

A critical evaluation and the identification of next teaching and learning steps focusing on a case study of an individual learner or a group of learners, based on an observed critical incident.

Introduction

This assignment aims to unpick a critical incident (CI) that was observed on the 22nd of September within a primary school, whilst observing a year 1 class. The CI which was observed will allow the author of this piece of work to identify key theorists and research the holistic development of children and young people. A CI is an event that occurs which has meaningful purpose to those involved and for whomever is observing, this can be positive or negative. To define what a CI is, Tripp's methodology is an ideology that a CI is split up into two phases, the what and the why. Similarly, Goodell (2006) states that a critical incident can be an everyday event that a teacher encounters within their practices. This methodology will be discussed further in the assignment and will be linked closely to the chosen CI.

In a classroom environment, critical incidents will occur throughout the day and there will be many that stand out and display something that will be intriguing and meaningful to the person who is observing. For example, a teacher may carry out an activity where the children sit on the carpet and meditate, this is where the person observing could question why the teacher had the children doing this and how it benefits the students, which could be seen as a CI. Within this assignment the author will be discussing the chosen CI, why they chose this, how this will affect their teaching, the role of reflection, how their CI links to the four purposes and will be reviewing literature based on differentiation and a behaviourist approach to teaching.

The role of critical reflection

Reflective practice is a process that is carried out by many people, researchers, teachers, coaches and more. According to Nagro and deBettencourt (2017), reflecting on experiences is vital for learning and developing new knowledge that informs future actions. This suggests that using previous experiences will shape our future deliveries, which is a constructivist approach. As well as this, it states within this journal article that the ability to reflect on one's practices in a meaningful and effective way, is known as reflective ability, which is the ability to review, analyse and evaluate teaching experiences. This implies that if we think about what we are reflecting on, and why we are reflecting, we are thinking about thinking and how

this affects future actions. Additionally, metacognition is a technique which makes us think about thinking, therefore linking this to reflection, would make people think about their performances in order to progress and develop further. Metacognition was introduced in the 1970's by John Flavell (Flavell, 1979) where this process was seen to assist the process of reflection by identifying strengths and weaknesses (Tami, S. 2020). To associate metacognition to the reflection of the CI identified by the author, the author of this piece of work will be using Kolb's Reflective Cycle (1988) in order to unpick the strengths and weaknesses of the experience, and how they can move forward from this to improve and analyse how this could benefit their own teaching practices.

Kolb's Reflective Cycle consists of six areas of reflection which will be discussed further on within this assignment. In addition to this, identifying the strengths and weaknesses will allow the author to identify whether they follow the Professional Teaching Standards during their own lesson deliveries. According to the HWB (Gov.co.uk, 2020) the current Professional Teaching Standards and leadership were published in 2017, and then further developed in 2019. These standards aim to set clear expectations about effective practice, enable practitioners to reflect on their practices, allow for further development and assist the performance management process (HWB, 2020). The importance of reflection and development is demonstrated through the development of the new Curriculum for Wales because weaknesses were identified, and changes were made. These changes are set to be out in place by 2022 in order to develop children to be ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical, informed citizens, and healthy and confident individuals.

Furthermore, critical reflection is important in the author's teaching practice because it is vital that we evaluate how our lessons went. This is because we are able to identify our strengths and weaknesses, consequently developing our weaknesses. In a study conducted by Sarro and Moussa et al. (2020), the authors evaluate the use of using mistakes to learn. It was stated that learning from mistakes will enable a person to improve and recognise where or what they need to change. This suggest that learning from our mistakes is a form of reflection as we are identifying what went wrong or our weaknesses, and then evaluating how we can develop and improve this. Likewise, further on in this assignment, within the reflection and evaluation section, the author will be discussing how the use of a SMART target will assist them in developing their own teaching practice as the next steps in their development.

As well as this, reflecting on the delivery as a teacher will allow the author to identify whether they have upheld the Professional Teaching Standards. According to the Welsh Government website (2020), it is important to follow these standards whilst teaching because the purpose of these standards are to support teachers in their role of educating children by identifying areas for development, reflective practice, and more. This suggests that the teaching standards were put in place for the benefit of the children as they aim to assist the teachers by supporting them with the educational journey of the children.

