

**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**

In this assignment I will be dissecting and analysing a critical incident which I have observed whilst being present in lessons in a secondary school. A critical incident is an incident that takes place in the classroom that has relevance to a technique or theory behind teaching. These do not have to be large, explosive, or even negative incidents, but can be a positive way a teacher has interacted with the learners. I intend to use this critical incident to understand how the theories that I have studied can be applied to real life classroom-based application, used by real teachers in their day to day. I will be doing this through looking into the relevant behaviour models and theorists, who's work directly inspired and mirrors the critical incident that I have identified. It is important in any job role that there is constant growth and improvement, in particular in teaching where our practices will have a direct impact on the lives of young learners. This means that we must be reflective and be able to step back and evaluate our own methods, in order to make changes and improve. Understanding critical incidents will play a key role in being successfully reflective, as it gives us a chance to look at specific instances that either were done well or could be improved on. As shown through the title, this is a key practice in the next teaching and learning steps, so that we as teachers are developing just as much as the students.

## **The role of critical reflection**

The role of the teacher is to inspire and motivate children to achieve their fullest potential, and this can only be achieved if the teacher is willing and working to develop their own teaching at the same time. Critical reflection is an extremely important part of the development of any teacher, as it gives them the opportunity to evaluate and adjust their practice. Tripp talks about this, "It is through rendering critical the incidents of normal everyday events that much personal-professional development can occur" (Tripp.D, 1993). This also highlights the importance of recognising that critical incidents do not necessarily need to be large explosive occurrences, but instead understanding that we can take incidents out of common events. It is important that a teacher can take a step back and take an analytical approach to their methodologies. This can be done through looking at critical incidents that have occurred within the lessons, and understanding what went well and what did not, and then taking the time to make adjustments and changes in order to fix the things that did not go well.

This will greatly assist me as I enter the world of teaching, as I will be going through a huge period of development in my early years in the profession and understanding the value and role of critical reflection will mean I am more open and able to grow as a teacher. Critical reflection will not only help develop my practice through teaching specific subject areas, but also improve my interactions with the children, and in resolving issues based away from the academic side of school.

Another reason why it is so important that teachers can adapt and improve is due to the developing role of a teacher. The modern-day teacher is required to deal with far more than just

delivering the curriculum, but also to deal with emotional, social and potential issues brought in from outside of school. This can particularly be impactful if a child has a difficult home life, and it may become the role of the teacher to act as a role model, and sometimes as a parent figure that the child may not have access to at home. Another hugely important factor is the impact that COVID 19 will have had on students' mental health and well-being, an area talked about in great detail by the Welsh Government's education COVID 19 recovery plan, "Their mental health and emotional wellbeing, their relationships and their physical health are all critical enablers of good learning" (*Renew and reform: supporting learners' wellbeing and progression*, 2021). This means even more that the role of a teacher is changing, and that there are going to be many new situations and obstacles that were not present before the pandemic. Therefore it is crucial that as educators we can understand the importance of critical reflection, as now more than ever, we will need to be caring towards students' mental health and looking at different ways in which we can support them as they work through this challenging time.

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

Following BERA guidelines "The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity". The school, teachers and students have all been kept anonymous throughout this observation.

For my first bridging experience in which I was given the opportunity sit in on some classes and observe teachers delivering lessons, I was sent to a secondary school in a reasonably wealthy area of Cardiff. It is a thriving school which had an incredibly positive ESTYN report from 2018, in which each of the 5 key categories were given the highest possible mark. This was a catholic high school which is relevant as a high percentage of the students will have joined the school based off factors such as church attendance, and whether their primary schools were faith based. The class that I observed were a year 7 mixed ability English class, with an extremely enthusiastic teacher, which in turn meant that the pupils were very engaged in the lesson. The lesson was also structured a lot more like a back-and-forth discussion, rather than the teacher just setting them tasks, which meant that the students were discussing the topics, and understood the aims of the lesson much better than they would have otherwise, which is the basis of where the critical incident I have identified has come in. The context of the school and classroom is extremely important, as often the teachers approach will be based how those specific children in those circumstances will react, meaning that the approach to a low ability class in a school in a more deprived area would be completely different to the approach to a higher ability class in a more privileged area.

