

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

A Critical Incident (CI) is defined as “typical, everyday events that are rendered critical through analysis”, and act as a reflective tool for the practitioner to improve as well as providing a focus for classroom research (Tripp, 2011, p.25). The CI methodology allows for critical reflection as it requires examining whether the incident is underpinned by learning theory and the driving force behind the incident. This therefore highlights that exploring the CI method in this assignment is a useful demonstration of critical reflection, the skills of which I can use more widely on a professional placement and in the future as a qualified teacher. This assignment uses an identified CI from two days of observation from a local primary school, which was used as window for further research into how aspects of Gamification such as class point systems and leader boards impact on the motivation and mindset of learners in the classroom. The importance of the process of critical reflection, the individual context of the school where observation took place and the importance of critical reflection will be discussed before reviewing relevant literature. The assignment will then use the collected research to reflect upon the selected CI and the way in which using a reflective cycle or methodology can help with personal and professional development. The assignment will conclude with a summary of the literature review findings and a brief discussion as to how this can lead to development of the professional standards required for QTS.

The Role and Importance of Critical Reflection

Critical thinking and reflection are defined by Snyder and Snyder (2008) as a skill, that with enough practice can become a habit in which learners question, analyse and evaluate information instead of accepting what is given which can lead to an expansion of ideas and understanding. It involves the learner thinking about the process of and how it can be improved or as Flavell (1979) described metacognition - a precursor for critical thinking: the process of thinking about thinking. The role of critical reflection is therefore a vital skill for any individual as it uses higher order cognitive skills that helps with the formulation of ideas.

Whilst critical reflection is an important skill for any profession, its vitality to education specifically and the teaching profession is elevated. It is worth noting the regard one views the importance of critical reflection for the teaching profession may depend on the view and role of a teacher that the individual subscribes to. Previous thinking such as Lawlor (1990) took the view that teaching is a craft that can be developed simply by watching and learning from an experienced teacher. However, many have

argued that the role of a teacher is not as a craftsman but as a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1988). In this case, the view that teaching is a craft that can be developed through observation places less emphasis on the importance of critical reflection than that of a reflective practitioner, where reflecting on what works well and needs to be improved upon is at the centre for future progression and development.

Smyth (1989) advocates for teachers to be reflective practitioners as this empowers teachers to become active instead of passive components within the education system that do not just deliver a set curriculum but consider what works best for the learners in that specific classroom. Orchard and Winch (2015) also support this view and argue that teachers that are successful reflective practitioners will improve their situational judgement by implementing recognised learning theories within a real-life context. Educational theories however cannot be implemented into a real-life context without critically reflecting on material and arriving at one's own ideas around the subject.

This assignment utilises Kolb's reflective cycle to reflect on how the material presented in the literature review relates to the identified CI. The four stages of Kolb's cycle are to model a concrete experience, followed by reflective observation, this reflection is then evaluated and implemented in a real-world context where the cycle restarts (Kolb, 1981., Svinicki and Dixon, 1987). This cycle will be used to inform my personal and professional development as I can explore how the theories and findings researched for this assignment can be implemented in my first professional teaching experience.

Context of Observation School and Class

Before discussing the identified CI, a brief context of the school where observation took place will be given. This assignment will adhere to the BERA (2018) guidelines throughout with measures taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of both the school and its staff and pupils throughout. Any material referenced will redact information that could remove anonymity.

The school observed is located in the North Gower, within the west of the Swansea local authority. The surrounding area of the school is ranked by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) as being within the least deprived 25% of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in Wales indicating high levels of income and affluency (WIMD, 2019., Swansea Council, 2019). There are around 140 pupils in the school with pupil age ranging from 3 to 11. The school proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is 6% which is below the national average of 18% as well as having a very low proportion of pupils that do not use English as a first language (ESTYN, 2019). All classes in the school have at least one designated teaching assistant. The school timetables forest school and outdoor learning for every

class weekly and offers opportunities to pupils such as access to peripatetic music lessons, a wide range of extra-curricular activities and quiet spaces.

Of the two days of observation undertaken for this assignment, one was undertaken in a split Year 5 and 6 class and the other in a split Year 1 and 2 comprised of around 25 pupils in each. There is a positive learning environment within the classroom with pupils being highly supportive of the learning of their peers. The school itself is also a very caring, welcoming environment in which learners are encouraged to do their best.