Observation school and class context

Ensuring that the author is adhering to the BERA guideline, the confidentiality and anonymity of the school and any participants will be protected throughout this piece of work. The BERA handbook for safeguarding (BERA, 2019) states that BERA believes everyone should be protected from exploitation regardless of their age, race, gender, disability, sexual orientation or ethical origin, therefore, this assignment will take every measure possible to ensure that BERA is followed correctly. To do this, the school will be identified as school X, no names will be used within this piece of work and anything else that may not be BERA compliant will be blacked out.

The CI that the author has chosen for this piece of work took place on the 22nd of September at X primary school. This primary school is a forest school which has its own field, lake, and woodland area at the back of the school. Within an edited book by Sackville-Ford and Davenport (2019), forest school is a pedagogical approach that is learner-centred, play-based education within wooded area. Within forest schools, the children would undertake activities that develop the children physically, for example, they have more space to move around and explore what the outdoors have to offer. To support this, according to Maynard (2007) outdoor education can develop the children's agility, stamina, coordination, and strength. Linking this with the four purposes, forest schools enable the children to become healthy and confident individuals because they are taking part in physical activity, developing confidence and building relationships.

Moving on, school X was not in a deprived area and created a hands on learning environment that gives every child equal opportunities. Looking at the school's website, the schools aims are to build a safe and nurturing environment for all, to develop independent and enthusiastic life-long learners, to ensure all children are respectful, respected, and valued regardless of race, gender ability, disability and more. To relate this to the CI that the author has identified, the author felt as though the children were respected and valued

during this CI because they were all given equal opportunities to achieve their highest potential. The key aspect that the author took away from the CI was the demonstration of differentiation. This is because the CI consisted of the teacher splitting the class into four groups during 'work time' which was based on their ability level.

Critical incident

As seen within appendix A, record three which is the chosen CI, was observed within a year 1 class where the teacher divided the children into four groups. These groups were based on their ability level and the children were put in these groups when they worked alongside the teacher. The author chose this incident as a CI because it demonstrated a teaching strategy that the observer has seen in many other schools. This strategy creates a more manageable learning environment which is one of the Professional Teaching Standards. This standard falls under the pedagogy section, under the refining teaching. This type of environment will create positive learning habits and behaviours as it engages the child as they are in smaller groups, therefore they have the teacher's full attention. To support this, within a study conducted by Mosteller (1995) analysed the effectiveness of smaller classes, the author concluded that the students in the smaller classes scored higher in tests, there were less behaviour problems and were more productive than bigger classes. This study alone displays that smaller classes are more effective and students benefit more from this type of learning environment. Furthermore, this could lead to an improved relationship between the teacher and the student, which is supported by Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvery (2018) as these authors state that positive relationships and learning environments lead to trust and increased interest for learning. This will therefore develop the children into confident, healthy individuals who form positive relationships based upon trust and mutual respect. Additionally, this suggests that having smaller groups would allow the teacher and the learner to form meaningful relationships which would enhance their learning.

Moving on, although this CI displayed differentiation and more support for the learners as the groups were smaller, which meant more one on one time with the teacher, the rest of the class were very loud and disruptive whilst they were playing. This could be seen as a negative aspect of splitting the groups up because the teachers focus is on a smaller group of children. To overcome this, rather than letting the children have free play, the teacher could assign each group to a certain play area where they are given task, for example, role play in the bakery that they had in the class. This would then cover many of the areas for learning as they would be 'cooking' which could be Expressive Arts, dealing with money which could be Mathematics and Numeracy, and communicating with 'customers' which

would be Languages, Literacy and Communication. As well as this, this activity would cover another one of the four purposes as it would allow the children to become enterprising, creative contributors who lead and play different roles in teams effectively and responsibly.

