

6007 resubmitted

Estella Chambers, 1800682

A critical evaluation and the identification of the 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.

Word count: 3,663

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to explore and reflect on an event that I feel would be significant to the learner. I aim to achieve this by explaining the critical incident that I witnessed and linking it to wider educational research. From this research, I will reflect on how critical incidences could affect my teaching practice and how I would aim to learn from them. The research viewed will be an amalgamation of psychology case studies surrounding behaviour, as well as current government documents pertaining to the curriculum in Wales. For the sake of this essay, a critical incident (henceforth C.Is for this essay) will be defined as, an observed event within a school environment that can be reflected on through greater research.

I will make a conscious effort to ensure that this essay follows the ethical guidelines set by BERA. BERA state that “researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institution and individual participants to privacy, and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity” (2018, p 21). In this manner, I will be referring to; the school I attended as *School 1*, and students and Teachers will be *student* and *Teacher*, followed by a relevant number if appropriate. Additionally, all references naming *School 1* throughout this essay’s appendices or references will be blacked out. The objective is an attempt to maintain the privacy the school and its pupils are entitled to.

The role of C.I in reflection

In *Critical Incidents in Teaching: Developing Professional Judgment*, Tripp (2012) describes how critical incidences are not discovered but are created by the observer, this is followed by an explanation of how the viewer’s interpretation affects if an incident is critical or not. From this definition, all events that take place in a classroom could be critical if the observer puts enough value on the incident’s meaning (Tripp, 1993). During chapter two Tripp emphasises

how “the vast majority of critical incidences ...are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine” (pp 24 and 25). Normal classroom events such as handing out worksheets, getting class attention and setting homework would or could all be C.Is. Therefore, C.I are going to happen during any teaching, and they are not something to be concerned about. It is important to see a C.I as a learning point, whether or not the C.I is positive, as teachers should be expanding their knowledge in accordance with the Education Workforce Council’s (2022) code of professional conduct and practice. Taking time to reflect and analyse a classroom event with further reading could help to improve teaching ability.

Additionally, The Welsh Government have developed *Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership* (2019) as guidance for what teachers need to evidence throughout their training. Part of this focuses on professional learning and how one should be aiming to increase their understanding through a wide array of research around their subject and teaching in general. Innovation looks at evaluating the impact of changes to practice meaning teachers should evaluate their practices to enhance their teaching going forward.

Goodell (2006) emphasises the need for teachers to reflect on their process in order for development to occur. While Goodell (2006) is looking at mathematics education, there is a clear discussion surrounding C.Is forming the start of reflection and improvement in all teaching practices through the use of wider research.

Modern teachers are instructed to care for and support students. Teachers’ roles have changed over time to fit in with student expectations. Holt-Reynolds (2000), discussed how teachers are expected to involve students more in their lessons and move away from lecturing. Emphasis has been put on reflecting, talking and creating projects to aid learning (Holt-

Reynolds, 2000). Additionally, Exeed College (n.d) and Eduk (2016), discuss several responsibilities teachers have that fall outside of education including, being an external parent for students in the form of mentors. In this way, it is important for teachers to be updating their understanding and reflecting on their work to provide relevant support for students. As the role of the teacher is ever-changing, I have chosen to look at this C.I as it is important to evaluate behaviour management in the role of the teacher. Particularly within the Expressive Arts AoLE as this is where I will be teaching in future.

Observation

During September 2022, I attended School 1 to observe as a PGCE student. The wider context of the school is as follows, a large, mixed sex, secondary school with just over 10% free school meals, which is lower than the average (My local schools, 2019). I used an A5 book where I documented events in order to evidence my observations. I recognised it was important to have several observations that I could then explore further. These observations could have become positive or negative C.Is depending on the wider reading.

