



Module Code: ECAD6016

Assessment Component 2 Written Assignment:

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development Plan: Actions, Impact, and Evidence-Based Reflections.

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AI Acknowledgement

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work.

I confirm that I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Word Count: 1510

Targets from previous module	How I have worked on these?	An example can be seen on...
1. Proofread all writing with more care.	Checked more so than usual and used the 'Read Aloud' function to ensure the assignment flows throughout with correct SPaG.	Through assignment.
2. Aim to explain ideas and links so the reader can share your understanding.	I ensured to use key theories supported by at least 2/3 other references. However, this was difficult which such a limited word count.	Through the literature review on page 4 and 5.

A Critical Evaluation of the Development of a Strategic Target in a School Development Plan: Actions, Impact, and Evidence-Based Reflections.

This assignment aims to critically evaluate a target within a School Development Plan (SDP), with emphasis on policy, theory and reflections on said action point. For the purpose of this assignment the school will be referred to as 'School A' to maintain confidentiality (BERA, 2024). The strategic target that will be explored is entitled to **“develop confidence of learners with problem solving and reasoning in Mathematics and Numeracy”**; underpinned by the overarching self-improvement areas entitled 'curriculum teaching and learning', and 'wellbeing, equity and improvement' (Welsh Government, 2024a). The South Wales located school with 172 pupils, has identified this target to reduce the link between disadvantaged pupils and attainment; with consideration for the 42% of pupils who are eligible for free school meals (eFSM). This is higher than the national average of 22% (Welsh Government, 2023a). The target further considers the 70% of pupils who are in the 30% most deprived areas in Wales (School A, 2024).

A School Development Plan (SDP) is a statutory document in Wales that outlines a school's priorities to improve the educational outcomes of all children (Welsh Government, 2024a). It should include sections of improvement, accountability and transparency (Welsh Government, 2024a). The Welsh Government (2024a) state that it is a framework that places great emphasis on continuous progression, wellbeing and learner voice, informed by clear national expectations and policies; 'Our National Mission', the Curriculum for Wales or our national goals within the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act' (2015). The National Mission is fundamental to School A in breaking down barriers for the disadvantaged learners, the unfortunate reality of many in School A (Welsh Government 2023b). However, a self-improving school recognises that teachers are the agents of change (Fullan, 1993). This is of particular relevance for School A as developing pedagogy can significantly contribute to child outcomes and reduce the attainment gap for less affluent families (Brown, White and Kelly, 2021). This is further supported by the Welsh Government (2024a) in allowing disadvantaged learners to have their own pathway to raise aspirations and to achieve their full potential.

The Curriculum for Wales (2022) recognises the value in developing confidence in problem solving. It fosters deeper appreciation and resilience, due to the critical thinking and application skills (Welsh Government 2022). However, while it presents problem solving as a method of developing these skills, it doesn't necessarily take into consideration disadvantaged learners.

Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism suggests that children learn more effectively through exploration and reasoning, and being proactive to the problems they may face (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 30). Through problem solving children are more likely to adopt a growth mindset that promotes positive attitudes towards learning, and persistence through periods of challenge (Dweck, 2007, p.178). This is of particular importance for disadvantaged learners according to the OECD PISA (2019) report, as learners who engage in problem solving, develop stronger critical thinking skills that are of significant importance for resilience. This is further supported in more recent findings that suggest effective practice includes problem-solving techniques, suggesting theories such as Vygotsky's still have relevance to this day (Estyn, 2018). However, these findings do not necessarily consider the challenges that may limit a disadvantaged child's ability to engage in problem solving.

While theorists such as Dweck (2007) suggest a link between a growth mindset and resilience, it is important to recognise that not all learners have equal opportunities to be resilient. Maslow (1943) suggests that learners of a disadvantaged background must have their physiological and emotional needs met in order to engage in cognitive tasks such as problem solving. Considering School A has a high number of learners eFSM, instability at home is unfortunately likely. A practical solution to this, could be ensuring breakfast clubs are effectively communicated, to ensure some of those basic needs are being met. Although, it is suggested that Maslow's theory is perhaps too fixed with regards to it not accounting for the more significant needs of some disadvantaged learners in School A (McLeod, 2018). Although, both Maslow (1943) and McLeod (2018) would agree that emotional needs must be prioritised before in order for children to get the most successful outcomes from their learning. A method of addressing this could be through daily check-ins where learners can express their feelings and needs before starting their daily activities. But this raises questions to whether problem solving has such benefits for disadvantaged learners if

children struggle to engage due to external circumstances (Welsh Government, 2023b). Suggesting that there is much more to consider with regards to what learners will get out of each opportunity.

