

Please add your targets from the previous assignment (Only relevant if you have completed an assignment)

	Targed/target	Yr hyn yr wyf wedi'i wneud yn yr aseiniad hwn What I have done in this assignment...
Targed/Target 1	Link the activity to the theory.	I have placed a particular focus on ensuring that the theory is relevant and applicable to my PTE.
Targed/Target 2	Use wider literature.	I have read extensively and made note of the valid points within the literature review. I then used these points within the discussion.
Targed/Target 3	More strategic approach to referencing.	I have taken a more strategic approach to referencing. Although I may have used various references for one point, this was done to show the validation of the evidence base.

ECAD6009-7003-C: Learners, Schools and Communities: where am I teaching?

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

Introduction

As schools have changed over time (Sheninger, 2014), an augmenting valuation has been placed on school improvement (Yikici & Altinay, 2017). I have been fortunate enough to have a Professional Teaching Experience (PTE) within a primary school in Swansea, South Wales – which will remain anonymous due to ethical considerations (BERA, 2018) – within which I had the opportunity to review the school's development/improvement plan (SDP/SIP). To satisfy the ethical considerations, the school shall be named *School X*. At the time of the most recent Estyn inspection (2014), there were 468 full-time pupils, many of whom were considered to be socially and economically disadvantaged. Approximately 28% of these pupils were recognised as having additional learning needs (ALN) whilst the percentage of free school meals stand at 36%, a greater proportion than the national and local averages. This inspection left the school with a report from which the school leaders had identified two strategic targets – one of which was to improve the learning experiences, pupil involvement and challenge across the curriculum. This essay intends to identify and explore an action point which concerns this target.

Literature review

SDPs were not initially engineered as a product of a consensus that concluded that there was a need for schools to identify areas for improvement (MacGilchrist & Mortimore, 1997). It was the mid-1980s and during a post-pioneering era that there was widespread encouragement for greater attention on school improvement (Inner London Education Authority, 1985; Glover, 1990). As Yikici & Altinay (2017) alluded, contemporary schools value this process greater now than they have done historically. The issue with this, as Schildkamp (2019) indicated, is that there is a discrepancy here as there is not a sufficient amount of literature surrounding this topic. The literature which does exist, however, portrays this topic area as being one which is considerably vast (Miravet & Garcia, 2013; DiPaola & Thomas, 2003; Park *et al.*, 2013; Yikici & Altinay, 2017; Schildkamp, 2019).

Existing literature dictates how the augmenting value of school development has led to a decrease in debate over notions and beliefs with regards to this topic area; and now, schools have a tendency to immerse themselves within a data culture (Johnson, 2005). This is not just an allegation made by Johnson (2005), but a concept which is widely supported (Schildkamp, 2019) as there is research which concludes that a school which immerses itself within a data culture can pay a greater contribution to student learning and achievement (Lai *et al.*, 2014; McNaughton, Lai & Hsalo, 2012; Poortman & Schildkamp,

2016; Van Geel *et al.*, 2016). Acting upon school improvement without the use of data is thought to be ineffective more often than effective, and it would cost the school with regards to finance and time (Schildkamp, 2019).

However a school gathers data, whether it may be systematically (e.g. Mandinach *et al.*, 2008; Marsh, 2012; Marsh, Pane & Hamilton, 2006; Schildkamp & Poortman, 2015) or through informal methods (e.g. Heitink *et al.*, 2016), the purpose behind SDPs should be for ongoing school development, as opposed to meeting accountability demands (Hoogland *et al.*, 2016; Datnow & Hubbard, 2015; 2016; Murray, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2013). It is because of this that there should be careful consideration of the different stakeholders involved (Park *et al.*, 2013).

The consideration of different stakeholders is a key area of discourse within this topic area (Miravet & Garcia, 2013; DiPaola & Thomas, 2003; Park *et al.*, 2013; Yikici & Altinay, 2017; Schildkamp, 2019). According to Schildkamp (2019), a pivotal stakeholder is the headteacher of the school. While the headteacher (as well as other teachers) can play a role in the formation of the culture of the school, it has been highlighted that classroom teaching can depend heavily on this culture (Miravet & Garcia, 2013; Yikici & Altinay, 2017). Yikici & Altinay have indicated that a crucial element in forming an appropriate culture and henceforth improving the school is providing resources and qualified manpower (2017). These resources which affect classroom teaching include "(...) academic press among teachers, student support, trust and respect" (Yikici & Altinay, 2017; p.2). The school leader should also collaborate with others involved, such as the community, and involve them in key decisions processes – this would, in turn, support the development of pupils and collaboration of teachers (DiPaola & Thomas, 2003).