Critical Incident Linked to the Four Purposes of the Welsh Curriculum 2022

The observation used as a CI for this assignment was taken from the Year 5/6 class. During the 2 days observation, 3 CIs were recorded and whilst one will be examined in detail, the others are recorded in the Appendix. The selected CI took place in a Welsh lesson focusing on a basic conversation about the weather. The class teacher placed each pupil into pairs roughly based on ability and were given five minutes to practice their conversation before coming to the front of the class to demonstrate to their peers. Depending on the standard of the conversation assessed, they would be awarded one, two or three house points with three indicating a better performance. House points would be displayed in a leader board format at the front of the classroom. This initially seemed to increase motivation for the pupils as many were excited at the prospect of earning points. Upon completion of the task, the class teacher gave immediate feedback on how improvements could be made as well as the house points awarded. Two pupils went to the front and were awarded one point each but on returning to their table, Pupil A was heard saying “It doesn’t matter, I am terrible at Welsh anyway”, seemingly ignoring the constructive feedback from the teacher. The response of Pupil A and what the cause of this response was what will be specifically examined as the Critical Incident for analysis. Whilst the potential of house points initially increased engagement and motivation amongst all pupils, on receiving a lower score this seemed to lead to a negative reinforcement in the sense that Pupil A perceived a lower score as an indicator of a prior assumption that Welsh was a weakness instead of using the lower score as motivation to improve the next time. Scoring systems and house points are potential examples of ‘gamification’ within education which will be a focus of the Literature Review.

This CI directly links to the four purposes of the new Wales Curriculum outlined by Donaldson (2015), specifically the first of the purposes: “Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives”. If the instances of negative reinforcement continue with Pupil A, this could potentially lead to a diminished desire to develop skills in Welsh as learners possibly naturally gravitate and receive more enjoyment from our perceived strengths. Alternatively, this line of thinking could be reversed within the context of the new curriculum as Pupil A may develop to realise that it is normal to have weaker

skills which can trigger ambition and a desire to improve through a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016). This creates scope for further examination and discussion in the Literature Review regarding positive and negative impacts of reward systems in classrooms and whether they can feed or hinder the ambition and motivation of learners.

It is worth noting that this incident also relates to the other curriculum purposes proposed by Donaldson (2015) such as a potential of a diminished confidence (Healthy, Confident Individuals) of Pupil A or a lack of a desire to contribute positively to future lessons (Enterprising, Creative Contributors). Whilst the relation to the other purposes of the 2022 Welsh Curriculum are highly relevant, they will not be examined in detail in this assignment so that in depth analysis of the impact that gamified reward systems can potentially have on the ambition and motivation of the learner.

Literature Review

Following the selection of the identified CI, this Literature Review will explore the concept of gamification and how gamified elements such as points and rewards systems are theorised to influence task engagement and pupil motivation. The review will then discuss some empirical studies within the literature as well as the potential impact that gamification may have on the 'growth mindset' of pupils.

Whilst there is not currently a single, clear definition of gamification, there is a consensus within the literature that the concept can be defined as integrating game aspects such as leader boards, badges and rewards into a non-game real world context such as education (Deterding et al, 2011). Electronic classroom reward systems such as ClassDojo where points are awarded for things such as good behaviour have increased in popularity in recent years with some of the reasons cited for their success being that they stimulate competitiveness in pupils, look colourful making it seem engaging and allow for the creation of individual avatars (Williamson, 2017). The field of research of gamification is relatively new with much of the research taking place in the last decade. One of the driving forces behind its implementation in an education setting is that children and young people will spend large amounts of time outside of school hours gaming so it is worth utilising a familiar framework within education and some such as Chapman and Rich (2018) argue that the addictive nature of these games may also increase the motivation of learners.

The concept of gamification, specifically using leader boards and point reward systems for pupils stems from the theory of behaviourism. Behaviourism uses the technique of Operant Conditioning, the process where living things can be conditioned to get a desired response. Ivan Pavlov was one of the first that proposed this theory in an experiment in which a dog would salivate on seeing food, but

this was combined with the ringing of a bell. The repetitive action of combining the bell with the food lead to a conditioned response in which the dog would salivate on the ringing of the bell alone. This was known as Classical Conditioning (Pavlov, 1927). The process and popularity of Operant Conditioning in educational theory are driven by the work of Skinner in which learners are offered a reward for displaying a desired behaviour which positively reinforces or conditions the learner to repeat the desired behaviour (Skinner, 1983). However, critics of behaviourism may argue that behaviourism and therefore gamified reward systems place the learner in a passive role in their own learning in which they have little agency and control over their own actions and behaviour. Furthermore, Boghossian (2006) argues that Behaviourism does not allow for reflective learning where the learner considers why their own behaviour may be inappropriate as the theory is too prescriptive of what is considered good and bad behaviour that leaves learners using less self-regulation as they are more reliant on rewards and behaviour controls.

