

Student Number: 1900460

Module Code: ECAD7003

Word Count: 2748 / 2500 (+/- 250)

Targets & Action Points: (Based on feedback from previous modules)

1. **Increase criticality within writing.** This will be done by conducting further research around topics, to find authors who perhaps have a different thought process and may offer an alternative perspective.
2. **Continue to use very good use of referencing.** This will be done by continuing to use knowledge of referencing, and a Harvard referencing template.
3. **Use appendices to support points where possible.** This will be done by using appendices to support writing where appropriate and necessary – and make direct references to these appendices within my writing.
4. **Make greater use of journal articles.** This will be done by using more journal articles to support my claims. This will be easier to do within this assignment, due to the topic being more recent and current – meaning more journal articles will be available on this topic.

Component Two: How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact and evidence base.

Introduction

This assignment sets out to critically reflect on one area of a school improvement plan, provided by my first professional teaching experience placement school. The school is located in a fairly affluent area, which can be assumed due to direct infrastructure (motorway) links to the capital, and due to the area itself being rich in medium-high end retail business, as well as discussions with the teachers of the school itself. The school is a secondary comprehensive English medium school, which received an excellent rating across the board from Estyn (2017) and received a green support category rating meaning it receives the lowest level of financial support available from the Welsh Government (My Local School. 2019). The school's FSM lies at 8.6%, which is far below the national average (Department for Education, 2019). The area of the school improvement plan that will be focused on involves the improvement of outcomes for boys aged 11-18 and aims to close the attainment gap between male and female students. This is a main focus of the school and is well enforced throughout the school. Data, as well as academic literature will be engaged with, as well as analysed and synthesised in order to gain an understanding of the field of research, before critically reflecting upon the school's own implementation.

Literature Review

Raising the attainment of boys within a secondary school setting is a fairly recent focus that schools are beginning to acknowledge and put help in place for (Tinklin, T. 2003). However, boys generally obtaining lower grades than girls, and girls continually surpassing boys in terms of results has been recorded since 1975 (Scottish Office, 1999). There is a magnitude of literature that evidences a certain difference between the average attainment of girls being higher than that of boys, including Tinklin et al (2001), Tinklin (2003), Younger et al (1999), Lindsay and Muijs (2007) being just a few. To juxtapose this, there are also some academics who believe that the perspective of looking at the data and comparing as girls achieving higher than boys is inaccurate, as they believe the situation is far more complex and instead, other variables are the true cause of the difference in attainment (Collins et al, 2000. Nuttall and Doherty, 2014). Collins et al (2000) state that teachers should look at the data and highlight which boys and girls have similar social variables such as class, ethnicity, etc. and recognise patterns of lower/higher attainment that way as opposed by gender. However, the authors previously mentioned also recognise that other variables may have some accountability to why boys under attain, but there is still a trend showing boys continually exceed boys (Scottish Office, 1999. Tinklin, et al 2001).

There are many variables that are accountable for the general difference between girls and boys achieve levels. Though the word count does not allow the discussion of them all within this literature review, some will now be reviewed.

A main variable that are said to have an impact on boys' attainment behaviour is the view that boys can put social popularity/acceptance above academic achievement more commonly than girls. It is well documented that boys are often known to be disruptive and seek approval from peers within the classroom at expense of their own as well as the class as a whole's education (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, Patterson. 1994. Schwartz et al, 2006). Such behaviour plays into the views of Guay, Boivin and Hodges (1999) in that those who are highly accepted socially are not often those who do well academically; providing some evidence that boys can put their social positioning within their social group above their academic success. The methods used by Guay, Boivin and Hodges to gather this view provides reassurance of the validity of the information, as they too questioned the validity of the research previously conducted within the field which shared this view. Having raised these concerns, they factored more variables and data

groups into their research to ensure more reliable outcome, which provided the same outcome as their predecessors in the field; suggesting that this view can be accepted.

Similarly, Younger et al (1999) discuss how boys refuse to take accountability and admit that their disruption is not only affecting others' ability to learn but their own as well, making it harder to raise attainment that falls as a result of this. This is challenged by the idea that boys can use disruption as a technique to distract their peers and the teacher from the fact that they do not know how to retain information and the anxieties that they have (Jackson and Salisbury, 1996); so, in an attempt to avoid embarrassment, they attempt to cover it up (Jackson and Salisbury, 1996). This again returns back to the concept of boys performing lower than girls due to societal expectations.

