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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

For my bridging experience as part of my teacher training, I have been placed in a school for 2 days to observe and identify critical incidents in the classroom, in this case involving a student and a teaching assistant (TA). According to Tripp's (2011) Critical Incident Model which is a reflective tool to inform our teaching practice, 'critical incident' refers to an important or significant event which does not have to be necessarily dangerous or serious. What makes an event critical is through "value judgement we make and the basis of that is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident". Critical incidents are any typical and everyday events and are made 'critical' through deeper evaluation and reflection.

I will use of one the identified critical incidents to describe, analyse and reflect on for this assignment in regard to developing teaching practice and the role of teachers. Following this, the assignment will focus on the school and class context in relation to the identified critical incident. The next section will discuss the critical incident linking it to Donaldson's Four Purposes which are the foundation of the new Curriculum for Wales (2022). Subsequently, there will be a section of the literature review that will provide an in-depth analysis of key literature on areas of research in relation to the context of the critical incident that is being analysed, where areas such as Assessment for Learning (AfL) and Classroom Management will be reviewed. The last section of the assignment will focus on the reflection, evaluation using some of the existing reflective models, and identifying possible next steps for the development of professional and personal development.

The role of critical reflection

Critical reflection according to Brookfield (2017) is "the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching", this means that teachers take a step back and think about their methods in practice and ideas which leads to further examination to what has worked and what hasn't worked, as well as any possible implications that might be arising in order to inform a better future practice. When thinking about the word 'critical' what comes to mind is criticism or vitality, when referring to critical reflections. What makes reflections 'critical' is the process of questioning, critiquing and analysing widespread methods and ideas about teaching and learning that have been implemented.

With the changing society and curriculum, teachers need to be critical in their reflection to adapt their methods, skills and techniques to the frequent changes and provide the best possible learning for their pupils. With the new curriculum reform in Wales; Professional Learning is fundamental in ensuring all staff have the necessary up to date professional knowledge and skills. A part of the Professional Learning Standard is reflective practice which now is crucial for teachers in ensuring that their learners are working towards and meeting the Four Purposes (Welsh Government, 2019). This is also something that cannot be a onetime scrutiny, it needs to happen regularly; daily, weekly and monthly. Reflective practice is critical and is immersed within professional development and it is key to professional growth and deepening pedagogy.

A number of reflective models have been established, largely in the 1970s and 1980s on teacher thinking in relation to informing practice by theorists such as; Kolb, 1975 & 1984; Gibbs, 1988;

Schon, 1979; Brookfield; 1988 & 2005). Critical reflection is important to teaching and in order for the reflection to be successful it needs to look at more than one model of reflection (Liu, 2013). It is crucial to consider that all aspects have been incorporated which is why Brookfield's four lenses is a great model of critical reflection. The process involves; 'Students' and seeing through their eyes, 'Peers' and taking on board their experiences and perceptions, 'Self' and own experiences as well as 'Scholarship' which is the theory and research (Brookfield, 2017). A strong model of reflection that has been widely exercised over the years is Schon's model of reflection which refers to 'reflection in action' and 'reflection on action'. It involves looking at the experience itself at the time it is happening and deciding what to do in order to move in the right direction as it is happening. The second part of that reflection is after the experience has happened and whether the experience has worked or whether it needs to be done differently (Schon, 2016). This model is successful as reflection in action allows teachers to make judgements at the time if something is not working and alter their methods for success.

There are many different models of reflection that are done of teacher practice as a whole, after teaching and as the teaching is happening, thus this allows to construct a greater depth of critical reflection as it caters to different situations and evaluates teaching in practice which limits or diminishes arising factors to teaching and learning. It is commonly known that not everything always goes to plan during teaching and having a reflective model in practice such as Brookfield's Four Lenses which allows for a thorough reflection through multiple perspectives.

Observation: School & Class Context

In order to comply with the BERA (2018) Guidelines as "the confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research", consequently all students, staff and the school will remain completely anonymous in this assignment. The school will be referred to as school X and the students in the chosen critical incident will be referred to as Student A.

The observation was conducted in an English medium Primary School located in Swansea. During my time at the school, I found out that there are 582 pupils currently on roll aged between three and eleven years. The school is a mix gender setting with 53% of the pupils being boys and 47 being girls. The pupils are organised into 17 different classes, 120 three- to four-year-olds are enrolled on part time basis (My Local School, 2021).

School X has identified that there are 9% of pupils with ALN, in addition there are a total of 18 pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Only 10% of pupils are entitled to free school meals (FSM) in the school, which is below the national average of 21%. As many as 32% of pupils use English as an Additional Language (EAL) with 18 different languages being identified to be spoken by the pupils (Estyn, 2018).