Nevertheless, this CI displayed diversity and equality through the strategy of dividing the class into four. This is because every child is given the equal opportunity to perform to a standard that is suitable for them and have equal amount of time with the teacher during 'work time' because they are in smaller groups, meaning the teacher can put more of their focus onto each individual. It is important to show equality and diversity within schools because not all children's needs are the same. To signify the importance of equality within the classroom, Buchholt, Stuart and Frones (2020) states that equality is a normative ideal that everyone is treated the same and given the same opportunities. This implies that children within the class should be given equal opportunities, in which they were within the CI as they had the same amount of time with the teacher during the 'work time'. Likewise, in the words of McCleary-Gaddy (2019) diversity in the classroom increases student creativity, problem solving and innovation. Therefore, linking to equality, the teacher was giving the children equal opportunities and ensure they had differentiated the lesson to suit the ability for each individual and in result, the students are gaining more from their education.

Literature review

To begin, taking into consideration the CI chosen by the author, they recognised that the reason for separating the class into ability groups was to differentiate the facilitation of learning. According to Smale-Jacobse, Meijer et al. (2019) differentiation is defined as acknowledging student differences, modifying teaching methods, learning activities, and respecting their needs to ensure they have the best possible learning outcome.

Firstly, the author started to undergo research on differentiation in the classroom and how this can affect student learning. As stated within a journal article written by Webster and Blatchford (2019) a study was conducted in England which found that 45% of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are educated within mainstream schools. This article signifies the importance of differentiating the strategies we use as teachers to ensure all children's education is to a level where they can excel. To focus this more on the local area, according to StatsWales, in Neath Port Talbot alone, there are 755 children with ALN across Primary and Secondary ages, see figure 1. This statistical evidence displays the number of children that may require additional support, which is why it is vital for teachers to be aware of different teaching strategies. Looking at this piece of literature the author believes this to

be reliable as it is an up-to-date document of the ALN children within the UK. As well as this, it displays the school action plan and action plan plus which is extra support within the schools for those children that need it, which illustrates that the identified 755 children that have ALN in Neath Port Talbot, over 1000 of these have access to extra support.

	Welsh medium (1)			English medium (5)		
	Statemented (2)	School Action (3)	School Action Plus (4)	Statemented (2)	School Action (3)	School Action Plus (4)
Isle of Anglesey	160	1,220	510	20	100	150
Gwynedd	245	1,150	1,340	25	150	160
Conwy	10	275	275	105	1,050	1,470
Denbighshire	35	395	310	150	880	1,105
Flintshire	20	140	105	455	2,205	930
Wrexham	15	170	95	430	1,195	785
Powys	40	695	300	110	1,465	880
Ceredigion	85	1,200	515	25	400	205
Pembrokeshire	30	445	295	205	2,090	1,110
Carmarthenshire	315	2,120	1,120	300	1,955	1,195
Swansea	65	625	245	1,350	3,895	2,360
Neath Port Talbot	30	340	165	755	2,045	1,365
Bridgend	*	15	35	135	1,515	1,020
Vale of Glamorgan	*	260	100	125	1,355	1,050
Rhondda Cynon Taf	55	795	340	645	2,975	1,590
Merthyr Tydfil	*	45	10	110	860	720
Caerphilly	40	385	295	450	2,320	1,605

Figure 1. Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in primary, middle and secondary schools by local authority, Welsh/ English medium and type of SEN provision (Stats Wales, 2021).

To relate this to the CI, according to the most recent Estyn report (2015) for X school, out of 476 pupils, 24% have ALN. This statistic identifies that nearly a quarter of the pupils within schools X have ALN and may need further support in their education. Furthermore, having separate groups based on ability level will give children the opportunity to work at an appropriate level for themselves. To support this, in the words of Renandya and Canh (2016), “without understanding input appropriately, it is difficult for learners to make good progress in their learning” (p.73). This suggests that learners must be learning at a suitable level for their ability in order for them to progress.

