

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

## **Introduction**

In this assignment I will be addressing the assignment title which states; a critical evaluation of the next teaching and learning steps focusing on a case study of an individual learner or group of learners, based on an observed critical incident. A critical incident is a way of developing a sound understanding and control of a professional judgement (Tripp, 2011). Tripp (2011) goes on to state that critical incidents are incidents that have been rendered down to become a critical incident and that they do not necessarily have to be negative, they can be positive critical incidents. Critical incidents are important as they allow for teachers to become reflective teachers, which can not only enhance their lessons and teaching practice but can also enhance children's learning (Bruster and Peterson, 2013). This assignment will be looking at the role of critical reflection and how important this is, this assignment will then move on to give some context of the observation that was observed, this will then link to the next section where the critical incident will be linked to Donaldson's four purposes of the curriculum. The assignment will then delve deeper into the critical incident by critically evaluating and analysing and will also draw upon some literature and theory. The assignment will then move on to reflect and evaluate on the critical incident and will provide some next steps as to how I can adapt what was observed in the critical incident into my own teaching practice. Then I will conclude by summarising the points made in this assignment.

## **The role of critical reflection**

Critical reflection is important in education as it allows teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the teaching styles, which allows them to challenge traditional models of practice, which in turn can allow them to become effective teachers (Shandomo, 2010). One reflective model that has proven helpful to teachers when they are reflecting on their thoughts, feelings and action when faced with a challenging situation in the classroom, is Gibbs's reflective cycle (Markkanen, Välimäki, Anttila and Kuuskorpi, 2020). Gibbs's reflective cycle allows teachers to view challenging situations as an opportunity to learn and evaluate their own professional practice (Markkanen, Välimäki, Anttila and Kuuskorpi, 2020). In comparison, Kolb's Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Cycle focuses more on the learners and their "internal cognitive processes" (McLeod, 2017). Whereby, the learners

reflect upon a new experience that they have encountered as then apply this to the real world where they can see what happens (McLeod, 2017). This differs from Gibbs's reflective cycle as this one has focus on the learners themselves and their learning rather than the teachers and how they can improve their own professional practice. These reflective cycles both show how important it is to critically reflect as a teacher and as a learner. It is important for teacher to critically reflect as it allows them to evaluate and improve their professional practice which can also have a positive impact upon the way in which learners learn. This then links into the importance of learners being able to critically reflect upon their learning, as it allows them to develop their learning and help them to progress. Regarding the Professional Standards, critical reflection can link to the influencing learner's area – more specifically reflection on learning, which is part of the pedagogical area of the Professional Standards. Reflection on learning can link to critical reflection as the teachers would have to critically reflect in the planning process, where they need to show that they have an awareness of how important it is for learners to reflect and evaluate behaviours and the outcomes of their learning (GOV WALES, 2020). Reflection on learning would really benefit from critical reflection as it allows the teachers to improve their lessons to incorporate this into their teaching, whereby they give learners opportunities to reflect upon their learning. Also, it would really benefit from critical reflection as it can also allow the learners to develop their learning and their behaviours by ensuring that they reflect so that they can see what they need to do in order to improve and progress. As well as reflection on learning linking to critical reflection, learners leading the learning can also link to critical reflection also. Learners leading the learning is also part of the pedagogical section of the Professional Standards. Learners leading the learning can link to critical reflection because teachers should be able to demonstrate that they are aware of how important it is to encourage learners to reflect upon their own learning, during the planning process (GOV WALES, 2020). Encouraging learners to reflect upon their own learning is important because it allows the learners to see where they need to improve and where their strengths are.