The C.I I have chosen to focus on is the use of a visual, positive rewards list on the board, to encourage desired behavior within the classroom. I have chosen to focus on this as one of the Teachers I observed used positive reinforcement to attain pupil focus. The students within the music class responded well to it with the majority of the class retaining focus once the list started to be compiled. The class I attended was a year eight, mixed attainment, music class. The form group had just completed a Spanish class which had clear routines such as the register had to be answered in Spanish, consequences were made very clear and the students knew the expectations of that teacher. The teacher gave clear instructions as to the intended learning and the pupils responded to the teacher's expectations. Moving to the music class

there was clear contrast between classroom teaching styles. Teacher 1, the teacher of the music class, focused a lot on positive ways of reinforcing 'good' behaviour, which included an achievements list that names were added to as they demonstrated desired behaviours. This was different to the Spanish teacher who had more of a teacher directed style of behaviour management. Teacher 1 allowed more of an expressive atmosphere within the class. Students were allowed to get out of their seats to help those around them and there was a substantial part of the lesson where students were able to present their musical pieces to the class. This lesson took place before lunch. I have chose to focus on this C.I because I feel that Teacher 1's style of teaching will led itself more to an expressive art classroom, by allowing students to discuss and explore concepts creating a more pupil let environment.

C.I links to Donaldson

One of the purposes of the new curriculum is to create "healthy, confident individuals who...are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy...." (Donalson, 2015, p 31). Therefore, institutions need to be clear about their expectations of their students, in order to support and nurture their wellbeing.

"Research has shown inconsistencies in the system of rules in school and in teachers' intervention behaviour (Jackson and others, 1993; Tattum, 1982). This study indicates that pupils' perceptions of such things, as well as their perceptions of arbitrary rules, unfair rules and rule applications, and bad or poor rule explanations from teachers, appear to lead to criticism and negative attitudes among pupils." (Thornberg, 2008)

Attempts to enhance the mental and emotional ability of the pupils are stunted due to lack of understanding on the student's part and lack of explaining from the school. If students feel they are being punished unfairly and are not given the time to explain this feeling, they could foster resentment towards the lesson or even the teacher. However, by clearly outlining the

rules and desired behaviour from students, teachers will be able to create expectations that students can understand. This would lead to fewer of the misunderstands that Thornberg (2008) discusses. If students are aware of how to behave and are encouraged to exhibit that behaviour through rewards, students are more likely to feel confident within the classroom.

Literature review

In the music lesson that I observed, Teacher 1 utilised positive reinforcement of behaviour through writing students' names on the whiteboard on a 'good list.' This type of critical incident links to behavioural psychology such as Pavlov and his famous dog experiment. Learning to associate an act with a specific response over time is known as Classical Conditioning. Over a period of time the brain learns to associate two stimuli to produce a response, known as a conditioned reflex. As a result of Pavlov's studies we gained an understanding of the links our brains can make and how one can intentionally manipulate an animal to elicit a set response (Gray, 1999).

When Pavlov started to explain his findings, there was conflict around the objectivity of the experiments. One of Pavlov's students tried to describe the study using "thoughts, feelings and desires" of the dog (Windholz, 1995, pp 575-577). In this way, the associate was giving human qualities to the dog that were subjective. Due to the dog being unable to tell the experimenter their thoughts first-hand, the experimenter is having to guess what these are. In this manner the results could fall under being subjective due to unsubstantiated bias. Within the classroom this could come across as assuming how students feel about a task without addressing them. The students could fill out a questionnaire, for example, to provide their own feedback, thus any reflection would be based on the evidence given.

However, Pavlov continued suggesting, “the experimenter, ... should concentrate his attention on the precise description of external conditions that affect the work of the salivary glands” (Pavlov, quoted in, Windholz, 1995, p 577). By reinforcing that the experimenter is looking for clear, visual, measurable reactions allows the experiment to be based on the facts. By reframing the results to look at physical reactions, the results of this experiment are less subjective, as the experimenter is not assuming the thoughts of the dog. By observing how the behaviour of the students changes through the addition of reinforcement, teachers could see if the students are responding to this stimulus. Therefore by focusing on the observed difference in behaviour would strengthen the use of reinforcement within the classroom.

Yet, Pavlov’s study was conducted on dogs, so it has been argued that the results of the study cannot be applied to humans as we are more evolved. This argument is based in the idea that humans and dogs do not share the same brain chemistry. The reflexes that a dog builds from this type of conditioning cannot be automatically applied to humans without any research done (Windholz, 1995, pp 575-577).

In 1921 *The Scientific Monthly* published a chapter titled *Studies in Infant Psychology* by John B. Watson and Rosalie Rayner Watson (McKeen Cattell, 1921). In their experiment, Albert was given a rat to pet, but a loud steel noise was created behind him any time interaction was attempted. Eventually, the child would cry upon seeing the rat without the loud noise, thus creating the conditioned response (McKeen Cattell, 1921). The study of Albert adds validity to Pavlov by showing that such reflexes can occur in humans. As a result, punishment could be used to exploit people into producing a suggested response.