Despite these criticisms, there are a range of empirical studies which demonstrate instances where gamified reward systems have increased motivation as well as engagement and enjoyment of tasks such as Landers and Landers (2015), Clark et al (2016), Sailer et al (2017) and Groening and Binnewies (2019). Many of these studies include analysis which provides two programmes of learning: one containing gamified elements and one without and then questioning participants of both programmes about their motivation and engagement. Chapman and Winch (2018) found that 67.7% of participants in their study said that the programme where they were awarded points and badges were more motivating than a more traditional learning programme, and in a study by Landers and Landers (2015), engagement was found to be higher as pupils following the programme with a leader board checked their work on average 29 times more than those without.

Whilst there does seem to be substantial evidence within the literature that gamified elements can increase task motivation, there is other evidence that creates a more complicated picture. Dichev and Dicheva (2017) completed an analysis of 51 different empirical studies in the field of gamification but found that only 26% of studies demonstrated a positive link between gamification and increased motivation in learners, 64% of studies were inconclusive and 10% showed a negative link. They also note that some of the problems within the field include a skew in the studies assessed towards STEM subjects as well as only 7 of the papers that satisfied their criteria as being aimed at primary age pupils indicating that there is substantially less evidence for the impact of gamified learning on younger pupils. Sailer and Homner (2020) completed a similar synthesis study to Dichev and Dicheva (2017) and whilst they found that most empirical studies they assessed showed that gamification had a mild positive impact on learning, they noted that one of the major problems in the field is that many studies are small in size. Bedwell et al (2012) add that a lack of a widely accepted framework of what

gamification in education actually looks like is one of the most important research gaps in the literature to fill. Whilst this paper is now almost 10 years old and would have been published when gamification was only beginning to be explored, it raises a valid criticism in that if there is no concrete framework for the field, it will be difficult to fully weigh up the positive and negative evidence of using it in an educational setting. Can papers that analyse the impact of leader boards, points or badges in singularity be analysed under the umbrella term of gamified elements and compared with each other or do they all act as one evidence base with a range of subsections?

The current evidence base in the literature surrounding the impact of gamification indicates a mixed picture and so it is now worth discussing the purpose of these systems in a classroom and how they should be implemented. Kickmeier-Rust et al (2014), argue that point systems can be used as a feedback tool as they relay back to the learner that they've done good work whereas others like Landers (2014) viewpoints as a reward system for the learner in the sense that they learn to enjoy receiving points as they can provide satisfaction. Whilst feedback has been viewed as a powerful tool to influence learning (Hattie and Jaeger, 1998), it needs to be used to answer the questions "Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?", for the learner to make progress (Hattie and Timperley, 2007, p.86), thus it is worth questioning whether points systems alone can provide specific, targeted feedback to improve learning. In a similar vein, using points solely as a reward could be problematic. Deci et al (1999), argued that according to Cognitive Evaluation Theory, the recipients of rewards can view them in two ways: either as a control on their behaviour or as a sign of their individual competence. If used as a control, this will likely diminish the motivation of the learner whereas if they feel that it shows their competence, this could improve motivation and so it is not clear cut as to the impact that rewards have on the learner. There is clear debate in the literature surrounding both the robustness of empirical evidence as well as the purpose or role of gamified elements in the classroom. However, before drawing conclusions it is important to discuss the impact that these systems can have on the mindset of learners and their outlook on the learning process.

The Growth Mindset is a concept created by Carol Dweck in which she argues that people with a growth mindset will believe that their talents and learning can be improved through hard work and perseverance, whereas the opposite of this is a fixed mindset where the learner believes that talents are innate gifts that cannot be improved on (Dweck, 2016). Individuals with a Growth Mindset will be less concerned about how they look to their peers whereas those with a Fixed Mindset will often compare themselves to others. According to Williamson et al (2017), the founders of ClassDojo cite Dweck's concept as one of their key influences in their design of the programme indicating that they perhaps believe that class points systems will encourage a Growth Mindset in the sense that those individuals will use the point system to establish their own standing within the group and how this can

either be maintained or improved upon. However, Rhew et al (2019) argue that those with a Fixed Mindset may have higher anxiety at being compared with others and so this highlights the importance of considering the circumstances of the individual in a classroom and accepting that what suits some will not necessarily suit others.

