mechanisms influencing the circles' value. On another level, both qualitative and quantitative data are acknowledged to have been socially constructed to a degree. It is not suggested that they represent objective truth, rather that they reveal participants' co-constructed interpretations and experiences.

A belief in the fundamental importance of context underpins the research which was designed to explore contextual factors as a route to revealing mechanisms. The study was conducted in three different schools, within each of which numerous interacting variables were active. These influenced participants' experience of the SC programme, and included individual, group and organisational factors, some unidentifiable. Rather than seeking to control these variables, the research was structured to explore them

within and across the three schools, in collaboration with those involved. Identification and exploration of these factors, some of which are likely to be mechanisms influencing the value of the intervention, was the main aim of the research. It was done qualitatively so as to explore them in depth and detail. Judging the efficacy of the SC intervention or quantifying differences between schools was not the aim of the research, because the experience of the programme in the different schools is proposed too context bound for this to be meaningful. It was believed that only in depth qualitative analysis could yield rich enough data to investigate the context and mechanisms which influenced the value of the SC programme.

A mixed methods paradigm was used, rather than a purely qualitative one, although qualitative methods were dominant. This was done to explore the value of the SC intervention in a different way - by tracking participants' self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety before and after taking part in the intervention. These constructs were identified as salient via the literature review and are measurable using established scales validated in previous research. Although quantitative, this aspect of the design was not included to compare schools in a positivist manner. Rather it was intended as a complementary means of exploring potential mechanisms. If participants vary significantly in these constructs across the programme, they may indicate important mechanisms, especially if these areas were highlighted in the qualitative arm of the research also.

The search for mechanisms guiding actions, and thus influencing outcomes, is an important critical realist principle, and underpins the researcher's approach here. In contrast to a purely social constructionist position, causation is acknowledged. The goal of the research is to identify what works, for whom, and in which circumstances, and thus generate some broadly generalizable truths about the SC intervention. It is suggested that some of the hypothesised mechanisms resulting from this research may

be of value if/when the intervention is initiated in other schools in the future. Thus, the research is underpinned by a belief that there is a discernible and generalizable reality to the experience of the SC programme for these staff working at this time in these three schools.

3.3: Research Aim and Questions

Aim: To explore mechanisms affecting the value of a Solution Circles intervention in three different schools.

Research Questions:

1. How did participation in the Solution Circles programme affect the self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels of the staff taking part? (RQ1)

2. Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the Solution Circles programme in schools? (RQ2)

3. Which mechanisms did Staff Facilitator Volunteers identify as affecting the facilitating of the SC programme in schools? (RQ3)

3.4: Research Design

This was real world, exploratory, mixed methods research, with qualitative methods dominant. It was flexible research, intended to be useful and to address the stated needs and requests of individual participants and participating schools.

There were three parallel research phases in analysing the data, each designed to address one research question:

> **Quantitative phase** (addressing RQ1): statistical analysis of self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety self-report scales completed pre and post intervention.
>
> **Qualitative phase one** (addressing RQ2): Thematic Analysis One, of participants' initial and feedback questionnaires and their verbal feedback during the last circle in the programme (Circle Five).
>
> **Qualitative phase two** (addressing RQ3): Thematic Analysis Two, of semi-structured SFV interview transcripts.

Figure 3.4.1: Outline of the research process (Please see section 3.5 and 3.6 for further details)

Pilot (January 2015)

1. School 1 and School 2 were recruited (January 2015)
2. Participants were recruited within each school to form a 'Circle Group'
3. Consent forms and pre intervention questionnaires were completed by all participants

4. Four Circles were run (roughly weekly) within each school & a minimum of two staff were trained in each school to be SFVs

5. Circle 5 , which was about the value of the research, was audio recorded in each school. Post intervention questionnaires were completed by all participants and the Head/SENCo of each school.

6. Semi-structured interviews with each SFV were conducted and audio recorded (within 3 weeks of Circle 5)

School 3 was recruited (May 2015)
Steps 2. to 6. above were repeated in School 3.

All data analysis was completed (September - November 2015)

Follow up meetings with Heads/SENCos will be held in each school (July 2016)

3.5 Details of Procedures

3.5.1 Pilot: In order for the researcher to gain proficiency in delivering the intervention, one pilot circle was facilitated in a Pupil Referral Unit in another South London borough. The pilot was also used to gather participants' feedback and use it to inform the rest of the research project [action points are detailed below]. Nine people volunteered to participate in this circle, all of whom completed feedback questionnaires. The findings and action points arising from the pilot were as follows:

- The solution oriented element was highlighted: *'it focuses on solving the problem and the positives'; 'allows the focus to be on the problem not on any individual'* **Action point:** ensure researcher/SFV is aware of the solution oriented underpinning and sticks to the model, perhaps reading out appropriate sentences, e.g. 'Think about what **can** be done'.

- The Focus Person reported that it felt both empowering and exposing to play this role in the circle. Talking uninterrupted for six minutes was described as particularly odd, and at times stressful: *'great at times, difficult at others'*. **Action point:** ensure researcher/SFV attends closely to the Focus Person during Step One, prompting and supporting as necessary.

- Participants reported liking the strict structure and timings of the model, particularly the phases when no interrupting was allowed. Comments included: *'I liked the discipline of the thing'; 'I particularly liked bringing in the formality with a group of staff who are very familiar with each other'; 'a great format for discussions – I will take something from this'; 'to have the discipline and not interrupt'.* **Action point:** ensure researcher/SFV sticks to the structure and timings strictly.

- Participants mentioned that they would have liked the written record/brainstorm and the timing to be more public. **Action point:** use a big visible clock to time circles, and make sure the written record is on an easily visible flip chart or whiteboard.

- A range of comments were made about the make-up of the circle group. The presence of senior leaders in the circle was thought to influence people's behaviour to a degree, although having a mixture of viewpoints, roles and experiences was praised also. **Action point:** researcher to be aware of this potential conflict, but to maintain the policy of keeping groups open to those who wish to join them.

3.5.2 Recruitment and Preparation

Following the pilot, the SC programme was publicised to all schools in a South London borough. The researcher did this by describing the project at an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) meeting and asking EPs to offer it to their schools. She also gave a presentation at the first SENCo Forum of the school year (a termly meeting for all SENCos in the borough). The Heads/SENCos of four schools approached the researcher and were given further information about the project via meetings, phone conversations and emails. Following this, the Heads/SENCos of two schools confirmed they wanted to be involved; two schools withdrew at this point. As outlined in Figure 3.4.1 a further school was recruited after School One and School Two had completed the intervention. Recruitment of School Three was done via an email from the researcher to all EPs in the service. This requested they propose the intervention to each of their schools again. One school expressed an interest and was given further information about the project via meetings, phone conversations and emails, as before.

Following this the Head confirmed that they would like to be involved. Details of schools have not been supplied so as to preserve anonymity.

After recruitment, a participant recruitment meeting was held at each school. All interested staff were invited, although please see Table 3.5.6.1 for details of how this aspect varied across schools. The participant recruitment meeting involved a presentation by the researcher and the opportunity for potential participants to ask questions and engage in discussion. These meetings varied in length and content across schools, because they were intended as open forums for potential participants to gain information about the project. Please see Table 3.5.6.1 for details of individual differences in methodology between schools. Factsheets on the SC programme (Appendix 1) and invitation letters (Appendix 4) were given out at participant recruitment meetings and were emailed to each participating school. Interested participants were asked to give their names (and indicate whether they were interested in training as SFVs) to the Head/SENCo in each school, who passed them on to the researcher. Thus, seven to nine volunteers were recruited per school including at least two SFVs. Each filled in an informed consent form (Appendix 5) before Circle One.

3.5.3 Participants

The three schools were a mainstream primary school and two secondary special provisions for children with social emotional and mental health difficulties, many of whom had been excluded from school. In total thirty-one people participated in the programme across the three schools. Six were male, twenty five female. This was a non-random purposive sample. Participants were recruited who worked directly with children and young people in participating schools at the time of the study, and who actively volunteered to be involved. Seeking motivated participants was done in an attempt to minimise attrition. It is acknowledged that this method of recruitment led to

a biased sample, but previous research supports this method as most likely to result in sustainable groups through which the programme can be explored (Jackson, 2002).

All schools expressing a wish to be involved in the research were accommodated. Equally, no constraint was made regarding participants' gender, age, ethnicity or professional experience. Every staff member expressing a wish to be involved in a circle in their school was given the opportunity to do so, providing they had the support of the Head of their school, gave informed consent and agreed to the ground rules established in that school. Thus, the extent of involvement in (and commitment to) the intervention ranged widely. Some attended one circle only. Others attended all circles and trained as facilitators.

Eighteen participants ['the sample'] attended the majority of circles (i.e. three, four or all five of the five circles) and completed pre and post intervention questionnaires. This group included thirteen participants who trained as SFVs, six of whom independently facilitated circles (or sections of circles) in their schools. Participants varied widely in the number of years' experience they had in schools and had a range of roles: teachers, teaching assistants, learning support assistants, learning mentors, a school receptionist, a site manager, members of the leadership team. Four participants had prior experience of group consultation. One had prior experience of Solution Circles.

There were commonalities in the sample of eighteen, which included:

- All were over eighteen years old and worked directly with children in schools in the same South London borough in 2014-15.
- All worked in schools with Heads who volunteered the school to take part in the programme.

- All can broadly be described as having volunteered to participate in the programme.

- All were considered to be non-vulnerable adults, and able to provide informed consent.

3.5.4 Ethical Issues

The researcher received ethical approval for this piece of research from the University of East London. Please see Appendix 6 for this approval. The key ethical issues related to the research were:

Informed consent: All participants signed an informed consent form (Appendix 5). As described in section 3.5.2, they were fully briefed on the nature of the intervention and the purpose and structure of the research. This was done through staff meetings, a factsheet (Appendix 1) and an invitation letter (Appendix 4). Participants, and prospective participants, had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the project with the researcher before, during and after the study. Most took up this opportunity, particularly around the audio recording of Circle Five and issues of confidentiality and anonymity.

Right to withdraw: Schools and individual participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time with no repercussions, including during a Circle or once the intervention was underway. Two schools did withdraw, one just prior to Circle One. No participants withdrew. Participants were informed at the start of the project that they were free to withdraw their data at any time prior to its analysis (i.e. before September 2015). Methods of data collection and analysis were explained to participants who were told that they were free to be involved in the circles but not contribute data if they so wished. Two participants chose not to complete the self-report

scales in the questionnaire pack, but did complete the initial and feedback questionnaires.

Protection from harm: As explained in section 3.5.6, ground rules were negotiated and agreed during each Circle One, with participants expected to follow them. In all schools confidentiality was a feature of these rules and was considered by the researcher, and discussed in the groups, throughout the programme. Although the ethos of Solution Circles is positive it was considered possible that challenging or sensitive issues could arise during the circles. This was indeed the case at times. Containing issues of this nature and supporting those in the circles during and after a circle was the role of the facilitator. For this reason, the researcher ensured that facilitators were trained and individually supported before, during and after facilitating circles. They were asked to liaise with the researcher regarding issues arising that concerned them and to signpost (as appropriate) support within the school and outside it for issues arising in circles that seemed to evoke worry or distress for participants.

Anonymity: Qualitative data was anonymised at the point of transcription, with participants given pseudonyms. Quantitative data and feedback questionnaires were anonymised using a number code prior to any analysis. Despite these measures and the fact that participants' and schools' names do not appear in this dissertation, complete anonymity was not guaranteed to schools or participants because of the small number of participants taking part in the study.

Confidentiality: As stated, one way confidentiality was maintained was in the ground rules agreed at each school. Each group agreed slightly different rules. Participants recognised, and were reminded by the researcher, that complete confidentiality is

impossible to guarantee for group tasks such as Solution Circles. Participants were also informed that confidentiality would be broken by the facilitator if information discussed during a Solution Circle implied potential harm to a child or young person. This aspect was discussed during SFV training. Confidentiality of participants' data was also considered. They were informed that examiners and the researcher's supervisor would have access to anonymised transcripts during the study, that their data would not be used beyond this study and that it would be destroyed within five years of analysis. All data was (and will continue to be) stored on a password protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet until it is destroyed. This thesis is the only material available in the public domain.

3.5.5   The SC Intervention

As stated, five circles ran in each school, and a minimum of two people per school trained as Staff Facilitator Volunteers (SFVs). These elements (5 Circles + Training) are referred to as the 'Solution Circles Intervention'. This was a small, flexible, exploratory study. As such, the researcher aimed to acknowledge and respond to the individualities of each school and its participants, collaborating to make the intervention useful for them. The intervention was not 'manualised'. Nonetheless, in order to explore the SC model of group supervision meaningfully, and place it in the context of previous research, the researcher aimed to keep the intervention as consistent as possible across schools.

The Five Circles: In all three schools five circles ran, roughly once a week. The following aspects were broadly constant across the three schools:

- In all schools ground rules were negotiated and written during Circle One and were referred to at the start of each subsequent circle.

57

- Every circle in every school began with a facilitator led discussion to agree the issue to be brought to the circle and therefore who would be the Focus Person for that circle.

- The structure and timing of every circle was the same:

  Step 1: The Focus Person described their issue with no interruptions allowed.

  Step 2: The Focus Person was silent. The group brainstormed possible solutions.

  Step 3: The Focus Person led a discussion about proposed solutions.

  Step 4: The Focus Person chose a 'Next Step' and a coach.

  (Each step was strictly six minutes. Please see Appendix 1 for an in-depth description of each step)

- Every circle ended (after Step 4) with the facilitator asking participants for feedback and inviting them to stay for further discussion and support if desired.

- Every circle had a named timekeeper who strictly timed the six minute slots using a big, visible timer.

- Every circle had a named, trained and supported facilitator to prompt, support and maintain solution oriented discussion. This was either the researcher or an SFV.

- Circles One and Two at every school were facilitated and recorded by the researcher.

- SFVs facilitating circles were given a written copy of the SC factsheet (Appendix 1) and were encouraged to start each step by reading aloud the description of that step.

- In every circle a named recorder (usually the researcher) created a written brainstorm record ('The Record') on a flipchart or whiteboard. This recorded participants' comments and detailed the issue, including proposed solutions and chosen actions. The Record (or a photograph of it) was given to the Focus Person at the end of every circle. Please see Appendix 7 for photographs of some examples of these records.

Training of SFVs: In each school a minimum of two people trained as SFVs. All participants who wished to train as SFVs were accommodated. Those who trained had the following roles in school: teachers, teaching assistants, learning support assistants, one emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA), one school receptionist, one site manager. The training element of the intervention was built in so that the intervention could be sustaining if desired. The SFV role was not believed to require expert knowledge or skills. Confidence to try out the facilitator role, practice, and an understanding of the model were thought the key requirements. Three of the six SFVs had prior experience of group consultation. None had prior experience of Solution Circles.

There was considerable difference between schools regarding who trained, how they trained, and the degree of facilitating done by each SFV. However, a number of aspects of SFV training and support were constant across schools. These included:

- All were trained by the researcher. This involved the provision of a training pack for all SFVs (see Appendix 8) and the opportunity to work through activities in the pack with other SFVs and with the input of the researcher. Activities were based on interpersonal skills, the SC model, and practical aspects such as how to decide on the Focus Person in each circle.

- All were provided with opportunities to talk about facilitating circles with other SFVs.

- All facilitated at least one circle or part of a circle.

- All had a 'debrief' with the researcher after facilitating a circle and all had ongoing individual supervision from the researcher, most of it informal and following the SFV's agenda.

- All received a certificate.

Despite the attempt to keep the intervention consistent across schools, this was real world research, meaning that there were differences in the intervention procedures across schools, particularly around the training of SFVs. Three main drivers of these differences were:

1. The researcher's desire to collaborate with schools to make the intervention useful for them. This meant, for example, that she endeavoured to match the training of each SFV to their individual needs. It also meant that she agreed to schools' requests for flexibility, e.g. to run extra circles, to alter dates or to bring particular issues to the circles.

2. Operational factors varied across schools, including cover restrictions, timetabling, staff absence, and meetings. This meant that the logistics around programme delivery inevitably varied, e.g. around dates, times and rooming.

3. The fact that, for practical reasons, the researcher ran the intervention in schools one and two concurrently, and in school three later in the school year. This meant that the SFVs in schools one and two attended an afternoon's training as a group of eleven, during which they could run mini

circles and discuss facilitating with a range of people. In contrast, the two

participants in school three attended two, less structured, sessions as a pair.

As has been described, the SC intervention was different in each school. Table 3.5.6.1

overleaf outlines many of these identifiable differences.

Table 3.5.6.1: Summary of differences in the SC intervention between schools

Aspect	School 1	School 2	School 3
Recruitment **(in all cases the researcher liaised also with an EP)**	1. Meeting and email communication between the SENCo and the researcher. 2. Meeting between the researcher, SENCo and Head. 3. Meeting between the researcher and interested staff.	1. Meeting, email and telephone communication between the researcher, the Head and the Executive Head. 2. Meeting between the researcher and all staff including the Head.	1. Meeting, email and telephone communication between the researcher and the joint Heads. 2. Meeting between the researcher and all staff including one Head.
Key liaison in school	SENCo	Head	Head
Room	Three different rooms – the staff room, the Head's office, and a large downstairs classroom. There were occasional interruptions in each.	Two different rooms – both private classrooms where there were no interruptions.	Always the same room – the staff room. There were occasional interruptions.
Duration of intervention	25/2/15 – 25/3/15 (one month)	6/3/15 - 8/5/15 (two months)	2/6/15 – 14/7/15 (one and a half months)
Participants	Eight signed up; seven were in the sample*	Thirteen signed up; three were in the sample*	Ten signed up; eight were in the sample*
SFVs	Seven trained; three facilitated circles. Training was one afternoon at this school in conjunction with School Two.	Four trained; one facilitated a part and a whole circle. Training was one afternoon in School One in conjunction with their SFVs.	Two trained; both facilitated circles. Training was informal after circles at this school.
Circles 1-4	All were facilitated by the researcher except Circle 3 which was facilitated by a SFV (Mary) and Circle 4 which was facilitated by a SFV (Sonia) in the absence of the researcher.	All were facilitated by the researcher except the start of Circle 4 which was facilitated by a SFV (Liz)	All were facilitated by the researcher except Circle 4 which was facilitated by a SFV (Jessica)
Extra circles	No extra circles	One extra circle	Two extra circles
Circle 5	Facilitated by a SFV (Paula) and recorded by a participant (Sonia)	Facilitated by a SFV (Liz) and recorded by the researcher.	Facilitated by a SFV (Jessica) and recorded by a participant (Sally)

* To be in 'the sample' a participant must have attended at least three of the five circles and have completed pre and post intervention questionnaires

3.6 Data Collection

A range of data was collected and analysed to address the three research questions.

Table 3.6.1 summarises data collection and analysis methods.

Table 3.6.1: Overview of data collection and analysis methods

Research Question	Data collected	Method of analysis
1. How did participation in the SC programme affect the self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels of the staff taking part?	**18 sets of completed Scales** All participants completed self-report Scales on self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety before and after taking part in the intervention.	Statistics (descriptive and inferential)
	Quantitative Phase	
2. Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the Solution Circles programme in schools? (RQ2)	**3 transcripts of Circle Five** Circle Five in each school was run as a 'Focus Group' to discuss the value of the research, and was audio recorded. **24 completed initial & feedback questionnaires** Most participants* completed feedback questionnaires on their experience of the intervention (Appendix 9) **3 completed SENCo/Head questionnaires** The named person in each school completed a feedback questionnaire (Appendix 9) about their experience of the intervention.	Thematic Analysis One (TA1)
	Qualitative Phase One	
3. Which mechanisms did Staff Facilitator Volunteers identify as affecting the facilitating of the SC programme in schools? (RQ3)	**6 transcripts of interviews with SFVs** Audio recorded semi structured interviews were conducted with two SFVs in each school at the end of the intervention.	Thematic Analysis Two (TA2)
	Qualitative Phase Two	

7 were not returned

3.6.1 Quantitative data collection

All participants in the sample were asked to complete an initial questionnaire and three self-report scales before and after taking part in the intervention. These were administered just before Circle One and straight after Circle Five. They took approximately fifteen minutes to complete and the majority of participants completed them. The self-report scales (detailed below) measured self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety.

These scales have been widely used with adult populations, including school staff. They are quick and easy to administer and therefore appropriate to the busy school environment. Each scale has been trialled in published research with reliability and validity shown to be satisfactory.

The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD RISC, Connor & Davidson, 2003; Appendix 10) is a 27 item scale that has been widely used in international research, much of it clinical. Items stem from resilience factors identified through a range of research and theory. The original sample group included a large non-clinical community sample.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE, Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995; Appendix 11) is a ten item scale that has been widely used in international research. It was originally developed for use with general adult populations and has been chosen in preference to scales developed specifically for teachers because 1. Many participants in this study were not teachers and 2. Scales developed for specific use with teachers (e.g. Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale, Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001) have not been used as widely as the GSE and may be less valid.

The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults (STAIA, Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970) is a forty item scale that has been widely used in international research with clinical and community samples. It was chosen because of its use with non-clinical populations, and because of its separate measurement of state and trait anxiety.

3.6.2 Qualitative data collection: Phase One

Recordings of Circle Five: Circle Five at each school was used to explore participants' views about mechanisms affecting the value of the intervention. It followed the format of all other circles, but in this case the researcher was the Focus Person who brought the issue to the circle. The issue she brought to Circle Five was: 'what affected the value of the SC intervention at this school at this time?' This 'Focus Group-like' format was chosen to create a reasonably naturalistic and interactive environment, and thus increase the chance of collecting authentic, rich data about factors influencing the value of the intervention. Each group of participants had been engaged in discussion and collaboration for weeks, and were familiar (and likely to be reasonably comfortable) with the SC structure, each other and the researcher. Circle structure builds in opportunities to reflect (e.g. when all participants listen in silence to the Focus Person during Step One) and to discuss the contributions of others, enriching the data.

The structure also includes the views of the researcher. During Step One the researcher reflected, with no input from participants, about her experience of the intervention in this particular school. During Steps Two and Three these ideas were inevitably discussed. Thus, the data collected from each Circle Five is conceived as having been co-constructed by the participants and the researcher, rather than being 'objectively collected' by the researcher. This is proposed to give insight into the value of the intervention, because group dynamics are central to what circles are and how they work

– they are more than a series of individuals each with an independent view of intervention value.

It is acknowledged that the researcher's close involvement in Circle Five at each school (and her involvement in previous circles and interactions) is likely to have influenced participants' experience of the programme, and vice versa. SFVs in particular had, by this stage, spent a great deal of time with the researcher discussing the intervention, and she could in no sense be considered an impartial observer. Her presence in Circle Five may have hindered some participants' willingness to give negative feedback, especially in the solution oriented context of the model. In addition, it is noted that Circle Five at each school started with six minutes of uninterrupted verbal reflection from the researcher, as per the model. These comments, while argued an important part of the data, are conceded to have influenced the views and comments of participants.

Please see Appendix 12 for transcripts of Circle Five at each school on CD.

Initial and Feedback Questionnaires: All participants filled in initial questionnaires (see Appendix 9) before Circle One. In addition, all participants who had had any experience of the programme (i.e. not just The Sample) were asked to fill in feedback questionnaires (see Appendix 9) after Circle Five. This was done to complement data collected during Circle Five. It sought to elicit the views of participants who had missed Circle Five, had dropped out of the programme, or who did not feel confident to comment freely during Circle Five itself.

3.6.3: Qualitative data collection: Phase Two

Interviews with SFVs: Six audio recorded in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher with six individual SFVs, two from each school to explore RQ3 ('Which mechanisms did SFVs identify as affecting the facilitating of the SC programme in

schools?'). Interviews were around fifty minutes' long and used open questions (Appendix 13) to explore each SFV's experiences of the intervention in depth and detail.

The thirteen SFVs who attended training and expressed a desire to facilitate circles varied widely in confidence and facilitating experience. The researcher hoped to explore a range of perspectives on the SFV experience in different settings, and chose to interview two SFVs from each school to do so. This was intended to investigate SFV's views in sufficient detail, but without diluting the data with the views of SFVs who had not facilitated circles and had little motivation or confidence to do so. The researcher asked the two SFVs in each school who had the most experience of attending and facilitating circles, to be interviewed. All agreed. Table Four gives details of this sample. Each of these interviewees (except one: Zola) had been deeply involved with the programme and had had hands on experience of facilitating a circle. Zola was interviewed in an attempt to get a richer representation of the SFV experience in School Two where only one SFV had facilitated a group. Zola had attended training, expressed a wish to facilitate circles in the future, and had approached the researcher with some ideas about how this might be workable.

Table 3.6.3.1: Details of the SFV sample

School	Who	SFV experience
1	Sonia	Attended SFV group training Attended all five circles Facilitated one circle
1	Paula	Attended SFV group training Attended four of the five circles Facilitated one circle
2	Liz	Attended SFV group training Attended four of the five circles Facilitated part of a circle
2	Zola	Attended SFV group training Attended two of the five circles Did not facilitate any circles
3	Sally	Attended informal SFV training as a pair Attended four of the five circles Facilitated one circle
3	Jessica	Attended informal SFV training as a pair Attended all five circles Facilitated one and a part of a circle

Having participated in a number of circles, training and supervision, each interviewee was known to the researcher. Although the researcher aimed for a degree of detachment during these interviews, it is likely that the researcher's pre-existing relationship with each SFV had some effect on their expressed views and the behaviour of the researcher. Thus, as during qualitative phase one, this data is conceived, to a degree, to be co-constructed with participants rather than passively 'collected' by the researcher.