### **Observation – school & class context**

The critical incident was observed in a large primary school in Pembrokeshire, there are about 700 pupils in the school and about 30% of them are eligible for free school meals. In the class there was the class teacher and one LSA, there were also some children who required a little more help and support because they had learning difficulties. The observation took place in a mixed ability year 4 class at the end of the day. It was a reasonably quiet classroom environment, as the children were sat on the carpet quietly. This observation was also observed just before the children had to go and collect their bags and coats to get ready to go home. The instructions by the class teacher were made explicit so

that the children could easily understand and follow the instructions that were given to them. Also, there were a few distractions as other classes had their doors open which meant that the children could hear what was going on elsewhere. However, this did not seem to become a distraction for the children in the class that was being observed, as they understood and followed the class teachers' instructions and sat on the carpet calmly and quietly and listened to what the class teacher was explaining to them.

### **Critical incident linked to Donaldson's four purposes**

The critical that was observed took place at the end of the day. The class teacher was choosing children's names to be put in the jar, this was to show that there were some children that were working and behaving very well throughout the day. The critical incident was when I noticed that the children who had their names in the jar were very happy and could not stop smiling. It was as if having their name in the jar boosted their mood, self-esteem and confidence. However, I also noticed that the children who did not have their names put in the jar were not as happy as the children who did. This would mean that there should be an element of care when doing something like this because it could have a negative impact on the children who do not have their names in the jar and could make them upset, which in turn could affect their self-esteem and confidence. This critical incident links to the four purposes of the curriculum, but more specifically to the ambitious, capable learners. This critical incident links to this purpose as it shows that the children who had their names in the jar have set themselves high standards and enjoy challenging themselves when posed with a problem and when problem solving (Donaldson, 2015). This can also link to healthy, confident individuals, as the children can build resilience when their name does not go in the jar and if they get a problem wrong or cannot solve a problem. This critical incident is also links to the healthy, confident individuals' purpose of the curriculum. This critical incident links to this because it shows that the children are developing their mental and emotional well-being by improving their confidence, resilience and empathy. It also shows that the children can cope with everyday life as independently and as confidently as they can (Donaldson, 2015). This links to the critical incident as having the children's names in the jar can improve their confidence and self-esteem but it can also allow the children who did not have their names in the jar to cope with everyday life as best, they can as they can become resilient individuals. The healthy, confident individuals' purpose of the curriculum could also help the children who did not have their names out in the jar, as it can help them to overcome challenge this could also help them to manage and cope with life as best, they can. So, when they do get their name put in the jar, they know that they were resilient as they would have overcome challenge and improved from the last time. This could also have a positive impact on their self-esteem and confidence.

## **Literature review**

This section is going to explore how positive reinforcement can impact children's wellbeing and motivation. On the flip side of this, this section will also explore how positive reinforcement can have a negative impact on children's wellbeing and motivation.

A theorist that supports the idea that positive reinforcement can impact children's wellbeing and motivation is B.F. Skinner. Skinner suggests that in order to keep a child's behaviour reoccurring teachers should increase the variety of rewards and reinforcers in order to keep the desired behaviour (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Skinner also found that schools began to incorporate a variety of different strategies that were more in line with his operant conditioning theory, which included different types of reward systems that were in the form of stickers and praise and reward systems that rewarded whole groups (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). These reward systems were in place in order to moderate behaviour within the classroom. Also, Skinner advocated that positive reinforcement was more powerful and effective than negative reinforcement (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). This is because positive reinforcement can have a positive impact on a child's wellbeing and motivation to learn. A study conducted by Uddin, Hena and Shanil (2017) supports this, as they found that teachers believed that positive reinforcement helps to improve children's motivation and their self-confidence and belief. Another theorist who suggests that positive reinforcement improves a child's wellbeing and motivation is Carol Dweck. However, Carol Dweck takes a different stance towards positive reinforcement by suggesting that teachers and parents should move away from praise that focuses solely on judging a child's intelligence. Instead, they should focus more on praising a child's efforts, hard work and use of learning strategies (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). This implies that Carol Dweck suggests that teachers should support children in having a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset because praising and rewarding children with a growth mindset can have a more significant, positive impact on children's motivation to learn as it focuses more on their efforts and hard work rather than on how intelligent they are (fixed mindset) (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). A study conducted by Hardy and McLeod (2020) also supports the idea that positive reinforcement can have a positive impact on children's wellbeing and motivation, because they state that using positive reinforcement with young children can have a significant impact on their motivation but also on their wellbeing in terms of self-confidence. This suggests that improving a child's self-confidence by using positive reinforcements can also improve their motivation to learn.