This is pertinent with involving the community as this has been found to have a direct correlation with pupil involvement – an element of school X's strategic targets (Fajoju, Aluede & Ojugo, 2016). It has been pointed out that within the community, parents, as stakeholders, being involved in the learning would increase the probability of education continuing at home (Rockwell, Andre & Hawley, 2008). While this can hold potential to fulfilling learning experiences, pupil involvement and challenge across the curriculum (Fajoju, Aluede & Ojugo, 2016), and the school leaders have other areas to focus on (such as increasing teacher-collaboration and other responsibilities within a professional environment) (Yikici & Altinay, 2017), it is pivotal that there is effective communication between these stakeholders (DiPaola & Thomas, 2003).

This collaboration could be important in achieving the strategic target of school X (to improve the learning experiences, pupil involvement and challenge across the curriculum) by dealing with the action plan (review the effectiveness of the literacy scheme of work in light of the LLC AoLE). Estyn (2012) have highlighted that, nationally in Wales, 40% of all pupils leave primary school and begin their KS3 studies with a reading age considerably lower than it should be. Half of these learners (20%) have a reading age of approximately nine-and-a-half years old (Estyn, 2012). Meanwhile, Donaldson (2015) indicated that this aspect of learning is the central premise to learning across the curriculum and that learners should be developing competence in this in different forms.

In considering that improving learning experiences, pupil involvement and challenge across the curriculum, Yikici & Altinay (2017) indicated that this could be done through the use of visual educational tools, including through the use of IT. Other researchers have toyed with the idea of virtual learning and have concluded that it is indeed effective in achieving a strategic target like school X's (Bouta & Retalis, 2013; So, Chen & Wan, 2019).

Developing an action point

School X's SDP has two strategic targets with six action points for each target. These targets have been decided from the recommendations from the most recent Estyn report (2014). The focus priority is to improve the learning experiences, pupil involvement and challenge across the curriculum, with a focus action point on reviewing the effectiveness of the literacy scheme of work in light of the LLC AoLE. There are two different ways school X have decided to achieve this action point.

1. Review the effectiveness of the 8 reading behaviours in light of the New Curriculum across the school.
2. Review the effectiveness of the school's present grammar, punctuation and spelling strategies, writing progression model and scheme of work in light of the New Curriculum.

While Schildkamp (2019) claimed that it should be the school leader who plays the central role in recognising the areas for improvement, school X's actions within this process correlate with this suggestion. The headmaster, with the help of the senior leadership team (SLT), discussed the evaluations from the most recent Estyn report (2014) and decided which route to follow.

In recognising these strategic targets, it is clear to see that these were not identified with the purpose of continuous development, rather than to meet accountability demands (Hoogland *et al.*, 2016; Datnow & Hubbard, 2015; 2015; Murray, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2013). The reason this is clear is because the most recent Estyn report was in 2014, and since the identification of this target and action plan, it has not since reached some form of target and stopped or changed. However, a reason for this could be because the school has not immersed itself within a data culture, as Johnson (2005) outlined, and therefore had no data to set any targets.

Not immersing itself within a data culture (Johnson, 2005) is most likely a disadvantage upon school X's part, as there is an increase in difficulty in measuring the impact of these action points. Alternatively, it could have possibly contributed it greater probabilities of student learning and achievement (Lai *et al.*, 2014; McNaughton, Lai & Hsalo, 2012; Poortman & Schildkamp, 2016; Van Geel *et al.*, 2016). Due to not immersing itself within a data culture, it could cost the school time and money (Schildkamp, 2019).

Though school X have shown an eagerness to evaluate progress throughout each academic year, there is no data to act as a yardstick. This is, of course, except for the data provided by Estyn (2012) which suggests that 40% of pupils begin their KS3 studies with a reading age lower than it should be; but this is a national statistic and may not directly reflect the statistic of this single school. There are various ways of data collection: systematically (Mandinach *et al.*, 2008; Marsh, 2012; Marsh, Pane & Hamilton, 2006; Schildkamp & Poortman, 2015) or informally (Heitink *et al.*, 2016). If these forms of data collection were considered and school X used these data as a means of measuring progress, then the impact of their action point could be measured accurately.

An area of discourse which the school has prided itself on is its links with the community. In the careful consideration of key stakeholders, the school leader did not keep things private and restrict others from having some knowledge of the school development process. Rather, he/she decided to forge links with the community through a number of different key events and initiatives. These events included occasional opportunities for parents/guardians to visit the school after-hours and look through their child's book to inform themselves of what they have been learning. Initiatives include: 'reading behaviours'; and 'reading books', which is accompanied by a comments book, where the teacher comments on the quality of the pupil's reading after listening to them read and the pupil can take it home and the parents/guardians can do the same. This means that education is continuing at home and

there is a greater likelihood that the pupils will elicit improvement (Lai *et al.*, 2014; McNaughton, Lai & Hsalo, 2012; Poortman & Schildkamp, 2016; Van Geel *et al.*, 2016; Fajoju, Aluede & Ojujo, 2016; Rockwell, Andre & Hawley, 2008).