Please see Appendix 14 for the SFV interview transcripts on CD.

3.7 Data Analysis

Three separate data analyses were conducted, each matched to a distinct research question and therefore phase of the research. This section will explain the three analyses. In the discussion these individual findings will be brought together, to synthesise an overview of the mechanisms affecting the value of the SC intervention overall.

3.7.1 Quantitative Phase: The relatively short duration of the intervention and the small sample size made detection of statistical significance unlikely. For this reason effect sizes (Cohen's d) were calculated as well as non-parametric analyses (Wilcoxon) of the (repeated measures) questionnaire data. One Wilcoxon analysis and one effect size calculation was done for each construct (self-efficacy, resilience, state anxiety, trait anxiety).

The following one tailed hypotheses were under investigation:

H_1 Participation in the SC intervention will improve staff resilience.

H_1 Participation in the SC intervention will improve staff self-efficacy.

H_1 Participation in the SC intervention will improve staff state anxiety.

H_1 Participation in the SC intervention will improve staff trait anxiety.

H_0 Participation in the SC intervention will not improve staff resilience.

H_0 Participation in the SC intervention will not improve staff self-efficacy.

H_0 Participation in the SC intervention will not improve staff state anxiety.

H_0 Participation in the SC intervention will not improve staff trait anxiety.

3.7.2 Qualitative Phase One: A thematic analysis of the three transcripts of Circle Five was used as the primary means of addressing Research Question Two, because of the rich, naturalistic nature of this data. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a good match to the critical realist stance underpinning the research, in particular in its recognition of context while seeking patterns; the research aimed to explore mechanisms linked to the intervention itself rather than to understand each person's individual experience of it in a phenomenological sense. An initial inductive thematic analysis of participants' feedback questionnaires was done, to generate loose themes.

These were then used to guide deductive thematic analysis of the Circle Five data. The initial analysis was done to interpret and cross check the views of all participants in the analysis, not just those who had been at Circle Five.

Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as: '…a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (p79). It is a flexible method for interpreting commonalities in qualitative data. The researcher was working to gain a rich understanding of possible mechanisms affecting the value of the programme and therefore explored the views of those who had been directly involved with it, in search of semantic themes. This was done without initial assumptions as to which aspects of the programme were meaningful for participants or what this understanding might entail. Thus, initial analysis was inductive. It was not theory driven, but involved the assumption that themes identified by the researcher reflected the general reality of participants' experience of the SC intervention in their particular context. They were then applied deductively to the Circle Five data. Exploration of all qualitative data involved interpretation by the researcher, focused around the research question.

All qualitative analysis involves interpretation, connected to the researcher's conceptual positioning of the research. In this case language is largely conceptualised as a means of expressing an individual's view, rather than purely as a social construction. As such, mechanisms affecting the value of the intervention were thought to be best identified through a semantic interpretation of participants' comments, rather than by searching for underlying latent meaning. Of course, thematic analysis necessarily involves active interpretation on the part of the researcher, particularly when he/she (as here) has been immersed in the programme and has interacted extensively with participants during it. The researcher was not an impartial observer of the intervention, nor was she an impartial analyst of the resulting data. This subjectivity

is compounded by the fact that Circle Five data included the researcher's own views. These factors meant that, to maximise trustworthiness of the data, the researcher needed a high level of reflexivity. The following actions were intended to maximise reflexivity:

- The researcher kept a reflective research diary and recorded a 'circle by circle' narrative of her experience of the intervention. This was referred to during analysis and interpretation.

- The researcher discussed thematic analysis of study data during regular university research supervision.

- The researcher organised three checks of her thematic analysis at stage 4 (see Table 3.7.2.1) during which checkers read all coded extracts allocated to each theme and noted discrepancies and lack of clarity. These checks were done by: 1. the person who transcribed the data and was therefore familiar with the research; 2. a peer on the professional doctorate programme with the researcher; 3. two 'educated laypersons'.

Thematic analysis was structured as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Table 3.7.2.1 overleaf explains how their analytic structure was applied to this analysis.

Table 3.7.2.1: Thematic Analysis Process

Phase (from Braun & Clarke, 2006, p8)	Description
*Generating loose initial themes from questionnaire feedback (**Thematic Analysis One only**)*	• *Feedback questionnaire responses were transcribed word for word onto the computer by the researcher, printed off, read and re-read.* • *The whole data set was highlighted with initial codes using colour on the computer. Codes were data (not theory) driven and represented interesting semantic features in the data as interpreted by the researcher. The researcher did not attempt an in depth analysis of latent meaning, but sought to code according to relevance to the research question – i.e. pertaining to mechanisms affecting the value of the programme. Time was spent coding, reading extracts together to check for unity, and recoding as appropriate. Once all data items had been coded they were collated together code by code into separate tables on the computer (please see Appendix 15 for the collation)* • *The list of codes was categorised into loose themes by mind mapping (see Appendix 16). Translating codes into themes was an interpretive process conducted by the researcher on the basis of perceived commonality in meaning between codes.* • *These loose themes were then applied to the Circle Five data as follows.*
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Audio recorded data from Circle Five at all three schools* was transcribed verbatim (not by the researcher) The researcher then familiarised herself with it over weeks, by actively listening to the original audio recordings over and over again while checking, reading and re-reading the transcripts. Any areas of particular interest were highlighted and noted down in the research diary at this stage. Interest was guided by the research question and (for TA1) the loose themes identified from inductive thematic analysis of questionnaire data.
2. Generating initial codes	The data set was then annotated with initial codes. Codes were driven by the research question, meaning that not every response was coded: all responses considered relevant to the research question were coded, even if (for

		TA1) they did not fit neatly with a loose theme.
3.	Searching for themes	The list of codes was now categorised into tentative overarching themes and sub-themes by the process of table sorting and mind mapping (see Appendix 16). Translating codes into themes was an interpretive process conducted by the researcher on the basis of perceived commonality in meaning between codes. This included consideration of the interrelation between the candidate themes and the three different school contexts.
4.	Reviewing themes	The 'candidate themes and sub-themes' resulting from phase three were now reviewed at the extract level – all extracts attached to each theme were read together to check for homogeneity. Clear distinction between themes was also sought. Themes which did not seem internally consistent and robust were altered or rejected. Connections between themes were illustrated in a 'candidate thematic map' (see Figures 3.2.1 and 3.3.1 and Appendix 17). This map was reviewed afresh against the Circle Five transcripts to check it was meaningful in this broader context. Some adjustments in themes and their connections were made to produce a final coherent thematic map illustrating the researcher's interpretation of the data.
5.	Defining and naming themes	The collated data extracts linked to each theme were next revisited and each theme was defined, described and named. The descriptor assigned to each theme was intended to capture its overall meaning in relation to the research question.
6.	Producing the report	In this final stage the relation between the final thematic map and the research question was articulated as a narrative and illustrated with extracts from transcripts.

*Or from the six SFV interviews in the case of TA2

3.7.3 Qualitative Phase Two: A separate (inductive) thematic analysis was done to address Research Question Three. In this case the six individual semi-structured interviews conducted with SFVs formed the data set. Thematic analysis was chosen for similar reasons to those discussed in section 3.7.2 above - as a theoretically flexible method to interpret patterns in rich linguistic data. Semantic themes were once more sought using steps one to six in Table 3.7.2.1.

Section Four: Findings

4.1 Research Question One: How did participation in the Solution Circles programme affect the self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels of the staff taking part?

Descriptive Statistics:

Table 4.1.1: Table showing Means and Standard Deviations (S.D.s) before and after intervention for each construct

Construct	Mean before	S.D. before	Mean after	S.D. after
Self-Efficacy	30.9	3.99	31.8	3.71
Resilience	111.6	19.1	107.1	10.20
State Anxiety	34.8	8.47	36.6	8.88
Trait Anxiety	38.3	9.8	36.8	7.79

(See Appendix 18 for the raw data and analysis)

Figure 4.1.2: Chart showing Means for each construct before and after intervention
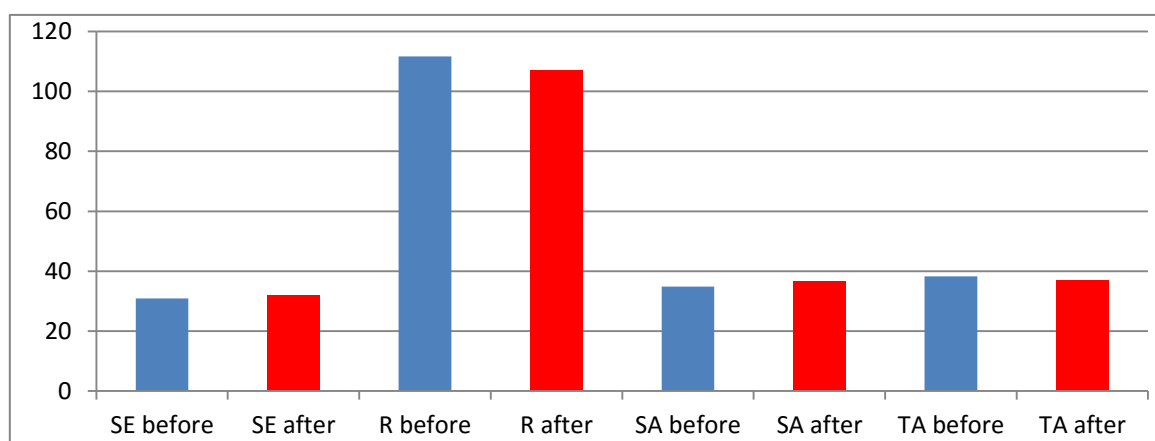

```
KEY
SE: Self-Efficacy
R: Resilience
SA: State Anxiety
TA: Trait Anxiety
```

Figure 4.1.3: Chart showing overall change in each construct after intervention

KEY
SE: Self-Efficacy
R: Resilience
SA: State Anxiety
TA: Trait Anxiety
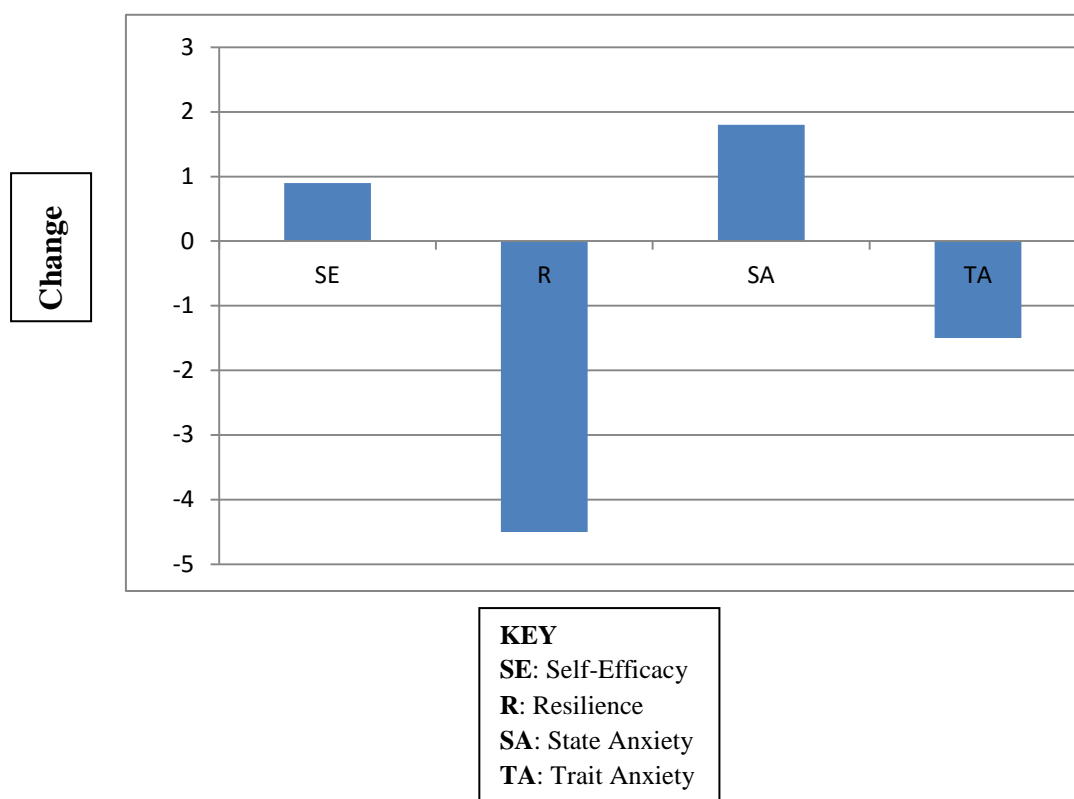
Table 4.1.2: How many participants had improved in each construct after intervention?

Construct	Number of participants who improved	Number of participants who stayed the same	Number of participants who deteriorated	Overall Result
Self-Efficacy	11	2	4	+7
Resilience	7	0	8	-1
State Anxiety	7	0	9	-2
Trait Anxiety	9	0	7	+2

Inferential Statistics:

Self-Efficacy: Analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that Self-Efficacy did not differ significantly before and after participation in the SC programme.

$(Z = 1.086, N = 17, p = .139$ one tailed)

The null hypothesis is retained.

Resilience: Analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that Resilience did not differ significantly before and after participation in the SC programme.

$(Z = - .057, N = 15, p = .478$ one tailed)

The null hypothesis is retained.

State Anxiety: Analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that State Anxiety did not differ significantly before and after participation in the SC programme.

$(Z = .440, N = 16, p = .330$ one tailed)

The null hypothesis is retained.

Trait Anxiety: Analysis using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that Trait Anxiety did not differ significantly before and after participation in the SC programme.

$(Z = -.751, N = 16, p = .226$ one tailed)

The null hypothesis is retained.

(See Appendix 18 for SPSS output)

The following Effect Sizes were calculated:

Construct	Effect size (using Cohen's d)	Descriptor
Self-Efficacy	0.23	Small
Resilience	-0.29	Small
State Anxiety	-0.21	Small
Trait Anxiety	0.17	Trivial

These indicate a small effect size in the predicted direction for Self-Efficacy and a trivial effect size in the predicted direction for Trait anxiety. The small effect sizes for Resilience and State Anxiety were not in the predicted direction.

Summary:

The quantitative data shows no significant difference in self-efficacy, resilience or anxiety as a result of the programme. However, the small effect size in the predicted direction for self-efficacy may be worthy of further investigation through use of a larger sample size and a repeated measures design.

4.2 Research Question Two: Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the Solution Circles programme in schools?

Analysis of questionnaire feedback generated four initial loose themes concerning this research question:

- The Structure;

- Things that make the group feel safe;

- Links to school priorities;

- Logistics and practicalities.

See Appendix 19 for further detail. These loose themes were used to guide a deeper thematic analysis of the richer Circle Five data which led to the identification of four final themes and eight subthemes (see Figure 4.2.1)

[Footnote: Details of how loose themes were generated can be found in Table 3.7.2.1. Appendix 20 contains the code book constructed to complete this analysis. Appendix 21 contains examples of coded extracts. Appendix 16 contains photographs of the thematic analysis in progress; Appendix 17 contains examples of preliminary thematic maps]

Research Question Two:

Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the Solution Circles programme?

Theme 1: 'The Structure'

Theme 2: A need to talk

Theme 3: 'Feel like a team'

Theme 4: School Context: What are you lot doing down there?'

Subtheme 1a: 'So focussed'

Subtheme 1b: 'Opening you up'

Subtheme 1c: 'Have your say'

Subtheme 1d: 'Empowering'

Subtheme 3a: 'Build up that trust'

Subtheme 3b: 'To exchange, give advice'

Subtheme 4a: 'It's like a machine'

Subtheme 4b: 'Everyone has got to want this'

Figure 4.2.1 *Final Thematic Map for Qualitative Phase One*

4.2.1: Theme 1: 'The Structure'

Four subthemes were identified within this theme.

Subtheme 1a: 'So focussed'

Participants felt that the model's strict timing and focus on one issue only, was particularly valuable:

> '***Marianne***: *the timing keeps you on track ... and it actually helps retain the focus. I realise that now because we haven't got the timer on and I think that we might be going a little bit off.*
>
> ***Ingrid***: *It stops repetition doesn't it?*
>
> ***Sune***: *And people labouring a point.'* **2:287***

> ***NOTE:** All Circle Five data extracts are followed by line numbers, to allow reference to the original transcripts (Appendix 12)
>
> For example: **2:287** refers to Circle Five data for School Two, starting on line number 287.

Subtheme 1b: 'Opening you up'

Participants linked aspects of the model to sharing and reflection. While daunting at times, this was thought to be of value. In particular the six minutes uninterrupted time at the start of the circle was considered to provide reflective space for all:

> '***Jessica***: *... you end up sort of answering your own – because you've got all that time, you end up kind of...*
>
> ***Emma***: *reflecting'* **3:202**

> '***Marianne***: *... what they've said had most value or more value in those last two minutes after this thing that they've struggled with the time.'* **2:75**

Participants also thought that the requirement of a named person bringing (and owning) a clearly defined problem, and talking about it without interruption for six minutes, put pressure on that person:

> *'**Kathrine**: ... but when it comes to the person that brings the problem those six minutes are like forever. They feel like a day! ...'* **1:285**

> *'**Shanaze**: but sometimes, you have the six minutes and then you start listening to your voice and then you start to retract and think – no – I'm not going to be that open.*
> *…Because you're talking, it's sort of opening you up and you think oh no that's too much exposure ...'* **1:288**

Subtheme 1c: '*Have your say*'

As well as facilitating reflection, the structure was valued because it meant that people could 'have their say' without interruption or upset:

> *'**Jessica**: I think it worked well for us because we're all quite big characters, so getting one person to talk and not to interrupt has always been a bit of a challenge…'* **3:82**

> *'**Emma**: You are allowed to have your say without being shut down, or losing it, or being moved on to a different subject or – being able to stay on topic'* **3:178**

Subtheme 1d: 'Empowering'

Participants valued the action/solution orientation of the model:

> *'**Marianne**: ... in the session that I was in we came up with some good strategies to use to move forward with a particular student'* **2:109**

The solution orientation was linked to feelings of agency and empowerment:

> *'**Sally:** ... I think it's quite empowering... the person who hasn't got a voice has now got a forum to have a voice and be in control and feel comfortable being in control...'* **3:257**

> *'**Rachel**: ... by doing this you've kind of got a package to then take to someone else and say look, it's not just me that thinks this – we've had a solution circle and come up with this. ...'* **3:187**

> *'**Emma:** Because everyone was giving their opinions it wasn't like a one-to-one 'you should do this, you should do that' – it was down to the person to sort of reflect and think yes maybe I'm going to try that because that would probably work better for me, not try that because you told me to do that.'* **3:118**

Summary of Theme One

Research participants valued the structured framework adhered to during each circle. Elements of this structure that participants particularly valued were: Its rule based focus, and its ability to 'open you up' and let you 'have your say'. These were linked to strict rules around interruption, and the underpinning empowering philosophy.

The following extract illustrates all Subthemes in Theme One:

> *'**Rachel**: ... I found it – well I like brainstorming sessions anyway - and I found this kind of added value to a normal brainstorming session: because of the*

timing, because of the uninterrupted issue. So that it was really interesting with those six minutes - people often kind of answered some of their own questions the more they thought about something, so I really liked that. And it gave some added purpose behind the brainstorming. And you knew that something was going to come out of it...' **3:66**

4.2.2: Theme 2: 'A need to talk'

The simple mechanism of providing a space to talk seemed to be valued by participants. They referred to the groups as an efficient and welcome means of meeting a 'need' or 'drive' to talk about their work, hinting that this need would have to find another outlet in the absence of an organised group:

> *'**Shanaze:** ... if you're in a restaurant and TAs come in, I say to my husband 'they work in a school'. 'How do you know?' I say 'they're talking about children. They're talking about their school and their children and this club and this problem, you know…There is a need. To talk.'* **1:312**

Participants often referenced the emotional component of their daily work and the relief of sharing this with others:

> *'**Sonia**: I don't think you always need a solution, always like you say, always need to have something happen. It is a … good opportunity to just maybe have a bit of a vent you know, not necessarily have a little bit of a moan – that's not really constructive*
>
> ***Kathrine:** …but just to share how you feel'* **1:73**

Some participants questioned whether the brief, tight model had the capacity to contain them emotionally:

> *'**Paula:** … depending on how emotional or how connected you are to that particular issue, it's not going to be everybody, but I think, I remember one*

week when it was like personal to me and everything was going around in my

mind. I could feel like in my stomach – I was really hot and I went back upstairs

again and it was kind of like I hadn't had time to snap out of it.' **1:185**

4.2.3: Theme 3: 'Feel like a team'

Participants reported that they valued the supportive 'team feeling' of the circle groups:

> *'**Tirunesh**: … I didn't get any of those feelings come out where you went away*
>
> *and felt you wanted to judge anyone or felt judged yourself, which is really*
>
> *important when you are working – trying to work as a team'* **3:103**

They linked its establishment to a range of possible mechanisms, including those

contributing to the trusting climate of the group (Subtheme 3a: 'Build up that trust')

and those facilitating problem solving and learning (Subtheme 3b: 'To exchange, give

advice').

Subtheme 3a: 'Build up that trust'

One mechanism that participants linked to trust was the establishment of shared rules,

including those around confidentiality:

> *'**Sally**: … I think there's got to be proper ground rules at the beginning,*
>
> *because this isn't about something – you know me bringing a solution and*
>
> *getting penalised after I've come out of the group… That I think we need to be*
>
> *quite clear on when we do the beginning – like a contract'* **3:226**

Another mechanism that participants identified as facilitating a team feeling was the

focus on action rather than blame:

> *'**Tirunesh**: Well, it's positive isn't it? You are not looking to attack somebody*
>
> *and be negative; you are looking for a solution, so that totally alters the focus*
>
> *of the discussion. You feel like a team rather than it being one person'* **3:142**

Group dynamics (i.e. who is in the group and how the group interacts) was also linked to team feeling, for example, the value of having a consistent group of attendees, building up trust in each other over time:

> *'**Sally**: I think it's nice when the same people remain in the group – I think it's – you feel a bit of solidarity – somebody knows what I'm talking about and knows what we've been doing and I think that's quite nice when you've got a team of people around you ...'* **3:244**

> *'**Sonia**: ... I think it's good ... if you've got that group once a week... once you've built up that trust with those people... It may be something in school, it may be something outside of school ... and you may come into school and it may be affecting your work, and if you know you've got that support once a week, then you know that you've got a network in school where.... it might be affecting your job ... but you know you've got somewhere to turn. ...'* **1:136**

Another group dynamics factor discussed was the effect of recruiting circle members similar in experience and role. Some participants felt that the establishment of a supportive, safe team atmosphere requires members to be at the same level in the school:

> *'**Jessica**: I'm not sure if people would feel confident to speak out say if there was lots of people at the table that they didn't really spend much time with or didn't have much to do with in the day...'* **3:222**

Some linked larger mixed groups with the potential breakdown of established group rules and boundaries:

> *'**Tirunesh**:... in a bigger more mixed group I don't know. Maybe other people would feel they were able to go above those rules...'* **3:238**

Subtheme 3b: 'To exchange, give advice'.

Participants felt the groups brought a valued team feeling because they provided a

forum for sharing the expertise and experience of group members:

> **'Shanaze:**... *sometimes ... you've just moved to another class and you can*
>
> *say... I'm not getting along with that person... did anyone else have that*
>
> *particular person with them and how did you get on? How did you get around*
>
> *this particular thing that I found annoying you know – that sort of thing'* **1:83**

> *'****Sonia****: ... to share ideas ... not complain – that's not helping – ... I think we all*
>
> *do that daily but that's not constructive – but you know...*
>
> ***Catherine****: to exchange, give advice..*
>
> ***Sonia:*** *... to exchange ideas and give advice and you don't always need to...*
>
> *you're gonna have to go and talk to someone and have a solution, but you know*
>
> *just advice and exchange of ideas is a basis'* **1:77**

Some participants associated heterogeneity of group membership with improved

problem solving and learning. They wondered if the more varied and mixed the groups,

the better the problem solving and learning would be, because a greater range of ideas

and experiences could be drawn on:

> *'****Mara****: ... definitely having a mix in the group- SLTs, TAs, teachers – helps,*
>
> *because it brings the problem from different perspectives, different angles...'*
>
> **2:119**

Across all schools, participants debated the trade-off, or tension, between having a

mixed role group versus a more homogenous group. The latter was broadly proposed to

facilitate a team feeling of safety and trust (Subtheme 3a), the former to facilitate a

team feeling of increased challenge and learning (Subtheme 3b):

*'**Sune**: If I say ... that the group of TAs is not working in this area or this is not working – a TA that's present – it might take him personally – like I'm saying you're not doing your job properly, and it's not that. It's just a question of management. It's just a question of – we need to see how do we make it better'* **2:158**

*'**Shanaze**: I don't think there is freedom of speech once you have management there'* **1:347**

Summary of Theme Three

Theme Three concerns mechanisms which seem to develop the 'Team Feeling' valued by participants. Trust seemed to be important here, and its development was linked, at least in part, to establishing ground rules and confidentiality, and to the set-up of a consistent and homogenous group. However, 'Team Feeling' was also associated with opportunities to 'exchange, give advice' in more mixed, fluid groups.

4.2.4: Theme 4: School Context: 'What are *you* lot doing down there?'

Participants indicated that school characteristics, processes and priorities were mechanisms affecting the value of the programme. Two subthemes were identified here: 'It's like a machine' which concerned logistics and organisation (Subtheme 4a) and 'Everyone has got to want this' (Subtheme 4b) which concerned the integration of circle activities with the priorities and activities of the rest of the school.