Furthermore, differentiation within small groups has been seen to increase the students' collaboration, creativity, positive interdependence and more (Creech and Hallam, 2017). Looking at this piece of literature, the author agrees that positive interdependence is

increased because the children are working with others that are at the same ability level, therefore they are able to collaborate and help each other whilst working. This will link with the four purposes because it creates enterprising, creative contributors who give their energy and skills so that other people will benefit, as well as applying their knowledge, healthy, confident individuals as they will be forming positive relationships, and finally ambitious, capable learners who can communicate effectively.

However, on the contrary, there are gaps within literature as to whether teaching in small groups have beneficial factors on the student learning. Supporting this, Tomlinson (2000) states that “differentiation is not a recipe for teaching” (p.1), suggesting that Tomlinson believes that differentiation is not a teaching strategy that works effectively within a classroom. The author of this assignment disagrees with Tomlinson as they have witnessed differentiation within the classroom working efficiently and has seen the benefits of this put in practice. In addition to this, there are other researchers who also agree with the author, such as Subban and Round (2015) who believe that differentiation within the classroom is essentially being able to constructively respond to the diverse needs of students and recognises that there are growing needs of additional support for students. Therefore, the use of differentiation within classrooms is effective and essential for student learning.

Secondly, theory is used to identify the approach taken whilst teaching and it is recognisable that school X took a behaviourist approach whilst teaching the year 1 class. According to Rostami and Khadjooi (2010) a behaviourist approach focuses on behaviour that is repeated and rewarded. For example, giving positive feedback once a child has finished their work. School X took a behaviourist approach during ‘work time’ as the children were given constant verbal feedback. The teacher would praise the children by saying “well done” or “excellent work”, and if they showed really good work and understanding they were given Dojos, which is a reward system that the school uses. At the end of the week, whoever has the most dojos would be presented with a certificate. Nevertheless, they were also given feedback that would help them improve. They did not give negative feedback as such; it was constructive feedback. The importance of constructive feedback is signified within a journal article written by Hamid and Mahmud (2010), where the authors discuss that constructive feedback provides the students with well planned, skilled and useful feedback which will develop the children’s professional learning and development.

Furthermore, Tripp defined critical incidents as an interpretation of an event from the past, that we can gain control and an understanding of our current professional practice and habits (Tripp, 1994). This is a judgment made from how we as observers perceive the CI and

judge the significance of the incident. Linking this to the assignment, the author has recognised that Tripp's definition of CI, demonstrates the importance of recognising the significance behind the incident. Furthermore, the significance of the incident chosen by the author is the use of differentiation to cater to all of the children's needs during 'work time'.

In addition to this, according to Tripp there are two stages of a CI. Stage one consists of describing the CI and giving the reader context about what exactly happened. During this phase, it is important to note down everything that will be of value to the reader and the observer because it will allow them to get as much information about the incident as possible. This can be seen in appendix A, where the author took notes from what they observed within the school. Secondly, the next stage is the why aspect. During this process the CI is questioned as to why it was chosen, what its value is within teaching. Furthermore, within the second phase of this process, theories can be used to underpin why this CI took place. Within this assignment the author will be using reflective practice to explain why and how this CI is effective and what the drawbacks could be. Through the use of reflective practice, the author can then explore the next possible steps for their development as a teacher.

Looking at this literature review, the author chose these two key topics to research further because differentiation is one of the most important teaching strategies that was observed during the CI. As well as this, the behaviourist approach stood out to the author because the use of feedback is seen to improve learning (Kola and Hein, 2006; Voerman et al. 2012), therefore this second topic was also a key piece of research. The strengths of choosing these two topics is that it was most relevant to the CI, which consequently allowed the author to gain a deeper understanding of why the CI was important to them. During this observation, the author recognised that this strategy was most effective as all the children were engaged and they were all taught at a level which was suitable for them, which ensured equality and diversity. Furthermore, the strengths of using Tripps methodology during this was that it allowed the author to identify exactly what was happening during the CI and then to identify why this occurred. The CI clearly demonstrated that the teacher was aware of the different abilities within the classroom, and this made the learning environment more manageable and efficient.

