

	Target from last assignment	What I have done in this assignment
Target 1	Read a wide range of sources including research informed journal articles.	I have read widely for this assignment to gain on overview but not all of this is works I have referenced. I felt this assignment learnt more towards government documents than journals for part of it.
Target 2	Consider what you say in relation to underlying theories and constructs about learning	I have tried to do this, particularly with reference to the benefit of arts education.
Target 3	Be selective about what you include and ensure you are as specific as possible in your suggestions.	I have been specific in the suggestions I have made towards the end of the assignment.

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

Word Count: 2749

“School self-evaluation should make a vital contribution to raising the quality of education,”(Donaldson, 2015, p83)

Donaldson’s assertion regarding the essential role of school self-evaluation is echoed by both Welsh Government (2014) and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of School X whose development plan will be discussed in this study. Appointment of a new Headteacher and

Deputy Headteacher in 2017 catalysed a rigorous process of critical, honest self-evaluation that encompassed all aspects of school life. This process resulted in the creation of a comprehensive, dynamic and crucially active School Development Plan (SDP) which informs the daily direction of the school. One focus of the plan has been the development of creativity at the school and it is the intention of this assignment to examine this aspect in greater detail. In accordance with BERA (2018) guidelines, the school will not be named in this study in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality rights of the school and all related parties. School X is an English medium primary school within a thriving small-town community in South Wales. The school is exactly on the Welsh average percentage for Free School Meal eligibility and approximately 34% of pupils have additional learning needs, currently 13% higher than the national average (Welsh Government, 2019).

The school context is relevant in considering its development plan, as whilst every school in Wales' plan should include the elements prescribed in the schedule of the Welsh Statutory Instrument (*The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014*), the local priorities for each school may be very different and may have to consider vastly differing factors. Welsh Government (2014) and Estyn(2019a) are unequivocal in their belief that effective planning should begin with authentic self-evaluation, although Estyn also recognises that this has not universally been a strength. In any form of planning, a thorough understanding of the current position both in terms of strength and weakness is essential in order to identify meaningful ways forward. Self-evaluation is undoubtedly important but the translation of its findings into an effective strategy that is understood and adopted by all is also pivotal. Welsh Government(2014) is explicit that although ultimate responsibility for the SDP lies with the governing body, on a practical level the plan will be produced by the headteacher in conjunction with the school staff and governors, and that the headteacher will also assume oversight responsibility for action and implementation. Collaboration between stakeholders is key to establishing a shared vision and greatly increases the likelihood of engagement with and commitment to actions. An effective plan should engender a sense of ownership in all who form part of the school community. This is created when all stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute to the planning, the intended actions and anticipated impact are clearly shared and communicated, and each individual understands their role within the broader whole. Actions implemented require a degree of honesty in the review of their impact equal to that of the self-evaluation that begins the cycle so that conclusions may be drawn and further action planned. A SDP is intended to be a "live document" (Welsh Government, 2014, p.17) that genuinely informs the improvement journey of the school, rather than a paper exercise to satisfy legislative requirements. The importance of this is underlined by Estyn's(2019b) move from a pre-inspection self-

evaluation to a “professional conversation” around the school’s existing documentation and actions as part of the inspection visit. This places greater agency with the school and the governing body to focus on the overall actions needed for their setting on an ongoing basis not just for inspection. This echoes Donaldson’s recommendation that the creation of a “high-performing system” should concentrate “more on the need to develop local responsibility and decision making, build capacity and engage teachers and schools more creatively in the improvement process” (Donaldson, 2015, p.99).

The need for creativity across education is a recurring theme for Donaldson(2015) and this is also the area of School X’s development plan this study will explore in greater depth. In the case of School X the skills developed across the school community through an expressive arts project are potentially life changing. The Cultural Learning Alliance or CLA (2017, 2018a, 2018b & 2019) reiterates that access to the arts is widely recognised to have huge potential benefits for every child’s wellbeing and emotional health. It also develops confidence and creativity. There is also research suggesting that those who have an arts-rich education have greater employability, as they will possess an attractive blend of “cognitive and personal skills, like creativity and collaboration – as well as content knowledge” (CLA, 2017), desired by employers. The paper, echoed by Art in Action (2020), argues that whilst there is a recognised need for the development of STEM disciplines in education, evidence suggests that a “STEAM skills agenda” (CLA, 2017) – or the fusion of Arts subjects with STEM – provides a more rounded curriculum that benefits all and develops these key skills.