However, there are some theorists and studies who are against or question the use of positive reinforcement in improving a child's motivation to learning. One theorist who is against the use of positive reinforcement to improve children's motivation towards learning is

Maria Montessori. Maria Montessori suggests that positive reinforcements have no place within the classroom (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Instead, Maria Montessori believed that self-confidence and esteem is best developed through using intrinsic motivation strategies, as these are a better way to improve a child's motivation towards learning, than extrinsic motivation strategies are (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). A study conducted by Maag (2001) found that educators preferred to use punishment in order to manage challenging and unwanted behaviour in the classroom over using positive reinforcement. This study also found that using punishment and negative reinforcements are preferred as they can remove the challenging or unwanted behaviours from the classroom or even the school. However, this study did recommend that educators should think about incorporating positive reinforcement into the classroom and the school, as this is more appropriate way in managing behaviour and in improving children's motivation towards learning (Maag, 2001). Another theorist that is against the use of positive reinforcement to improve children's motivation towards learning is Albert Bandura. Bandura disagrees with Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, by stating that he did not accept that children learn a behaviour by being rewarded or punished (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). In fact, Bandura suggested that learn through observational learning, this means that the child does not have to be rewarded for the behaviour, as it was enough to just simply observe someone else being rewarded for the desired behaviour (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). This suggests that children learn to not behave or to behave in a certain way through observation, rather than by being rewarded or praised. A study conducted by Tauber (2010) supports the idea that negative reinforcement is a positive behaviour management strategy to use in the classroom. However, this study recognises that teachers are not confident enough in implementing this strategy into their classrooms (Tauber, 2010). So, this study is trying to portray the positive impacts and effects of negative reinforcement in the classroom setting.

However, regarding Carol Dweck's stance towards positive reinforcement and children's motivation towards learning, Dweck does state that if parents and teachers reward children in terms of their intelligence, too much then the children will become fearful of failure. Therefore, Carol Dweck suggests that positive reinforcement in terms of praising children regarding their efforts and hard work would be a lot more beneficial to the child as it can have a more positive impact on their motivation towards learning. This way of positive reinforcement can also mean that children will not become afraid of possible failure as they will be aware from the teachers and parents that they have tried hard and that their hard work and effort is being rewarded, as failure is not something to be afraid of. This fear of failure could in turn begin to have a negative impact on children's wellbeing, as their self-confidence and esteem could fall which could mean that they no longer feel confident in

completing slightly more challenging work as they are afraid that they might fail or get it wrong. A study conducted by Henderlong and Lepper (2002) suggest that positive reinforcement or praise may sometimes undermine or have simply no effect on a child's intrinsic motivation or in general their motivation towards learning. This implies that too much positive reinforcement or the continued use of positive reinforcement can have a negative impact on children's wellbeing and motivation towards their learning. However, in saying this, Henderlong and Lepper (2002) note that if the positive reinforcement or praise is viewed as sincere, then it can particularly be beneficial regarding the child's motivation in general and their motivation towards their learning. This highlights that Henderlong and Lepper (2002) are aware that genuine positive reinforcement and praise can have some positive impacts on children's wellbeing and motivation towards learning. Also, regarding Bandura's social learning theory, he stated that he felt that rewards and positive reinforcement has no place within the classroom. However, he does consider that when positive reinforcement and rewards are used at the right time and for the right reasons, that they can in fact be a very powerful strategy in behaviour management and in improving a child's wellbeing and motivation towards learning. This shows that even though Bandura disagreed with the use positive reinforcement and rewards, he did however consider that they can sometimes be powerful when increasing a child's motivation to learn. However, regarding positive reinforcement having a negative impact on children's wellbeing and motivation towards learning, there is a study that indicates that positive reinforcement rewards in fact do not have a negative impact on children's wellbeing and motivation towards learning. A study conducted by Cameron and Pierce (1994) found that positive reinforcement and rewards do not have any negative impact on or decrease a child's wellbeing or motivation towards their learning. This suggests that it does not matter how often positive reinforcement or rewards are used it will always have a positive impact on children's wellbeing and motivation towards their learning. Cameron and Pierce (1994) also identified that positive reinforcement and rewards do not harm a child's intrinsic motivation in anyway. Again, this also suggests that positive reinforcement and rewards do not negatively impact on a child's motivation towards their learning. However, the only thing to be cautious about here is the year in which this study was published. This study was published in 1994, this means that it is more than likely that some of the result in this study could be outdated and unreliable when incorporating it into today's times. Although, as previously mentioned there are some recent studies that could support this study when discussing positive reinforcement and the impact it can have on children's wellbeing and motivation towards their learning. This section has discussed the literature that is for and against the impact that positive reinforcement and rewards have on children's wellbeing and motivation towards their learning. This section has found that a few theorists and studies support the idea that positive reinforcement and rewards can have a