Reflection and evaluation

Reflection is a practice that allows us to recognise what we are doing well and where we can improve. Voulgari and Koutrouba (2021) described reflection as an act where we can look

back to make judgements and alter our teaching behaviours, to research and improve our knowledge. The role of critically reflecting within this piece of work is looking back onto the CI and recognising that the incident had positive outcome and positive effects on the children. However, CI aren't always positive, some negative incidents occur which create a whole different environment, controlling behaviour management for example.

As well as this, it is important to consider the four purposes and how these link with the CI. Looking at the four purposes, the author can identify that it builds relationships between the teacher and students, creating healthy, confident individuals. The group differentiation and the strategies used by the teacher created enterprising and creative contributors who think creatively to reframe and solve problems. This was signified during the Mathematics lessons where the author identified the CI, the children were given resources such as linking cubes which they had to use to solve their mathematical questions.

Moving forward, critically reflecting on this experience the author noticed that the teacher would use different strategies whilst teaching different groups, which was a clear representation of differentiation and the ability to adapt to fit the needs of all. This links to this assignment because the author has been able to make links with previous experiences, for example, the author used grouping and differentiation a lot whilst coaching therefore it is interesting to see how this strategy works within a classroom environment. Furthermore, after some research, the author has recognised that this strategy is just as effective in a classroom as it is during a coaching session. This is because the children are grouped based on ability levels, therefore the teacher was able to use resources that were suitable for each age group and ability. Within a book written by Marks (2016), the writer implies that ability-groups is beneficial to student learning as they can be closely monitored for any improvements or struggles.

Moving on to Kolb's Reflective Cycle. The author has decided to use this model to reflect on the observation to implement what they have learned for this CI into their own teaching practices. It is important to make sense of the CI and how this can improve teaching because it allows the teacher to understand that the CI can occur in their teaching pedagogy, and can develop their knowledge in the sense of using the accumulated CI over the years of teaching to have a continuous cycle of development (Alanazi, 2018). The first stage of Kolb's cycle is the Concrete Experience which is the 'doing' phase, in this case it is undertaking the observations. During this phase the author identified the CI which was splitting the class into ability groups. The next stage is the Reflective Observation which is reflecting on the experience. To do this, the author explored any areas of possible exploitation, which was ensuring that all of the children were working at an appropriate level

for their ability. The third stage is the Abstract Conceptualisation which is learning from the experience. Within this stage the author realised that they would like to take a more differentiated approach whilst teaching, therefore they have created a SMART target plan, which can be seen in appendix B, which will assist their development for this. Finally, the active experimental stage, this is where the author will be trying out what they have learned. During this phase the author has included aspects of differentiation into their lesson plans, as seen in appendix C, for their teaching practices and will try these whilst teaching in their placement school. Looking at appendix C, the resources used for a planned mathematics lesson has been altered for each group.

Linking this reflection to the assignment title, it is important to identify the next teaching and learning steps that will ensure this experience has been beneficial and developed the author's skills and knowledge. Looking at appendix B, the author can see that they have identified that they want to develop how they structure their lessons so that the learning environment is more manageable, and that they can differentiate their lessons to make sure all children's needs are fulfilled, regardless of their ability, age, race or gender, which is one of school X's aims (██████ primary, N.D.).

Conclusion

To conclude this essay, the author chose to discuss how the teacher split the class into four ability groups and what the reasoning behind this was. The role of critical reflection is to identify what went wrong and what went well, in order to develop future experiences. According to Moon (2003) critically reflecting on experiences will allow a practitioner to enhance their learning as it plays a critical role in professional practice. In addition to this, the Professional Teaching Standards that the author recognised whilst observing was the refining teaching and differentiation. Recognised these led the author to applying this to their lesson plans which they will be using on their PTE1. This is important as it demonstrates that the author will be completing the Active Experimental stage of Kolb's Reflective Cycle. As well as identifying the Professional Teaching Standards, the author linked the CI to the four purposes and how the grouping based on ability links to three of the four purposes. The importance of this is that the new curriculum for Wales is based upon the four purposes which means it is vital for teaching strategies to comply with these purposes. Differentiation was demonstrated throughout the CI, and the teacher took a behaviourist approach within these groups. As mentioned, positive reinforcement is seen to enhance student learning (Hamid and Mahmod, 2010), therefore this strategy of using differentiation and positive reinforcement ensures diversity and maximises learning. Finally, the author now has an in-