Subtheme 4a: 'It's like a machine'

Participants linked a number of practical, logistical elements to programme value, and commented at times on the connection between these more tangible factors and the development of the more intangible 'team feeling' factors included in Theme Three.

One example of this regarded the importance of organising a private room in which to meet:

> *'**Mary**: We need to be able to have that room where – that venue where it's just us venturing what problems is affecting us and be confident to do it without have to be looking – is there someone who is going to pass by to hear…'* **1:96**

> *'**Catherine**: … if we are to trust each other then tell about confidential stuff we need to be alone – left alone.'* **1:94**

Protected time, planned and communicated in advance, was another organisational mechanism that participants thought was important:

> *'**Paula**: I think in order for this to work – and for this to be important – we've all got to have the same things – like today the teacher didn't know that I was going off – Shanaze's teacher didn't know. They planned for Shanaze to be up there this afternoon so of course that gets their back up already because it's like **well** whatever they'd planned to use us for they can't anymore so it's just like 'What are **you** lot doing down there?'* LAUGHTER. *'Do you know what I mean? 'What are **you** lot doing down there!'* **1:204**

Some participants indicated other organisational mechanisms, such as those concerned with developing facilitator expertise:

> *'**Sonia**: … Well it's here now so it's for us to carry on isn't it?*
>
> ***Catherine**: It's like a machine. Once you run it you cannot stop it…*
>
> ***Sonia**: Well we've done the training.'* **1:436**

In each school, Circle Five participants discussed how best to adapt and use SCs within their particular school context. They debated logistics and what was feasible. They

began planning how they would embed/operationalise the programme at the end of the research, including the challenges that they would face:

> *'Marianne: … perhaps we could have a board or people can write up and share ideas and then we could say actually ok, we are going to have a solution circle on this. People that… feel they have something to contribute to that can attend that and then we'll have another group on this.'* **2:232**

Subtheme 4b: 'Everyone has got to want this'

Participants discussed the value of linking the supervision groups to the dynamics and priorities of the whole school. This touched at times on what the purpose of the circles should be, and at what level, e.g. individual, whole school:

> *'Paula: The issues have got to be things that improve the school, but for it to be obvious that they improve the school'* **1:363**

Participants highlighted the need for the programme to connect to the school context, rather than appearing 'cliquey':

> *'Rachel: I see the solution circle more as a tool but for anyone to use because we'd have to be careful if we carried this on with just this group because we're excluding quite a lot of people, key people in the company…'* **3:266**

Thus, mechanisms facilitating the communication and integration of circle activities within the school were valued. These mechanisms included how group make-up is determined and how solutions generated in circles are enacted:

> *'Marianne: I think the issue may be that you come up with the strategies but then – from that particular session we haven't got anything in place, so I think getting the strategies is one thing but making sure that we move forward to the next step and actually take the action.'* **2:111**

The fundamental ability of school managers, in particular the Head, to facilitate or disrupt the programme was discussed in all circles. Management understanding of the programme, support of it, and interest in it, were identified as important mechanisms guiding programme value:

> *'**Joan***: I think everyone has got to want this, everyone has to be wanting to work together with one goal which here is the child – that's how I believe it should be…'* **1:426**

Summary of Theme Four

Theme Four concerned the school context. Participants acknowledged that SC groups sit within this context and interact with it. They discussed the importance of being active contributors to this interaction, particularly around communication and methods of embedding groups within school systems. Logistical and organisational factors (e.g. protected time) were considered important and influential on the value of the groups as well as their capacity to sustain.

4.3: Research Question Three: Which mechanisms did SFVs identify as affecting the facilitation of the SC programme in schools?

This phase of the research was concerned with the SFV role, explored through thematic analysis of interviews with SFVs. Four themes and nine subthemes were identified (see Figure 4.3.1 for the final thematic map and Appendix 23 for descriptions of all theme and subthemes)

Research Question Three:

Which mechanisms did SFVs identify as affecting the facilitating of the Solution Circles programme in schools?

Theme 1: 'The Structure'

Theme 2: Individual characteristics

Theme 3: Support

Theme 4: School Context: 'Dealing with what's in the field'

Subtheme 1a: 'Time chunks'

Subtheme 1b: 'Separate roles'

Subtheme 1c: 'Positivity'

Subtheme 2a: 'Encourage people to talk'

Subtheme 2b: 'Everything's there, everything's ready'

Subtheme 2c: 'Enjoy it'

Subtheme 3a: Practising and doing

Subtheme 3b: Supervision

Subtheme 3c: 'Support each other'

Figure 4.3.1 *Final Thematic Map for Qualitative Phase One*

4.3.1 Theme 1: 'The Structure'

One mechanism that influenced SFVs' navigation and experience of the facilitator role was the nature of the SC model itself. Three Subthemes were identified here: Structure (Subtheme 1a), Roles (Subtheme 1b) and the Solution orientation (Subtheme 1c)

Subtheme 1a: 'Time chunks'

SFVs commented that the timed structure of the model supported them in their role:

> '**Sally:** ... I think having those kind of time chunks really gets to the root of whatever it is – whether it's an issue, a problem, a focus – I think that's really helpful...' **22***

> '**Jessica**: ... I think the structure of it makes it easy. The fact that that sheet has step 1, step 2 so you know right, – done that – done that – now I'm onto here – and then it's like, we've finished.. And also its only half an hour so it's not too much.' **133**

---

*NOTE: All interview data extracts are followed by line numbers, to allow reference to the original transcripts (Appendix 14)

For example: **22** above refers to line number 22 of Sally's interview.

One mechanism SFV's thought might support them in operationalising the timed SC structure was the use of prompt cards or similar:

> '**Sonia:** I think maybe just a laminated sheet with a list, an idiot's guide- 'Do not question, Do not interrupt...' – do's and don'ts basically' **336**

> '**Paula:** ...like a little bank card, a little structure, so it's there and so you can have a little pointer that you can look at, just look up, just to put you back on – back to the task. I think that would be quite helpful.' **273**

'Jessica: ... I think with the steps – each one has valid points you know because you need to remember to say 'not what you can't do but what you can' and I think if you became a bit sort of ad libbing you may not get all the important facts in...' **144**

Subtheme 1b: 'Separate Roles'

The SFV role was thought to extend into Step Four: 'Next Step'. This responsibility involved supporting both the problem owner and the coach:

'Sonia: ... make sure someone, see if someone is going to go with the person presenting and yes follow up and make sure they've done it and what the outcome was really.' **186**

'Jessica: You know, if it's a problem enough for you to bring up, then it needs to be dealt with I suppose, so as long as you're not pushy, just be like 'I'm going to drop you a phone call...' **200**

The Recorder role (including the production of a written record) was considered to add value to the facilitator role:

'Liz: Well to have something to take away is extraordinary. I've rarely known that in any group I've ever been in – you have a piece of paper to take away ... I do think that's a very important part of the process and I suppose we all like to be given things don't we' **283**

'Sonia: Well it's just because everyone is blurting out things you're not actually going to remember it all are you so they're just putting it all down on paper for them. And then they can look up and see what they've all said and take out the bits that they want to do.' **461**

> '*Jessica*: we did one the other day and …the whole thing got emailed out to us. It did work really well.' **418**

The interrelation of the SFV role with the roles of recorder and timer was seen as bringing some tensions, particularly around the challenge of using the facilitator to record and time in addition to facilitating:

> '*Liz:* I think you have a clearer space and a clearer mind if you're just facilitating and someone concentrates on how to write that...' **300**

> '*Sonia:* I don't think the facilitator should be doing it [Recorder role] but then that means somebody who should be taking part in the group has to get up and do it' **409**

> '*Liz:* … I would say they are two separate roles and they require different qualities maybe within a person – a different thought process. And a different listening process really.' **312**

Most agreed that the timer role was important but that the facilitator could do it, especially if they had a big clock:

> '*Sonia:* I mean the facilitator could be the timer – keep your eye on the clock – that's not impossible' **432**

> '*Liz:* The big clock was very important – really really important – I think it would lose something of its quality if there wasn't the clock…' **467**

Subtheme 1c: 'Positivity'

SFVs described the solution oriented element of the model as a key mechanism influencing their role. This aspect of the programme was perceived variously as: interesting, effective, different, and liberating:

'Sally: I think the first time it was very different for me – very very different!' **116**

'Sally: …We know it's not going to turn into a slanging match, we know that no one is going to be put under the microscope, you're not being judged – you know you're not being looked upon – you know as not doing your work properly or things like that …' **80**

'Jessica: I wouldn't enjoy it if it was like – oh, how does that make you feel? … I think within the work setting, you know, its positivity' **249**

However, facilitators also found the solution oriented approach could be stressful at times:

'Liz: … or that everything has to be positive or it's all going to go down the drain!

Jo: Did that feel like a pressure?

Liz: It did, like, oh god! Someone's getting negative there! Oh no!' **226**

Summary of Theme One

SFVs connected the structure of the circles to their experience of facilitating. They felt that the delineation of clear 'time chunks' enabled them to feel confident in their role, and valued the positive ethos underlying the model. The presence of other roles in support of their own (e.g. Recorder) seemed to add to the feeling of a clearly set out framework that SFVs could successfully guide participants through.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Individual SFV characteristics

Subtheme 2a: 'Encourage people to talk'

Certain personal qualities and skills were identified as integral to the SFV role (see Appendix 24). They included a range of interpersonal skills such as attending, prompting, questioning and listening:

> *'**Paula:** … sometimes you've got to just sit down and just listen and facilitate and keep your opinions to yourself and actually you learn a lot more…. and a person gets a flow, because sometimes when you like interrupt a conversation it's – the person might back out and might just leave it somewhere where it's not where they wanted to go…'* **224**

> *'**Sonia**: … you can ask a question, but don't **just** ask questions.'***324**

> *'**Liz:** So yes I think to some extent you are in charge of them, but as a sort of mid-wife really – to give birth to what they want to say and maybe to help them to say it now and then…'* **251**

> *'**Jessica**: … that's what you're doing – you're encouraging others to open up, share and give their opinion, but if you're a very opinionated person yourself and like to be that mouth in the room then maybe that's more difficult for someone.'* **121**

The SFV's skill in providing reflective space for participants was discussed:

> *'**Sonia:** … they need to be comfortable with sitting in silence. I know I find that – with the xxx I used to find it quite hard to sit there in silence and some people are quite uncomfortable with that but it actually can be quite useful'* **54**

SFVs also commented on the importance of showing empathy:

'Zola: Well I think that they'd need to somehow show some kind of empathy and understanding - some kind of empathy or understanding of how everyone feels in that solution circle at the time.' **159**

SFVs' understanding and sensitivity to non-verbal communication was highlighted as another key contributor to the role:

'Paula: I think sometimes shifting your gaze as well because sometimes she'll be looking at you and some people get intimidated by that and kind of like small little gestures like smile, say it's alright carry on. All those things kind of help.' **260**

'Liz: I'm not sure how you would do this but in a way you need to hear what the ulterior message is. I'm not sure how you would do that in a quick way because that's often not what people say. It's not what they're saying in words it's what they're saying under the words really or what they don't say.' **354**

SFVs felt that assertiveness skills on the part of the SFV were important and meant that they could keep people on track. Some linked this to having a belief in yourself and being a 'confident person':

'Jessica: No I think I'm bold enough to say 'no' actually – you need to pipe down' **234**

'Zola: Because I think that there needs to be somebody there that can keep the boundaries....' **130**

Although the SFV role was described as complex, challenging, even frightening, SFVs felt a mechanism underlying its potential success was the ability of the SFV to remain calm, to appear in control:

> '*Liz: ...and I think as a facilitator you do have to appear potent and to feel your own potency so somehow to rise above all that chit chat and all that negativity...*' **243**

> '*Jessica: I think your delivery is important...I think for the person who's doing the 6 minutes it's probably – it can be quite overwhelming sometimes so to make sure that you can make people feel at ease and sort of get everyone to be calm and settled before they start – I think that is really important.*' **104**

Some comments linked this to being able to contain the emotions of those in the group:

> '*Zola: .... because it can – there is a possibility or a chance that things could get heated or someone may get upset and we don't know how people's emotions are going to change and move around because it could be something very personal – I mean it could be you know an issue where there's a real problem with a child and member of staff or a problem with a member of staff and a member of staff or whatever, and it's quite personal and there needs to be somebody there who can really hold that together and I suppose it would have to be someone who's held – who has a lot of people's trust.*' **134**

Subtheme 2b: '*Everything's there, everything's ready*'

The responsibility taken by the SFV to provide organisational and administrative support for the group was thought to be important. This included recruiting a consistent group and encouraging members to attend:

> '*Jessica:... if someone started not coming week after week, I'd be like 'are you not up for it?– if they said they were not up for it that's fine. But I would encourage people to do it.*' **293**

'Liz: … a quality that grows with a group that meets often that isn't there if people are just popping in when they can, so if I was trying to set it up I think I would aim for that.' **431**

'Sally: For me I think you should be committed to it – I think you should be committed to at least three. I don't think that once you join it you see what happens and then you don't turn up for the rest, I would get very suspicious with that …' **272**

Facilitators' work to establish ground rules was linked to their ability to secure a committed 'safe' group and therefore to the value of the programme as a whole:

'Sally: I think it really relies heavily on the ground rules and the aim of it. I think that really needs to be … kind of like sent home.' **375**

'Liz: that might be something – to contract a bit more definitely for what it is and to give people more of a sense of safety in a way that they know what it's going to be, or maybe demonstrate and bring the big clock' **461**

Another key factor was organising a room:

'Sonia: … It's very difficult here because it's really hard to find somewhere that's totally private' **352**

Securing equipment was considered part of the SFV role also, and as an influence on facilitator success:

'Sonia: … Whoever's facilitating: make sure that you've got your timer, your paper, your pens – everything is sorted out so that everyone is not walking into the session and you're not running around getting your bits and pieces ready – it's all done – set chairs up – everything's done.' **386**

Subtheme 2c: 'Enjoy it'

Facilitators' level of interest in the programme, and motivation to remain involved, were associated with its value. Many SFVs were motivated by the programme's perceived links to their own interests and/or professional development:

> *'**Sonia**: I think because I'm doing the xx course I just thought it would be something that goes side by side. I'm just curious'* **234**

> *'**Jessica**: I'm not sure – I can definitely see most of – anyone out of our group could definitely do it – I'm not sure if they will but they definitely could. I suppose it would depend if you would enjoy it or not… but some people don't want to be that person – they don't want to be standing out on display.'* **215**

> *'**Paula**: … I think it's like personal growth as well.'* **234**

Summary of Theme Two

This theme concerned the individual characteristics of SFVs and how these affected the groups. Interpersonal skill, e.g. listening and showing empathy, was thought important, as well as organisational skill, and the two seemed to be interconnected. SFVs felt that they could be a motivating as well as logistical force, and noted the importance of enjoying the role.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Support

Participants felt that the SFV role can be learnt and developed:

> *'**Liz:** …so it is a kind of power position and I think one could learn how to use that power more quickly, more deeply and in a better way so that I didn't have – one didn't have- that nervousness, because in a way you are responsible for guiding it but I think the trick would be to learn how to guide it and not feel like*

you're in charge of them or – that you're responsible for everything that's said'
217

Thus, SFV characteristics identified as part of Theme Two are proposed to interact with those of Theme Three, because Theme Two mechanisms may be methods of developing/extending Theme Two SFV characteristics.

Subtheme 3a: 'Practising and Doing'

Hands on practice and experience of running circles were considered to help develop the SFV's skills and confidence:

> *'Liz: ...in a way we've only dipped our toe in the water – we've only learnt the process, but to actually deepen the process you would have to do it for a while. Yes. I think it could plumb considerable depths if you had some kind of commitment to it.'* **204**

> *'Zola: I think the training should be, to be honest, a full day really – at least – and really really do far more role play. Do more practising so actually have solution circles and just keep going through them, going through them, going through them until everybody has a go at facilitating and feels comfortable. I think it's really more about doing ...'* **189**

Some felt that their being part of a circle in any role helped them develop facilitating skills:

> *'Paula:... I think it's – after you've seen it, your confidence is developed and I think you learn skills whether delivering or just listening.'* **216**

Modelling was another mechanism discussed:

*'**Jessica**: … and also the best thing that you did was model it for us, show us how it, show me and Sally how you do it, and I think demonstrating rather than explaining is the best way'* **338**

Subtheme 3b: Supervision

SFVs recognised a role for supervision in developing their practice as facilitators, whether from an external source or within the school:

*'**Jessica**: Just that I really hope that we carry it on and do you know what, it would be – in September – … I would like to say to Sally, let's do this as a thing. It would be nice for you to maybe come back in in say a few months' time and see how we're getting on with it'* **363**

*'**Sonia:** Maybe is there like a cluster group thing for… We have cluster meeting groups for all sorts of things now so there could be a cluster group meeting for facilitators or something along that…'* **560**

*'**Sally:** Yeah I think maybe there could be a part where the facilitator is able to have a discussion with – I don't know with somebody … almost like a bit of supervision and say, you know I was stuck on this bit or didn't know what to do on that part or the group ran riot or I'm finding that this person is very, very antagonising and I'm not sure how to address it …'* **334**

Subtheme 3c: 'Support each other'

SFVs identified the support of their colleagues as an important mechanism directing their experience of becoming SFVs and developing in the role:

*'**Paula:** I think it was a good experience. I think we all support each other quite well'* **213**

*'**Jessica:** Actually another member of staff told me that I'd be the right character to do the role and I think it's nice to be encouraged to do something…'* **88**

Summary of Theme Three:

Theme Three concerned the support mechanisms that SFVs identified as helping them to develop in confidence and competence in their role. The processes of supervision, practice and training were highlighted, as well as the input, encouragement and support of colleagues within each setting. However, there was acknowledgement also of those outside of the school system but within the Local Authority.

4.3.4 Theme 4: School Context: 'Dealing with what's in the field'

Flexibility and understanding of school ethos and dynamics, as well as the busy and chaotic nature of schools, was valued:

*'**Liz:** …it's a many facetted thing really. I don't think you can go away and think right that's it – we've sorted that student out now or that problem … so you're always just dealing with what's in the field in a way, what the elements are of it. It's never just one thing is it – if you apply black and white thinking it's not going to work really…'* **149**

*'**Sonia**: … you, sort of know the limitations on it really, because you know the staff and the management in the school and you know what's available to you, so you're kind of, you know what you've got to work with…'* **170**

4.4: Summary

As in the Findings for RQ2, key mechanisms affecting facilitation have hinged around context (the school and beyond) and the model itself. In addition, training and individualised support of facilitators were considered to be mechanisms supporting the development of SFV confidence and expertise.

Some of these ideas and mechanisms were summarised by Sally and Paula who gave the following advice to future SFVs:

> *'**Paula:** I think you… have to be **you** really, because one person could do it completely different I think – just kind of being really natural, being relaxed…'* **256**

> *'**Sally**: What would I give? advice? To feel confident, don't feel intimidated. To encourage everybody to be able to – I mean set your ground rules at the beginning. If you have to do it at the beginning of every group then so be it, but if you feel that it's not happening then maybe there is something that needs to be addressed… Hold the group. Encourage the issue bringer to be able to – prompt them, but also keep that last bit where we do have the first step in check- because … the issue bringer can get lost in everybody's conversation. And just enjoy it. Don't think too much – you know - don't think too much about it. You don't want it to be all doom and gloom because it can – you know you have a group of people who is there to support each other, and that's what I think it should be. I think just to have fun.'* **320**

Section Five: Discussion

5.1: Introduction and Overview

This research set out to explore mechanisms affecting the value of Solution Circles as a group supervision tool in schools. The Research Questions under investigation were:

1. How did participation in the Solution Circles programme affect the self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels of the staff taking part?

2. Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the Solution Circles programme in schools?

3. Which mechanisms did Staff Facilitator Volunteers identify as affecting the facilitation of the SC programme in schools?

This section will discuss the findings of each Research Question in turn, before integrating these separate findings. Implications for schools, EPs and education providers will be considered. The limitations of the study will then be examined, followed by the researcher's final reflections on her position in, and journey through, the research.

Discussion of Findings

5.2: RQ1: How did participation in the Solution Circles programme affect the self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels of the staff taking part?

Inferential statistics indicated no significant differences in any of these constructs as a result of taking part in the programme. Overall, all samples were relatively small (around fifteen participants). In addition the use of self-report measures necessitated non-parametric statistics which lack power. For this reason effect sizes were calculated also.

A small effect size was noted for self-efficacy. In addition, self-efficacy was the construct for which the largest proportion of participants showed improvement, by some margin (thirteen of sixteen participants improved or stayed the same on this construct after the intervention). Self-efficacy is belief in one's ability to achieve something (Bandura, 1977). As discussed in Section Two, it has been linked to improved performance and well-being, including for teachers. It has also been shown alterable in response to experience and interaction with others (Bandura, 1977). It may be that the experience and peer interaction provided through participation in group supervision can alter self-efficacy. The solution orientation built into the SC model may be significant here through its inherent assumption that successful action can and will be taken to address a problem. It may be that participation in the solution oriented circles allows conscious consideration of personal successes (experience) as well as repeated exposure to the successful endeavours of peers (vicarious experience). This matches Hawkins and Shohet's definition of supervision as developing: 'themselves, their practice and the wider profession' (2007, p60). However, it is important to be cautious. This study did no more than indicate that self-efficacy (of the three variables investigated) seems to be the one most worthy of further research in the context of Solution Circles.

Although self-efficacy has been singled out, it is important to consider context, including the possibility that some of the constructs measured in this study were more sensitive to factors outside of the programme than others. Over the course of each programme, at each school, numerous contextual factors were likely to be affecting participants' self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety levels. It may be, for example, that 'time of year/term' effects were highly influential; possibly more influential on (for example) anxiety than resilience. This idea is perhaps best illustrated by a participant's comment to the researcher that she felt much more anxious after the programme of

circles than before because 'the end of the school year is so stressful'. It may be that self-efficacy (compared to anxiety or resilience) is more robust in the face of these 'time of year/term effects', perhaps because it is less affected by the exhaustion staff report feeling towards the end of term.

As discussed in Section Three, the research was underpinned by a belief that individuals participating in the group supervision programme had different experiences of it. It is worth considering the possibility that some constructs varied more widely between participants than others. This is borne out by the presence of outliers on the two anxiety analyses and the broad range of Standard Deviations across constructs. Self-efficacy for example had a Standard Deviation of only 3.7, compared to one of 10.2 for resilience, suggesting less individual difference in this construct. Overall, no claim can be made that the supervision programme significantly altered participants' self-efficacy, resilience or anxiety levels. However, the small effect size found for self-efficacy suggests that this construct is the most susceptible to influence by participation in the SC programme and may be worth further research.

5.3: RQ2: Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the Solution Circles programme in schools?

The provision of support is a key goal of supervision (see Section 1.5) and was found to be important to participants. As described in Section Four, participants liked the structure of the groups (Theme One). They felt their group supervision sessions met a need to talk about their work (Theme Two), including the emotional side of it. They valued the 'team feeling' (Theme Three) of the groups and identified support from, and meaningful interaction with, the broader school context (Theme Four) as influential on programme success. These four themes will be discussed in turn.

5.3.1: Theme One: The Structure

As discussed in Section Two, the distinction between a conversation about work and a session of group supervision may be made on the basis of purpose, but also the presence of explicit structure or rules. Previous research on group supervision (e.g. Stringer et al's large study, 1992) indicates that structure of any kind is a feature of good supervision. However, most approaches prescribe a particular structure (e.g. Circles of Adults, Work Discussion Groups). Consistent with the evidence base discussed in Section Two, a framework or structure to guide supervision groups was identified as valuable in the current study. The issue of whether 'any structure will do' or if some structures are superior to others remains unresolved and was not the aim of the research. Most participants were not in a position to compare the SC model of group supervision with any others, and were not asked to. It also seems likely that matching the particular structure to the particular context/group is a factor in its own right. Nonetheless, participants did seem to value certain elements of the SC structure above others, notably: its focus; ability to 'open you up'; provision of a forum to 'have your say' uninterrupted; and, its empowering philosophy.

Participants liked the focus that the SC structure encouraged, including its process of funnelling down a mass of ideas to one issue and one next step per session. This seems to fit with the 'education' goal of supervision to a degree. As previously stated, a circle is exactly twenty four minutes long. Within this time there are clear rules about who can speak, for how long, and what they should speak about. These rules can be connected to the focussing or 'distillation' process going on during a circle. Perhaps the superficially straightforward emphasis on 'sorting out one thing at a time' was appealing, maybe comforting, to school staff because of their likely daily encounter with layers of complex and, at times, ill-defined problems. It is possible that other available opportunities to discuss work elaborate on this complexity and confusion in the absence of a process to try to logically and systematically make sense of it – to focus. In fact, some participants compared participation in circles to other meetings or initiatives they had been involved with. They distinguished between getting bogged down and lost in detail, and (in the case of the circles) being focussed and feeling that you are moving forward. Some described the step by step focussing process of the circles as refreshing and exciting – something welcome and new that they had not encountered in schools before. However, a few found the model too prescriptive at times and wondered if it's brevity and lack of explicit reference to emotional aspects of work restricted its power to meet the supervision needs of staff.