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

The critical incident I have identified took place towards the end of the lesson in a year 7 English class. It was a very well behaved, interested and engaged class, which means that my critical incident was not something the teacher did in reaction to anything negative or explosive, but was instead a teaching technique that simply improved the student's learning experience. The teacher set the children a writing task, in which they had to write their own paragraphs like the one they had already read as a class, based on the theme of nostalgia. Once the task was set, the teacher then began writing bullet points on the board under the title success criteria. She then turned to the class

and asked for examples of what they should be looking to include an achieve in their own paragraphs, by raising their hands and waiting to be selected. The entire lesson up until this point had been more of a back-and-forth discussion between the teacher and student, and she had done an excellent job of getting all students involved, and this in turn meant that students were not scared or nervous to raise their hands and make suggestions when asked. Once the teacher had taken roughly 8 or 9 suggestions, she then allowed the children to begin the task for the remainder of the session. The effect this had was that the children were extremely engaged with what they were doing, and because they had set their own success criteria, they had a much deeper understanding of what they were trying to achieve, rather than just being fed information to take in. This teaching method also links directly to one of Donaldson's four purposes "Enterprising, creative contributors", in which Donaldson emphasises that children should be ready to be play a full part in life and work, meaning that they are involved in every step of the process, making them more mentally involved with whatever task they are engaged in.

### Literature Review

My critical Incident is almost directly reflective of the theories of reality therapy (Glasser.W, 1999), In which some of the key aspects are children being involved in setting class rules and satisfying the five needs. Out of the five needs, several can be seen in my critical incident, with the children being given both the freedom and power to decide their own success criteria, but also the needs of belonging and love, as through this technique the teacher has shown the students that she cares about them and values their opinions. My critical incident was also an excellent example of the humanistic approach, as highlighted in *The Journal of Language teaching and research*, where it is explained that "Teachers in humanistic classrooms had better create a community learning atmosphere where a sense of belonging pervades and, as was remarked earlier, this end is easily achievable via conducting learner-centered classes" (Khatib.M, 2013, p.49). This quote and entire piece of literature was extremely helpful to me, as it helped me to understand the effect that the teaching techniques used were having on the children. It showed that the teacher is creating a sense of community within the classroom, making children more comfortable in their learning environment. I also believe that the term "learner-centered classes" is very important, as it shows the aim of what each teacher should be striving towards. I personally am an advocate for this approach to learning, as I know alternatively some theories may lean more towards individual focussed learning rather than a community led group effort.

There were several pieces of literature which helped me understand in further detail the impact that being involved in the creation of the success criteria can have on a young learner, in particular in this quote from Sadler, "What follows from all this is that it is necessary to involve pupils in conversations about the quality of their work and performance so they get to apply a concept of quality that is in line with that of the teacher" (Sadler.D, 1989). The essence of this article from Sadler, and particularly from this quote is that student participation on the success criteria puts the learner and teacher on the same page, and stops confusion moving forward with the task, as well as making the students feel happier and more comfortable in what they are doing. This is an excellent source as D Royce Sadler is a professor from the University of Queensland, whose work has been cited almost 7000 times, showing its validity. In the book *Making Formative Assessment Work, effective practice in the primary classroom*, after analysing some research it is outlined that "From the above one could conclude that learners have to be aware of the criteria against which their work is judged before they can be expected to engage in self-assessment or peer assessment" (Hall and Burke, 2004, p.55). This shows another benefit of the students engaging with the success criteria, as

often it is beneficial to be able to look back and self-assess their own work, a task that will be a lot more straight forward if the student fully understands and is engaged with the original criteria. It also shows how important it is that the students are fully aware of the criteria they are working against, as commonly students will be set a task, and only once they are being marked will the criteria become available. This can create problems, as a lower mark may simply be a result of misunderstanding of the aims, rather than a lack of knowledge or ability. This has also come from a very well respected book within the field, created by two professors of education, and has been used and cited multiple times as an excellent resource for articles, journals and essays which centre around formative assessment and success criteria.

One of the most important reasons why students input into the success criteria is so important, is not only so that they can work towards the aims that are clearly set in front of them, but also to develop a deeper understanding that will result in the ability to self assess and peer assess their work. This is expanded upon by Wiliam and Black, "This option implies the development within students of the capacity to assess themselves, and perhaps to collaborate" (1998, p.25), this article talks in detail about how important it is that students can, not only assess their own work, but also work as a group and in collaboration with each other. This is also an article that has come from The Kings College London, by two well respected professors, and an article that has been cited in many books and journals since its publishing. The importance of a co-constructed success criteria is emphasized by Vandas and O'Connell, "Constructing the criteria for success enlists students to share in the process as partners to determine what it will take to accomplish the Learning Intentions." (2015, pp.55-76), this demonstrates that students being part of the process will hugely assist them in accomplishing the aims and goals set by the success criteria, as the were an integral part of that criteria being created. A reason why this source was so helpful is because throughout the book it not only talks about the benefits of co-constructed criteria and formative assessment, but it also gives several examples of the methods in practice and shows how you can apply them to your own practice, which is not something that is normally offered.