Possibly the most significant assertion by the CLA is in the 2019 paper, that “access to the arts is access to our national life, and it is a social justice issue” (CLA, 2019). The paper cites research indicating that children who do not have arts exposure are less likely to attain well at school than those who do, and they will experience the negative impact of this in adult life and employment. This is probably indicative of the lack of accessibility to the arts for those on a low income, and the disadvantages discussed are probably related to poverty overall rather than a pure reflection of the impact of the arts on a child’s attainment. However, the research supports some widely held views, contains insights from many relevant authorities and highlights the significant disparity that exists. Welsh Government sought to address this inequity through the commissioning of the “*Culture and Poverty*” report by Baroness Andrews in 2014. The report recognises the potential attainment advantages for the most economically disadvantaged should the arts and Welsh culture be made accessible to all regardless of income. A report prepared by the Irish Arts Council and Combat Poverty Agency in Ireland in 1997, reached similar conclusions for its own context. Whilst the Irish report is over twenty years old there is value in its consideration alongside

the 2014 report as there is significant correlation in the findings. It is also an indication of the longevity of this issue. There is a clear, well documented link between poverty and educational attainment and child poverty is a significant issue for Wales. As such addressing this and seeking to reduce its impact is one of the key foci of Welsh Government's (2015) *"Programme for Children and Young People."*

CLA (2019) underlines the vital role schools can play as possibly the only access point to the arts for some children, and this reality was recognised by School X in choosing to develop creativity through various mediums of the expressive arts. School X is a pioneer school for development of the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020) and this has promoted an increased level of self-awareness throughout the school. Staff and pupils are accustomed to reflecting on and evaluating their practices in order to provide meaningful feedback as part of this development process, laying foundation stones for the changes ahead. The journey towards the creation and implementation of the new curriculum underpins much of the school's actions and planning. It is therefore unsurprising that the SDP priorities are determined by an honest self-audit against the "four purposes"(Welsh Government, 2020, p.11) and the twelve pedagogical principles proposed by Donaldson (2015). The purposes audit is undertaken by all staff against each of the underlying behaviour statements of the purposes as identified in the Welsh Government guidance (2020). The staff rank each statement from 1 indicating this behaviour is not developed at all, to 5 indicating that the behaviour is fully embedded. The same process is utilised for the principles audit with the intention of identifying teaching and learning improvements in the classroom. Whilst the data produced could be considered subjective, the staff are key stakeholders in the school and probably amongst the best placed to evaluate the learning in their own environments. Staff are asked to provide evidence to support their assessment and a whole school picture emerges. The initial audits identified the "Enterprising, creative contributors" (Welsh Government, 2020, p.24) purpose to be the least embedded across the school and that encouraging collaboration was the least embedded principle. Development in these areas became foci for the SDP.

The qualitative data from these audits viewed together informed the creation of a large-scale expressive arts project to help learners develop more creative thinking and provide exposure to various media. This was to be collaborative between two classes in a year group and feature pupil voice. School X's community has a strong industrial heritage and discussions with pupils and members of the governing body decided that this should be the project's theme, examining the influences that had shaped the area and how this may relate to the present and future. It was decided that Year 5 would undertake the project as this linked seamlessly to the Victorians topic currently taught as part of the Year 5 programme,

and much of the area's industrial history relates to this era. The collaborative possibilities of this project were extended through discussion with the governing body, one of whom is employed at another school (School Y) within the same Local Authority but in a vastly different geographical and socio-economic context. School Y is also in an area with a significant industrial heritage. It was considered by both staff and governors that a collaborative project that spanned both schools and encompassed their shared industrial roots, but also acknowledged their historical and present-day differences, offered an even greater opportunity to both schools. The resulting target for the SDP embraced many of the school's aspirations but given the strong local flavour of the intended project this was noted on the SDP under the heading of Community, with developing and improving local links as one of the aims.

