

Component 2

Title: How a school develops one aspect of its SDP: a report that critically reflects on the actions, impact, and evidence base. (2,500 words)

Introduction

In this component of ECAD 7003, the task is to delve deep into one aspect of a school, School Development Plan (SDP), or School Improvement Plan (SIP), to critically reflect on the actions that are taken by schools to improve their practices and do what they see as best for their pupils, teaching staff and the local community. Trying to understand the reasons for taking this action and the evidence that has prompted the action. In the Welsh Government's (WG) guidance, the phrase 'improvement planning;' is understood that 'development planning' means the same and is interchangeable (WG, 2021, p.2).

The school in question is an English-medium 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school located in South Wales. The school serves the community of the town it is situated in and its surrounding villages. The number of pupils on roll is around 1,200 which includes around two hundred in the sixth form. Around 9% of pupils receive free school meals with an exceptionally low percentage of pupils having an additional learning need (ALN) that requires a written statement (ESTYN, 2020, p.1).

In this school's SIP, they have highlighted one area for improvement within the school based on the recommendations given to them by Estyn. They recommended that the school needs "widen the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh Language Skills" (ESTYN, 2020, p.3). A point to improve that is in line with the Welsh Government's target to reach one million Welsh speakers by 2050 (Welsh Government, 2017, p.2).

Literature review

School development is a government requirement. As of September, the first, 2015 school must have an SDP in place as a minimum to fully comply with the regulations (WG, 2014, p.6). The understanding is that in every school there is room for improvement and that each school will be in a different place on its journey of improvement (WG, 2014, p.5). The New curriculum in Wales is set to be fully rollout to all years by 2026 with the current year 7's being too first to have gone through school entirely in the new curriculum, as set out in 'Curriculum for Wales: The journey to 2022.' (WG, 2020, p.14). Improvement is at the forefront of the Welsh Government 'Our national mission.' (WG, 2017) In the ministerial foreword Kirsty Williams, the Cabinet Secretary for Education at the time of publication says that a "renewed commitment to improving both the skills and knowledge of our young people" (WG, 2017, p.2). A commitment to improvement is the purpose of education in Wales. Either as a whole school or as an individual teacher. Being a reflective practitioner and 'evaluating the impact of changes in practice' (WG, 2018, p.55). Constantly thinking of how one can do better, is key to the progression of education. Understanding what is most effective in your setting and how parts can be improved.

Stakeholders are a key factor when deciding what to include in an SDP. Taking all of their opinions into account. Who are the stakeholders in a school? According to the Welsh Government in their publication on 'Education in Wales: Our national mission' (2017) as part of the government's priorities to create policies, including those such as SDPs.

Continue the process of co-constructing policies with key stakeholders, making explicit how teachers, support staff, school

leaders, local authorities, regional consortia, and other stakeholders
each contribute to realising the vision for the Welsh learner.

School development is a constant process that must always cover a period of three years (WG, 2014, p.16). To review, monitor and update the 'live' document annually or after an inspection from ESTYN (WG, 2014, p.16). This notion of a 'live' document that is constantly updated was found in School Z is evident that they are constantly looking at ways to constantly improve. Following the guidance given to the school by the Welsh Government in image 1 in the appendix (WG, 2022b). It conveys the idea that 'Self-evaluation, improvement priorities and school development plan and support, collaboration and improvement' are a constant cyclical part of the SDP process. However, with information and evidence encompassing everything. It implies that a school must have a rhyme and reason to support its points to develop and improve the practice of the school.

The School Improvement Plan in question sets out to address a recommendation set out by ESTYN in their inspection report. The recommendation made is to 'Widen the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills' (ESTYN 2020). This is in line with the Welsh Government's goal of one million Welsh Speakers by 2050 (Welsh Government, 2017, p.2). The use of Welsh in classrooms other than in dedicated Welsh lessons is key to bettering the child's progression of learning Welsh according to ESTYN (2013, p.9). With this, it is clear that ESYTN thinks that using incidental Welsh in the classroom is the way forward to creating a million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050. Incidental Welsh refers to interactions between adults and children that arise naturally in an unstructured situation (ESTYN, 2013, p.9). This idea sounds wonderful in theory, that using a little bit of Welsh every day will create a million Welsh speakers. However, as argued by Catharine Morgan.