Although, Foster (2023) emphasises the significance of problem solving as without it, disadvantaged learners can become passive towards their learning and it can limit their future prospectus. But, as our national mission is to reduce the barriers for disadvantaged learners, it is important that practitioners prioritise problem solving. If learners can successfully engage in problem solving, they can be equipped with essential lifelong skills that deepen their understanding, that they may not attain through other of learning. Thus meaning, if we provide problem solving opportunities, as a nation, we are another step closer to reducing the attainment gap for those disadvantaged learners through the principles of the SDP.

It is important to recognise the reasons as to why the school itself developed this action point. Developing mathematics and numeracy was a recommendation within School A's Estyn report (Estyn, 2017). This shaped the mathematical priorities within the SDP in 2019 (School A, 2019). However, when School A evaluated their maths related targets, it was suggested they needed to apply the five proficiencies in their pedagogy in support of Estyn (School A, 2024). As well as the Curriculum for Wales by establishing what matters to their learners (Estyn, 2020), leading to the problem-solving target

The increase in children eFSM from 33% (2017) to 42% (2024) has also influenced the development of this target as problem solving could be a suitable method to encourage learning lifelong skills and a positive attitude towards learning (Foster, 2023). School A outline the National Mission within their SDP, and apply their teaching of problem solving to one of the ways in which they will play a part in meeting the needs of the school and the disadvantaged families (School A, 2024).

It is suggested that successful pedagogy isn't only met through the identification of targets, rather than how it is implemented (Estyn, 2018). Goldstone (2022) suggests that in order for goals to be achievable leaders need to set clear and achievable targets (Goldstone, 2022). School A dedicated time to support this target through an inset day, where all staff undertook training from Lynwen Barnsley who specialises in developing independent mathematical thinkers. The Welsh Government (2024b)

state that time, training and working collaboratively are vital to empower staff and make their pedagogy more powerful. School A (2024) have recorded that the staff felt more confident in delivering problem solving, since engaging with this training.

School A must continue to monitor this target through a range of different evaluation processes. The noted strategies to this are teacher assessments, math screening and national tests, AOLE monitoring, pupil voices and book scrutiny (School A, 2024). Estyn (2016) suggest that evaluating first-hand evidence is deemed as good practice as it benefits a professional development culture by meeting the specific needs of the SDP. Fortunately, my practice involved planning independent problem-solving tasks, as well as providing questions to extend learners thinking in extension activities; these methods of implementation were evaluated in staff meetings.

Although School A use a range of data collection techniques to assess the impact of problem solving, it was important to address that there were areas of difficulty in order to upgrade the standard of practice (Schmoker, 2003). For example, when providing problem solving as an extension, the lower-ability children did not know number facts to apply to the problem-solving question. However, differentiation shaped future planning, in allowing the children who are yet to grasp basic concepts an opportunity to do so through the principle of progression 'conceptual understanding' (Welsh Government, 2022). Whilst, the more able and talented learners focused on apply number facts to problem solving through the 'fluency' and 'strategic competence' principles of progression (Welsh Government, 2022). The need to collect data from student achievement is emphasised and supported by theoretical frameworks, suggesting it is appropriate method to evaluate (Demetriou and Kyriakides, 2012). This is evident through my personal implementation of problem solving using number bonds.

To conclude, it is fair to mention that the implementation of problem solving can have significant benefits to disadvantaged learners. However, the principles of the SDP state that the evaluation process is just as important as identifying the targets in finding evidence to support what matters the most to the learners in School A. In this case, problem solving was important to close the gap for disadvantaged families in developing life-long skills. Therefore, engaging with School A's SDP has allowed me

to understand the important bridge between national policies and meeting the needs of the school, putting the learners at the heart of the curriculum.

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