As well as this limitation of the structure, some reported finding the rigorous rules stressful at times, particularly the interruption ban in force during Step Two. This may be because the set-up of a SC is unfamiliar and peculiar. It may also reflect the skill of the supervisor (SFV). However, it is important to consider the possibility that the rules of the model do not allow sufficient space for staff to discuss issues to a level of detail that they are comfortable with. Some suggested that this depends on the person and

situation, which supports the idea that matching the individual/group/context to the particular model of group supervision being used is important. It may also be that the blunt chopping up of the twenty four minute supervision session into functional chunks makes it ill-suited to more complex or entrenched problems. Whether it is possible to categorise problems in this way is moot. However, it is worth considering Grahamslaw and Henson's recent study (2015) which compared Circles of Adults and SCs, and how the current study fits in with their findings. As stated in Section Two, they concluded that SCs are best suited to tackle short, in-house, clear cut problems which do not require expert facilitation. The current study supports this to a degree. However, overall, the current study indicates that SCs are a flexible model which can be successfully adapted to a range of issues and needs. If a consistent group supervision team have been established, within which people are clear of aims, roles, rules and responsibilities, it seems reasonable to suggest that SCs can be used as longer term supervision tools, rather than simply as one off problem solving tools.

The ability of the circles to 'open you up' was noticed, and valued, by participants. It was linked to circle structure. This 'opening up' seemed to refer to the circles providing opportunities to think and reflect aloud, and internally, about work issues. Reflection can be an individual or team enterprise, and can be defined as: 'giving serious thought or consideration to an issue' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). This implies the conscious setting aside of time, and the conscious directing of mental effort, towards that issue. Opportunities to reflect are rare in busy school environments, which may be seen to prioritise action over reflection. Participants linked reflection to the rules in force during step one and two of the circle, when the problem owner talks without interruption about their issue, and then the group brainstorms solutions around this issue without interruption from the problem owner. It may be that there is a connection

between this and the idea of 'opening up' as they were both linked by participants to step one of the model, and they are both concerned with speaking freely aloud. This opportunity to talk aloud freely and honestly about an issue, whether as the problem owner or a member of the brainstorm team was seen as novel. It could be interpreted as a desire to reflect, perhaps to learn. Maybe participants' working lives were sufficiently busy to make this kind of opportunity rare, but valued.

Participants across schools described the experience of taking part in the SC programme as 'empowering'. There seemed to be a number of dimensions to this, some of them personal, some of them context specific, all of them linked to the solution orientation of the circles. It may be that the individual approach of each facilitator is relevant here. However, structure seems to be relevant too. The structure of each circle frequently 'reminded' participants to be positive, to take control and suggest actions to be taken: "think of what *can* be done". The act of facilitators reading instructions encouraging positivity and action from a sheet at the start of each step in a circle may be important too. However, especially after the group was established, facilitators and participants seemed to remind each other to focus on solutions and action rather than ruminate.

Further, the 'next step' built into each circle was one structural component that arguably encouraged participants to exercise some power. They reported that this focus felt invigorating, but also created a pressure. There were individual differences here, for example some participants were keen to have a coach; some actively resisted this idea. The coach in a Solution Circle is a volunteer from the group who telephones or sees the problem owner within three days, to check with them if they took their first step. They may also play the role of a supporter, e.g. going with the problem owner to see the Head about a child. There also seemed to be a group dynamic factor at play, wherein members of the circle group felt supported or empowered to (e.g.) go and talk to

113

management about an initiative or idea, because they felt that the group was with them. The groups seem to have the potential to develop a feeling of power and unity of purpose in their members, and perhaps beyond also.

5.3.2: Theme Two: A Need to Talk

Circle participants referred to a need or drive to talk about their work, and felt that even a brief intervention such as SCs went some way to meeting this supervision need. Across schools, staff linked this desire to 'get it out' to the emotional side of their work, including feelings of responsibility for the well-being of the children and young people in their care. Many studies discussed in the literature review noted the potential of group supervision to contain the emotions of participants and provide support and reassurance. Psychodynamic research (e.g. De Rementaria, 2011) highlights this, framing much of the work as emotional (rather than practical) and in need of unpicking by psychodynamic analysis so that staff can function effectively in their daily work. Perhaps corroborating this idea, participants in the current study expressed relief at being able to talk about work, and surprise at the level of emotion the circles elicited. Whether these feelings illustrate unresolved psychodynamic conflict cannot be determined. It is also unclear whether talking about work affects people's ability to do it, despite participants commenting that they thought it did, and despite some evidence that supervision has an impact in the classroom (e.g. Buttery & Weller, 1988). As discussed under Theme One above, the nature and purpose of the group seem to matter. Staff raised the important role of peers in meeting this 'need to talk', perhaps because they are seen as best able to understand and relate to issues of concern encountered in daily work.

5.3.3: Theme Three: Feel like a Team

Linked to the 'need to talk' was the question of who to talk to. As stated above, it was felt that the 'need to talk' is sufficiently strong to be sought out whether a formal supervision forum was available or not. However, the development of a trusting 'team' was valued. This supports research findings discussed in the Literature Review (e.g. Gupta, 1985). Here, the importance of developing consistent supervision groups comprised of familiar, trusting peers who are 'enthusiastic volunteers' was cited as important. Circle participants seemed to refer to something very similar – establishing a trusting, supportive group of like-minded people with similar roles and a deep understanding of the pressures of the daily work under discussion. Factors contributing to the effective establishment of this team, and those linked to sustaining it, can be considered important mechanisms influencing programme value. This piece of research indicates that these factors include: grouping people with similar roles in the school and establishing regular attendance – i.e. setting up consistent, committed, professionally homogenous supervision groups. However, as will be discussed, the data also identified a tension between the support and education functions of supervision. It suggested that groups could be too homogenous and 'cosy' which could interfere with effective problem solving and learning.

The 'education' function of supervision seemed to be highlighted by Subtheme 3b: 'To exchange, give advice'. One participant commented that the circle is 'the process, not the group' and warned that if it is not considered in this way then the group could be seen as a 'clique' and rejected by the rest of the staff. Thus, the circles were conceived of both as one-off problem solving tools, and as supportive group supervision sessions to discuss school issues. This may be linked to the 'funnelling' structure of the groups, and fits with their originally intended use as a problem solving tool involving a mixed

group of problem solvers. As stated, there seemed to be tension between establishing a close familiar team and establishing a mixed and possibly challenging group with potentially better problem solving power. This debate was engaged in across all three schools and there was no resolution to it. It is perhaps worth considering whether SCs are sufficiently flexible to serve both these functions well – an established and consistent group that feels supportive and is able to creatively and innovatively solve problems. It may be that the people involved determine this, perhaps especially the SFV. The positioning of the circles within the school context may also be important, e.g. groups could be fluid, or perhaps an established group exists with 'guests'. It seems likely that, regardless of make-up, the supervision process set up should be understood and supported by the whole staff.

5.3.4: Theme Four: School Context: 'What are *you* lot doing down there?'

The title of this theme was taken from a participant's comment that, in her school, even the teacher who she was supporting was unaware of her (management sanctioned) attendance to the supervision groups, and resented it as a result. As indicated above, there may also be a danger that an established and seemingly 'closed' circle group could become, or be seen to become, a 'clique' outside of the rest of the school. Participants in all schools raised this concern, and discussed the importance of building in mechanisms to communicate and discuss group aims, processes, next steps and outcomes with the rest of the school staff. Participants did not propose particular methods, and it is likely that methods would need to be negotiated and evolved within each specific school context. However, operationalisation might involve the use of a 'report back' slot for the group at staff briefing, or a system staff could use to 'book into' circle sessions they wished to join. Communication of circle activities within the school was clearly important to participants, across schools.

A connected issue was the provision of strong and consistent practical support for groups from beyond the circle group. Hawkins and Shohet's definition of group supervision (2007, see Section 1.5) references the wider context and profession. The evidence base unequivocally supports the idea that organisational and administrative support from within the school, particularly from management, is vital for the success of a supervision group. This is supported by the findings of the current study. The phrase 'It's like a machine' (Subtheme 4a) refers to the logistical underpinning needed for a supervision group to run smoothly and successfully, such as the provision of a private room and protected non-contact time to attend circles, or the investment by school leadership in training and supervision of SFVs. Although these appear to be clear cut practical elements, participants did link them to emotion and motivation. For example, some referred to feeling guilty about leaving class to attend circles; some worried about confidentiality when they could not secure a private room. It may be that where participants perceived strong endorsement from the wider staff group, including management, they felt more justified and relaxed in their attendance and their supervision experience was better.

Linked to the above points, the research indicates that a group supervision programme is likely to be most successful when consciously and thoughtfully embedded in the whole school context. It should not be an island, but an integral part of the whole school landscape: 'Everyone has got to want it'. Participants did report that the time they spent attending a circle group was useful and enjoyable. However, the point was also raised that there is only a set quota of time in the school day, and that time they spend in the circle is time they are not spending in class 'working'. This means less time marking work, planning lessons, or talking to pupils and other staff. These concerns indicate that the brevity of a SC (compared to for example a Circle of Adults) is a strength.

5.4: RQ3: Which mechanisms did Staff Facilitator Volunteers identify as affecting the facilitation of the SC programme in schools?

Neither piece of published research on Solution Circles was concerned with training up facilitators within schools. However, both discussed the nature and purpose of the role. Although, for Research Question Two, circle participants in this study did comment on the role of facilitators, this commentary was fairly cursory, and ideas about facilitators were not interpreted to be a theme or subtheme in the RQ2 data set. This fits with Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015) conclusion that a key feature of a SC is that it is non-hierarchical and does not require 'expert' facilitation or supervisory skills. Indeed, participants in more than one school reported a perception that they were 'in it together', rather than being guided through a process by a facilitator. Nonetheless, the rest of the evidence base, including the only other piece of published research on SCs (Brown and Henderson, 2012) attests to the vital role of the facilitator in supervision groups. Research Question Three was concerned with identifying mechanisms affecting the facilitation of the group supervision process. Four were identified and will be discussed in turn: the SC structure itself; individual facilitator characteristics; support for facilitators; and, school context factors.

5.4.1: Theme One: The Structure

Just as participants reported valuing the SC structure, SFVs identified it as affecting the facilitation of their circles and helping them meet the supervision needs of participants. A key element of this was the separation of the supervision session into 'time chunks'. SFVs seemed to associate this with making the circles easier to facilitate. As discussed in Section Two, research on group supervision reveals a debate regarding how important facilitator expertise and experience are. Solution Circles seemed to be seen by SFVs as a group supervision approach that was unthreatening and accessible to all, and

this was linked to structure. Although SFVs reported feelings of nervousness and performance anxiety, they also commented that the simple structure which they could read out from one page of A4 paper gave them the reassurance that they could successfully facilitate a circle. It may be that this apparent simplicity is deceptive and reduces SFVs' awareness of more subtle and difficult aspects of facilitation. Supervision can be seen as a delicate relational endeavour with a continuous drive towards growth and exploration. Circle structure and brevity may not help facilitators meet this complex supervisory ideal. However, the 'time chunks' and rules do seem to give facilitators the confidence to 'have a go', perhaps because having this structure removes some of the uncertainty from the role and places some of the responsibility for working through the problem with the wider group, especially as all in the wider group will have specific roles to play in the circles, e.g. as problem owner, timekeeper, or coach.

The clear delineation of these roles within the circle structure was important to facilitators and the interaction of the SFV role with these other roles seems to have been a mechanism affecting the facilitation process, perhaps taking pressure off the SFV. Overall, SFVs seemed to value the contribution of the timekeeper and recorder, feeling that they brought order and understanding to the group supervision process. The production of a coherent record, compiled by the recorder as each circle unfolded, provided a useful prompt/cue/thinking tool to which the SFV could refer to support the facilitation process. The giving of this record to the problem owner at the end of the session and the adoption of a coach to support the problem owner in their identified next step could be seen as operations that move power away from the SFV to the rest of the group, possibly making the SFV role less isolated (and less of a 'supervisor') than in other supervision models. SFVs felt that a good facilitator could take more

responsibility around following up and linking circle action points up from week to week. Exploring ways of doing this effectively without removing the problem ownership from the problem owner may be important, and may be linked to the relationships within and beyond the circle group.

The solution oriented underpinning of the SC structure seemed to influence facilitation. As stated in Section 5.2, many participants found the 'positivity' of the groups a new experience. Perhaps this made the process of facilitating easier, because of concerns about conflict. SFVs in all three schools had concerns about disagreement and criticism being expressed in the groups. Some of these concerns were rooted in actual experience of this in other staff meetings or groups. They commented that the solution orientation of the circles freed them of this worry, because the structure and rules of the sessions did not allow space for these negative comments to surface. Of course, this could be argued a weakness of the model. However, it was valued by facilitators and it seems that the positive slant of the groups was a fundamentally underpinning feature linked to the ability of the groups to provide the support and education purposes necessary for effective professional supervision. There may be links to other themes in the study here, for example the establishment of trust and team feeling, or the provision of a space to be honest and reflect. SFVs admitted to some anxiety about negative comments and approaches 'slipping in' but were generally surprised and pleased that they did not tend to. They put this down to the structure of the circles, including the reading out of the rules before each step. However, they also acknowledged the role of the facilitator in helping the group navigate the process.

5.4.2: Theme Two: Individual Characteristics

Certain personal qualities and skills, e.g. showing empathy and active listening, were thought by facilitators to be especially relevant to the role. Many of these can be

grouped under the heading 'interpersonal skills', although the list is wide ranging (Appendix 24 has a list of the many qualities SFVs mentioned under this theme). These skills focussed around an agenda to 'encourage people to talk' and to help them feel comfortable and supported. This gives an insight into how SFVs perceived their role and relevant skillset within circles. It is interesting to place this conception of a skillset in the context of previous research. Most studies included in the Literature Review asserted the importance of interpersonal skills of the sort described here. However, in addition, many proposed that facilitation necessitates some kind of expert knowledge or training, in some cases of SEN, in some of the particular model, in some of the Psychology underpinning the approach. Tempest, Huxtable and Knapman's (1984) research, for example, involved Support Teachers undertaking four hours of seminars, twelve hours of instruction, and a number of practical assignments. This extensive training was run by EPs and involved teaching the 'sequentially selective problem clarification model' for use within group sessions. Thus, the level and details of the skills or expertise appropriate to the role varied considerably across approaches and studies. This may indicate the relative weighting given in different models to the 'support' and 'education' purposes of supervision. The SC model may be better suited to support than education.

Although in this study, as will be discussed below, facilitators placed practice as a necessary dimension of their work, they did not consider a period of training necessary to facilitate well. This could be linked to the solution oriented nature of this particular approach to group supervision – the process is simple and assumes that people are experts in their own lives and able to exercise agency as regards issues/problems which they encounter whether at work or otherwise. In contrast, some other models of supervision rest on the idea that a more qualified or 'expert' individual (perhaps an EP)

is required to 'help' those with less power or knowledge, or fewer skills. Examples of this philosophy include the Staff Sharing Scheme and Work Discussion Groups. Even consultation based models, which assume that the group in interaction is more than the sum of its parts, tend to specify a level of skill and expertise from the facilitator to unlock this potential. For this reason it is suggested that an EP facilitates consultation groups, or closely supports facilitators, rather than a member of school staff.

As regards this research, it would seem that the ability of a facilitator to listen and encourage, perhaps even to feel 'on a level' with those in their supervision group, was thought to be more important than the mobilisation of expert knowledge and high level skills. Motivation and interest were also considered important ingredients of good facilitation. SFVs felt that being able to relax, enjoy the facilitation process and 'make it your own' was vital to the supervision groups' successful and sustainable running. This may reflect the solution oriented principles underlying the model, but perhaps also gives an insight into the sample group – SFVs were largely enthusiastic committed volunteers who believed in the project and felt invested in making it work. The majority of the evidence base cites this commitment from facilitators as crucial, and the current study supports this idea.

One aspect of their commitment seemed to be practical. The SFV role was seen, in part, as organisational and concerned with monitoring the supervision group. The subtheme 'Everything's there, everything's ready' refers to the perceived responsibility of SFVs around practical preparations for sessions. This included the securing of equipment and a room, but also the gathering of people together, possibly even the recruitment of members. Previous research consistently associates organisation and administration with group success and sustainability (e.g. see Stringer et al's work, 1992). However, this area has usually been linked to management support, rather than to the facilitator

role. This difference in the current study may be due to the solution orientated philosophy of the circles. Perhaps this biases SFVs towards taking responsibility, ownership and initiative themselves, rather than waiting for management support and endorsement. Of course, it could also be that those who volunteer to facilitate SCs are the kind of people to embrace this approach anyway - a biased sample.

One other idea arising under this theme was the link made by SFVs between the seemingly mundane organisational/administrative dimension of the job and the emotional containment of members. Supervision is widely accepted to involve providing support. However, with the exception of WDG research, it is rare to find reference in the literature to the idea that the provision of practical support, including a private room, can be emotionally containing for group members. It may be that facilitators show the group through this action that they are 'kept in mind'. This may in turn contribute to group participants feeling valued and part of a team, which may in turn make groups more successful and sustaining. Incidentally, the evidence of the current study is insufficient to assert this mechanism. It simply indicates the possible connection between practical and emotional support. The proposition that the SFV may play a containing role for group members raises the question of what kind of support they themselves need in order to do the job well.

5.4.3: Theme Three: Support

Support for facilitators was interpreted as influential on their navigation, understanding and confidence in the role. SFVs identified a range of sources of support. These included: having plenty of exposure to circles as a facilitator and a participant; having access to supervision, formal and informal; and having the support and involvement of peers, including other SFVs from inside or outside the school. Methods of providing

and developing these support structures can be considered mechanisms influencing the facilitators' practice of the role.

Perhaps the easiest of these mechanisms to operationalise would be the provision of practice opportunities. In this study all SFVs felt that they would have liked to have attended more circles as participants and to have had more 'dry runs' before facilitating a whole circle in their schools alone. They felt their ability to facilitate, and their confidence, were boosted by facilitating short circles and parts of circles in a training setting, with the support and feedback of a more experienced facilitator. Building in these opportunities, perhaps in collaboration across schools, would seem to be worth doing for schools hoping to build SC group supervision into their working practice.

In addition to practice 'on the ground', facilitators seemed to value the interest and input of an outsider, for both the supportive function of supervision, and an educational one. SFVs talked about the responsibility of facilitating and its potential to challenge and isolate the SFV. Whilst they recognised the role of formal supervision, they also considered informal, ad hoc support of their role from colleagues as a significant influence on their experience. SFVs described the SFV role as fairly simple to play competently but with considerable scope to extend and develop. Perhaps the skillset identified in Theme Two is the area under development as an SFV improves their practice.

5.4.4: Theme Four: School context: 'dealing with what's in the field'

In keeping with the rest of the evidence base, facilitators considered their role to require an awareness and sensitivity to the wider school context. This echoes Theme Four in Section 5.3.4, i.e. school context based mechanisms were identified in response to both RQ2 and RQ3. However, the themes are different in emphasis. Participants (RQ2)

discussed the need for systems to provide logistical support and facilitate communication between the supervision group(s) and the whole school. However, SFVs' responses (RQ3) were more concerned with how to manage less tangible elements of the broader school context with flexibility and intuition. One SFV described the school as 'a living breathing thing' to be understood and responded to by the SFV. This could imply the importance of establishing confident and competent internal facilitators rather than relying on external facilitators who may lack understanding of the everyday circumstances and pressures of their particular school at this particular time. The idea of an internal SFV 'taking the temperature' of the staff and school and responding to it, positions the SFV as a potentially powerful figure within the school context and could be linked to the solution oriented underpinning of the SC model. However, caution is needed here. SFVs may simply be taking a pragmatic and flexible stance based on the belief, already formulated, that supervision group activities must be relevant, and seen as relevant, to the school community as a whole for them to be worth doing.

5.5: Summary and Integration of Findings

All Research Questions were concerned with identifying mechanisms affecting the operation of SCs for group supervision in schools, and thus illuminating ideas around how they might best be run for this purpose. Supervision must involve a drive towards developing group members' practice, as well as fulfilling one or more of the following functions: support; education; quality control. A range of ideas regarding the value of SCs to meet these criteria have been discussed through three separate Research Questions. This information can be integrated under three main areas, each indicative of mechanisms influencing the operation of a SC group supervision programme in schools:

1. The Structure

2. The People

3. The School Context

Each area will be discussed in turn. Please also see Table 5.5.1 for a synthesis outlining specific mechanisms and contextual factors identified by this piece of research.

1. **The Structure**: This research indicates that the timed, four step SC structure is valued by school staff and that they consider strict adherence to it to be important to the success of supervision. The solution oriented philosophy underpinning the circle structure was felt to make the programme effective. Participants seemed to welcome this action orientation and find it a good match to schools. In the words of Catherine: '…*we need to be positive. We need to change our thinking if we want to change something else, don't we?'*

All circle steps are permeated to a greater or lesser degree by an ethos of positivity and a bias towards action. Solution orientation seemed to be one mechanism which might underlie the establishment of a trusting team,

because of its philosophy of working on what can be done rather than unpicking what is going wrong. Of course, action orientation may be at the cost of reflective opportunities, especially when each circle is so short. However, it is worth recalling that participants did link the circles with 'having their say' and 'opening up', which could be seen as evidence that SCs facilitate reflection. Overall, the question of whether group supervision for school staff is most valuable when action or reflection focused is not resolved. However, the research indicates that both are desired by staff, both are facilitated by the SC structure, and that methods of building in more reflective time to the group supervision process are worth considering.

2. **The People**: '*…It depends on the people actually…' (Mara)*

    RQ1 did not reveal any significant differences in resilience, self-efficacy or anxiety as a result of participation in the programme. However, these were small samples and the statistics necessitated by the experimental design lacked power. A small effect size for self-efficacy suggests that this construct may warrant further investigation. Indeed, much of the data collected for RQs two and three points to the importance of the beliefs, skills, motivation and actions of the people involved in the circles, and the relationships between them. Even where commentary concerned practical elements such as the model itself, the challenges of finding a room in which to meet, or the importance of whole school priorities, participants talked about them in the context of the people involved within the school. There was almost no mention of the impact of people and systems beyond the school, e.g. local authority or government policy. The research suggests that

the people on the ground in each school were key to the operation of the programme. Having a group of enthusiastic and motivated staff learning together and supporting one another seemed to be enough to make the supervision programme feel successful. In this sense SCs can be seen as a non-expert model reasonably easy to set up and sustain if enthusiastic managers and volunteers are available in a school.

One variable which came up in all three RQs was individual differences. Quantitative data was spread widely and participants completing these questionnaires showed many different responses to this research phase, for example some reported feeling distrustful, uncomfortable or confused about questionnaire completion, some chose not to complete, some were enthusiastic and eager to hear 'how they had done'. On top of this, in both thematic analyses, across all schools, participants commented that the programme was experienced differently by different people. This was for a variety of reasons and across a range of aspects of the programme. For example, some loved the discipline of the structure, some found it constraining. Participants' views of the first step (talking uninterrupted for six minutes) were particularly illustrative of individual differences – some hated it. Emma for example commented: ' … *I'm not confident, so six minutes was long… for everyone to have their eyes on me. So I felt a bit uncomfortable… I probably wouldn't want to come up with another solution because I wouldn't want everyone watching me…'*. This possibly highlights the importance of facilitators (and those setting up supervision groups) taking a sensitive and individualised approach to supervision, listening to and supporting participants on an individual basis. It may even involve

adapting the model slightly to allow all to be included, e.g. suggesting some write down or pre-record their first step.

In a similar vein, SFV's comments across themes, and across schools, hinted that there was considerable variety in their motivations, methods, and needs when it came to supervision. Liz for example raised the idea that the SC model suits some facilitators more than others: '*…Some people just seem to be able to do it, so I suspect they're the kind of people who make policies and write reports and things like that…*' It seems likely that any approach to working with SFVs would need to be tailored to individual SFVs' skills, circumstances and beliefs.

3. **The School Context**:

Whilst the SC structure and the people involved in operationalising it as a group supervision tool are vital, school context was identified as a theme in both qualitative analyses, albeit in slightly different ways. This suggests that the school context harbours important mechanisms that influence programme success. Variables associated with this broader dimension are suggested to be capable of making or breaking a supervision programme within a school. Like any school initiative, a staff supervision group runs within the broader context of school ethos, priorities, processes and personnel. An initiative that is a poor match to these characteristics seems doomed to failure. In this case, a school ethos which values staff well-being and the 'need' for staff to talk about their work seems likely to be fertile ground for the practical and psychological support of supervision groups. Further, schools will vary in their acceptance of a solution oriented approach. As Paula says: '*…If they understand the model, they respect the*

model, they appreciate the model, they want it to happen, then all the other

things just fit into place...'

This study indicates that communication between the supervision group(s) and the rest of the school, and integration of these groups within the school community, is important. SFVs may have the capacity to enact these aims and perform the role of a conduit between supervision groups and the school, perhaps ensuring that the group's activities match those of the 'living breathing' and endlessly changing school. In turn, it seems likely that facilitators will need support from the wider school context if they are to play this complex and flexible role effectively, e.g. through protected time for supervision. Their energy, relationship building and communication skills seem likely to be significant here.

As discussed above, a number of plausible mechanisms and contextual factors have been identified by the research. Table 5.5.1 provides a synthesis of this thinking and suggests links between mechanisms, contexts and outcomes.

Table 5.5.1: Mechanisms identified as affecting the value of the SC intervention by this piece of research (and therefore suggested priorities for future research)

Input	Mechanisms	Context	Outcomes
The Solution Circles programme	1. **The Structure** -strict adherence to the timed four step structure; -Solution Orientation. 2. **The People**: -enthusiastic volunteers; -participants understand and value solution oriented work; -committed and skilled facilitators.	**The School Context**: -Positive and solution oriented school ethos with staff well-being a priority; -School management support of supervision groups; -Stable school staff.	Improved staff well-being Improved staff problem solving ability Improved staff self-efficacy

These suggestions are tentative only. Future research might extend this work through a Realist Evaluation framework. This would involve implementing some of these mechanisms and measuring some of these outcomes across contexts, so as to identify successful configurations of the intervention. For example: 1. Measure people's problem solving ability; 2. Deliver training about SCs before participants start the intervention (and/or select participants on the basis of how well they understand/believe in the model); 3. Implement the SC programme; 4. Measure people's problem solving ability; 5. Note the contexts in which (or people for whom) it improves most. Please see Section 5.7 for more detail regarding implications for future research.