Critical Incident linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes

The Critical incident as shown in Appendix A, took place in a mixed year 3/4 class and happened during maths in the morning of the 1st observation day. School X has a mixed year 3/4 class as well as another year 3 and year 4 class, they have established three separate groups for maths where the children within all these classes mix and are grouped based on ability. The maths group set in the classroom observed was the lower ability group. The critical incident was an interaction of a TA with a student, she noticed work of Student A and instantly started speaking to him firmly "What are you doing? We are putting them in order, look at me", to which the child sat frozen and visibly upset. The TA continued "Don't copy them down, write them down in order". Straight after she looked at

the second TA nearby and loudly said “they need a lot of instructions in this group”. The following day during the morning maths session I took it upon myself to check in on Student A to see if they knew what they were doing. I instantly noticed that the student’s page apart from the date and learning objective was empty, further enquiry uncovered the student was unsure of the instructions. Student A was sat at the back of the classroom and on multiple occasions when I approached him, he was unsure of the tasks.

I have found that my critical incident is quite negative in terms of children’s learning, development and well-being and is strongly linked to two of Donaldson’s (2015) ‘Four Purposes’ being; the ‘Healthy, confident individual’ as well as ‘Ambitious, capable learners’. I have found these to be strong links as children are continuously building their mental and emotional well-being which they do through developing confidence, resilience and empathy but these areas are not always supported which can impact individual children meeting a purpose such as becoming a healthy and confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society. Their environment and people around them are crucial to children’s development and growth as individuals. Although, people in children’s learning environment could become a factor, within this critical incident the factor being the TA, which may have a detrimental impact on that mental and emotional well-being by deteriorating the Student A’s confidence and resilience. The critical incident that occurred also links to the ‘Ambitious, capable learners’ purpose of the ‘Four Purposes’ established by Donaldson (2015) this is because the encounter between the TA and Student A could impact their confidence to set themselves high standards and enjoy challenge, they may question their ability and whether they should make their own connections in learning to complete tasks. The critical incident links negatively to the ‘Ambitious, capable learner’ purpose as Student A may feel if they get something wrong they will have the same negative experience as the critical incident which might lower their willingness to ask questions in order to solve problems or seek challenge in the classroom. However, witnessing the critical incident from the learners perspective, potentially Student A and their peers might view this as a lesson and an incident they do not want to reexperience and become more questioning to inform their learning to reach their goals and in turn enjoy solving problems.

Literature Review

From the identified critical incident, there is relevant literature and theory which can be linked, some of which may be supportive and some may be against. There are two crucial areas that have been identified within the critical incident that will be deeply reviewed, which are; the ‘importance of AfL in the classroom’ and ‘Seating Arrangements’ as a Classroom Management strategy.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning takes place during the process of teaching and learning. It allows students to be directly involved in their own learning. AfL helps identify the gap between where the learner is and where they need to be. AfL requires teachers to share their learning objectives with their learners, use effective questioning and feedback strategies, as well as encourage self and peer assessment (Hendriks, Scheerens, and Slegers, 2014).

In a study conducted by Kippers, Wolterinck, Schildkamp, Pootman and Visscher (2018) just over 58% of teachers have stated that they do not share learning intentions or success criteria with their students because they did not deem it important. This emphasizes the importance of understanding AfL when putting it into practice, as students cannot successfully take part in self-assessment and correspondingly in peer-assessment without the necessary information. This shows that although AfL may be used in the classroom, without the right information provided such as the success

criteria and learning intentions, students will not be able reflect and improve successfully as standards and expectations will not have been set or shared.

As described by Hattie (2012) learning through the assessment for learning allows students' knowledge and understanding to be more visible. It helps the students understand what success looks like and how to adapt their work in order to reach it. This makes for a crucial strategy in developing students learning and ensuring they are on track in their learning. This aspect strongly links to the identified critical incident where Student A was not on track and was making mistakes, but because AfL strategies have not been implemented, they were unable to improve or adapt before it was too late. However, according to Weiner's Attribution Theory (1986) success is manifested through the 'Casual Attributes' which are; effort, ability and level of task difficulty or luck. Factors may arise that impact casual attributes which will feed into reflection towards success or failure. Weiner (1986) has emphasised the importance of linking failures to controllable factors. What this indicates is that when students reflect on their work and are met by multiple mistakes its important to encourage them to consider possible factors that could have affected their work which will lead to successful reflection and help them overcome their failures.

Stobart (2008) stated that in AfL, a strategy such as feedback "is seen as the key to moving learning forward" (p. 144). This is supported in the work of Hattie (2009) 'Visible Learning for Teachers, he has discussed how feedback strategies are one of the most significant factors in the improvement of learner outcomes. AfL which is a part of formative assessment, allows the students to reflect on their own work create opportunities for improvement where necessary, whether that is of their understanding of what they are doing or the work that they are doing. However, reflection may not always be successful or beneficial, it is possible that students might feel lost if they are unaware of the goals that they are working towards.