Another variable that aids in the idea that boys generally may produce lesser results in examinations is due the theory that girls are said to be able to memorise after understanding more frequently than boys (Hutchison, 2004). Meyer (2000) shares a similar idea but worded slightly differently, in that boys have a tendency to memorise before understanding, meaning they often memorise the wrong understanding of a topic or idea therefore leading to lesser grades when it comes to assessment. It is said to often come down to the fact that boys will often take shortcuts where possible when learning (Reichert and Hawley, 2010), and in this case, jump the gun in understanding and think that they have understood so allow themselves to become distracted before the understanding is fully developed and correct. Meece and Jones (1996) contradict this view to some extent, saying that data shows girls to memorise more as they memorise methods of problem solving as opposed to the actual answer better than boys. Even though Meece and Jones (1996) contradict Meyer (2000) to some extent, the final outcome is still the same; girls are able to memorise the answer/ a solution to an answer more efficiently than boys, providing the same outcome.

Whatever variables are most accountable for the attainment gap, a solution and series of extra provisions need to be put in place in order to minimise or close the attainment gap between girls results and boys. Clark et al (2008) discuss how boys are likely to benefit from a senior mentor within their education providing a coaching or mentoring scheme to act as a parental figure to them within school, regardless to whether such figure is available outside of school or not; however, Clark et al (2008) discuss, that those in low income families or those who are lacking such figures at home are likely to benefit even more. Lacrose is a well published author within the field of male pupil mentoring within an educational setting, with a great scale of their research being on the topic (Lacrose, Bernier, Soucy, 2005. Lacrose et al, 2010. Lacrose et al, 2011

being some). Lacrose being an expert in the field agrees with the view of Clark et al (2008); BuBois and Karcher (2013) however discredit Lacrose' views due to them being based on established theory but without considering the potential drawbacks of such method, and any potential challenges the implementation of their ideas may reveal. Keller (2005) on the other hand shares the same ideas and theory as Lacrose et al (2005, 2010, 2011) and Clark et al (2008) but does recognise potential challenges and provides context and possible solutions to them. Keller refers to Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1982. Gormley, 2008) which states that mentoring will provide benefit to male pupils only where the mentoring/coaching occurs over an extended period of time, as pupils are then more likely to feel secure and safe in their presence as time has allowed such relationships to be built, which will encourage them to confide in and listen to without becoming disengaged and acting out. Keller (2005) considers that this may be problematic in those children who have a lack of parental figures and therefore may have parental sensitivity which restricts their ability to form parental like relationships with the said mentor. Keller (2005) advises that through extended caring attitudes and perseverance with portraying a role in which they can confide (Lindsay and Muijs, 2007) the relationship will be built over time regardless.

Developing Action Point

School Improvement Plans are an essential part of planning, when a school wishes to continually modify their strategic focus (Doud, 1995. Fernandez, 2009). This dedication to such a plan encourages goal setting, strategy development, and commitment agreements from members of staff which ultimately ensures that the strategy and goal will be kept to due to the accountability involved (Armstrong, 1982. Kotler and Murphy, 1981). By doing so, high quality goals are likely to be made as a result (Fernandez,2009). Davies (2006) argues that planning, and school development plans, do not achieve strategic goals, and instead it is the smaller processes that are developed along the way that lead to success; and others suggest that school improvement plans often lead to more of what the school already has/does (Wong, 2003). However, should each level of a school development plan that is advised by Fernandez (2009), then each the school improvement plan should provide aid to areas within the school that truly need assistance and the focus of the school, and an adequate step by step approach to its success/improvement will be developed and provided to those who will be responsible for its implementation. These steps will be discussed further below; however, the school

itself has not provided a detailed school improvement plan or data, or information to coincide with what has been discussed with the Deputy Head (senior mentor) at the school during bridging tasks. Instead, suggestions of what actions/plans/data could have been used by the school or educated suggestions of what the school does do will be used to provide a real life/practical application of the theory.

The first step, as suggested by the school's Deputy Head, by Fernandez (2009), and by School Self Evaluation Guidelines (Appendix 1), would be to formulate what areas within the school may need the additional help of being focussed on as an improvement area. Examples could be to close the attainment gap, raise literacy or numeracy level averages, improve the whole school's average attendance level or even a specific year group, improve outcomes of a key stage, improve deliverance of the digital competency framework, etc. These can possible focus areas can be communicated through the school senior leadership meetings (as done within the practical application school), through departments making suggestions (Appendix 1), and by looking at data such as outcomes of key stages, attendance of key stages, etc (Fernandez, 2009). From these, strategic plans/targets can be formulated that can be implemented throughout the school – often through a 3-year process to allow time for pupils to settle into initiatives and then for improvements to happen overtime. The school used as a practical focus however changes these goals annually, and instead of allowing time for targets to be met, senior leadership members. Decide. Whether the target is still required at the beginning of a school year.