depth plan of how they will be using the CI to structure their next steps of their teaching practices, by ensuring differentiation whilst planning and always giving positive feedback.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 22nd September 2021, 9am, Year 1 class
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context - First thing in the morning when the children came into school - They were all sitting on the carpet with the teacher during the register - During drillio time the teacher would get them standing for some activities and songs
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) - First thing in the morning during and after register time - Singing - All of the children and the teacher sang a good morning song - The teacher sang the register and the children sang back, he would sing their names and they sing his. - First activity of the morning, drillio, it was a lot of singing, they sang the days of the week, months of the years. Lots of singing and repetition - The songs were in the tone of another song, so the days of the week was in the Adam's family tone, Macarena for the months of the year. - All of the songs were snag in English and then in Welsh. - Some songs would have dance moves and actions, the macarena – they would do the dance too.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be" under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? - Repetition – storing in the long-term memory - Associating what they are learning to the song and dance moves/actions
Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here) - Early in the morning - Morning routine - Same thing everyday - Children were excited when they first cane in but when the teacher started to sing the good morning song they were all focused and engaged.

Record 2

Date and time, year group: 22nd September 2021, 11:15am, Year 1
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context In the classroom, during maths lesson with one of the groups.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) - One of the children had the maths question wrong when they were doing work within their group - The teachers said it was okay to make mistakes because that's how we learn - The other children agreed with the teacher, and they continued the lesson.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? - Getting the children to understand that mistakes aren't always a bad thing - Telling them they learn from mistakes, so they aren't afraid to make mistakes - Refining teaching
Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here) - This critical incident took place before lunch time - The children were excited but during 'work time' they were very engaged and focused - All the children were understanding, and they know making mistakes isn't bad as long as they learned from them. - Always praised for trying

Record 3

Date and time, year group: • 22nd September 2021, 2021
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context • In the classroom after break time • During 'work time'
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) • The teacher has set groups for the class, based on their ability levels • There are four groups, red, blue, green, yellow • Two of the groups would be playing, one would be with the teacher and would be with the teaching assistant. • Differentiation
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? • Making sure all the children work at an appropriate level • Smaller groups so more focus was on the children that were working
Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here) • Demonstration of managing the learning environment • After breaktime so the class were full of energy from running outside • Fully engaged whilst doing their work because smaller groups meant more of the teachers focus was on the children • However, two groups that were okaying were loud and disruptive which could negatively affect those who are doing work.

Appendix B

TARGET <i>What area do you want to develop in your own practice?</i>	• The way I structure my lesson based on ability levels. • Using grouping rather than teaching the whole class.
TIMESCALE <i>When do you want to achieve this by?</i>	• I plan to do this by the first week of my PTE1
RESOURCES <i>What do you need to help you achieve this? Who do you need to talk to/observe? What do you need to research?</i>	• I will need to observe lessons, so I am more aware of the ability groups within the class • Make sure I know which groups the children are in so I can plan accordingly
SUCCESS CRITERIA/ OUTCOME <i>How will you judge whether it has been successful or not? What impact do you hope to see in teaching and learning? What research/literature is this based on?</i>	• The children will be engaged and focuses • The work will be completed • My attention will be focused on the children on the table with me
MONITORING/ EVALUATION <i>How will you check that you have successfully achieved your target? Lesson observation? Book scrutiny? Pupil voice?</i>	• Lesson observation • Assess their understanding of the work by using a traffic light system, MR. men, smiley faces etc.

Appendix C

Red Group

There are 6 fire engines. There are 2 streets on fire, how many fire engines can go to each street?



Blue group

There are 5 fire engines. There are 2 streets on fire, how many fire engines can go to each street?



Green Group

There are 4 fire engines. There are 2 streets on fire, how many fire engines can go to each street?



Yellow Group

There are 3 fire engines. There are 2 streets on fire, how many fire engines can go to each street?