In order for the students to know where and how to improve their work, they need a form of feedback, although as identified by Ramaprasad (1983) teacher's feedback may often inform students on where they have gone wrong, such as; is their answer correct or not, rather than on how to improve their work. This shows that even through AfL may be applied within learning, it needs to have the right form of feedback in order for learning and improvement to occur. Feedback cannot be based solely on where the work has gone right or wrong, it needs to provide the additional comments on performance standards or attainment targets to improve individual learning. Chappuis and Stiggins (2000) argue that feedback may not always be effective as it may be misinterpreted poorly or be modified to suit the learner and completely rejected.

Hendriks et al (2014) argued that feedback is only effective when it meets these areas; motive, opportunity and means. The motive refers to what the feedback aims to achieve, it should be given when the learner requires it and has to match individual learner needs, there should also be enough opportunity for the learner to be able to implement it to improve, this refers to receiving feedback in a timely manner and, lastly, the learner should be encouraged and motivated to improve as well as develop their ability to utilise the feedback received.

However, Andrade, Du and Wang (2008) argue that teacher feedback is not always an efficient or a successful AfL strategy and that the learners alone can be the source of their own feedback. Self-assessment an AfL strategy and involves the learner thinking of their own work or learning and create their own judgements on the progress and quality of their work. Pang (2020) stated that self-assessment has immense value as students are already aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and will be able to use this in their reflection and improvement. Although, some of his

findings also indicate that some students do not possess the assessment skills required to effectively reflect on their own work and will need to build upon this before improving their learning.

This view is supported by participants in a study conducted by Kippers, Wolterinck, Schildkamp, Poortman and Visscher (2018) it was found that students of the participants in the study either do not participate in self-assessment because they lack self-knowledge or they self-assess infrequently. This research exhibits some significant issues as it is clear that the students need to learn the skills in order to effectively self-assess. The literature shows that failing to utilise AfL strategies in practice such as self-assessment or conducting it infrequently will not benefit the students. Learners need the opportunity to assess and reflect on their learning in every lesson and daily in order for that assessment to have an effect on learner outcome and improvement.

Seating Arrangements

The second area of the critical incident to be discussed is 'Seating Arrangements' as Classroom Management strategy, it involves many aspects such as; seating arrangements, grouping, maintaining discipline and monitoring. Seating arrangement is one of the most important classroom management strategies which links to the critical incident and this was seen as a factor to learning for Student A. Views of classroom management have changed drastically from the ideas that it is purely for the exertion of control over the student to the art of establishing a good climate and managing instructions effectively" (Ming-Tak and Wai-Shing, 2008).

In research conducted by Marx, Fuhrer and Hartig (2000) findings show that learners who are sat closer to the front of the classroom tend to contribute more to classroom discussions and ask or answer questions, whereas only 31% of learners sat in the back do so. This suggests that student engagement in the classroom to learning and teaching heavily relies on student seating and their location. Where children sit in the classroom can have a detrimental impact on their academic achievement, thus findings show that the attention on the task in children who are sat at the back of the classroom is much weaker compared to those who are sat at the front due to more frequent interactions (Wannarka and Rhul, 2008). It is evident that on-task and off-task behaviour is dependent on the seating of individual pupils, which means where students are placed will have an impact on whether they are on task during the lesson. This is further cemented by Wasnock (2010) who found that seating affects more than just behaviour, it may affect the ability to gain the attention of learners if student seating is not set out appropriately. This emphasises the importance of seating and its impact on teaching and student learning if there is difficulty in relaying instruction due to poor attention of the students. This can be linked to what was observed in the critical incident where Student A was sat on group table at the back of the class and on multiple occasions have not understood the instructions with the possibility of their seating arrangement being a factor.

In recent years grouped seating has become widely implemented within classrooms, Gutierrez (2022) has found that seating children in groups feeds into the social constructivist elements which enable students to develop and utilize their social skills but also learn from each other. The data presented by Wasnock (2010) contradicts these findings as 45% of teachers found that students were indisputably more distracted in grouping of four or more. His research indicates that seating arrangements such as groupings mean that students become prone to distractions which will impact student outcomes as they will be potentially miss crucial instructions and their focus will not all be on learning. However, Dumbar (2004) contradicts this view and argues that it is not the seating arrangements that impact the student intake of instructions but the instructions have to be implemented in a way that suits the chosen seating arrangement. This indicates that teachers have to develop a method of relaying instructions in a way that fits the arrangements they have made

prior, it may not be the inadequacy of seating that is the problem but the method of providing instructions.