Another stakeholder involved in the SDP are the teachers. In considering that the headteacher of the school plays a crucial role in forming the culture of the school (Yikici & Altinay, 2017; Miravet & Garcia, 2013), it's important to remember that "teachers' values and thoughts play a crucial role on the formation of school culture", too (Yikici & Altinay, 2017; p.2). The teachers within school X are clear on the aims of the school and the direction it intends to go in. This is thanks to good working relationships and collaboration amongst the staff within school X, however there is one aspect which could be improved. Yikici & Altinay pointed out that an important aspect for consideration in SDPs is whether there is enough qualified manpower to meet the expectations. Generally, there was enough manpower, but there were times where there was not enough. This led to some R.W.I. sessions being cancelled for multiple consecutive days, and this is crucial as it is directly pertinent to this focus action point. However, it is fair to point out that schools sometimes face unavoidable issues.

Reflection and evaluation

Upon reflection, it is fair to say that school X's action point is a good action point in principle. At first glance, it is clear that there is a visible link to a national issue, a local issue, and a major component of the New Curriculum (and Donaldson's Successful Futures (2015)). There are clear elements to this action plan which act as steps to achieving the strategic target, there is a willingness to reflect upon these steps shown, and all of the stakeholders have some form of role to play.

However, there are certain aspects of this SDP which could have been operated differently. Firstly, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to immerse a school within a data culture. Not only will it save the school time and money (Schildkamp, 2019), but the school will have readily available statistics to measure the impact of their action plan. This would open doors to efficient self-evaluation and data analysis. This, in turn, has a direct correlation to student learning and achievement – the potential of this could have been unlocked with data (Lai *et al.*, 2014; McNaughton, Lai & Hsalo, 2012; Poortman & Schildkamp, 2016; Van Geel *et al.*, 2016). A suggestion would be to consider the different forms of data collection (systematic vs informal) and this could make the school development process more fluent and efficient (Schildkamp, 2019).

Alternatively, school X have clearly immersed themselves within the community through the various events and initiatives they have on top of the events which most schools have (such as parents evening). This has enabled education to continue at home, and it has blurred the lines between school and home, permitting children to understand that education does not just happen within an educational institution. These events and initiatives offer the chance for the improvement of student learning and achievement (Lai *et al.*, 2014; McNaughton, Lai & Hsalo, 2012; Poortman & Schildkamp, 2016; Van Geel *et al.*, 2016).

Other stakeholders were considered and involved in this process, too, such as teachers; this, in turn, affected classroom teaching (Yikici & Altinay, 2017; Miravet & Garcia, 2013). This was certainly done well as the resources for teachers were considered and provided for. This harmonic relationship amongst the staff enabled a good school culture to be cultivated (Yikici & Altinay, 2017). There would be no suggestion for improvement within this area except for providing back-up plans for absentees, so that initiatives such as R.W.I. are not cancelled. However, as I have previously mentioned, some issues are unavoidable.

The focus area surrounding SDPs is a considerably vast area, and it is unfortunate that there is not enough literature on it – according to Schildkamp (2019). Without the sufficient literature, then there will always be some difficulty in determining whether or not a school's development plan is effective. The targets were set after the most recent Estyn report in 2014, and they have not been changed since, nor is there any data to measure whether or not the school has improved since. It is clear that school X has developed their knowledge and preparation for the New Curriculum, however, in considering that within this action point, there are just two tasks, it raises the question of whether it is enough. A fair assessment would be to declare that there are both positive and negative things about this SDP but there is certainly a potential for more.

Conclusion

This essay has sought to investigate school X's SDP and underpin the literature surrounding the process. I have learned about the importance of data and how it can drastically improve the fluency, efficiency and analysis of the SDP. In the future, this would inform my professional practice as I realise that this should be one of the central premises within this process. It is crucial to remember, however, the other aspects of school X's SDP which did not require data and were addressed well. For example, the consideration of the school culture and the provision of resources and manpower.

School X clearly took national issues as well as local issues into consideration, which taught me that a SDP should not solely focus on the school's aims but also ponder the wider goals. For example, it is a national mission that there are a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050, so if I was to be involved in the school development process now, then national aims such as this one should be contemplated. I also learned that the importance of good interpersonal relationships within a working environment is important to the successful delivery of a SDP, as it increased the fluency of the working team and appeared to motivate staff to work harder towards the school's goals.

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