positive impact on a child's wellbeing and motivation towards their learning. However, these theorists and studies have come up against other theorists and studies who disagree and say that positive reinforcements have no place within the classroom or that just simply suggest that they do not have any impact on their wellbeing or motivation towards their learning. Although, there is one theorist who suggests that positive reinforcement and rewards can cause children to become fearful of failure.

## **Reflection/Evaluation & Next Steps**

The critical incident that was observed focused on the effects of positive reinforcement on children's wellbeing and motivation towards their learning. Regarding the critical incident that was observed, the kind of positive reinforcement that was used, was quite regularly throughout the school day. As discussed in the previous section, the overuse of positive reinforcement in the classroom can sometimes have a negative impact on those children who do not have their names put into the jar. So maybe, positive reinforcement should be used only, when necessary, maybe at the end of the school day for instance. The role of critical reflection in this instance is very important because the teacher could ask the children on what they think worked best during the lesson and how the teacher could further improve, but it is also important that the teacher reflects on their own teaching strategies and the strategies that they use in the classroom regarding positive reinforcement. A reflection model that could be useful here could be Gibbs' reflective model. This model would be useful here as it can help the teacher reflect on their own professional development and can help them identify which strategy for positive reinforcement is best and could help them judge how often they should use the strategy for (Markkanen, Välimäki, Anttila and Kuuskorpi, 2020). As previously mentioned critically reflecting on professional development is very important when needed to improve lessons and classroom management. In terms of my own professional development, I would like to develop the use of positive reinforcement and good classroom management. I would like to achieve this by the end of the PGCE programme and by the end of the first NQT year. There are also some resources that I would draw upon in order to help me to achieve this. I would need to talk to and observe other teachers who have successfully implemented positive reinforcement into their classroom. I would also need to draw upon some reflective models in order to successfully reflect. I could use Gibbs' reflective model and Kolb's reflective model when reflecting on my professional development. I would also need to draw upon relevant theorists and research that have a positive outcome in the area of positive reinforcement and motivation. Also, in order to judge whether the implementation of positive reinforcement and motivation in the classroom has been successful or not, I would reflect on what went well and what could be improved. I would also hope to see children motivated towards their learning and hope that