Watson and Watson go on to discuss how this fear they had instilled in Albert had transferred onto other objects too, without further conditioning. Albert had become fearful of rabbits, dogs, fur, cotton wool, Watson's hair and a Santa mask (McKeen Cattell, 1921, p 513). Albert's mind had linked the similarities between these objects to create fear that had not previously existed. This emphasises the care that needs to be taken with conditioning. In theory, a person could condition a subject to carry out something they consider to be healthy, for example, being quiet in class. However, without clear instruction and nurturing of this conditioning, the subject could transfer this response to being mute throughout their lives.

Both Pavlov, and Watson and Watson build strength to the existence of classical conditioning. However, both of these studies are over one hundred years old which make it hard to know if these same results would come from the study being replicated today. Yet, these theories can be utilised today because they can be seen reflected in the behaviour of students. Reinforcement is still used in several forms through schooling (Akin-Little et al, 2004). Akin-Little et al (2004) discusses how even verbal praise as reinforcement could be seen as a form of bribery through the work of Kohn (1993).

Due to ethics we would not be able to carry out another Watson and Watson study. Article 32 of the *United Nations- Convention on the Rights of the Child* states “...Parties recognise the right of the child to be protected from... performing any work that is likely...to interfere...or be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or special development” (General Assembly resolution 44/25, 1989). Therefore, recreating Watson and Watson's study would be a breach of the rights of the child. We can ascertain from research on Albert that conditioning in this manner has an effect on the mental development and could

effect social development too. For example, a student could have a negative relationship with a teacher and this could be transposed into all authority figures in adulthood.

The studies conducted by Pavlov, and Watson and Watson, fall under the behaviourist school of thought in psychology. This is due to them both suggesting that the behaviours (responses) formed are a result of reacting to the outside environment. Behaviourism sees teachers having sole control over the class. If the teacher expects a reaction from pupils then they need to enforce that response from the beginning. Additionally, both studies explore classical conditioning- the response is involuntary (McKeen Cattell, 1921).

Operant conditioning focuses on voluntary response, which is the common structure of reward systems. Skinner coined operant conditioning as behaviour “controlled by its consequences” (Cerutti and Staddon, 2003). As such, teachers are able to elicit desired behaviour from students through the use of a reward. By incentivising students with positive behaviour points and seeing their peers being rewarded for good behaviour, teachers can use this technique to control their classroom.

One contrasting theory for teaching and learning is Constructivism. Constructivism comes in three forms; cognitive, social and radical. Cognitive constructivism is based off the works of Jean Piaget and emphasised how learning is built together. This style sees learning like a stack of bricks, each building on the last. In this manner, if a brick is skipped or not learnt then the next brick is harder to build. Following Piaget would see teachers using what young people have already learnt as a stepping-stone for new knowledge. All prior knowledge forms a framework for understanding new work (McLeod, 2019). Through this idea one need to approach behaviour management and reinforcement from the beginning. Teachers should not

assume that students will understand what names on a board mean without providing an explanation for this action. Without linking the positive behaviour to the action of reward students will find it difficult to know there is a correlation between these events.

This opposes the very much teacher led and directed mode of instruction with centring the students at the heart of the learning. Constructivism builds on the works of Piaget and Vygotsky in that students build on pre-existing knowledge through a collaborative classroom environment in which students maintain a dialogue with the teacher (McLeod, 2019). This style of teaching takes into account that different students will come from different backgrounds and therefore will be arriving in class with a unique level of understanding. This style lends itself to the new curriculum for Wales. A theme that is commonly repeated in Donaldson's *Successful Futures* (2015) is constructing a curriculum that is more pupil-central. Constructivist theory would allow lessons to have more space for students discussing and learning from each other.

There were five members of staff in the room which could have lead to the students feeling uncomfortable and 'watched', this could have caused them to act out for example. Teacher 1 was being observed by another PGCE student, the head of the AoLE conducting an observation of their own and a support staff- assisting a pupil. Cook (1962) details how the Hawthorn effect can take place within the classroom, leading the students' and teachers' behavior uttering due to the presents of an observer. Further studies (Arnold et al., 1975 and Oswald et al. 2014) indicate that adult behavior changes under observation. Therefore, it is difficult to gauge of the events of the room are accurate compared to non-observed situations.