5.6: Limitations of the Research

A key feature of the quantitative side of this research was its reliance on self-report measures. In fact, all data, qualitative and quantitative, represents the subjective interpretations of participants. For this reason, conclusions can only reasonably be drawn regarding how this particular group of people felt before and after the programme, and what they think affected its value within their particular contexts.

As mentioned in section 5.2, there were a number of limitations to the quantitative methods employed in the research. The samples were small and the design did not include repeated measures data collection across two comparable time frames, e.g. at the start and end of term one, and at the start and end of term two (during which the circles took place). In addition the quantitative data itself was ordinal, meaning that non-parametric statistics were used, which lack power. As a result it remains unclear whether staff levels of self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety were affected by participation in the programme or whether the lack of significance was an artefact of the weak methodology and statistics. It is also possible that those with a deeper and more protracted involvement with the programme, such as committed and interested SFVs who attended all circles, did change in one or more of reported self-efficacy, resilience and anxiety as a result of the programme. Although an attempt was made to allow for this hypothesised differential (by including in the sample only those who had attended at least three circles) those returning questionnaires for analysis still varied widely in their actual engagement with the programme. Participants also, as reported, had widely differing attitudes to the filling in of questionnaires, some refusing to do so at all and some struggling with the time and literacy demands of the enterprise. These factors are likely to have affected results.

It is also important to note that these participants were not a random sample of school staff. They were volunteers who had shown an interest in the programme and therefore can be considered to have had a vested interest in group supervision and solution oriented work, as well as a likely desire that the circles continue at the end of the research period. In addition, the close involvement of the researcher with these participants is likely to have affected their behaviour and experience. The researcher was present in almost all circles, trained and supervised SFVs, and also collected all the data via individual interviews and recordings of Circle Fives. Participants may well have been constrained in their responses, particularly around negative experiences. True anonymity was not possible in this context and using these techniques. It may have been particularly difficult for SFVs to say anything critical of the researcher or the model because of their close involvement with the researcher over a number of months.

This research was not intended to be evaluative. However, participants inevitably made comments regarding its value, and these fed into themes and conclusions made by the researcher. Thus, a limitation to be considered when contemplating the implications of the research is the possibility that participants may not have been reporting positive changes and aspects of value to them due to SCs in particular. Rather they may have been responding positively to the experience of a change in itself. This so called 'Hawthorne Effect' (see Diaper, 1990) means that no clear conclusion can be drawn about whether SCs are a valuable intervention. However, this was not the aim of the research.

Although it was naturalistic and generated rich data, the reliance on Circle Five data to answer RQ2 can also be considered to be a limitation of the research. One reason for this was that these circles were facilitated by recently trained SFVs, who varied in their facilitation skill and confidence and therefore their ability to 'extract' the data. Their

involvement as circle five facilitators also meant that they contributed very little data of their own to RQ2, despite being, almost by definition, those staff who were most heavily experienced and involved in the circle programme. The other limitation linked to the use of circles to gather data is the fact that SCs were never intended for this purpose. Their focus on next steps and action can be seen as a poor match for the tapping of participants' views about mechanisms influencing circle value, perhaps especially under the charge of an inexperienced facilitator.

In addition, the researcher was present in all Circle Fives, not as a facilitator, but as the problem owner. This change in role is a limitation in the research because of its capacity to bring role confusion for both the researcher and the participants. Although the facilitator referred to this at the start of these circles, and clarified her role, it is possible that participants' responses were influenced by her comments, because she was a powerful figure in the research. Equally, her comments may not have been as free as if she had not been so intimately involved, and powerful, within the research. This may have skewed the data away from some areas that were relevant to the participants, but less relevant to the researcher. Another factor which could have skewed Circle Five data was the fact that in some schools senior leaders were members of the circle group. This could have hindered some participant's freedom of expression throughout.

As regards RQ3, a limitation of the research was the fact that participant and SFV experiences varied greatly across and within schools. Although the circle structure was prescribed and SFVs stuck to this format, SCs were not used as a manualised intervention, and therefore circles inevitably differed. They were affected by school context factors as well as differing relationships with the researcher and between the researcher and each setting. School context factors of relevance included: 1. differences in rooming, including how private the room was and how consistent the venue was over

time; 2. differences in the 'developmental stage' and priorities of the schools. For example one was a new school and many of the issues brought to circles were about identity and policy; other schools focused more on individual children; 3. how well known participants were to each other (including the relationship between the SFV and group members), a variable linked in part to the size of each school and the stability of their staff. Overall, training and supervision given to SFVs was often informal and guided by the SFVs themselves. The implication of this varied SFV experience is that grouping the responses of SFVs across schools to generate themes may, to a degree, be misleading. Although an attempt was made to take this into consideration during the analysis, it is suggested that assumptions regarding the mechanisms guiding facilitation of circles should consider each individual school context. Overall, considerable caution is recommended when generalising results from this study beyond the contexts in which they were collected. It is suggested that the findings represent the particular reality in these particular schools at this particular time.

5.7: Implications for future research

This research identified a number of mechanisms linked to the use of Solution Circles for staff supervision. As discussed, those most strongly implicated concerned the SC structure, the people involved, and the wider school context within which the groups operated. These are suggested the priority for future research through a critical realist framework wherein specific aspects of each mechanism are implemented in turn and their impact investigated. Thus, practical information about how the intervention works in a particular setting can accumulate. Section 5.5 (including Table 5.5.1) provides a synthesis of plausible mechanisms, contexts and outcomes of interest. The following two mechanisms are suggested to be priorities for future research:

- By enlisting enthusiastic volunteers, and through immersion and practice, participants have an understanding of, and belief in, the SC model and its solution oriented, positive underpinning;

- Through on-going training and support, SFVs develop their facilitating skills and facilitate circles according to the model, but with sensitivity to individual differences.

Investigation of specific details within these mechanisms may also be helpful. For example, this research suggests that the twenty four minute four step structure should be kept constant. However, the data identified around individual differences implies that future research might consider investigation of: a) Methods of reducing the anxiety of some 'problem owners' during step one. This might be by exploring their use of a pre-recorded or written First Step which they, or another circle member, reads out or plays; b) Adopting methods to introduce more reflective time for participants that want it, e.g. a timed reflective session at the end of the circle. These mechanisms could be implemented and monitored.

As regards the people involved in the circles, the research indicates that their characteristics are significant, along with the resultant group dynamics. Future research might explore the impact of aspects of this that are measurable, such as group make-up. This could include the investigation of how group stability affects programme success. Active investigation of the relative success of groups made up of staff with a broad variety of roles and experiences is also suggested, perhaps extending this into experimenting with groups comprised additionally of professionals outside the school context, or with parents, children and young people. Another personnel factor suggested for future research concerns SFVs. They were identified in this research as potentially powerful and significant influences on group success, e.g. as links between the rest of the school and the supervision group. Future research might investigate systems that could be put in place in each school to facilitate this, and to support SFVs. The effect of protected, planned in, supervision time, or the release of SFVs to meet with SFVs from other schools to discuss their experiences, could be one area to explore.

This study was conducted in three settings. None were mainstream secondary schools. One was a mainstream primary school. Two were mainstream secondary special provisions for children with social emotional and mental health difficulties, many of whom had been excluded from school. It may be interesting to try SCs in a mainstream secondary school, perhaps to facilitate focussed problem solving with a mixed staff group. School context was identified as significant in this research and it is suggested that future research might explore this further. Areas proposed for investigation are mechanisms that facilitate the integration of the supervision group with the rest of school, e.g. providing protected time or negotiated communication systems. The critical realist approach of implementing a mechanism, measuring, and feeding back, clearly requires consideration of measurement methods. Naturalistic qualitative methods are

suggested because of their ability to explore the richness and complexity of participants'

experiences of the intervention. Data could be gathered from circle members as well as

those in the wider school. However, it is suggested that qualitative methods are

supported by other tools and approaches, e.g. the General Self-Efficacy Scale; measures

of staff attendance to work or circles; measures of problem solving ability; measures of

well-being; measures of group sustainability. These could be used within a more robust

repeated measures design.

5.8: Implications for schools and education

Enhancing staff well-being by running successful sustaining supervision groups for school staff is a task which, historically, has proved difficult to tackle:

> 'Few school managers have been able to put in place a stable, organised and effective means of support and supervision for their staff' (Newton, 1995, p9)

One implication of this research is that staff in schools want to talk about their work in a solution oriented way with peers in a structured setting. Staff seem to want groups that are focussed on improving life for their pupils, that do not take up too much time, and that are supported by managers in their schools. It is suggested that practical school systems to support staff supervision groups are set up well in advance of groups beginning. The school context was identified as important in this research and it is suggested that consultation with senior managers and staff across the school should be one aspect of this. It could be used to identify the precise elements in each individual school that are likely to influence the successful operationalisation of the programme. The theme 'it's like a machine', connected to RQ2, indicates that it is worth considering in advance how to set up/configure this 'machine' and keep it running.

Consideration of how the groups interact and communicate across the school community is recommended, so as to ensure a good match between school ethos and the aims and systems around the groups. It is also worth considering the emotional dimension for those taking part, and thinking about how to brief those volunteering for the groups: '*I didn't realise how much emotion was behind the actual issue that I brought and it wasn't just the things that I shared – it brought up other things that I… couldn't really bring up at the time, but at least it's there now – I've brought it to the surface…*' (*Sally*)

SFVs were found to be potentially important in developing methods of communicating and integrating supervision into school life. They could play a role in communicating/connecting with the wider school and placing supervision groups within identified school priorities, e.g. linked to the school action plan. SFVs will themselves need support to do this, including initial training which involves practice. It is suggested that this support comes at least in part from outside the school, perhaps from an EP. Formal links with SFVs in other schools may be worth forging also, in order to provide SFVs with both support and learning opportunities.

5.9: Implications for EPs

One implication of the research for EPs is its endorsement of SCs as a flexible and practical tool for group supervision. EPs who are called on to deliver group supervision, for example of ELSAs, teachers, or other EPs, may wish to consider using SCs to do so. They may also like to consider facilitating one off circles themselves during casework - to problem solve and reach consensus for action over, for example, a particular pupil or pupil group. The SC facilitator role is a good match to the EP skillset. Participants welcomed the idea of a skilled outsider, such as an EP, facilitating circles, as well as recognising the trust and knowledge that could be brought by an internal facilitator.

The potential for using SCs as tools for organisational change and for systems work, were also hinted at by this piece of research. Whole school issues, for example around policy, were often brought to circles and a number of participants felt that circles could be used effectively in this way. Thus, EPs could consider using SCs when involved in this sort of work.

EPs could also support schools in operationalising SCs effectively. In common with previous research, this study indicates that the facilitation of SCs does not require expert

knowledge and skills, but does require school-wide enthusiasm, motivation and willingness to adhere to the designated structure and solution oriented philosophy. Thus, schools that wish to adopt SCs into their work are surely capable of doing so independently of EPs. However, the consultative skills of EPs, and their knowledge of solution oriented work, may make them well placed to help schools set up sustainable applications of SCs in their schools which match their particular needs. In practical terms, the potential value to be added by EPs in this area is suggested to be through the following:

- Modelling effective facilitation of circles and providing training, supervision and support for SFVs.

- Consulting across the school system to help operationalise SCs. This may include training staff, identifying priorities, and helping to set up support systems around the groups.

- Providing ongoing supervision for SFVs as well as ad hoc support for all involved.

- Helping schools to set up practical systems to monitor and evaluate the value of SCs within their particular settings.

It may be that the key EP role here is to help establish circle groups/ systems that are self-sustaining, and to help schools build in-house expertise. Bozic & Carter (2002) cited Hanko's suggestion that EPs can play an important supportive role here. She stated that for staff supervision groups to embed themselves into the school organisation, facilitators must have access to a support group of their own and EPs must remain involved with the school after the set- up of the groups. Hanko commented that, with this support, staff skills, confidence and knowledge increases, and job-related stress decreases. This study did not measure any of these things, or seek to connect them

141

to supervision. It merely indicated that, in the three participating schools, staff valued the groups, liked the structure, and welcomed the input of an EP to support their running.

5.10: Reflections of the Researcher

As the researcher in a study which involved fifteen circles, many of which I facilitated, I was closely involved with the school managers and participants in the three schools throughout. This was particularly true for those who volunteered to be SFVs, with whom I discussed circles and followed up concerns over a number of months. I was far from being an objective bystander and felt like a member of every circle group I worked with. Over the course of this time I kept a reflective diary, recording my experiences, opinions and emotions as a facilitator and supervisor. Re-reading this illustrates: 1. How emotional and stressful I found it to be at times; 2. How different the school contexts were, and that I responded differently within each context. This diary extract illustrates these two points a little:

> *I arrived at X five minutes after a serious violent incident and at the end of an extremely challenging day for the staff. Thus, staff debrief (twenty five minutes) preceded my circle and meant it started late. I had a big group with a wide range of previous experiences, motivations and attitudes… The circle went well, although comments sometimes strayed into negative/what's the point nothing ever changes territory. The structure was very helpful and I did a lot of prompting.*

Even the schools with similar intakes were very different in ethos, staffing and systems. This meant that I experienced them differently, facilitated circles differently and supported SFVs differently. The study involved three different schools and therefore a range of facilitators. I noticed that the enthusiasm of SFVs to continue the groups was most marked in the facilitators I worked with in the final school. On reflection this could indicate my changing skills and attitudes over time. These social factors inevitably affected my data collection and analysis, and my approach to the research.

One change I noticed over the course of the study concerned my consciousness of the solution orientation of the circles. At the start I did not consider this characteristic of SCs to be of great significance; by the end I considered it one of the most important features of the groups. As stated in Section One, the choice of SCs as the subject of the research was influenced by my background as a teacher and a belief that peer support might support staff well-being. I felt that the brevity and structure of SCs might be a good match to busy school life, features clearly linked to the solution orientation of the circles. It may be that immersion in the groups over time, and my development as an EP over the year I undertook the research, drew the solution orientation to the surface, no doubt influencing my qualitative analysis and conclusions.

Throughout the study I was aware of a tension that I perceived between the positioning of SCs as one off problem solving tools (as they were originally conceived by Forest and Pearpoint) and their positioning as a structure to be mobilised for group supervision over time. I understood that participants, and those in their wider school context, had a variety of perceptions regarding the purpose of the circles. When listening to my data I noticed that I commented and asked often about what type of issues participants thought should be brought to circles, and that this was probably because I was seeking data on participants' views about the underlying purpose of the circles. I realised over time that participants were less concerned about this than me. Most took a pragmatic approach, wanting the circles to feel useful, but not worrying about what this might look like or how 'useful' might be defined. By the end, I felt similarly pragmatic and that the tool is sufficiently flexible to be deployable in a range of ways according to what suits each particular context. This process perhaps serves to illustrate the personal nature of the research and the fact that the themes described and conclusions drawn are the product of

prolonged interaction between me and the participants, as well as the development of my own thinking and practice as an EP over time.

Having completed the research and reflected on the process, I believe that flexible, small scale 'real life' research is important in Educational Psychology, because it seems to match our daily work. EPs are often involved in this kind of research, but do not call it research, for example when planning and evaluating intervention work. My experience of examining intervention as a researcher - at close quarters and over a number of months- reinforced for me the importance of exploring, developing and reviewing intervention in its 'real world' context, and in a curious, on-going manner. I chose exploratory rather than evaluative research in part because of my scepticism about generalizable 'right answers' as to what good intervention looks like or how to track it. This scepticism remains, in part because the research pointed to context as such a vital influence on experience.

In fact, I have extended my interest in, and understanding of, systematically investigating mechanisms in context as a means to extend practice (see Matthews, 2003). The research gave me an opportunity to plan and deliver intervention, as well as collect information and interpret it in order to plan future intervention. This cycle of matching intervention to context and acting on feedback, similar to the philosophy of action research, was useful, and helped me extend my practice as an EP. However, conducting the research has also reminded me that all research should be of practical value, at the very least to those taking part, and ideally beyond. As with daily EP work, I feel that I must communicate my findings effectively for the research to have been worthwhile.

I chose this research area and approach because of a belief that developing sensitive intervention matched to context is an important (perhaps defining) element of EP work. I felt that the research helped me to reflect on and extend this somewhat intangible skill. It reinforced the importance of relationships and context to all our work in Educational Psychology, as well as the power of working with the systems around the child. It also clarified, for me, the power of collaborative practitioner research.

5.11: Overall Conclusion

John Ruskin (1851) cited in Cooper (2015) stated that: 'in order that people are happy in their work, these three things are needed: they must be fit for it, they must not do too much of it, and they must have a sense of success in it'. SCs arguably contribute to the first and last of these. This thesis proposes that keeping school staff happy in their work is likely to improve their practice. Further, that the provision of good group supervision built into the structures and processes of a school can contribute to this. The research suggests that Solution Circles could be operationalised to structure these supervision groups, and that they were valued for this purpose by the staff volunteers at the three schools where the research was conducted.

The key mechanisms identified to drive the value of the groups were: the strict, timed, solution oriented structure of the circles, the people involved, and the establishment of operational and emotional support for the groups from the wider school context. It is suggested that a critical mass of motivated, interested and organised people within the school is needed to make the groups sustainable and useful. Also, that training and support from outside the school, for example from an EP, is likely to support their success, particularly as regards developing in-house facilitator expertise and confidence. The degree of match between the particular school ethos and the philosophy and aims of the circles was found to be important.

Solution Circles are a practical, positive, non- expert model that could be used to provide group supervision for school staff. They are proposed to be a flexible tool and therefore a good fit to busy school environments under constant change:

> *'I think you could take this anywhere – you could use it in any workplace*
>
> *couldn't you… it's just a shell for you as a company to fill, so it could go*
>
> *anywhere' (Jessica)*

References

Ajmal, Y. (2001). Introducing solution-focused thinking. In Y. Ajmal & I. Rees (Eds.), *Solutions in Schools*: BT Press.

Annan, M., & Moore, S. (2012). Using the staff sharing scheme within the Targeted Mental Health in Schools (TaMHS) pathfinder. *Educational and Child Psychology, 29*(4), 88.

Atkinson, C., & Woods, K. (2007). A model of effective fieldwork supervision for trainee educational psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 23*(4), 299-316.

ATL. (2015). Latest Media Releases. Retrieved 24/6/15, from https://www.atl.org.uk/media-office/media-releases.asp

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological review, 84*(2), 191.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child development, 67*(3), 1206-1222.

Bartle, D., & Trevis, A. (2015). An evaluation of group supervision in a specialist provision supporting young people with mental health needs: A social constructionist perspective. *Educational & Child Psychology, 32*(3), 78-89.

Berg, I. K., & Shilts, L. (2005). *Classroom solutions: WOWW coaching*: BFTC.

Bhaskar, R. (2013). *A realist theory of science*: Routledge.

Bion, W. R. (1985). Container and contained. *Group relations reader, 2*, 127-133.

Bozic, N. (2004). Using letters to support consultative work in schools. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 20*(4), 291-302.

Bozic, N., & Carter, A. (2002). Consultation groups: Participants' views. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 18*(3), 189-201.

Bozic, N., & Crossland, R. (2012). Using Realistic Evaluation to evaluate a pilot local authority common induction programme. *Debate, 145*(December), 7-12.

Brown, E., & Henderson, L. (2012). Promoting staff support in schools: Solution Circles. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 28*(2), 177-186.

Buttery, T. J., & Weller, L. D. (1988). Group clinical supervision: a feedback model to enhance teachers' questioning skills. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 67*(1), 239-242.

Caplan, G. (1963). Types of mental health consultation. *American journal of orthopsychiatry, 33*(3), 470.

Caplan, G. (1970). *The theory and practice of mental health consultation*: Basic Books.

Caprara, G. V., Barbaranelli, C., Steca, P., & Malone, P. S. (2006). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of job satisfaction and students' academic achievement: A study at the school level. *Journal of School Psychology, 44*(6), 473-490.

Choi, J. N., Price, R. H., & Vinokur, A. D. (2003). Self-efficacy changes in groups: effects of diversity, leadership, and group climate. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 24*(4), 357-372.

Connor, K. M., & Davidson, J. R. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC). *Depression and anxiety, 18*(2), 76-82.

Cooper, A., & Dartington, T. (2004). The vanishing organization: Organizational containment in a networked world. *Working below the surface. London: Karnac*.

Cooper, C. (2015, 17 July). Five ways to de-stress this summer, *Times Educational Supplement*.

Creese, A., Norwich, B., & Daniels, H. (2000). Evaluating teacher support teams in secondary schools: supporting teachers for SEN and other needs. *Research Papers in Education, 15*(3), 307-324.

Daniels, H., & Norwich, B. (1992). Teacher support teams: an interim evaluation report. *London, Institute of Education. London University*.

Daniels, H., Norwich, B., & Anghileri, N. (1993). Teacher support teams: An evaluation of a school-based approach to meeting special educational needs. *Support for Learning, 8*(4), 169-173.

de Rementeria, A. (2011). How the use of transference and countertransference, particularly in parent–infant psychotherapy, can inform the work of an education or childcare practitioner. *Psychodynamic Practice, 17*(1), 41-56.

De Shazer, S. (1982). *Patterns of brief family therapy: An ecosystemic approach*: Guilford Press.

De Shazer, S. (1985). *Keys to Solutions in Brief Therapy* (New York and London, Norton).

DFE. (2015). Get Into Teaching.   Retrieved 24/6/15, 2015, from https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/

DfEE. (2001). *Promoting children's mental health within early years and school settings*. London: DfEE.

DfES. (2004). *Removing Barriers To Achievement: The Government's Strategy for SEN*. Retrieved from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DfES%200117%202004.

Diaper, G. (1990). The Hawthorne Effect: a fresh examination. *Educational Studies, 16*(3), 261-267.

Dick, R., & Wagner, U. (2001). Stress and strain in teaching: A structural equation approach. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*(2), 243-259.

Dunham, J. (1983). Coping with stress in school. *Special education: forward trends, 10*(2), 6-9.

Elton. (1989). *Discipline in Schools*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office Retrieved from http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/elton/elton1989.html.

Emanuel, L. (1999). From individual to institution: How the psychotherapy of a mentally handicapped girl has informed my consultation work in a school. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry, 19*(2), 185-200.

Forest, M., & Pearpoint, J. (1996). Solution circles: getting unstuck, a creative problem solving tool. http://www.inclusion.com/ttsolutioncircle.html

Fox, M., Pratt, G., & Roberts, S. (1990). Developing the Educational Psychologist's Work in Secondary School: A Process Model for Change. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 6*(3), 163-169.

Freud, S. (1900). *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 1*: London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. *Standard edition, 14*(239), 1957-1961.

Galton, M., & MacBeath, J. (2008). *Teachers under pressure*: Sage.

Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American psychologist, 40*(3), 266.

Gersch, I. S., & Rawkins, P. (1986). A teacher support group in school. *British Journal of Special Education, 13*(1), 9-12.

Gill, D. (1986). *A Staff Sharing Scheme: A School-Based Management System for Working with Difficult Children*: Auckland: Department of Education.

Gill, D., & Monsen, J. (1995). The staff sharing scheme: A school-based management system for working with challenging child behaviour. *Educational and Child Psychology, 12*(2), 71-80.

Gillespie, B. M., Chaboyer, W., & Wallis, M. (2007). Development of a theoretically derived model of resilience through concept analysis. *Contemporary Nurse, 25*(1-2), 124-135.

Gillham, B. (1978). *Reconstructing educational psychology*: Taylor & Francis.

Grafton, E., Gillespie, B., & Henderson, S. (2010). *Resilience: the power within.* Paper presented at the Oncology nursing forum.

Grahamslaw, L., & Henson, L. H. (2015). Solving problems through circles. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 31*(2), 111-126.

Gu, Q., & Day, C. (2013). Challenges to teacher resilience: Conditions count. *British Educational Research Journal, 39*(1), 22-44.

Gupta, Y. (1985). Headteachers too need pastoral support. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 1*(3), 112-114.

Hanko, G. (1990). *Special needs in ordinary classrooms: supporting teachers*: Simon & Schuster Education.

Hanko, G. (1995). *Special needs in ordinary classrooms: from staff support to staff development*: D. Fulton.

Hanko, G. (1999). *Increasing competence through collaborative problem-solving: Using insight into social and emotional factors in children's learning*: David Fulton Pub.

Hanko, G. (2002). Promoting empathy through the dynamics of staff development: what schools can offer their teachers as learners. *Pastoral Care in Education, 20*(2), 12-16.

Hawkins, P., & Shohet, R. (2007). *Supervision in the helping professions*: McGraw-Hill International.

HMTreasury. (2016). *The Budget*. London: The Stationery Office Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2016-documents/budget-2016.

Hsu, S. (2005). Help-seeking behaviour of student teachers. *Educational Research, 47*(3), 307-318.

Jackson, E. (2002). Mental health in schools: what about the staff? *Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 28*(2), 129-146.

Jackson, E. (2005). Developing observation skills in school settings: The importance and impact of 'work discussion groups' for staff. *Infant Observation, 8*(1), 5-17.

Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of educational research, 79*(1), 491-525.

Jones, D., Monsen, J., & Franey, J. (2013). Using the Staff Sharing Scheme to support school staff in managing challenging behaviour more effectively. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(3), 258-277. doi: 10.1080/02667363.2013.820173

Matthews, J. (2003). A framework for the creation of practitioner-based evidence. *Educational and Child Psychology, 20*, 60-67.