The next step as suggested by Fernandez (2009), SSE Guidelines (Appendix 1), and the school itself is to assign members of staff to monitor the progression of improvement strategy. For the improvement goal of improving outcomes for boys as used in this practical example, the member of staff in charge discussed how role models were implemented and assigned to those boys who needed support. This corresponds with the idea of Lacrose et al (2005), in that boys may need a mentor figure to motivate them towards the same level of personal success as other pupils in their year group. However, with the school reviewing targets annually, and with this being the first year that this improvement goal has been in place, raising outcomes for boys may not be a focus of the school net year; suggesting that the schools strategic plan contrasts the view of Bowlby (1982) and Gormley (2008) due to their view being that mentoring schemes such as that one in place need to be developed over an extended timescale in order for relationships to be formed to such a level that a difference is made.

In order to know how successful the strategic plan put in place within the school improvement plan is, the goal must be somewhat measurable (Fernandez, 2009. SSE Guidelines Appendix 1). Though the school has not provided exact details of how they measure the success of the goal to raise outcomes of boys, it can be assumed that this is done through the recording of assessment/examination data, and grades/points (Welsh Government, 2017). By recording continual summative and formative assessment data (Black and Wiliam,) an idea of the pupil's progression can be made based upon it.

Self-reflection is an element of the School Self Evaluation guidelines (Appendix 1) and is also considered as an essential point of effective strategy formulation (Fernandez, 2009). The school does not detail any plan of self-evaluation within the school improvement plan, neither did they discuss this with the writer during a bridging meeting based upon the school improvement plan. Self-evaluation would be useful in determining whether the efforts being put in by the school to raise the outcomes of boys is successful so far, and whether any changes to the strategy need to be considered (McNamara, 2003).

Finally, a section of a school improvement plan that is suggested by Fernandez (2009) but is not within other literature considering the development of school improvement plans, or within the actual school improvement plan provided by the school. This point is potential areas of professional development of staff. Implementation in this area would allow the school not only to upskill their teachers but upskill them in areas that would benefit the school and outcomes for the pupils. This also makes it more likely that the strategies formulated are successful due to them being based on research (Fernandez, 2009).

Reflection and Evaluation

The first area of reflection would be that the school has very little planning of when self-evaluation will occur within its school improvement plan, for the strategic goal of raising outcomes for boys. It is suggested by Fernandez (2009), and McNamara (2003) that self-evaluating allows the school to recognise potential areas of improvement within its strategy/plan towards obtaining the goal in mind; in this case raising outcomes for boys and closing the attainment gap. The problem of not identifying these problems would be a waste of school resources, as well as the problem not being solved. Identifying problems in the plan will allow these to be rectified earlier on.

Secondly, Bowlby (1982), Keller (2005), Lacrose et al (2005) and Gormley (2008) all clearly state that for the mentoring scheme to work (what is called the role model scheme by the school), it must be run over an extended period of time in order for the relationships to be built enough to provide benefits. These benefits being listening to advise without reacting negatively, actually taking on board help, and allowing themselves to build parental like relationships with staff that may allow them to confide in the member of staff and display areas of weakness that their teachers may not have picked up that is the actual cause of a problem at hand. The school reviewing this strategic plan annually may find that the spend of resources may not have been beneficial enough within the first year (which based on the literature, it is unlikely to show blatant benefits within the first year), then a decision may be made that this plan is not worthwhile – meaning that this support to pupils which is beneficial long term, may be revoked. Therefore, it is recommended that this target within the school improvement plan is not considered as “complete” or “not worthwhile” at the end of the academic year, and instead is extended indefinitely.

A third area of reflection is that interventions put in place to increase boys' outcomes e.g. grades, are not portrayed as something 'extra'. Tinklin (2003) states that both boys and girls detest additional support as it creates the impression that they are lesser, or that they have to do more work; both of which are demotivating. Lindsay and Muijs (2007) and Tinklin (2003) state that twilight sessions, holiday time sessions, etc. do not work for those already being considered as a worry of falling or being behind as they are those who will refuse to admit that it is their fault and is therefore up to them to fix (Younger et al, 1999). So, by creating the impression that they are having to make this work or time up, then they are unlikely to respond to the intervention. Therefore, by incorporating it into their timetable as opposed to extracurricular, by providing a welcoming and assistive approaches opposed to an autocratic role, and by providing high but realistic impressions, then these pupils are more likely to respond (Lindsay and Muijs, 2007). Based on discussion from the pupils themselves and the teachers whilst at the school, this is something the school has done well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, raising outcomes for boys was focussed on a theoretical and practical basis. Theory suggests that the most beneficial method of doing so is providing a mentoring based intervention in place to motivate and encourage them to achieve

more than they already are. This must be incorporated within their academic timetable, and must be communicated to them positively, as any sense of it being extra or negative will deter them and be counterproductive. On a practical level, this is being done well by the school, however there is potential for this scheme to be cut short, which literature advises against, and in fact encourages its running over an extended period of time.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



School Self Evaluation. (2016). Six Step Process of School Self Evaluation. Available Online at: <http://schoolself-evaluation.ie/primary/sse-2016-2020/six-step-process/> [Accessed: 1/4/2020].