The mixed empirical evidence of the impact of gamified elements as well as the context they should be implemented in will be reflected upon in the following section. The impact that gamified elements in a classroom has on learners with Growth and Fixed Mindsets could be a study in itself, but here acts as an example of how a consideration of the individual is needed when designing classroom rewards and motivations. This literature review has found that whilst there might be many benefits to using gamification, there is currently not always a clear-cut consensus on the tangible impact that these systems have on learners.

Reflection and Evaluation

Relating the literature back to the CI, in terms of what elicited the negative response of Pupil A in the Critical Incident Section of the assignment, possibly the pupil had fixed mindset tendencies as described by Dweck (2016) and felt self-conscious at receiving less points from others and therefore justified this to themselves. Alternatively, perhaps the Cognitive Evaluation Theory described by Deci et al (1999) could partially explain the response as the learner felt that the points awarded indicated low competence. The initial excitement in the class from awarding points for the task perhaps reinforces the findings of some of the studies in the literature review such as Landers and Landers (2015), Clark et al (2016), Sailer et al (2017) that gamified elements can increase task motivation but using if pupils continue to receive lower marks this could lead to them feeling incompetent.

Using Tripp's CI methodology has opened some interesting avenues of research in the fields of behaviourism and gamification and allowed me to explore contrasting ideas and viewpoints in the previous section of the assignment. Before this assignment, I had not given much consideration as to how points systems may not work for all learners. Because I have experienced three different schools that use points and leader boards, I had assumed that they were commonplace and enjoyable for all learners but exploring the literature in the previous section has allowed me to question how these systems can best be implemented or how they can be tailored to suit an individual. Whilst I believe that there is still a role for them in a classroom as a motivational tool, I realise that other methods might better suit individuals. Reflective practice will help me to challenge unconscious biases I was unaware I had before starting this course. I often find connecting theory to real-life practice quite difficult and understanding how theories can impact upon practices but using Tripp's methodology allows for refining a lot of information from classroom observation into a more manageable amount

that has opened a window to interesting research. This methodology has allowed me to see more clearly how material discussed in lectures can be implemented in a classroom.

Whilst this methodology has been useful for this assignment, if following Kolb's reflective model, it is important that this is not the end point as a reflective practice should be a cycle. Having observed and conceptualised the CI (steps 2 and 3 of the cycle), I could then explore this further in the classroom by experimenting with points systems and perhaps giving pupils of lower ability rewards for effort or other qualities such as being kind to others regularly to enforce that a Welsh session might not be their strength, but they are good at other things. Points and leader boards are symptomatic of a behaviourist education approach, and this may work for one group of pupils, but I think my practice would be strengthened by researching other behaviour theories and drawing from different schools of thinking as other strategies to provide motivation could work better for another group of pupils. It is important that although the CI should be grounded in the school context, finding driving factors that underpin the incident should be grounded in theory. The essence of Kolb's reflective cycle in education however is that you test an approach in the classroom based on theory, evaluate how its working and then adapt your approach where required and then revisiting the theory to see what improvements you could make.

This style of analysis could assist with personal development as I could use a similar framework to help me identify personal areas that I could improve. For example, one aspect that makes me anxious about the first teaching practice and the career in general is my own personal confidence in delivering content to classes. I could use a reflective methodology like Tripp's, or the cycle described by Kolb to work out what it is that makes me nervous about delivering content, researching strategies that could help boost my confidence and then experimenting and testing these before teaching to see which works best, whilst reflecting on any improvements or adjustments that need to be made. In terms of my professional development, I think a reflective cycle like the analysis of this assignment could help me with my lesson planning as I will reflect on lessons after teaching them and see what could be adjusted to improve future lessons or to make sure that the lessons are providing pupils with the skills and knowledge they need as well as having meaningful links to Donaldson's (2015) four purposes. In terms of my development for the professional standards required for QTS, I could use a reflective cycle for improving my leadership which I know is a weakness by identifying what I find difficult about leading others.