McKeown, D. (2014, 17 October). Want happier pupils? Try de-stressing staff. *Times Educational Supplement,* 38-39.

McLoughlin, C. (2010). Concentric circles of containment: a psychodynamic contribution to working in pupil referral units. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 36*(3), 225-239.

Medina, A., & Beyebach, M. (2014). The Impact of Solution-focused Training on Professionals' Beliefs, Practices and Burnout of Child Protection Workers in Tenerife Island. *Child Care in Practice, 20*(1), 7-36.

Morgan, N. (2016). *Stepping up to shape an educational system for all (speech to NASUWT).* gov.uk: gov.uk Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/stepping-up-to-shape-an-education-system-which-delivers-opportunity-for-all.

Newton, C. (1995). Circles of Adults: Reflecting and Problem Solving Around Emotional Needs and Behaviour. *Educational Psyschology in Practice, 11*(2), 8-14.

Norwich, B., & Daniels, H. (1997). Teacher support teams for special educational needs in primary schools: evaluating a teacher-focused support scheme. *Educational Studies, 23*(1), 5-24.

Ogden, T. (2001). The prevention and management of behaviour difficulties in school. Research and practice. *International Perspectives on Inclusive Education, 1*, 75-89.

Osborne, C., & Burton, S. (2014). Emotional Literacy Support Assistants' views on supervision provided by educational psychologists: what EPs can learn from group supervision. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 30*(2), 139-155.

Oxford English Dictionary. (2013). Oxford University Press.

Pawson, R., & Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic evaluation*: Sage.

Rees, I. (2009). *Solution Oriented Schools*: Northumberland.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research. 2nd edn. Regional Surveys of the World Series*: Blackwell Publishers.

Rockoff, J. E. (2004). The impact of individual teachers on student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Economic Review*, 247-252.

Rodney, W., Napier, M., & Gershenfeld, K. (1989). Groups: Theory and Experience: Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Roffey, S. (2012). Pupil wellbeing—Teacher wellbeing: Two sides of the same coin? *Educational and Child Psychology, 29*(4), 8.

Roffey, S. (2015). Becoming an agent of change for school and student well-being. *Educational & Child Psychology, 32*(1), 21.

Rutter, M. (1985). Resilience in the face of adversity: Protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder. *The British Journal of Psychiatry, 147*, 598-611.

Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 57*(3), 316.

Salter-Jones, E. (2012). Promoting the emotional well-being of teaching staff in secondary schools. *Educational and Child Psychology, 29*(4), 18.

Soni, A. (2015). A case study on the use of group supervision with learning mentors. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 32*, 65-77.

Stringer, P., Stow, L., Hibbert, K., Powell, J., & Louw, E. (1992). Establishing staff consultation groups in schools: A programme to train facilitators of school based staff support groups in consultancy. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 8*(2), 87-96.

TA. (2013). Teachers Assurance Stress and Well-Being Research. 1-16. https://www.teachersassurance.co.uk/.../2013/.../stress-and-wellbeing-research

Tang, J. J., Leka, S., & MacLennan, S. (2013). The psychosocial work environment and mental health of teachers: a comparative study between the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. *International archives of occupational and environmental health, 86*(6), 657-666.

Tempest, A., Huxtable, M., & Knapman, N. (1987). Support and advisory groups: a new initiative in service delivery. *Education and Child Psychology, 4*(3+ 4), 66-73.

Wagner, P. (2008). Consultation as a Framework for Practice. In B. Kelly, L. Woolfson & J. Boyle (Eds.), *Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology* (pp. 139-161): Jessica Kingley Publishers.

Wetchler, J. L. (1990). Solution-focused supervision. *Family Therapy, 17*(2), 129-138.

Wilson, D. F. (2004). *Supporting teachers, supporting pupils: The emotions of teaching and learning*: Psychology Press.

Winnicott, D. (2012). The mother, the infant and the matrix. *Donald Winnicott Today*, 46.

Appendix One:

<u>Solution Circles Fact Sheet</u>

What is a Solution Circle?

A Solution Circle (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996) aims to help staff discuss school issues as a group, and to generate solutions. Each circle takes no more than thirty minutes and involves around 8 people who listen, discuss and collaborate around a focus issue brought to the group by a participant.

What are the roles in a Solution Circle?
- Presenter of the problem (focus person)
- Time keeper
- Note Taker
- Brainstorm Team

What happens during a Circle?

Step 1 takes 6 minutes:

The presenter of the problem (focus person) takes 6 uninterrupted minutes to outline the problem. This can be anything to do with their daily work with children and young people that they feel stuck with. The timekeeper keeps time and make sure no one interrupts. The recorder takes notes. Everyone else (the Brainstorm Team) listens. If the problem presenter stops talking before the six minutes elapse, everyone else stays silent until the 6 minutes pass. This is vital! The problem presenter gets 6 uninterrupted minutes.

Step 2 takes 6 minutes:

This is a brainstorm. Everyone chimes in with ideas and creative solutions to the problem presented. It is not a time to clarify the problem or to ask questions. It is not a time to give speeches, lectures or advice. The facilitator must make sure this is a brainstorm. Everyone gets a chance to give their brilliant ideas. No one must be allowed to dominate. The problem presenter listens - without interrupting. He/she must not talk or respond.

Step 3 takes 6 minutes:

The group now have a dialogue led by the problem presenter. This is time to

explore and clarify the problem. Focus on the positive points only, not what <u>cannot</u> be done.

Step 4 takes 6 minutes: **The First Step**
The focus person, with the support of the group, decide on first steps that are doable within the next 3 days. At least ONE step should be initiated within 24 hours. This is critical. Research shows that unless a first step is taken almost immediately, people do not get out of their ruts. A coach from the group volunteers to phone or see the person within 3 days and check if they took their first step.

Finally the group does a round of words to describe the experience and the recorder gives the record to the focus person.

Appendix Two: Papers identified by the Literature Review

S = specific model   SN = snowball

Please see References section also.

Model	Dates	Papers
Group supervision generally	1984-2015	Gersch & Rawkins (1986) SN Tempest, Huxtable & Knapman (1984) SN Gupta (1985) SN Stringer, Stow, Hibbert & Louw (1992) SN Buttery & Weller (1988) Osborne & Burton (2014) Soni (2015) Bartle & Trevis (2015)
Quality Circles (QC)	1990	Fox, Pratt & Roberts (1990) S
Teacher Support Teams (TST)	1993-2000	Daniels, Norwich & Anghileri (1993) S Norwich & Daniels (1997) S Creese Norwich & Daniels (2000) S
Circles of Adults (COA)	1995-2002	Newton (1995) S Bozic & Carter (2002) S SN Grahamslaw & Henson (2015) S
Staff Share Scheme (SSS)	1995-2013	Gill & Monsen (1995) S Annan & Moore (2012) S Jones Monsen and Franey (2013) S
Work Discussion Groups (WDG)	1999-2011	Emmanuel (1999) S McLoughlin (2010) S De Rementaria (2011) S
Solution Circles (SC)	2012-2015	Brown and Henderson (2012) S Grahamslaw & Henson (2015) S

SSS

3 papers

QC
1 paper

COA

2 papers:

2 couldn't be
obtained

24 papers

14 on a specific
model

TST

3 papers

SC
2 papers

8 on group supervision
generally

WDG
3 papers
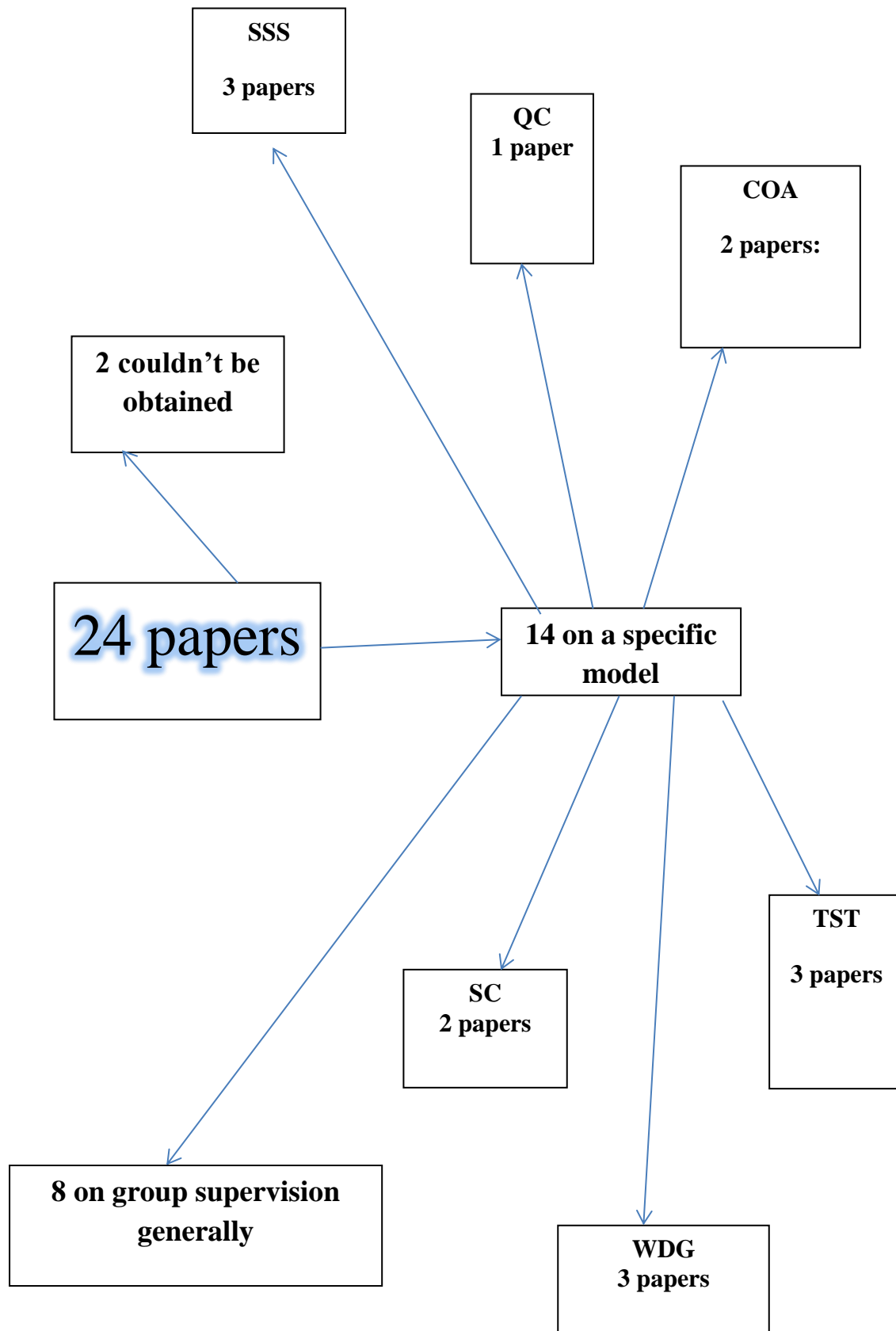
Appendix Three:

Area Four: Group supervision as a means of managing referrals.

The potential of staff supervision groups to internally manage school issues and cases (rather than referring them to outside agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service) was raised in other areas of the Literature Review. This section discusses groups which have been set up for this express purpose – to reduce individual referrals of children with SEN by schools. Much of the research to be discussed here is on British Teacher Support Teams (TSTs; Daniels, Norwich & Anghileri, 1993). Their inception was influenced by American Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) which will not be discussed in depth because their American origins set them outside the search criteria. TSTs are proposed to be more informal than TATs, with membership voluntary. Large numbers of TATs have been established and evaluated across America, over decades. They were established as 'pre-referral intervention' within American schools from 1979 onwards. So called 'Difficult To Teach' (DTT) pupils were a key target group for these teams. Trained in-school consultants and a selection of teachers made up each TAT. TATs are an acknowledged influence on TSTs, although Daniels, Norwich & Anghileri also drew on Hanko and Caplan's ideas when designing the TST.

Daniels, Norwich & Anghileri (1993) describe the goal of the TST as to: '… put teachers in the foreground …develop their confidence and competence in making provision for children with SEN in mainstream classes' (p169). They evaluated three primary school TSTs run by EPs through a range of data collected before, during and after the running of the TST. This included: TST work records, feedback from the EPS, and questionnaire data from a range of staff. Unusual in the evidence base, the following negative factors were identified:

- Confidentiality was reported to be a barrier to communication by some.

- Finding time to run the groups was difficult.

- Some staff seemed reluctant to engage in the groups and reported that some strategies raised in the group were not workable.

- Some staff reported a 'sense of failure coming from having to request support' (p172)

However, overall, most staff, in most schools, reported that there were more advantages than disadvantages associated with participation in a TST. As in previous studies, the supportive, collaborative element of the groups was positively reported: 'rather than receiving suggestions alone, many teachers reported that it was the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their own concerns with the support of colleagues that they particularly welcomed' (p172) These authors also reported that schools with established TSTs had reducing numbers of individual EPS referrals.

Daniels and Norwich (1992) set up six TSTs in primary schools and wrote at length about the issues involved. Norwich & Daniels (1997) carried out a mixed methods evaluation of these TSTs over time. They collected a range of data including questionnaires, TST minutes, field notes from TST trainers, and interviews with Heads, staff and SENCos. This was a two term study involving pre and post measures. No control group was involved.

Staff involvement was highest for the few TSTs that ran during the school day, with participants reporting increased status of these groups. Although some schools and some individuals (including a Head) were reluctant to be involved, findings were largely positive Only three of ninety eight staff questioned their use, and 57% of cases referred to the TST were reported to be closed to the satisfaction of the referrer. All cases referred were reported to have shown some improvement, but clearly there is no

way of knowing how much this can be attributed to the TST. As with much of the evidence base, those reporting on it are deeply involved in the groups, and have a vested interest. This makes it particularly difficult to unpick changes linked to them. Norwich and Daniels speculate, on the basis of their interview data, that the power of TSTs lies in their ability to increase teachers' active engagement and their tolerance of challenging behaviour.

Creese, Norwich and Daniels (2000) used a 'case study evaluation strategy' to compare TSTs set up in three schools, including a school considered to have had a successful TST experience, and one which had not. Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, field notes and the observation of TST sessions were carried out at the start of the programme, the midway point, and a year after set up. Results were mixed and largely mirror those reported elsewhere. However, these authors raised the point that TSTs seem to work better in some contexts than others. They suggest that the TST is best suited to behavioural referrals, and to 'successful' schools of strong ethos which already have good teamwork and high levels of satisfaction with management support. This context is proposed to facilitate true collaboration, organisational support and a high profile for the group, thus leading to success. Interestingly, this finding appears to directly contradict Stringer et al's proposal that groups work well in 'high stress, poor communication' settings, illustrating the difficulty of identifying reliable patterns in the evidence base. It may be that different skills and conditions are needed to establish groups in different contexts, seemingly with little consensus as to what these are likely to be.

Appendix Four: Participant invitation letter

Thinking Space in Schools:
What is valuable about Solution Circles?

My name is Joanna Wood and I am training to become an Educational Psychologist at the University of East London. This research forms part of my Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with sufficient information to decide whether to participate in my research study.

Project Description

I plan to evaluate an intervention known as 'Solution Circles' and am interested in how valuable this intervention is in different schools, in particular what the staff think of it. A Solution Circle (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996) aims to help staff discuss school issues as a group, and to generate solutions. Each circle takes no more than thirty minutes and involves around 8 people. Participation in a circle involves active listening, discussion, and collaboration around a focus issue brought to the group by a participant. Please see the 'Solution Circles Factsheet' for more information.

Participants will be asked to take part in five Solution Circles. The last circle (which will be audio recorded) will involve discussion of the intervention itself: strengths, weaknesses and applications in schools. Participants will also be asked to spend around 30 minutes completing questionnaires before the first and last circles.

In addition a volunteer is sought at each school to be trained and supported as a Solution Circles Facilitator. This person will facilitate Circle two with the researcher, and Circles three and four alone. They will receive a training pack, take part in an afternoon's training and attend individual supervision with the researcher. At the end of the study these facilitators will each be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview of around 50 minutes about their experience of the intervention.

Confidentiality of the Data: Key Issues

- Participants, participating schools, and the London borough in which the research will be undertaken, will not be identified by name in the write up.
- Participants will be asked to complete questionnaires anonymously, recording only a numerical code at the top. However, to track completion of questionnaires, the researcher alone will be able to identify participants from this code during the study. Immediately following the

study the connection between names and codes will be destroyed. The questionnaires themselves will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

- Complete confidentiality of issues discussed in the circles will be sought by agreeing ground rules with participants. However, it cannot be guaranteed due to the group setting.
- Solution circle five and semi-structured interviews with facilitators will be audio recorded to ensure accurate collection of staff views. These recordings will be anonymized at the point of transcription and destroyed immediately after transcription. Anonymized transcripts will be retained for five years after completion of the study and then destroyed.
- All data will be locked in a filing cabinet and/or stored on a password protected computer accessed only by the researcher.

Location
Solution circles will be carried out in quiet private rooms within schools.

Disclaimer
You are not obliged to take part in this study and should not feel coerced. You are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Please feel free to ask me any questions. If you are happy to continue you will be asked to sign a consent form prior to your participation. Please retain this invitation letter for reference.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this study ☺

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Wood

Trainee Educational Psychologist
(Tel xx Email xx)

If you have any questions or concerns about how the study has been conducted, please contact the study's supervisor: Dr. Mark Fox, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ
(Tel: xx Email:xx)
or
Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr. Mark Finn, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Tel: xx Email:xx)

Appendix Five: Informed consent form

Consent to participate in a research study

Thinking Space in Schools: What is valuable about Solution Circles?

I have the read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purpose of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures involved.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher involved in the study will have access to identifying data. What will happen once the research study has been completed has been explained to me.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

☐ I volunteer to be a Staff Facilitator and understand that this requires half a day's training and participation in individual supervision after each circle that I facilitate.
(please tick or cross)

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)
……………………………………………………………………………………….

Participant's Signature
……………………………………………………………………………………….

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

JOANNA WOOD…………………………………………………………………..

Researcher's Signature

……………………………………………………………………………………

Date: ……………………..………

Appendix Six: Ethical approval

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

SUPERVISOR: Mark Fox   **REVIEWER:** Volker Thoma

STUDENT: Joanna Wood

Title of proposed study: Thinking Space In Schools: What is valuable about Solution Circles?

Course: Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child

DECISION *(Delete as necessary)***:**

*APPROVED

APPROVED: Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED <u>BEFORE</u> THE RESEARCH COMMENCES (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is <u>not</u> required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made <u>before</u> the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):*
Student number:

Date:

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

If the proposed research could expose the <u>researcher</u> to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

	HIGH
	MEDIUM
x	LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any):

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*:   *Volker Thoma*

Date: 30/01/2015

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee (moderator of School ethics approvals)

PLEASE NOTE: *For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

*For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's insurance and indemnity policy, travel approval from UEL (not the School of Psychology) must be gained if a researcher intends to travel overseas to collect data, even if this involves the researcher travelling to his/her home country to conduct the research. Application details can be found here: http://www.uel.ac.uk/gradschool/ethics/fieldwork/

Appendix Seven: Photographs of a selection of circle records

NB: **Black**: Step 1 & 2; **Orange**: Step 2 & 3; **Green:** Step 4 (next step)
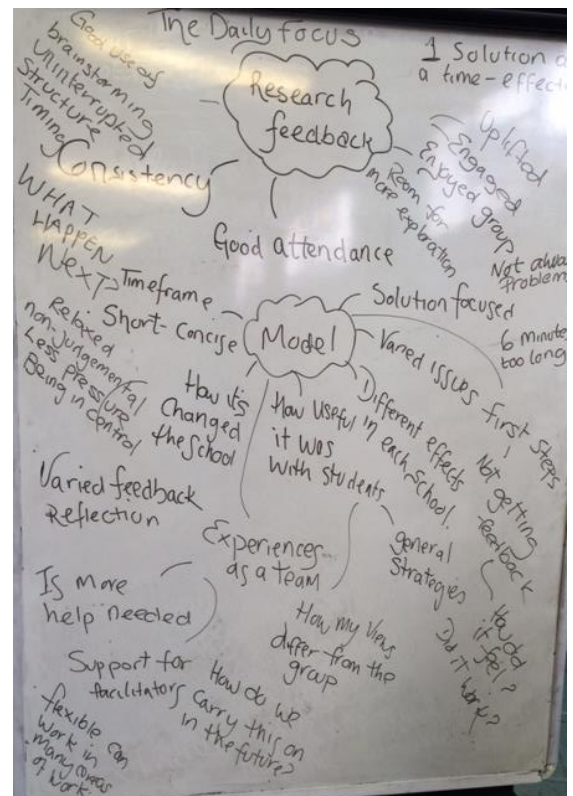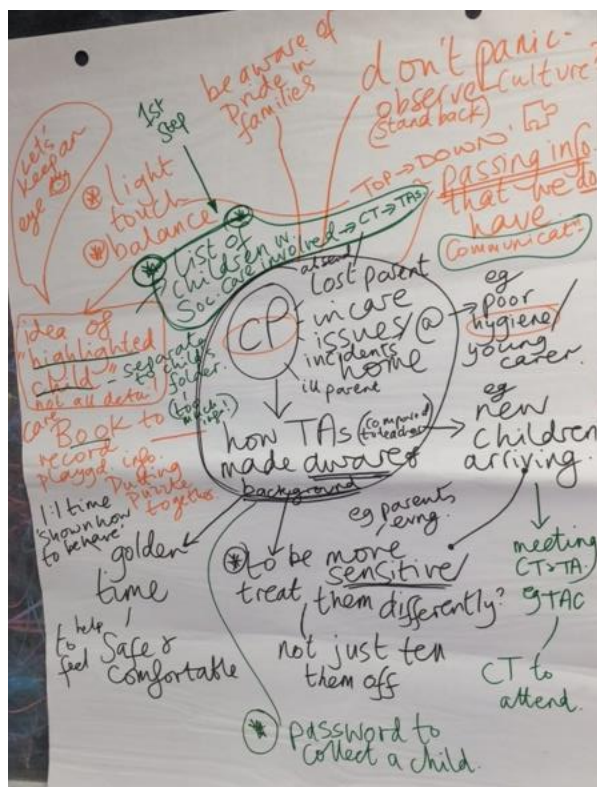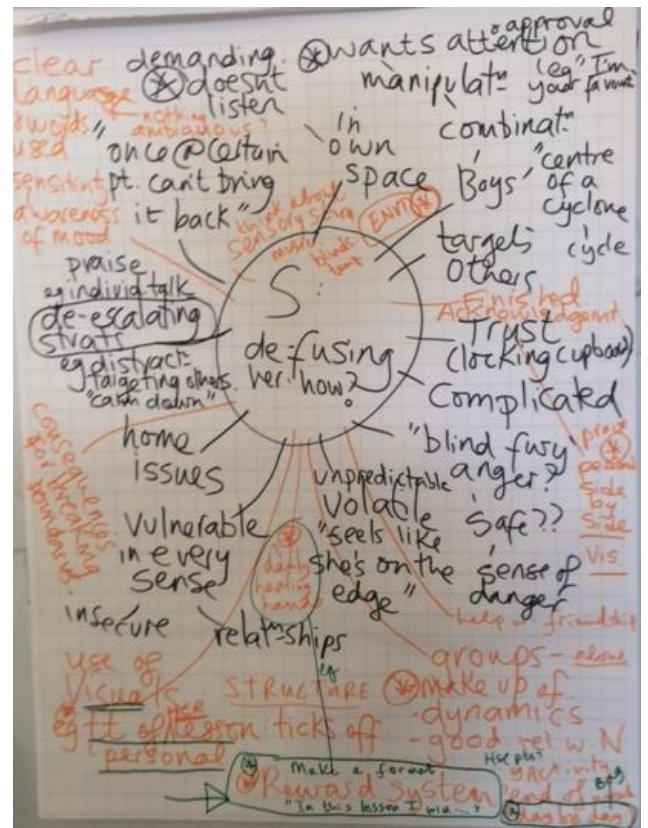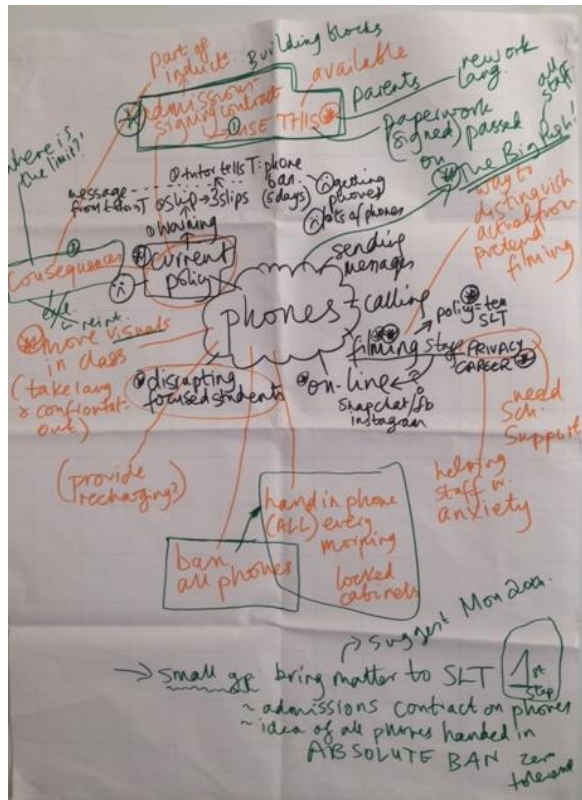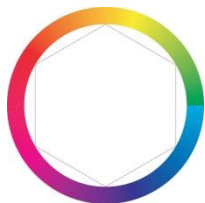
Appendix Eight: SFV training pack: selection of materials

1. SFV Training Overview

> **Session Aims:** to understand what the SFV role involves; to feel confident in the role; to feel supported in delivering circles; to know what to do next.