School X's SDP is very detailed for each of its priorities and clearly states who is responsible for and involved in each action, what actions will be undertaken and how, the intended outcome including the benefit to the school and learners, methods of monitoring and crucially a target date for review. This is also evident in the planning for this project. It is a significant undertaking and is steered by a lead teacher from each school. As funding from the Arts Council of Wales was being requested, a detailed plan had to be submitted to them. This included descriptions of the schools and their contexts, the stakeholders involved including the various external artists, a pupil voice panel, the external agencies that might display the work produced, events and trips to enhance the project and the proposed benefits to the school and community. Much of this information is replicated in the SDP, which also recognises the CPD potential for staff involved with the project who would receive some artistic training to be able to further develop these skills in the school. For this project, the SDP also holds details of how this will be shared with the local community. This includes the display of some of the artwork at a local gallery, a community webpage sharing the project and inviting comment and contributions, and an event at the school open to parents and the whole community to unveil a copperwork sculpture, showcase a dance performance and share a reportage style video tracking the project.

A robust programme was planned, beginning with an immersion day where all pupils involved came together with the various artists to experience each of the media, to get to know each other and form collaborative relationships. The emotional benefits of exposure to the creative arts have already been outlined in this study and the response of the pupils was a significant consideration. In preparation for the launch event, pupils were asked to consider how they felt and their responses were then combined into a chart featuring many faces expressing the various emotions, drawn and labelled by the children. The pupils then completed these before and after each experience. This not only allowed them to express

any anxieties about the unfamiliar before and analyse their own response afterwards, but this has acted as a barometer of impact for staff. The collating of these charts over the course of the project has given each child a visual representation of their emotional journey with far fewer children expressing nerves or anxieties about new experiences and the creative expressions over time. Growth in artistic skills has also been clearly visible in the work produced. Amongst the carefully planned measures for this project an unexpected indicator was presented when a pupil spontaneously wrote a poignant poem from the viewpoint of a miner after a visit to a mining heritage museum. For the child concerned this represented unprecedented levels of communication. Whilst the planned parent and community surveys to be completed after sharing events, staff feedback from their CPD and pupil voice feedback is very important, it could be argued that this authentic response is perhaps the most telling.

School X has a well-developed SDP process in place and the plan is reviewed every half term to assess progress against all targets. Each action is reviewed and colour coded green, yellow, amber or red and this then highlights completed actions and those requiring further focus. Whilst the creative action point has been the focus of this study and much of the data that led to its creation was qualitative, it should also be noted that many of the other points on the SDP are also informed by more quantitative data. Given the nature of this action point it is perhaps appropriate that it has been driven by 'human' data, although when considering the potential benefits this exposure to the arts could bring, particularly to the most disadvantaged, it could be considered that quantitative data such as the distribution of free school meal eligibility across the school may have suggested an alternative group of participants. The school has recognised this and now provides regular small group art sessions with one of the artists solely for the most disadvantaged pupils and those who might benefit most from the emotional outlet art can provide. It is difficult to be critical of a project that has added so much to the life of the school and that is being shared across the area as an exemplar, but it may have been possible to extend the benefits to pupils even further by providing an opportunity to develop more creative problem solving skills alongside their artistic development. This could perhaps have been rooted in the historical context such as devising safety measures for heavy industry of the era.

The creative arts project has been a very successful undertaking and has undoubtedly built artistic skills in both pupils and staff whilst increasing appreciation of local heritage and creating opportunities to engage with the local community. It is also evident that pupils have become more confident in expressing their emotions in response to the various media and experiences. The opportunities any school can offer is obviously determined by budget availability and in this instance the Arts Council funding has made so many options possible.

To achieve Brighouse and Woods(2013) vision of “such experiences as an entitlement”(p.48), the ever-present economic challenge must be overcome. A key learning point for me as a developing teacher has been that there is funding available to support many endeavours with the potential to bring as many benefits to school and community as School X’s has, success lies in pursuing these opportunities. I am also convinced of the wellbeing benefits associated with access to the arts and I will strive to bring this to as many pupils as possible.