Conclusion

To conclude, this assignment has used the observed CI to undertake further research into elements of Gamification and evaluate some of the empirical evidence of where it has been implemented in

classrooms and potential benefits but also reasons to perhaps be cautious of incorporating these systems into teaching practice. There is evidence to suggest that gamified elements can make learning more enjoyable and motivating for some learners, but this is caveated in the literature that a more solid framework of what gamification entails is needed to make this statement with more assertion. The impact of using points and leader board systems in the classroom may be driven by the purpose of which they are being implemented – either as a reward system or to provide feedback but could also be affected by the individual mindset of the learner. Whilst the findings of the research undertaken for this assignment need to be grounded in the school context, the transferrable skills developed in writing it have allowed me to explore the importance of critical reflection.

Tripp's Critical Incident methodology allows for users of it to compress the school day into a single incident that opens windows for further research. Using a reflective methodology like this has demonstrated to me that in order to further my personal development of skills for the professional standards for QTS, a small aspect needs to be identified (like a Critical Incident within the school day) and improved through reflecting on aspects that work well and need to improve rather than addressing and trying to improve upon the whole of a professional standard in one go. Utilising reflective methodologies in my PGCE year will allow me to develop my skills as a reflective practitioner that will in turn equip me with the skills to reflect on the four purposes of the Welsh Curriculum and that they are being addressed when planning and evaluating effective lessons.

-4278 words

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Appendix

Contained in this section are the notes made of the three critical incidents that were recorded on the 2 days of school observation.

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 22/9/21 Y5/6
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context Within a PE lesson – an outdoor activity with class teacher leading a demonstration about the the exercise. The teacher was leading a warm-up activity. The PE lesson was after lunchtime .

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

A pupil with ALN had been quite worked up during the warm-up and was becoming increasingly frustrated. The warm-up task was to complete different exercise such as side-stepping, lunges and heel flicks. The pupil in question was not doing the exercises correctly and was just running and so other pupils were telling them that they were doing it wrong, leading to the pupil shouting at others. The class teacher made the pupil a team captain for the next activity leading to the pupil feeling excited and re-engaged.

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

Research avenues to consider could be research into the benefits of ALN inclusion for both the individual and the rest of the class, as well as researching the impact that giving a pupil with ALN a role and the impact that this can have on their personal development. The social development of pupils with ALN and how this could be aided in the classroom could also be considered.

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)

The warm-up proved to be quite a stressful environment for the pupil. After the session, I discussed the incident with the teacher and they said that the pupil is part of the school football team so regularly joins in with other pupils.

Record 2

Date and time, year group: 22/9/21 Y5/6

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

In a classroom in a Welsh activity. All pupils were put into pairs and were practicing conversations about the weather in Welsh that would then be performed in front of the rest of the class. The lesson took place towards the end of the school day.

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

Pairs would be awarded 1 to 3 'house points' depending on the quality of conversation with 3 indicating a better conversation. 2 pupils that were sitting on the same table as me that had been identified as lower ability by the class teacher received one house point and feedback from the teacher. On returning to the table, Pupil A was heard saying "It doesn't matter, I'm terrible at Welsh anyway", to Pupil B.

Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? This could lead to study of behaviour theory regarding the positives and negatives of different reward systems in the classroom. How can these systems lead to positive or negative reinforcement? In this case, negative reinforcement took place “I can’t do this so will only get one point”. Alternatively, research could be undertaken into building resilience in pupils and what can be used to motivate them. This could be linked to the the benefits of using a range of learning styles.
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) Took place towards the end of the day so fatigue could have played a role. Also worth considering that Welsh levels will be further behind due to lockdown with many parents feeling that they could not teach Welsh from home due to their lack of use of the language. Some pairs seemed to really thrive with this activity and enjoyed performing their conversation for the class. All pupils seemed to really support the pair that was at the front of the classroom.

Record 3

Date and time, year group: 23/9/21 Yr1/2
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context At lunchtime out on the yard. The class teacher and I were on our lunch break and so the teaching assistant on duty reported the incident to us at the end of lunch.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) One pupil had put their hands around the neck of another in an unprovoked attack, they had previously punched another pupil in the face earlier in the week. The observed Critical Incident took place when the class teacher told the pupil they were going to see the headmaster, leading to the pupil getting very upset and crying.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? The pupil in question was identified at the start of the day by the class teacher as having an unsettled home life with social services potentially being involved. This could lead to study of how home issues impact on the social development of the learner. As this was a repeated offense, study of behaviour theory or potentially how to deal with these events could be considered.

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)

The pupil was taken outside of the classroom by the class teacher to minimise disruption for the rest of the class. The pupil was then taken to see the headteacher.