Resources: pack for each person; envelopes; A3 paper and coloured pens; clocks

Session:

- Thank you for volunteering.
- **Introductions**
- **Hopes for session**. 1. Go over aims; 2. With a partner: What led you to volunteer? How do you feel about the role? Worried about? Excited about?
- **Any questions?**

- **SC factsheet for SFVs: read and discuss** with a partner.
- Any questions?
- <u>Activity 1</u>: what is the role of the SFV card sort – yes, no maybe.
- Any questions?
- <u>Activity 2</u>: Is it an appropriate referral sheet (with a partner). Then join with another pair and compare notes. (10 mins +)
- Any questions?
- **Go through SFV tips sheet ('a few things to think about')**
- <u>Activity 3</u>: summarising and prompting. NO QUESTIONS ALLOWED!
  (1 facilitator; 1 talking about an issue of their choice)
- <u>Activity 4:</u> Mini SC: group of 4; just steps 1 and 2
- <u>Activity 5</u>: Role of SFV card sort: piles of yes and no and discussion

- **Plenary**. Did we meet the aims?
- **Reflection and debrief.**
- **Reminder:** supervision will be done after each SFV facilitated circle.
- **Evaluation forms**

2. What is the role of a SFV? CARD SORT

Expert	Reframing	Following up
Therapist	Organising	Giving everyone their say
Challenger	Giving emotional support	Listening
Being creative	Activating participants	Preventing interruptions
Coaching	Time keeping	
Training	Nudging	
Supporting	Prompting	
Showing empathy	Recording	

3. Solution Circles Fact Sheet FOR SFVs

What is a Solution Circle?

A Solution Circle (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996) aims to help staff discuss school issues as a group, and to generate solutions. Each circle takes no more than thirty minutes and involves around 8 people who listen, discuss and collaborate around a focus issue brought to the group by a participant.

What are the roles in a Solution Circle?

- Presenter of the problem (focus person)
- Time keeper
- Note Taker
- Brainstorm Team

SFV tips are highlighted

What happens during a Circle?

BEFORE: Think about whether this is an appropriate referral (i.e. relevant to many; emotionally safe; not so entrenched that progress is unlikely; something that the problem owner really wants changed and believes is changeable). Encourage the problem owner to write down or record 'the problem' and really OWN it. Ensure the recorder and time-keeper are equipped and clear of their roles. Remind the group of ground rules.

Step 1 takes 6 minutes:

The presenter of the problem (focus person) takes <u>6 uninterrupted minutes to outline the problem.</u> This can be anything to do with their daily work with children and young people that they feel stuck with. The timekeeper keeps time and make sure no one interrupts. The recorder takes notes. Everyone else (the Brainstorm Team) listens. If the problem presenter stops talking before the six minutes elapse, everyone else stays silent until the 6 minutes pass. This is vital! The problem presenter gets 6 uninterrupted minutes.

Step 2 takes 6 minutes:

This is a <u>brainstorm</u>. Everyone chimes in with ideas and creative solutions to the problem presented. It is not a time to clarify the problem or to ask questions. It is not a time to give speeches, lectures or advice. The

==Encourage everyone to participate. Stay solution focused: try to deter negativity and to discourage people from 'giving good advice!'.==

Step 3 takes 6 minutes:
The group now have a dialogue ==led by the problem presenter==. This is time to explore and clarify the problem. Focus on the positive points only, not what cannot be done. ==Try to protect the problem owner from being overwhelmed and harassed with questions==

Step 4 takes 6 minutes: **The First Step**
The focus person, with the support of the group, decide on first steps that are doable within the next 3 days. At least ONE step should be initiated within 24 hours. This is critical. Research shows that unless a first step is taken almost immediately, people do not get out of their ruts. A coach from the group volunteers to phone or see the person within 3 days and check if they took their first step.

==Try to encourage the setting of SMART targets. Support the coach==

Finally the group does a round of words to describe the experience and the recorder gives the record to the focus person.

Appendix Nine: Initial and feedback questionnaires

<u>INITIAL</u>:

Please will you share your view……….

1. Why did you volunteer for the Solution Circles program?

_____

_____

2. What are you hoping for from your involvement in the Solution Circles program?

On a scale of 0 to 10, how useful do you think the program will be? Please place a cross.

0 ------1------2------3------4------5------6------7------8------9------10

Not useful at all ---**Very useful**

Name: _____

Many thanks for your time.

FEEDBACK (Participants):

Please will you share your view……….

    1. What did you like most about the Solution Circles program?

_____

_____

    2. How could the Solution Circles program be improved?

_____

On a scale of 0 to 10, how useful was the program to you? Please place a cross.

0 ------1------2------3------4------5------6------7------8------9------10

Not useful at all --Very useful

Would you like the program to continue in your school? _____

Would you recommend the program to staff in other schools? _____

Many thanks for your time.

FEEDBACK: SENCos and Heads

Please will you share your view……….

1. Why did you choose to trial the Solution Circles program in your school?

_____

_____

2. What did you like about the Solution Circles program?

_____

_____

3. How could the Solution Circles program be improved?

4. What would make the Solution Circles program sustainable in your school?

_____

On a scale of 0 to 10, how useful do you feel the program was in your school? Please place a cross.

0 ------1------2------3------4------5------6------7------8------9------10

Not useful at all ---**Very useful**

Would you like the program to continue in your school? _____

Would you recommend the program to other schools? _____

Many thanks for your time.

Appendix Ten: Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale

(CD RISC)

A number of statements which people use to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then circle the appropriate box to the right of the statement to indicate how true this is of you at the moment. There are no right or wrong answers.

	1 Not true at all	2 Rarely true	3 Sometimes true	4 Often true	5 True nearly all the time
1. I am able to adapt to change.					
2. I have close and secure relationships.					
3. Sometimes fate or God can help.					
4. I can deal with whatever comes.					
5. Past success gives me confidence for new challenges					
6. I see the humorous side of things.					
7. I feel obligated to assist others in need.					
8. I tend to bounce back after illness or hardship.					
9. Things happen for a reason					
10. I give my best effort no matter what					
11. I can achieve my goals					
12. When things look hopeless, I don't give up.					
13. I know where to turn for help					
14. Under pressure, I focus and think clearly.					
15. I prefer to take the lead in problem solving.					

16. I am not easily discouraged by failure.					
17. I think of myself as a strong person.					
18. I can make unpopular or difficult decisions.					
19. I can handle unpleasant feelings.					
20. I have a strong sense of purpose.					
21. I have few regrets in life					
22. I like challenges					
23. I work to attain my goals					
24. I have pride in my achievements					
25. My friends are willing to help me make decisions and listen to me.					
26. My family is willing to help me make decisions and listen to me.					
27. I find my job rewarding.					

Appendix Eleven: General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)

A number of statements which people use to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then circle the appropriate box to the right of the statement to indicate how true this is of you at the moment. There are no right or wrong answers.

	1 Not at all true	2 Hardly true	3 Moderately true	4 Exactly true
1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.				
2. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.				
3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.				
4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.				
5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.				
6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.				
7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.				
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.				
9. If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.				
10. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.				

Appendix Twelve: Circle Five transcripts
(On CD)

Appendix Thirteen: Semi-structured interview schedule

RQ3 = Which mechanisms did Staff Facilitator Volunteers identify as affecting the facilitation of the SC programme in schools?

- Can you tell me what it was like taking part in this project/ What was it like taking part in the Solution Circles intervention?

- What made you choose to be involved in the Solution Circles intervention?

- What made you want to train as a facilitator?

- What was it like training to be a facilitator?

- What was it like facilitating a circle?

- **<u>What issues came up for you as a facilitator? At a personal level? When interacting with others in the group? Working within the school system?</u>**

- What advice would you give other facilitators?

- What was the best thing-worst thing for you about taking part in the programme?

- What were the best and worst things for you about training as a facilitator?

- What do you think about using Solution Circles in schools?

- How do you think Solution Circles could be useful in schools? How/Why not?

- Is there anything else you think it would be useful for me to know if I am to run Solution Circles in the future?

Appendix Fourteen: Semi-structured interview transcripts
(On CD)

Appendix Fifteen: Final collation of questionnaire codes

(Thematic Analysis One)

Code 1: Structure - general

'coming together within a specific structure to enable maximum focus'	'Focused approach to problem solving
'it did not allow for expression of feelings but this is the nature of the process. If it did, its nature would be different'	'the model itself; the inclusion of a time (increases focus)'
'structure'	'A SC is a technique not a group of people'
'it was clear and simply delivered'	'the time limit on the process'

Code 2: Everyone gets a say; not being interrupted

'Being able to have my say without being talked over'	Enabling others to speak without interruption'
What I liked most: 'to be given the chance to say what I wanted to say'	'Uninterrupted airing of the issue'
'I liked the structure. I felt it gave everyone the chance to have their say'	'that everyone got to contribute'

Code 3: Structure -Step one –

'Better if 'less time to speak' (for focus person in step 1)	'I would like to know what problem is being brought before the circle'
'reduce the talking time' (i.e. step one)	'knowing the issue to be discussed in advance'
'adapt time on section one and three of the model'	

Code 4: Structure – Step three – dialogue and clarification

'time for discussion'	'more focus on the problem'
'adapt time on section one and three of the model'	

Code 5: Structure- ground rules

'ground rules'	'ground rules at the start'

Code 6: Solidarity & sharing & support;

'coming together within a specific structure to enable maximum focus'	'solidarity'
'it helps exposing and solving problems without the confrontation of others'	'supportive approach'
'the opportunity to freely air concerns and work on solutions together rather than a "them and us" feeling'	'airing views and problems'
'meeting on a regular basis and discussing school's issues/problems'	
'sharing ideas, being able to talk about issues that face each one of us'	'staff working together and supporting one another'
'we all were able to meet as a team and discuss what we are concerned about'	'chance to get together and support each other'

Code 8: Safe

'Safe environment to express views'	Perhaps a longer session as the process becomes more familiar and 'safer'
'I feel 6 minutes is a long time to talk. I felt like all eyes were on me and I did not feel comfy with that'	'longer time for introductions'

Code 9: Private space/room

'more private venue'	'room, space'
'a room without interruptions'	

Code 10: Logistics & practicalities

'easy to adapt to a school environment'	

Code 11: *Management support and involvement*

'to open it up to the whole school, as we have done previously, so that solutions can be found for difficult situations swiftly instead of what currently exists'	'SENCo to sit in the last session to show support and see it in action'
'by involving more senior management next time'	

Code 12: Came at the right time

'I think the SC has been really helpful and I think it came to us at the right time as we are going through some difficult transitions'	

Code 13: Training Matters

'longer time for the training'	'training with other school – other perspectives'
'longer training'	'more time to be trained'

Code 14: Make-up of group (size, roles, voluntary?)

Better 'with a small group'	'more people involved at different times' 'A SC is a technique not a group of people'
'the invitation to be open to every member of the working team'	'it would be good if groups were larger, particularly if the problem involved the whole school (although more time may be needed for more people!)'
'to include all TAs'	'having time for everyone to contribute'

Code 15: Focus on solutions not problems/positive;

'strategies to move forward with regarding problems'	'definite outcomes'
'brainstorming'	'sharing and resolving problems'

Code 16: Visual record;

'showed ideas'	

Code 17: Facilitator actions

'allowing the person who brings the issue to have more control and	

focus when discussing the first steps as they tend to get lost in the various discussions taking place at the end'	

Appendix Sixteen: Photographs of the thematic mapping process

Thematic Analysis One:

Thematic Analysis Two:

Appendix Seventeen: Examples of draft thematic maps
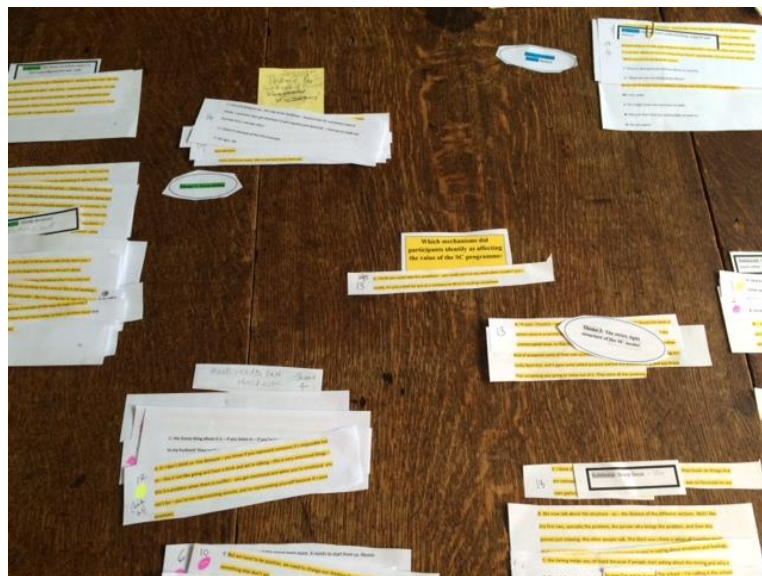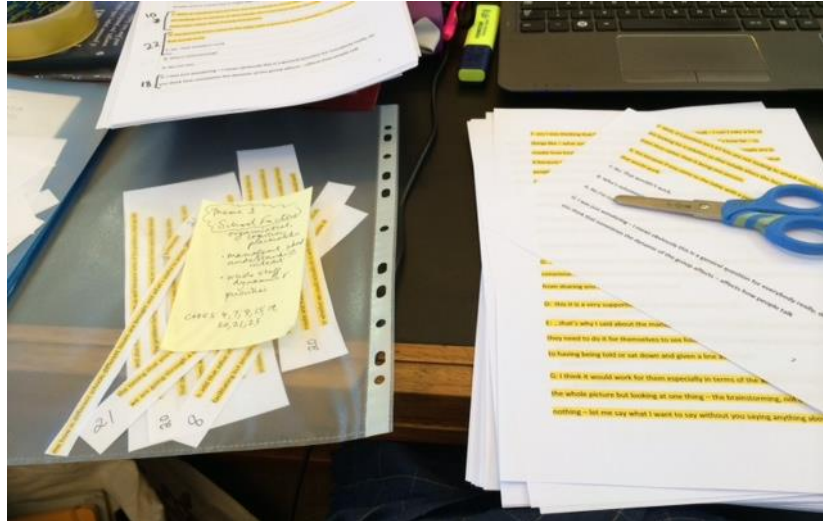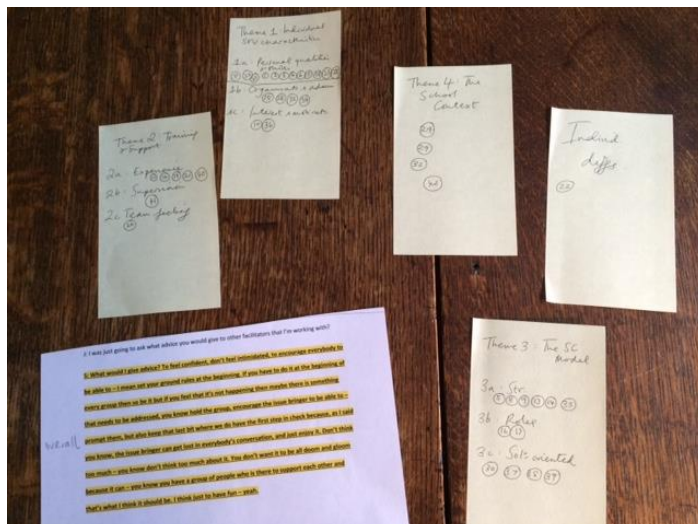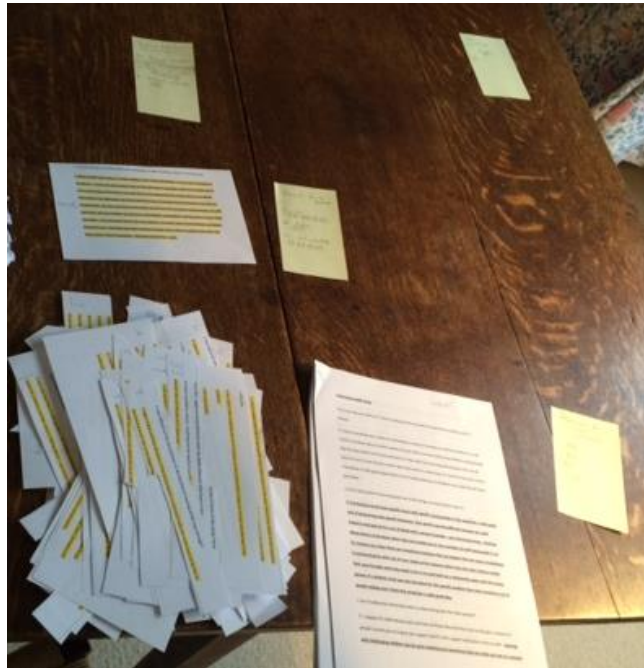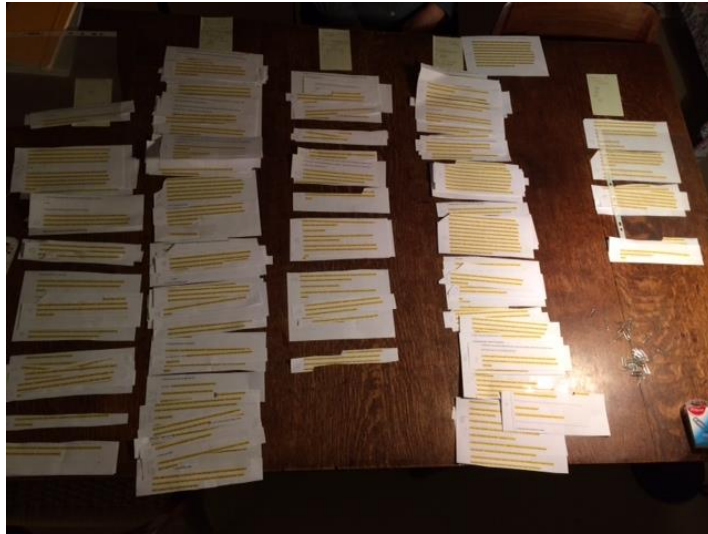
1. **Early maps for Thematic Analysis One:**
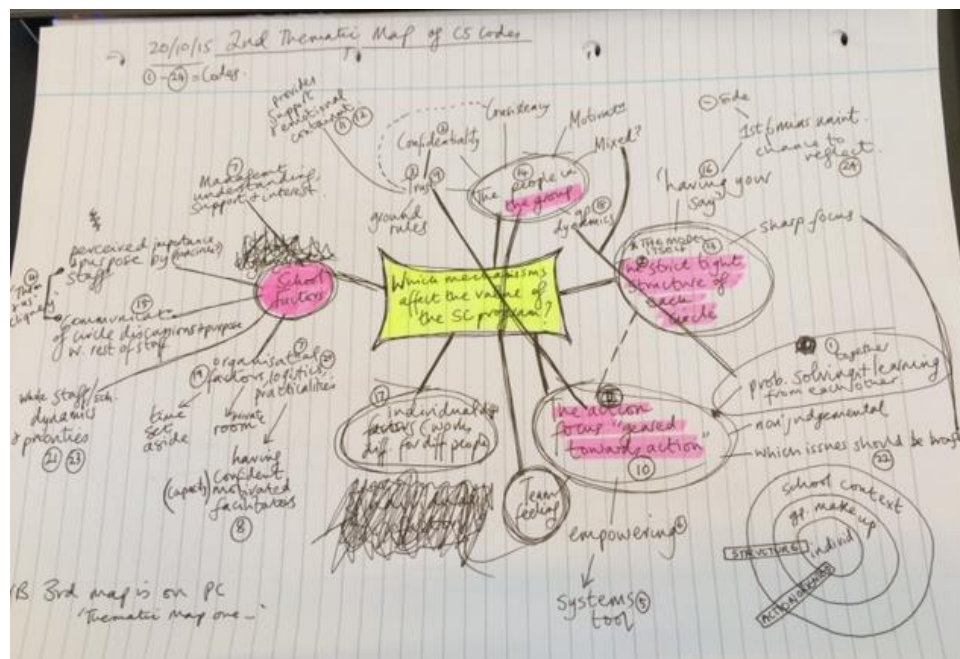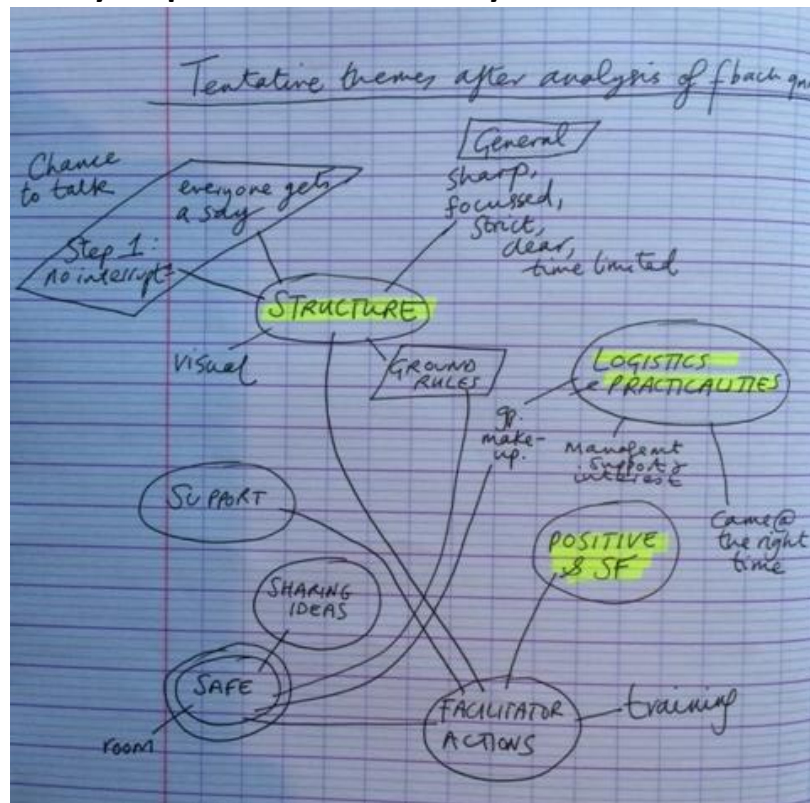
2. Late stage of Thematic Analysis One:

Subtheme: Organisational factors, logistics, practicalities, e.g. providing private room, time, training etc.

Subtheme: Whole staff dynamics and priorities

Subtheme: Management understanding, support and

Subtheme: The focus on action makes it feel non-judgemental and 'safe'

Theme 1: Team feeling

Theme 2: School context factors

Subtheme: Factors leading to the build-up of trust

Emotional support and containment

Ground rules

Group dynamics

Confidentiality and perceived confidentiality

Consistent attendees

Similarity of role and status of group members

Which mechanisms did participants identify as affecting the value of the SC programme?