Using this method is being done to 'tick a box' and is often conducted with the use of a defective methodology (Morgan, 2021, p.278). The limitation to the ideal is the understanding that teachers have of implementing the strategy in the classroom and their perception of using it. Are these people enthused by this and are actively driving it forward or are they just 'ticking a box' to get ESTYN and WG off their backs? A generation of pupils have a limited ability to converse in Welsh and now part of this generation are teachers or trainee teachers themselves so there is a lack of extrinsic and or intrinsic motivation to drive this well (Morgan, 2021, p.278). Motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language learning (Dornyei, 2016, p.1). Ensuring pupils that Welsh is relevant to their daily lives will ensure motivation to learn and develop confidence in the language (Morgan, 2021, p.33).

Developing an action point

Developing an action point that becomes a part of a School Development Plan comes either from an external or internal source. External could be that ESTYN inspects your school, observing if there are gaps or faults in the school, and then making a recommendation to improve a certain aspect. Such as the SIP of school X, and the recommendation 'to widen the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills' (ESTYN 2020.) Furthermore, external sources could be results from WJEC and other examination boards and spot the trends in the results. Such as pupils' literacy skills in papers across the pupils' results have a similar shortfall in the pupil grasp of literacy skills. For internal sources, considering the viewpoints of the stakeholders are key. Pupils and teachers are the real drivers of this source of information. They are the people that see the 'front line' of education day in and day

out and will be there to notice gaps or faults in the schools. Once acknowledged, then actions can be developed by the leaders within the school. Treating a school as an 'a learning organisation,' having a shared vision that has a sense of direction and serves as a motivating force to achieve individual and school goals (OECD, 2016, p.2). This shared vision is a process that involves all staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders (OECD, 2016, p.2). Having so many potentially differing opinions can be a mind field to work through. Being open and transparent about change is key to success.

Have a drive to experiment and innovate practices, maintaining open minds towards doing things differently and having students actively engaged in inquiry (OECD, 2016, p.5). This idea comes from the LeerKRACHT Foundation in the Netherlands. They are aiming to promote a holistic view of education throughout the country. Echoing what is being implemented in Wales at the moment with the new curriculum. A child-centred approach to education. Where we take the child's values, knowledge, and leading ideals (Veraksa, Sheridan, Colliver, 2021, p.14). Though remember that governing bodies are responsible for promoting ambitious standards of educational achievement (WG, 2012. cited in WG 2014, p.4). A whole pitcher approach takes everything into account as suggested by the Welsh Government in image 1 in the appendices. An all-encompassing circle with a cyclical process that keeps the wheel of development moving forward.

Priorities for development plans are different for each school. For example, school x (ESTYN, 2020) has the goal of improving literacy, and Welsh, and sharpening self-evaluation planning, whereas a school like School Y (ESTYN, 2016) has the goal to improve written feedback and improve the Welsh language such as school x. These priorities come from ESTYN's external review of the schools'

practices, and they deemed these to be a priority for the schools to improve on.

ESTYN had recommended school Z (ESTYN 2019) continue on its improvement journey, meaning that they found little to improve and recognised that the school is progressing forward in a proper manner that is great for all stakeholders.

How is School X's approach to tackling widening the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills? The way they intend to tackle this is set out in the form of four bullet points: first to increase the use of Welsh across the curriculum with an agreed approach, with more opportunities to develop reading, writing, and speaking Welsh outside their Welsh lessons. Secondly to use external speakers and organisations to encourage pupils. Third to maintain Welsh options at AS level and A level. And finally, to develop Welsh opportunities for extracurricular clubs. Though vague in words with the buzz words of 'improve, develop, and opportunity,' sounding a little tokenistic. However, looking a bit closer at what they are trying to achieve. They are creating a whole school approach and ethos to using Welsh in the classroom, and they want all teaching staff to include the agreed Welsh in their lessons and develop the majority of their language skills through their Welsh lessons. A constructivist approach aims to build knowledge over a long time. A constructivist approach is the theory of knowledge growth and life-long development built on the philosophy of pragmatism (Dewey, 1916, cited in Duffy and Tobias, 2009, p.34). In an education setting it's a pedagogical label for making sense of an activity to explore, inquire and discover through hands-on learning (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992 cited in Duffy and Tobias, 2009, p.34). Building the use of Welsh through the curriculum and across the school is in theory a positive way to spread the value and enhance pupils' experiences of using the language in their day-to-day school lives (Morgan, 2021, p.3). However, is this an issue for pupils only using the

language in those situations? Are they able to apply the Welsh used and learned in different parts of the curriculum across the school and or outside in the wider world? Assessment for this needs to be discussed and planned for and published via the SIP to understand how they will gain an understanding of how pupils have attained the language skills required to succeed in their attainment of the Welsh language.