A clear understanding of the needs of the school and a highly structured development plan have made this project possible, and its effects will be felt long into the future. When the SLT next reviews its progress it should rightfully feel it has delivered on its aspirations for this project and its outcomes. It is saddening that the final community sharing event has been unable to go ahead due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but it is perhaps ironically fitting that a school that has championed creativity may now need to think creatively to find an alternative way to share its impressive finale.

References

Andrews, K. (2014) *Culture and Poverty - Harnessing the power of the arts, culture and heritage to promote social justice in Wales*. Wales: Welsh Government. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/culture-and-poverty-harnessing-the-power-of-the-arts-culture-and-heritage-to-promote-social-justice-in-wales.pdf> (Accessed: 19th March 2020)

Art in Action.org (2020) *Why is arts education important for 21st Century learning? 5 reasons to go from STEM to STEAM*. Available at: <https://artinaction.org/resource/arts-education-important-21st-century-learning-5-reasons-go-stem-steam/> (Accessed: 3rd March 2020)

Brighouse, T. & Woods, D. (2013) *The A-Z of School Improvement*. London: Bloomsbury Education.

British Educational Research Association [BERA]. (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* 4th Ed. London: BERA.

Cultural Learning Alliance (2017) *STEAM – Why STEM can only take us so far, Briefing Paper 1*. Available at: <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CLA-STEAM-Briefing-A4.pdf> (Accessed: 25th March 2020).

Cultural Learning Alliance (2018a) *The Arts, Health & Wellbeing – Why the arts make us happier & healthier, Briefing Paper 3*. Available at: <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Arts-Health-and-Wellbeing-Briefing.pdf> (Accessed: 25th March 2020)

Cultural Learning Alliance (2018b) *The Arts in Schools – Why the arts matter in our education system, Briefing Paper 4*. Available at: <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Arts-in-Schools-Briefing-A4.pdf> (Accessed: 25th March 2020)

Cultural Learning Alliance (2019) *The Arts for Every Child – Why arts education is a social justice issue, Briefing Paper 5*. Available at: <https://culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Arts-for-every-child-CLA-Social-justice-briefing.pdf> (Accessed: 25th March 2020)

Donaldson, G. (2015) *Successful Futures – Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales*. Available at:

<https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150225-successful-futures-en.pdf> (Accessed: 10th March 2020)

Estyn (2019a) *A national evaluation and improvement resource for schools*. Available at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/national-evaluation-and-improvement-resource-schools> (Accessed: 16th March 2020)

Estyn (2019b) *Inspecting self-evaluation: a new approach*. Available at: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/school-self-evaluation-improvement-project/inspecting-self-evaluation-new-approach> (Accessed: 18th March 2020)

Moore, J. (1997) *A report by a Working Group on Poverty: Access and Participation in the Arts*. Dublin: The Arts Council/Combat Poverty Agency. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/268214229_PovertyAccess_and_Participation_in_the_Arts_Report_of_a_Working_Group_on_Poverty_Access_and_Participation_in_the_Arts (Accessed: 19th March 2020)

The Education (School Development Plans) (Wales) Regulations 2014 Welsh Statutory Instrument 2014/ 2677(W.265) Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2014/2677/schedule/made> (Accessed: 25th March 2020)

Welsh Government (2014) *School Development Plans – Guidance 155/2014*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/school-development-plans.pdf> (Accessed: 25th February 2020)

Welsh Government (2015) *Programme for Children and Young People*. Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/seven-core-aims-for-children-and-young-people.pdf> (Accessed: 9th March 2020)

Welsh Government (2019) *My Local School*. Available at: www.myllocalschool.wales.gov.uk. (Accessed: 10th February 2020)

Welsh Government (2020) Curriculum for Wales guidance. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/afca43eb-5c50-4846-9c2d-0d56fbffba09/curriculum-for-wales-guidance-120320.pdf> (Accessed: 3rd April 2020)