Theme 3: The SC model

Subtheme: Chance to reflect

Subtheme: Allows you to 'have your say'

Subtheme: Problem solving together and learning from each other

Subtheme: Empowering: Gives a feeling of Agency

Solution oriented

Subtheme: Sharp focus

Individual differences – it is different for different people

3. Early stages of Thematic Analysis Two:
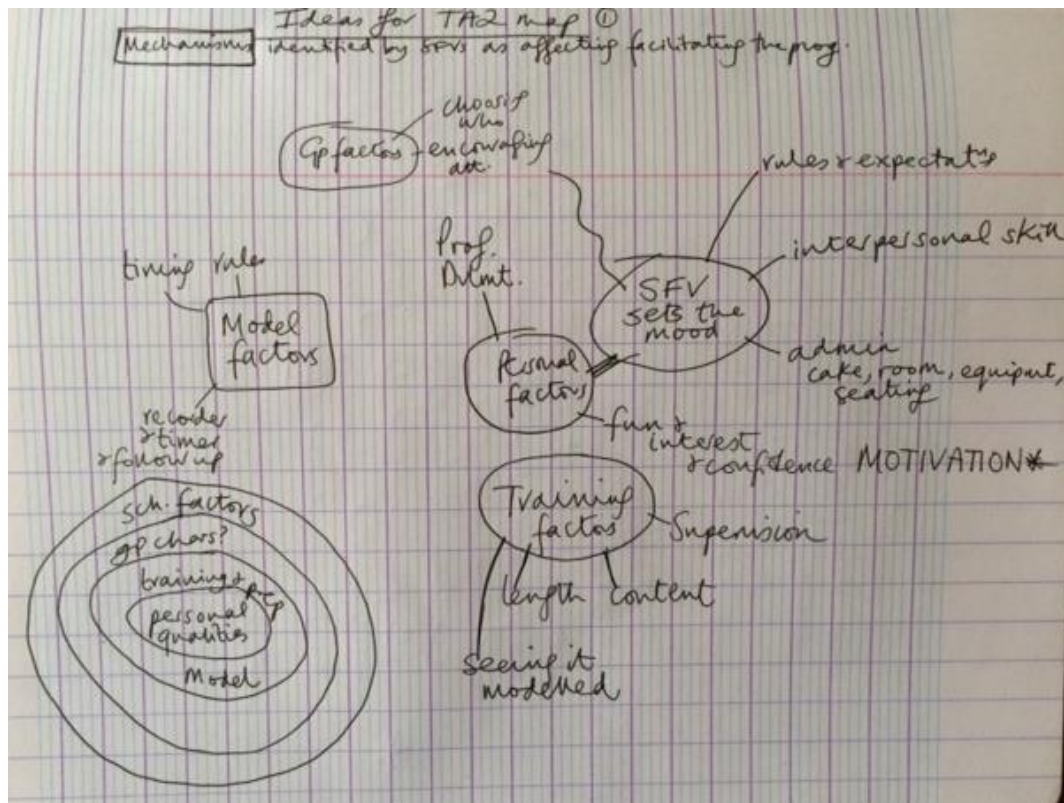
Appendix Eighteen:

Raw quantitative data and SPSS analysis (on CD)

Appendix Nineteen: Table showing initial themes identified from questionnaires (Thematic Analysis One)

Theme	Description	Illustrative quote
1: The structure	The SC model itself seemed to be a mechanism that participants linked to programme value.	'I liked the structure. I felt it gave everyone the chance to have their say'
2. Things that make the group feel safe.	Participants reported valuing the safe, supportive atmosphere of the groups. Thus, factors engendering this sense of safety in the group were identified as important.	'safe environment to express views'
3. Links to school priorities	The degree to which the circles could help address whole school issues was identified by participants as affecting their value.	'I think the SC has been really helpful and I think it came to us at the right time as we are going through some difficult transitions'
4. Logistics and Practicalities	Logistical factors were thought to influence the success of the programme.	Better if: 'more private venue'

Appendix Twenty: Code Books for thematic analyses

Thematic Analysis One

Theme 1: Team Feeling; **Theme Two**: School Context; **Theme 3:** The SC Model; **Theme 4**: Space to talk

Code	Description	Example	Theme
1. Problem solving and learning	Comments about group members working as a team to learn and problem solve.	'.. to exchange ideas and give advice and you don't always need to-kind of, you know-you're gonna have to go and talk to somebody and have a solution but you know just advice and exchange of ideas is a basis'	Team feeling
2. Confidentiality	Comments about keeping issues discussed confidential and the importance of ground rules.	'and the confidentiality thing-it seems like just a little thing but it's quite a big thing isn't it because you're exposed- I mean some of the stuff we did talk about was'	Team feeling
3. Trust	Comments about developing trust and being honest and open in your comments to the group.	'We are building up trust – perhaps we don't trust each other as much but being in that circle we are building up that trust…'	Team feeling
4. Cliquey	Comments about the circle group being seen by staff outside it as a closed and secret 'club'.	'…because they can also think…you're going to have a like 'them and us' aren't you?'	School Context
5. Systemic change	Comments about circles influencing systemic change in the school.	'and lots of the things that have come up have been 'Oh why can't we think about a policy on this' or change – big systemic changes rather than little tiny – oh perhaps we'll get together and but a new bag for that child' or it's been quite big – kind of process things which has been interesting'	The SC Model
6. Empowering to be in circle group/power of	Comments illustrating a belief in the power of the circle group to initiate	'It could be quite empowering actually, couldn't it actually if we used it…'	The SC Model

	the group.	change.		
7.	a. Organisational support; b. Management support.	7a: Comments about the provision of resources for the circles, e.g. rooms, time. 7b: Comments about the power of the school management to make or break the initiative.	7a: 'we need to be able to have that room where – that venue where it's just us venturing what problems is affecting us….' 7b: 'I think everyone has got to want this, everyone has to be wanting to work together with one goal which is the child – that's how I believe it should be but I don't think we have that here.. and I know what you're saying, that you think it starts with us. So what we're looking at is a bottom upwards movement of change when we've got a head that's said 'it's my way and my way only'	School Context
8.	Facilitating and training to facilitate	Comments about the role of the facilitator and/or the importance of training for facilitators.	'D: she has. Well it's here now so it's for us to carry on isn't it? E: It's like a machine. Once you run it you cannot stop it. D: Well we've done the training'	School Context
9.	Risk element of being the problem owner.	Comments about the shadow side of brining an issue to the circle.	'but sometimes, you have the six minutes and then you start listening to your voice and then you start to retract and think – no – I'm not going to be that open'	The SC Model
10.	Positive and solution focused. Geared towards action.	Comments about the action focus of the SC model.	'Can I – I want to talk about what I liked most about it – in the session that I was in we came up with some good strategies to use to move forward with a particular student'	The SC Model
11.	Supportive.	Comments about the warm, non-judgemental and emotionally containing feeling of being in a circle.	'I also think it was good that no-one got offended by it – whatever they said…'	Team feeling
12.	Need to talk about the emotional side	Comments about the need to discuss work issues, including the emotional side.	'I think it's an amazing opportunity to meet on a regular basis and discuss things that are	Space to talk

of work.		happening around school that trouble us. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to do that'	
13. Model/Structure	Comments about the SC model, including comments about the value of each step in the circle.	'C: The timing keeps you on track because if people start asking about the timing and why it should be so short and it actually helps retain the focus. I realise that now because we haven't got the timer on and I think that we might be going a little bit off… E: It stops repetition doesn't it? A: And people labouring a point'	The SC Model
14. Who should be in the group?	Comments about the pros and cons of having a more or less mixed group; comments about the value of consistency of attendance to circles.	'I don't think there is freedom of speech once you have management there'	Team feeling
15. Beyond the circle.	Comments about the importance and logistics of communicating and including the rest of the school and senior leaders in the programme.	'Maybe not us bring something but so he *(Head)* could – because we do a lot of stuff and he says 'Oh yes that sounds good. Go and do that' You know what he's like – he does it with me 'Oh yeah, that's great go and do it' He has no idea what you were doing'	School Context
16. Talking space – 'have your say'	Comments about the ability of the model to meet a need to 'have your say'.	'you are allowed to have your say without being shut down, or losing it or being moved on to a different subject or – being able to stay on topic'	The SC Model
17. Idiographic - Its different for different people	Comments linked to the relative value of the programme to different people.	'other people they might not like the pressure and this might work anticlockwise so the opposite way …'	Individual diffs.
18. Group dynamics.	Comments about how group dynamics affect the value of the circle/programme.	'I was just wondering – I mean obviously this is a general question for everybody really, do you think that sometimes the	Team feeling

		dynamic of the group affects – affects how people talk?'	
19. Time devoted to circles interferes with the job.	Comments about the time commitment to attend circles taking time away from staff member's work with children.	'I'm not saying abolish it. I'm saying it's a good idea but the impact on being in the classroom and being in our groups and on particular children that we are helping, then to me it doesn't – it's too much'	School Context
20. Logistics and practicalities on the ground in each school.	Comments specifically referencing the value of the programme within that particular school and how it might be most valuable.	'C: Yes but what A said is very good – like if we met maybe sort of like once a month or once a fortnight….'	School Context
21. School ethos and priorities influence the value of the group/different in different schools.	Comments about the connection between whole school developmental stage and the value of the programme, including the idea that the programme 'came along at the right time'	'… because you know what A said is right, we're in a state of transition and there's lots of things going on and if we deal with too many things then we can't deal with each thing effectively…'	School Context
22. Which issues should be brought to circles?	Comments about whether circles are better at addressing some issues than others.	'A: Yes because if you came to the table with a personal home problem, I don't know how that would work. F: No. That wouldn't work'	The SC Model
23. Circle activities should help the school, and be seen to help the school.	Comments suggesting that circles are most valuable if they have a whole school application.	'It doesn't make it right. It doesn't make it best for the school.'	School Context
24. Chance to reflect	Comments indicating that participants feel the model allows them space to reflect, and that this is valuable.	'A: Like B said you end up sort of answering your own – because you've got all that time, you end up kind of.. C: reflecting'	The SC Model

Thematic Analysis Two

Theme 1: Individual SFV characteristics (1a: personal qualities and skills; 1b: organisation and admin; 1c: interest and motivation); **Theme 2: Training and Support** (2a: experience; 2b: supervision; 2c: team feeling); **Theme 3: the SC model** (3a structure; 3b: roles; 3c: solution oriented); **Theme 4: the school context**; **Overarching theme**: Individual differences.

Code	Description	Example	Theme
1. Strict and assertive	Comments about the need for the SFV to enforce the strict, timed SC structure and to stop people interrupting.	'…I think they need to be quite strict because – get them to rein it in a little bit because they can go off and digress a bit…'	1a
2. Diplomacy	Comments about the need for the SFV to negotiate but keep participants at ease.	'…but you can do it in a diplomatic way'	1a
3. Interpersonal skills	Comments highlighting the importance of interpersonal skills to the SFV role, e.g. showing empathy, listening skills, sensitivity to group dynamics.	'…some listening skills would be great…' 'it's about helping another person to bring their issue forward'	1a
4. Reflective space	Comments regarding the responsibility of the SFV to help provide opportunities for reflection for all participants.	'yeah, be comfortable with the silence sort of thing'	1a
5. Issue choice	Comments about the role SFVs should play regarding the selection of issues to bring to circles.	'… there has to be an element of it that a facilitator must be aware that this might be an issue that can't be dealt with in the group…'	3a
6. n/a			
7. Confidence	Comments about the need for SFVs to feel and act confident.	'I think you do have to have confidence to be a facilitator and not just confidence in terms of kind of moving the person along in the right direction but again also maintaining that group - you know being mindful of others in the group just in case it can get a little bit off you know – out of control when really it shouldn't.'	1a
8. First steps	Comments about what role the SFV plays regarding the selection of first steps	'… I think we need to be tighter at the end at that first step there'	3a
9. Follow up	Comments about what role the SFV plays in supporting the coach, and following up first steps.	'um, to encourage them, to follow up really afterwards and make sure someone, see if someone is going to go with the person	3a

		presenting and yes follow up to make sure they've done it and what the outcome was really'	
10. Professional development	Comments linking being an SFV to developing professionally.	'just another string to your bow really'	1c
11. Training too short	Any comments on the need for SFV training to be longer.	'You would need at least half a day's training to do it properly'	2a
12. Practice	Comments highlighting the importance of practice, whether formal or informal	'keep practising, keep practising' 'Obviously a lot more role play. More practice.'	2a
13. Knowledge of the model	Comments about SFVs needing to know the model well, and use prompt sheets and tools to help them implement it.	'I think maybe just a laminated sheet with a list, an idiot's guide –'do not question, do not interrupt' – dos and don'ts basically'	3a
14. Structure	Comments that suggest that the strict structure of the circles makes the SFV role easier to manage.	'what helps to make the role easier I think is the structure because it's so easy to follow…'	3a
15. Administrative	Comments about the SFV as administrator – providing equipment, organising the room, where people sit etc.	'…we just need to find a different venue really because it needs to be somewhere really private'	1b
16. Links to recorder role	Comments about the links between the recorder role and the SFV role.	'… but when you've got to stand up and concentrate on writing stuff down its hard to take part in the conversation'	3b
17. Links to timer role	Comments about the links between the timer role and the SFV role.	'I mean the facilitator could be the timer – keep your eye on the clock – that's not impossible'	3b
18. Difficult	Comments about the strain of the SFV role, including about it being daunting, tiring and exposing.	'That judging yourself and assessing yourself and it's constant self-assessment and self-deprecation really and oh god they probably don't like me as a trainer you know – facilitator – so there's all that for facilitators to have to work through really to show their potency …'	1a
19. Exposure to the model	Comments about indirect means of learning to facilitate.	'…you learn skills whether delivering or just listening'	2a
20. Team feeling	Comments linking the SFV experience to the actions of the wider group.	'Love us, hate us but we all kind of pull together regardless…'	2c
21. You grow into the role	Comments about the value of learning SFV skills over time.	'I think that it is a role that could deepen…'	2a
22. Be yourself	Comments about individuality in the role –	'But as time goes by you witness it and you put your	Individual

	each individual SFV sets the depth and climate of the process.	own kind of slant on it, so it was good to do. I would say it was alright'	Differences
23. Non-verbal communication	Comments regarding the need for SFVs to be sensitive to 'what's not said' – e.g. body language, facial expression.	'…skills of picking up things like softer messages or body language or what's not said…'	1a
24. Insider or outsider	Comments about whether the SFV should be a member of school staff or someone from outside.	'…you being an outsider worked really well because you had no idea of the day-to-day running…'	4
25. Trust	Comments about the need for participants to trust the SFV.	'I'm kind of seen as – I feel kind of accepted by the group…'	1a
26. Complex and responsible role	Comments stressing the complexity and challenges of the SFV role.	'Yes. Because at our training there were a few of us from our school and someone who I thought would be really good at facilitating actually was very uncomfortable. So it's quite interesting because it is quite a responsible role to have'	2a
27. Emotional support	Comments about the role of the SFV in supporting participants emotionally.	'I mean if I went in and I was a facilitator at the time of this I think I would have that view that you cannot begin until something's cleared so I would always have to ask…'	1a
28. Getting a group together	Comments highlighting the role of the SFV in initiating, organising and maintaining a group of participants.	'yes you know, every six weeks a block of six people…'	1b
29. Power	Comments about the role making SFVs feel powerful	'well it's kind of empowering and I felt in charge of people'	4
30. Solution pressure	Comments about the pressure to maintain the solution orientation of the group.	'…oh god, someone's getting negative!'	3c
31. Using your instinct	Comments about the need for SFVs to not think too much at times, but to follow their instinct.	'But using it in a way – your instinct – I suppose it's more instinctual than anything of what they're not saying.'	1a
32. Flexibility	Comments about the need to adapt the SFV at times to the priorities and chaos of school	'Very busy. And every week there's something different – you know you never know what's going to happen in a school because it's a living breathing thing and it's probably true that they can't come that week	4

		because the course work has to be sent off or something…'	
33. Rules and expectations	Comments about the importance of SFVs organising the agreement of ground rules.	'It's just to make sure that everybody is clear at the beginning'	1b
34. Atmosphere	Comments about the need for SFVs to establish a welcoming and unthreatening atmosphere.	' a couple of jokes here and there, bring them cake'	1b
35. n/a			
36. Enjoyment	Comments about how enjoyment of the role affects how you do it.	'…I enjoyed it and I hope that we will carry it on. I think Sally and I will definitely try and carry it on'	1c
37. n/a			
38. Solution orientation brings liberation.	Comments about the solution orientation making the SFV role clearer and easier.	'…I do feel like I have to justify myself, whereas in solution focus there's no room for that'	3c
39. Different and new	Comments about the solution orientation bringing an unusual/ fresh feeling to the facilitator role.	'I think the first time it was very different for me…'	3c
40. Modelling	Comments that highlight the importance of seeing the SFV role modelled.	'…I think its modelling it yourself…'	2a
41. Supervision	Comments indicating that SFVs value follow up, supervision and external support.	'I'd feel happy chatting with Sally about it, definitely'	2b
42. Whole school	Comments about the SFV role in communicating circle activities and decisions with rest of school.		4

Appendix Twenty-one: Examples of coded extracts for Thematic Analysis One and Two

Thematic Analysis One:

This sample is from Circle 5, School 3. It starts on line 66 (see Appendix 12)

> **Codes are shown here** (see Appendix 19 for the Code Book)

13

Rachel: I'll start. I found it – well I like brainstorming sessions anyway and I found this kind of added value to a normal brainstorming session because of the timing, because of the uninterrupted issue, so that it was really interesting with those 6 minutes - people often kind of answered some of their own questions the more they thought about something so I really liked that. and it gave some added purpose behind the brainstorming and you knew that something was going to come out of it. They were all the positives…

10

I think the big question is what's to happen next because it was really good to have one thing that you had to follow up on that day but it's kind of – what happens after that I suppose.

13

Emma: I feel having one subject or one solution put across rather than you start talking about one thing then you jump to another thing in most debriefs, pre-briefs, but having just one to focus on and everybody being able to put in …

----

17 …but the only not positive but negative is that I'm not confident so 6 minutes was long and for everyone to have their eyes on me so I felt a bit uncomfortable for that so I probably wouldn't want to come up with another solution because I wouldn't want everyone watching me or because I didn't feel comfortable with that.

Pause

----

13 **Jessica**: I think it worked well for us because we're all quite big characters so getting one person to talk and not to interrupt has always been a bit of a challenge when we've had debriefs and things like that so I think the structure definitely works well for us…

----

21 …. and as I said earlier the timing that you came along to do the circle solutions with us was good timing because we are going through a lot of transition so I think it's been really helpful.

10 **Victoria**: I think what B said about – you know the follow up really that I think – I'm not sure I mean those people who brought solutions how well they felt that that part of it has actually gone forward…

----

20 … and also thinking long term as well because some of the problems that we did raise, I know that the problem-bringer only focussed on one but there were other issues that came out of that – would we go back and explore other solutions for all the other

problems and how we would then build that in because you know what A said is right, we're in a state of transition and there's lots of things going on and if we deal with too many things then we can't deal with each thing effectively but those people who did bring a problem – how did they feel that that bit went afterwards - actually resolved itself or didn't?

----

21 | **Tirunesh**: I think it was really good because you go to so many things and they touch on things that are relevant to you but other stuff is not relevant so the fact that it was so focussed on our own particular issues at this time was really good…

----

20 | …My concern is about how we then run the thing for management so they get the chance to perhaps look at the same issues with us maybe and maybe how we actually get our points across so that there is a really open forum or whether we could actually do it with both – I don't know whether that would work?...

----

1 | … People would be so aware because obviously being able to speak freely is quite a key thing and not feel judged or ? – it never felt like that at all. So I didn't get any of those feelings come out where you went away and felt you wanted to judge anyone or felt judged yourself which is really an important thing when you are working – trying to work as a team.

----

13 **Jessica**: I think you could take this anywhere – you could use it in any work place

couldn't you – totally, it's just a shell for you as a company to fill so it could go

anywhere.

----

11 **Constantina**: I also think it was good because no-one got offended by it – whatever

they said. Like this bit we're doing now where people can give – you know – some sort

of feedback – no-one really felt the person who spoke, who's the lead speaker, didn't

feel offended by what anyone put up on that board and I think it shows a lot of

maturity doesn't it from us…..

Thematic Analysis Two:

EXAMPLE ONE: This sample is from Paula's interview. It starts on line 241 (see Appendix 14)

Paula: I think I had kind of butterflies as well like anything new that you're going to try really you never really know whether you're doing the right thing, whether you're being bossy, whether you're giving the person enough cues. You can only get your emotions once you're in the room really which you can't really describe – yeah I think initially it was like whoa. It's the unknown.

18 ←──────── | **Codes are shown here** (See Appendix 19 for the Code Book

----

Jo: Yeah it's a bit daunting doing that role.

Paula: But as time goes by you witness it and you put your own kind of slant on it so it was good to do. I would say it was alright.

22

Jo: What kind of tips would you give a facilitator at another school who was going to take it on or me in helping them?

Paula: I think you can – you have to be *you* really, because one person could do it completely different I think – just kind of being really natural being relaxed

22

----

and I think sometimes shifting your gaze as well because sometimes she'll be looking at you

and some people get intimidated by that and kind of like small little gestures like smile, say it's

alright carry on. All those things kind of help.

23

Jo: Yeah.

Paula: I think initially maybe you could write little cards to yourself.

13

Jo: Yeah we were talking about that earlier about how sticking to the model can seem quite

difficult and maybe something on a bit of paper. I don't know what do you think?

Paula: Yes that's quite useful, like a little bank card, a little structure so it's there and so you

can have a little pointer that you can look at, just look up just to put you back on – back to the

task. I think that would be quite helpful.

13

EXAMPLE TWO: This sample is from Sonia's interview. It starts on line 33 (see Appendix 14)

Sonia: Everyone got a bit ooh …it was a bit of a free for all and then… I think they need to be quite strict because – get them to rein it in a little bit because they can go off and digress a bit.

1 ← **Codes are shown here** (see Appendix 19 for the Code Book)

Jo: The group can go off on their own thing?

Sonia: and then everybody starts talking over… and when the person presenting the problem is talking and it's their time and everybody starts throwing in their two pennith – they need to stick to the rules .

1

Jo: So the facilitator is that… must make sure everyone sticks to the rules and it sounded like there is something in there like refereeing almost?

Sonia: Yeah, a little bit, but you can do it in a diplomatic way.

2/3

 Jo: But I mean what kind of skills do you think a facilitator would need in the ideal world?

Sonia: Diplomacy, um they need to have good listening skills to kind of ….sort of… see – they need to kind of be – I don't know really – they need to just let the person talk but – they don't really necessarily need to ask questions – be non-directive sort of thing– just let them talk….

3

…I don't know – its… they need to be comfortable with sitting in silence. I know I find that – with the counselling I used to find it quite hard to sit there in silence and some people are quite uncomfortable with that but it actually can be quite useful.

Jo: Yeah absolutely – so sometimes to give a space –

Sonia: yeah be comfortable with the silence sort of thing. Sometimes the person talking can sit there for a few minutes and everyone is like – that's when everyone else will start talking even though they're not supposed to – but then the person could think of something else.

4

Jo: Yeah but in the first 6 minutes of course no one is supposed to interrupt.

Sonia: Well they're not supposed to but they do.

1

Jo: OK so actually that role of the facilitator to really keep – do you think it works well – the model with the 6 minutes?

Sonia: I do but in the 6 minutes when the person is bringing the problem, when they finish talking, if there is a silence for a couple of minutes it's like everybody feels really uncomfortable with that silence so it's like – oh we've got to talk now because we can't sit in silence and they all sit there – oh we've got to talk – we're gonna say something.

Jo: So there is something about the group as a whole knowing to leave that – I suppose the facilitator maybe sets that kind of context.

Sonia: It's Just to make sure everybody is clear at the beginning –

33

Appendix Twenty-two: Theme and subtheme definitions for Thematic Analysis One

Theme	Theme definition	Subthemes	Subtheme definition
Theme 1: 'The Structure'	Participants valued the strictly timed and tightly structured SC model.	**Subtheme 1a**: 'So focussed'	Participants felt the model's insistence on one 'problem' 'owned' by the 'Focus Person' was valuable, but that this also put pressure on that person.
		Subtheme 1b: 'Opening you up'	Participants felt that aspects of the model encouraged reflection.
		Subtheme 1c: 'Have your say'	Participants felt that the strict rules of the model allowed people to 'have their say' without interruption and upset.
		Subtheme 1d: 'Empowering'	Participants commented on, and showed in their language, that the solution/action oriented nature of the model gave them a feeling of agency and empowerment.
Theme 2: A need to talk	Participants valued the groups because they met a need to talk freely about their work, including its emotional component.	-	-
Theme 3: 'Feeling like a team'	Participants valued feeling like a supportive, collaborative, purposeful team. They identified group dynamics and rules, and the action focus of the circles, as mechanisms affecting team	**Subtheme 3a**: 'Build up that trust'	Participants felt that group climate and dynamics, establishing shared rules, and a focus on action rather than blame, meant group trust could grow.
		Subtheme 3b: 'To exchange, give advice'	Participants valued the bringing together of a range of expertise and experience in the groups. Some participants felt that

	feeling.		the more varied and mixed the groups, the better the problem solving and learning.
Theme 4: School Context: 'What are you lot doing down there?'	Participants indicated that whole school factors affected the value of the programme.	**Subtheme 4a:** 'It's like a machine'	Participants felt that organisational factors, logistics and practicalities affected the value of the programme. These included the provision of a private room, protected time and the training of facilitators.
		Subtheme 4b: 'Everyone has got to want this'	The degree of integration of the programme with the needs and interests of the rest of the school staff was identified by participants as influencing the value of the programme.
			Participants felt the interest, support and involvement of school managers (in particular the Head) affected the value of the programme.

Appendix Twenty-three: Theme and subtheme definitions for Thematic Analysis Two

Theme	Theme definition	Subthemes	Subtheme definition
Theme 1: 'The Structure'	Participants linked aspects of the SC model itself to the nature and success of the facilitation process.	**Subtheme 1a**: 'Time chunks'	The requirement by SFVs to enforce the tight timed structure of the SC model was thought to facilitate the SFV role.
		Subtheme 1b: 'Separate roles'	The interaction between the facilitator, problem owner, recorder, timer and coach roles built into the SC model were felt to interact to affect facilitation of the circles.
		Subtheme 1c: 'Positivity'	The solution orientation of the model was identified as influencing the SFV role.
Theme 2: Individual SFV characteristics	Participants felt that certain individual SFV characteristics and qualities affected the facilitation process.	**Subtheme 2a**: 'Encourage people to talk'	Certain personal qualities and skills were identified as underlying the value of the SFV role, in particular interpersonal skills and the ability to contain the emotions of others.
		Subtheme 2b: 'Everything's there, everything's ready'	SFVs identified engagement with the organisational and administrative side of the SFV role as a mechanism influencing its value.
		Subtheme 2c: 'Enjoy it'	Participants felt that motivation and having an interest in the SFV role and 'believing in it' affected its enactment.

Theme 3: Support	Training, support and supervision were identified as affecting the facilitation process.	**Subtheme 3a:** 'Practising and doing'	Practising the SFV role and having experience being in the circles, whether as a facilitator or not, were thought to develop facilitator competence and confidence.
		Subtheme 3b: Supervision	Supervision, formal and informal, from inside and outside the school, was linked to improved SFV practice.
		Subtheme 3c: 'Support each other'	Facilitators felt that they did not perform the SFV role in isolation. Colleagues in school were identified as influencing SFVs' decisions to take on the role and their development within it.
Theme 4: School context: 'Dealing with what's in the field'	SFVs felt that the facilitation process is affected by certain school context factors.	-	-

Appendix Twenty-four: Qualities of SFVs
(as identified by SFVs)

kind	approachable	self controlled
containing	responsible	resilient
listening	non-verbal	frustration tolerant
strict	detached	sensitive
confidence	assertive	nice
reflective	challenging	diplomatic
balance	containing	