It is important to highlight when talking about success criteria, that one of the key points of the children coming up with their own and their being lots of different targets set, is also to accommodate different ability levels. This then leads to the question of should each child be judged in comparison to each other based off these criteria, or as a case-by-case scenario in which we look at the individual's progression based off the criteria they have set. This is talked about in the book *Improving Educational Management: Through Research and Consultancy* (Bennet and Glatter and Levacic, 1994), where it is discussed, the achievement can be judged off three factors, which are comparative, progress and target. This gives clear insight into a fair judgment, as comparative shows the level compared to other children, progress show the child's individual progression and target looks at how well the child has achieved the aims and goals set. This last point in particular elates heavily to my critical incident as when the target has been set collaboratively by the children, it makes the goal seem more achievable and allows them to achieve higher than they normally would.

A point which has been highlighted and talked about which shows another excellent angle on the benefits of the teacher student collaboration, is that it shares the responsibility of the learning in a much clearer way, so that the student does not feel lost and out of their depth. This point has been shown, "Formative assessment, in particular, is something teachers do *with* and *for* students. Teachers involve students *with* them in the assessment, thus students and teachers are partners, both sharing responsibility for the learning" (Heritage.M, 2010, p.7). This quote in particular is very helpful, as it discusses the phrase, "*with* and *for* students", which I think perfectly encapsulates the approach taken in by the teacher that led to my critical incident. The book that this

quote is taken from, *Formative Assessment : Making It Happen in the Classroom*, is an excellent insight into formative assessment and success criteria, gives a lot of very applicable perspectives that are commonly seen applied in the classroom on a day to day basis. The author herself is recognised as an expert in formative assessment, and is an independent consultant for education, following this a trust this to be a reliable and quality source for my assignment.

In Shirley Clarke's book *Visible Learning: Feedback*, she discusses three key aspects of learning, that she has established from past works, in particular the skill, the will and the thrill. The thrill directly talks about the hugely positive impact and the importance of collaborating with the students in creating success criteria, "We need to help students to be motivated to achieve the success criteria; enhancing the commitment to these criteria; co-constructing success criteria with students and ensuring that they are appropriately specific, clear and challenging - actively involving students in their own learning and training them to be involved in their own self-assessment." (Clarke, S. 2018, p.13). This point summarises very clearly the point I have been pushing throughout this assignment, as the term *the thrill*, relates directly to the excitement and engagement that is stimulated in the students, when they are invited to be an active part of what they are being assessed on. This is an extremely reliable source as Shirley Clarke is a well-respected, well recognised leading expert on the practical application of formative assessment, directing several national research projects on curriculum and assessment.

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

Critical reflection is a massively important part of growth and development for a teacher. This is because it allows us to take a step back and analyse what we are teaching to the students, take it apart, and make it better in order to improve the all-round experience. This was extremely helpful to be able to go into a real school and observe lessons given by professional working teachers. This allowed us to look at the way in which these teachers were approaching the class, the structure of the lesson and their communication with the students. Once we had observed all these factors, we were able to break down what we liked about their approach, why these techniques were affective in the classroom and whether this would be something that I could take forward and apply to my own practice.

In my specific experience, as talked about already, I observed the teacher allowing the students in the class to participate in the creation of the success criteria for the task they were about to complete. This gave the students an excellent understanding of what they were trying to achieve in the task, as they are required to be engaged from the outset. Of course, an increased understanding of the task and targets means that productivity is also increased, and the children can aim higher and achieve more. I think the next step in this process would be to look at the outcome of children's performances. As often children learn in very different ways, it is possible that this approach may not suit all children, so it is important to continue observing. It is also important to make sure that all children in the class are engaged with the initial creation of the success criteria, as it could be easy in a class like this for a child to hide behind other more enthusiastic children, and not engage with the task. To avoid this, a method of ensuring that all are engaged would be by using names on lollipop sticks to select who gives suggestions for success criteria, that way everyone in the class would have to think of some, and if a child struggled, they can be given closer support once the task is underway.

There are a few ideas from this that I will be able to take into my own practice and my own style of teaching. I believe after looking at the evidence set out, that it is hugely beneficial for children to have as much input into their learning as possible. One way of doing this would be as

direct example of the critical incident that I have observed, which would involve getting input from the class on the success criteria that they are going to be marked against, this can be used across a range of subjects and allow students to engage with the tasks at a higher level. The overall idea that I have taken from this is not just with applying a teacher student relationship within creating success criteria, but also in several other areas of teaching as well. One in particular where this can be applied can be through students being given the options of the difficulty levels of the task, giving lower ability students the opportunity to challenge themselves and push for a level they may not have before, had they not been given the chance to attempt more difficult tasks. But this would also give the opportunity for higher ability children to not be expected to achieve perfection in every task they attempt, as there may be times where they are tired and may be struggling with a piece of work. This technique would take away the pressure to push themselves too far, when they may already be exhausted.