the teaching that they receive is differentiated and the best it can possibly be. In addition, in order to check that I have successfully achieved my target of implementing positive reinforcement and good classroom management into the classroom, I would use pupil voice and ask them to reflect on their learning and reflect on my teaching. I could also get an experienced teacher to observe one of my lessons and ask them if they thought it went well and if I have achieved my target successfully. I would also ensure that when I implement positive reinforcement and good classroom management into the classroom that I am also in line with the professional standards. The implementation of positive reinforcement and good classroom management would link to the pedagogy part of the professional standards but more specifically to the influencing learner's section. Also, the implementation of positive reinforcement and good classroom management into the classroom can also be linked to reflection on learning, as it allows the learners to reflect on their own personal learning but also allows them to reflect on the teacher and their teaching (GOV WALES, 2020). Ensuring that I link my teaching and the implementation of positive reinforcement and good classroom management into the classroom to the Professional Standards is important as it shows that I would be willing to continue to grow and progress regarding my own professional development.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this assignment has addressed the assignment title which stated, a critical evaluation of the next teaching and learning steps focusing on a case study of an individual learner or group of learners, based on an observed critical incident. This assignment found that positive reinforcement and rewards can have a positive impact on children's wellbeing and motivation towards learning. Some theorists and studies also found that the overuse or disuse of positive reinforcement and rewards can have a negative impact on children's wellbeing and motivation towards learning. However, there was one theorist who argued that the constant use of positive reinforcement can cause children to become fearful of failure. The use of positive reinforcement and good classroom management in the classroom can allow the practitioner to become reflective, as they could reflect on their personal use of positive reinforcement and decide whether they need to use it less or more often. As this assignment identified, being a reflective practitioner is a positive thing as it can allow children to suggest different ways in which the teacher can deliver tasks and lessons and can also allow the teacher to identify aspects that went well or aspects that need improving. This assignment also found that the implementation of positive reinforcement and good classroom management links to the pedagogy section of the Professional Standards, but more specifically to the reflection on learning aspect. As previously mentioned, involving learners in the reflection process is an important factor as it allows the learners and teachers

to progress and improve together when implementing the use of positive reinforcement and good classroom management into the classroom (GOV WALES, 2020). This assignment also identified that the implementation of positive reinforcement and good classroom management can also link to learners leading the learning. This assignment links to this aspect of the Professional Standards because having the learners at the heart of their learning is important. So, when implementing positive reinforcement and good classroom management, children should also be apart of this process especially when teachers are reflecting on the use of positive reinforcement and good classroom management.

## **Appendix**

### **Record 1:**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 – 3:15pm – year 3                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Where and When:</b> Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context<br><br>Year 3 class at the end of the day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>What happened:</b> a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)<br><br>The class teacher got the children to sit on the floor and reflect on their learning, by deciding which colour circle they felt they were. Red being I have no idea, orange being I understood some of it but I still need some help and green being im absolutely fine I know what I'm doing. After the |

children had done this the teacher then asked them to rate her teaching from red to green. Red being miss I didn't know what I was doing, so you could do this, this and this to make it better, orange, miss that was okay but I still need some help so could you do this next time and green, miss you well there is nothing you could do better.

**Areas of possible exploration:** what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider?

I could explore how learner assessment can improve or impact on a child's learning and progression. This could have a positive impact on their learning but could also have a negative impact on their learning and progression.

**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)

It was quite a quiet environment as it was at the end of the day.

## Record 2:

Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 – 08:55 – year 4

**Where and When:** Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

Year 4 class, they had just arrived in class.

**What happened:** a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)

When the children arrived in class, they knew exactly what to do. They knew that they had to put their bags and coats on their pegs and then they knew that they needed to get their whiteboards and pens out and start doing some maths questions.

**Areas of possible exploration:** what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents?  
What avenues of research could you consider?

I could explore the impacts of good classroom management on children’s learning.

**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)

It wasn’t really a busy environment as it was quiet as they had just arrived in school. The teacher didn’t have to explain to them what they had to do because they already knew.

### Record 3:

Date and time, year group: 23/09/2021 – 15:15pm – year 4

**Where and When:** Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

Year 4 class, at the end of the day.

**What happened:** a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)

At the end of the day the class teacher chose names to be put in the jar, this was to show that there were some children that did very well throughout the day.

**Areas of possible exploration:** what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider?

I could explore how positive reinforcement can improve children’s wellbeing and learning and even motivation.

**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)

Was a reasonably quite environment as the children were sat quietly before they had to go and get their bags and coats ready to line up to go home.

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