Lessons that take place before lunch can effect the students' behaviour as their last break had been over an hour ago and their sugar levels could have been low. "Not having enough glucose in your blood...can make you feel weak...and 'fuzzy minded'...glucose ensures good concentration and focus..." (BDA, 2020). Glaser et al. (2006) illustrates the students who have just eaten are more likely to perform better, are more alert and more motivated. Therefore, students who have not eaten for an extended period of time are more likely to require behaviour management intervention.

Reflection/next steps

The nature of this task allowed me to observe that even the most experienced teachers (for example teachers who had been teaching for over twenty years) did not catch every negative incident that I saw occurring within their classroom. Upon reflection this is encouraging, as one of my concerns when entering this task was the pressure to observe every C.I. An experienced teacher would understand whether to ignore or address the C.I and the benefit. Having experienced, observed and caused C.Is throughout my education, it is reassuring to know that these events are not always negative. Additionally, not seeing or addressing these negative C.Is could cause less of a distraction to the class than making an example of them.

Having witnessed several C.I and explored the above C.I in detail it has become apparent that critical incidences will happen in any classroom. Going forward C.Is are not something to fear as they occur all the time. As Tripp says they are "commonplace events that occur in routine" (2012, p 25) so naturally they will happen throughout my teaching career. Looking into this C.I in detail has allowed me to see that instructions and boundaries are particularly important within a class. If I am to introduce a new stimulus that I expect a specific response from, it is important that the young people understand why I have done so and know what

response I expect from this stimulus. For example, if I expect my students to know that when I clap my hands they clap back, following my pattern and then stop what they are doing, then I need to explain that at the start and continue to reinforce this method. If I were to change the type of attention grabber halfway through with no explanation, this could lack clarity for the pupil. However, if there is a similarity between the two attention grabbers, for example, the same beat, one clapped and one stomped, then the stimulus could be transferred so that they students automatically link them. Therefore, the attention grabbers are technically different but the similarity or consistency of the beat could cause the same response without having to demonstrate prior what is desired.

Furthermore, with the knowledge I have now gained regarding giving instructions within my class, I will make an conscious effort to make sure that any information I express is as clear as possible in nature. In this way there will be little room for ambiguity. Throughout my teaching career I will also undergo observation. To ensure my instruction is clear I will make my observer is aware I have set out this goal, therefore, my observer can correct me or make a note if I do anything that strays from achieving this.

Ultimately, when teaching it is important to be aware that each pupil might respond to instructions differently. Expecting students to respond to a given stimulus takes time and requires reinforcement. (McCattell, 1921). Creating a learning environment that allows class discussion will inspire deeper learning, following the constructivist way of thinking (McLeod, 2019). If a teacher expects pupils to follow their rules, they need to ensure that their rules are explained in a clear way. *'It's Not Fair'* ... (Thornberg, 2008) details several studies that show that if children do not understand why they are being asked to follow a rule, they are less likely to do as asked.

Finally, the *Code of professional Conduct and Practice* (Education Workforce Council, 2022) point 3.4 states “[registrants] communicate appropriately and effectively with all involved in the education of learners and young people.” If such emphasis is placed on making sure that within teaching, members of staff communicate effectively with one another, this should be extended to the learners too. Therefore, teachers should be expected to make themselves clear when giving instructions and setting rules. Teachers should make an effort to maintain stimulus given to diffuse any confusion that could arise and should give space for pupils to communicate if they feel they have been wrongly reprimanded.

Conclusion

In conclusion, following the expectations of Welsh Government (2019), teachers are instructed to analyse their practice and input new techniques as they learn them. One of the ways teachers can reflect is by looking at an observation of a C.I within a classroom. Using Tripp’s (1993) online of what C.Is are teachers can then expand their knowledge, particularly of behaviour management.

From this essay I have established that positive reinforcement is one way that desired behaviour can be enforced. Teachers can use reward systems to encourage positive responses from their students. As Skinner (Cerutti and Staddon, 2003) explored, consequences impact reactions. Therefore, demonstrating positive consequences for example, an achievements board, will encourage desired behaviour for example, increased student attention.

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