Reflection / Evaluation & Next Steps

Thinking about the critical incident and Brookfield's reflective 'Lenses', I was able to attain deeper insight through the different perspectives of the four 'Lenses'. Starting with my own perspective on what happened, as conducted by the TA, the strategy of walking around and observing students working and their work has proved successful in detecting those students who are making mistakes. However, I have found that the approach taken to instruct Student A to be quite harsh and challenging. Whereas if different approach has been utilized, more questioning and giving them the opportunity to reflect on what they have done wrong rather than telling them what to do; Student A would not have sat frozen and still unsure, they would have been able to learn through their own reflection. As discussed in the literature review, self-reflection which is part of AfL allows for students to see where they are at and where they need to be and adapt their own work appropriately which will act as learning (Hattie, 2009; Andrade and Wang, 2008; Pang, 2020). The fact that the student has been observed to be unsure of the task on multiple occasions emphasises the importance of AfL in the classroom and potentially how seating can work to both the teacher and student advantage. Reviewing literature provided insight to the importance of giving students opportunities to self-reflect but also give them feedback on where their mistakes lie rather than point out mistakes. Using AfL strategies in lessons would help avoid occurrences such as the critical incident but also develop student learning by helping them paint a clear path to success themselves. The importance of seating has been also highlighted through the critical incident as well as the literature review, as it showed how seating can affect student learning and understanding. It has been found in the literature review that seating is an important classroom management strategy and an aspect that may influence academic achievement because students sat at the back of the class are more prone to distractions and off-task behaviour (Wannarka and Rhul, 2008). Student A has been seated right at the back of the class on a group table where some pupils would talk. It puts into question if Student A has been sat on the table at the front closer to the teacher and the board whether they would be clearer of task instructions and potentially be seen to quicker.

Secondly, looking at the incident through the Student A's Eyes, their reaction to the TA and the fact that what has been said has not been useful to the student is to be expected. From observations it was found that the student is quite quiet and has been unsure of tasks on a number of occasions but never was one to lift their hand up to ask for help. It is evident that the student is quite shy and how the way the TA has communicated towards them would be upsetting and simply instructing them on what to do be ineffective in putting them on track if they do not understand the task at hand.

The TA's perspective is they the class including Student A need a lot of instruction, through chats with the TA I have found that she regularly helps in the Maths groups and has been for a number of weeks. This indicated that she has developed her own strategies that have proved somewhat effective in that class which is why she gives clear instructions to children who as implied in the incident make mistakes and need to be told what to do repetitively.

Lastly, reflection has been made using the Attribution Theory as part of the last reflective lens 'Scholarship'. Weiner (1986) says that people are their of reflectors of failures and successes. The Attribution Theory emphasises that achievement can be attributed through different casual attributions such as; effort, ability and level of task difficulty. In the case of Student A they have made an effort to do the task yet if AfL strategies were implemented they would be prompted to make that effort to reflect on their work. The fact that Student A following the incident seemed to

have hardly any work done on the task or not at all shows that the incident with the TA impacted their self-esteem and therefore made them doubt their ability to execute tasks. Although if they had the opportunity and motivated to self-reflect they would have the chance to adapt their work and conduct the task correctly; on future tasks, they wouldn't question their ability and give tasks proper attempts. The level of the tasks have had been designed especially for the maths group which means that it was at the right level of difficulty for Student A and were challenging enough. According to Weiner's Attribution Theory, student's successful outcomes is dependent on the casual attributions and entwined with the concept of motivation.

Reflecting upon the critical incident using Brookfield's Lenses I have been able to develop my understanding of what it is to be an informed and reflective teacher. I understand that in order for individual student's learning to be successful it is important to consider how and where students are placed within the class and adapt this as appropriate. I now understand importance of using AfL strategies to promote self-learning because if these are not in place children will take in information but not learn from it. AfL in my practice will ensure that all students have an opportunity to take account of their own learning, realise their own mistakes and instead of being told their what is right and wrong which can impact their self-confidence in their abilities; instead, it will help learners become confident reflectors and contributors to their own learning. Moreover, I learnt that the way students are spoken to may impact the way they perceive their abilities which could further affect their work. My reflections have also made me aware of how student placement in the class may impact their academic achievement, this gives me ideas to take into my own practice. In order to enhance student achievement, it will be important to take every lesson as an opportunity to also assess whether seating works for every student and whether changes need to be implemented. As observed in the Critical Incident if a student was constantly unsure of the task I would seat him closer to the front where he could be given more support and be in the centre of learning.

Conclusion

This assignment set out to describe, analyse and reflect upon the critical incident I have observed in a local primary school. Using notes and online information on School X I was able to describe and inform of the school context. Using the notes I have made and the STEER Booklet (see Appendix A) I was able to clearly discuss the identified critical incident and link it to Donaldson's Four Purposes. In the literature review I was able to critically review upon major findings of my identified areas of research which were; the importance of AfL and Seating Arrangements as part of Classroom Management strategy. Finally, I was able to reflect upon my critical incident using the identified reflective models and key literature and theory which have greatly contributed to my personal and professional development.

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