All these skills will be extremely valuable to be moving forward in my professional life, as it will allow me to listen to students more and will allow them to have a voice and say in the way in which they learn. I believe this is an important factor in creating an inclusive and positive thinking environment for children to work and learn in. These skills will also help me to develop personally as it opens up my own way of thinking and the way on which I engage and listen to people.

## **Conclusion**

I have approached this assessment looking to achieve a greater understanding behind the methodologies that influence techniques and approaches' taken by teachers in the daily working classroom. I believe that I have achieved this, and have gained valuable insight into the positive impact of students having influence over how and what they learn. The work that I have done in this assessment will assist me greatly in my future career as a teacher, as it has allowed me to understand techniques that I will take forward into my own practice. My approach also links directly to the 5<sup>th</sup> professional teaching standard set out by the Welsh government, "Value the active involvement of children and young people in their progress, development and well-being", as shown here one of the key goals of the government is to make sure that children have an active involvement in their development, which is something that the critical incident I have observed does extremely well. Overall this assessment has given me experience in analysing and breaking down teaching techniques, in a way in which I can understand the background and the reasoning behind it, allowing me to be a better teacher, and giving me the tools to improve throughout my career.

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## Appendices

### Critical Incidents/Observations

#### Critical Incident 1

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| Date and time, year group: 22/09/2021 10:30 Year 7                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Where and When:</b> Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context<br>A year 7 english lesson, higher ability group in the morning before break. A well behaved class with lots of students that engaged in conversation with the teacher about the class, and seemed genuinely interested in the subject.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>What happened:</b> a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)<br>The children were set a task to create their own paragraphs similar to the example shown at the beginning displaying different writing techniques and approaches. Once the task was set, the teacher asked the students to put up their hands and suggest goals and techniques that they should look to achieve in their work. This meant that the class set the marking criteria rather than the teacher, so that they felt far more involved and engaged in what they were being asked to do. It also meant that students were more likely to include these techniques and be more creative with their work, as they had been highlighted |
| <b>Areas of possible exploration:</b> what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents?<br>What avenues of research could you consider?<br>Possibly looking into the humanistic approach theory, which involves a lot more of the students taking the learning into their own hands and being responsible for their own tasks. This type of approach also gives the children more confidence with their work, and will build a more positive relationship moving forward with that teacher and that subject.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Notes:</b> 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)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

## Critical Incident 2

Date and time, year group:

22/09/2021, 1:30, Year 7

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

The observation took place in a year 7 Welsh class, with a group that were quite easily distracted, which created some obstacles for the teacher in maintaining focus for the group throughout the lesson.

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

Once the class had come to an end, the children were instructed to pack their things away, and stand up behind their chairs with their uniform tidy and without speaking. The children went to do so but there was still conversation happening through the class. They were told to sit back down and try again without speaking. The children did this, but once again some at the back were still speaking to each other. The teacher once again told them to sit down and explained that they would have to keep doing this until they were able to do it quietly. She then instructed them to stand up one last time, and this time there was silence in the classroom. Only then were they allowed to leave to head to their next lesson.

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

What avenues of research could you consider?

This is clearly a class where the teacher feels a level of discipline is important in order to keep them under control. Especially as this is a class she will have for the rest of the year so it is important to establish ground rules. This could be use of assertive discipline theory, as the teacher felt the need to take control, and is establishing a discipline plan in explaining when they will be allowed to leave.

**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)

One point relates to what I have just mentioned, but it is important to note that this lesson has taken place a few weeks into the school term, so the teacher is still establishing a discipline plan, setting boundaries and ground rules early on to set an example for the rest of the year.

### Critical Incident 3

Date and time, year group:

23/09/2021, 9:30, Year 7

**Where and When:** Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context  
Morning welsh lesson with a mixed ability year 7 class. Important to establish that due to the students coming from different primary schools, their abilities will be different, so the teacher wanted to start them at a base level.

**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 lesson the teacher asked the students all to get their planners out, which the students knew meant they were about to be set homework. Almost every student in the class let out a sigh, and began complaining as a group, which the teacher quickly shut down. She told everyone to be quiet, and then explained to them that they are no longer in primary school, and that homework was a part of high school that they would have to get used to. She then went on to explain the work, before the end of the session.

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

The most interesting part of this critical incident is the way in which the teacher dealt with the disruption. It would have been very reasonable for her to tell the class off, or even raise her voice, as the protest to the homework was very loud and disruptive. But instead she took the approach to explain why homework was being set, which de-escalated the situation as well as answered why the children were upset.

**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)