School X's SIP is vague in the wording of its action points to meet the recommendation. It offers a small indication of what the school is intending to do to address the recommendation made by ESYTN in 2020. In conversation with senior leaders at the school, there was mention of a larger 'live' document that supports the published SIP and gives greater detail as to how the school instead tackles the recommendations and their self-evaluation points raised by the stakeholders of the school. However, this document is kept internally and is kept so only staff involved in the strategic planning are aware of the full picture.

Reflection and evaluation

In reflection of the school improvement plan produced by School X., It is evident that they are attempting to address concerns and or recommendations raised by ESTYN (2020). They have produced four action points and have highlighted who is involved in leading the charge, as it were to address each step to achieving this goal to widen pupils' opportunity to develop their Welsh language skills (School X, 2022, p.12). Some mention is made of who will evaluate how the opportunities have been widened but no mention of how this is going to be done. Is it through assessments, inspections, pupil voice, staff voice, or a governor's review of the curriculum? The SIP for School X leaves a lot to the imagination instead of a strategy. Boilerplate ideas that look great in theory though lack the substance behind

the points to fully widen the opportunities for pupils. However, as mentioned earlier, there is a bigger supporting document with detailed strategies for how they intend to use and implement within the school to meet the improvement point.

Things that can be done differently; firstly, to include greater detail in the SIP to show to stakeholders and the wider public for everyone to understand how they are going to 'increase the use of Welsh across the curriculum' (School X, 2022). Superimposing a theory on this action point could be to say that this is a constructivist approach to learning the language building the knowledge over time. However, pupils must be shown the links in the learning for them to fully grasp what is being taught. In discussions with a music teacher about linking the learning and showing pupils how things fit together they said, "that pupils need to be shown these links as some can not see how one bit of music theory links with the rest. They need it pointed out and shown how each bit goes together." The second point in the SIP to tackle the recommendation has more substance in using external speakers and organisations to encourage Welsh outside of lessons (School X, 2022). However, there is a distinct lack of names of suggested companies or speakers that could be used. Having a rough idea of what names would be greatly appreciated to understanding what things the school is aiming to do and achieve with this. The final two points of this section are in the same vein to suggest with little to no substance as to what to do to meet these goals and succeed in widening the opportunities for Welsh across the school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the assignment has enabled the critical analysis of a school's SDP or SIP, to think critically of the reasoning behind decisions made and to think of what theory might have led to the decision made by the senior leadership team to create the action points. Also, to consider how the stakeholders in the school have a say in what goes on in this document and that there is normally a large document that supports the main SIP that extends the points into greater detail.

For future use this has allowed for the realisation of theory in practice and how it can all link together. The theory is there to support and inform teaching. Everything has a reason as to why we do things in a certain way. Whether it is cognitive load theory or positive reinforcement, constructivist, or humanist approach. And only those in the school will understand what works best for their pupils. As an outsider looking it can be difficult to gauge the rhyme and reason behind some of the decisions made. However, this experience will be invaluable when moving up the ranks as a teacher in a school.

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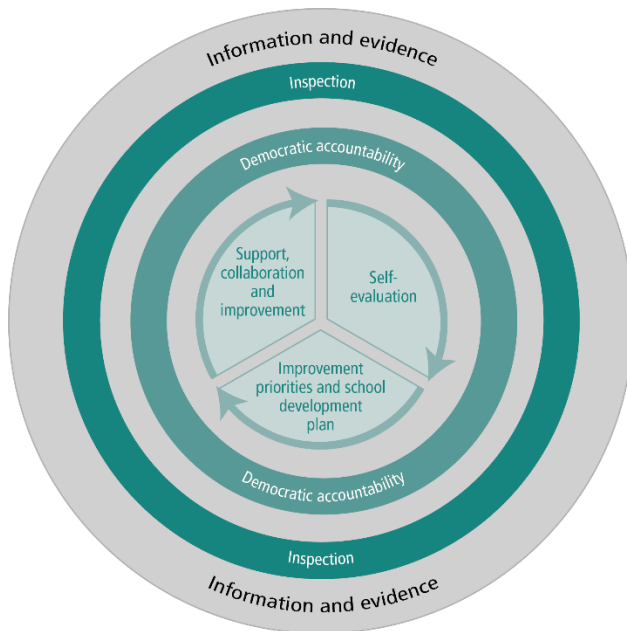
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Appendices

Image 1



(WG, 2022b)