

ECAD6007 Assignment 2023/24

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.

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Laura Stephens 2305554

Introduction

This assignment will contain a critical incident evaluation observed in a classroom setting using critical incident methodology by David Tripp (1993). Tripp draws on his own classroom experience to provide strategies for approaching critical incidents in teaching and emphasizes the importance of experience, informed opinions, flexibility and constant self-monitoring in developing professional judgement. The core intent behind this exercise was to initiate an exploration of the value of reflective practice, drawing upon my own experiences in the classroom, to formulate a plan for enhancing my future teaching methods. In the context of the classroom, a critical incident is an event or situation that occurs during the teaching and learning process which marks a turning-point or change in a pupil's learning development. However, many of these critical incidents whether positive or negative are not always obvious and can occur in a daily routine unnoticed of professional practice. It is stated that within a school setting critical incidents are not "things" but are "created" and "produced" in the way an observer looks at a situation (Tripp, 2011, p. 8). During a professional practice an observer will interpret a value of judgement of a significant event and collect valuable data which later will be analysed and reflected upon during reflective practice to find a solution (Tripp, 2011). This assignment will follow the research, literature and analysis around challenging behaviour in a classroom after an observation of a critical incident within a school setting, as evidenced in the appendices. This chosen observation of the critical incident will be discussed within a literature review which will highlight key areas to better understand the relevance of the questioned incident. This will result in each section to delve further into the theoretical ideas linked with reflective practice and how these concepts are connected to the teaching profession. Following on from this the incident observed will be reviewed in relation to the curriculum for Wales before defining my own reflection to indicate the next teaching steps for my future practice. The critical incident took place in a KS4 performing arts classroom in an English medium secondary school. The incident focuses on a student calling out over the teacher and not respecting the classroom rules of no calling out and not putting their hands up when wanting to speak. From this observation and

talking to the class teacher this incident had been supposedly happening for some time and no successful solution has been found yet. Methods to help this will be outlined in this assignment.

Literature Review

The critical incident observed has drawn attention to key aspects that can be explored and linked within a review of literature. The forthcoming review will delve into theories related to understanding challenging behaviour, the social learning theory, concepts of emotional literacy, operant conditioning and behaviour management strategies involved within a school setting.

According to an article from independent thinking (2020), Adele Bates states that bad behaviour is not attention seeking but a “response” made to an unmet need from a student and if the behaviour gets worse throughout the lesson, the student is trying to express more of what they need but is unaware on how to vocalise it in a controlled manner. Many explanations lead on to why children respond with various behavioural responses in a school environment, and this can be potentially due to students experiencing or suffering from a type of trauma. Children use this as an attempt to cope with the emotional and psychological distresses linked to toxic stress and while these responses can be adaptive in a traumatic situation, they may manifest as challenging behaviour in other contexts. A review by Kristina Hallet (2023, quoted Cynthia M.A Siadat, 2023, para. 3), a certified clinical psychologist, found that a trauma response is the “reflexive use of over-adaptive coping mechanisms” used as an adaptive coping strategy in the actual or perceived presence of a traumatic event. The four-stages of the trauma-based behaviour responses that children are known to use are fight, flight, freeze and fawn. Fight, an “active self- preservation” function that refers to an intentional action from an individual that involves aggression and confrontation when faced with stress and can manifest into anger, hostility and violence when asserting control (Hallet, 2023, para. 8). Flight, “avoidant” behaviour results into escaping and avoiding situations causing individuals to withdraw from social situations, places or people (Hallet, 2023, para. 12). Freeze relates to

“dissociation and “immobilizing” behaviours that when the defence enacts the individual is frozen unable to move, spaced out and detached from reality and have the inability to engage with others or to respond to the situation appropriately (Hallet, 2023, para. 16). Fawn, known as a “pacifying” behaviour focuses on attempting to appease or please others often to avoid conflict or danger and to receive approval (Hallet, 2023, para. 20). Individuals that exhibit this response could also display submissive behaviour and have difficulty setting boundaries with others. Using this framework tool in future practice helps foster a better understanding of these trauma responses while teaching in a classroom allowing teachers to understand and recognise the signs of what type of behaviour to look out for before then being able to provide the effective support suited for each student individually. Alongside this Bessel Van Der Kolk (2023) research on neurobiology of trauma and how trauma effects the brain and nervous system suggests that trauma impacts on physical and mental health and that the event “overwhelms” the central nervous system, altering the way an individual processes and recalls memories. As a result, trauma distracts focus and emotional control of an individual and “interferes with the brain circuits” (Bessel van der Kolk, 2023, para. 4) hence the challenging behaviour.

However, Albert Bandura emphasizes the role of observational learning and modelling in his social learning theory acquired through copying, observing and imitating the behaviour of others, especially when those behaviours are unpunished or rewarded. The most famous experiment conducted by Bandura featured the “Bobo Doll”, an experiment in which children observed adults interacting with a toy that was subject to physical aggression (Bandura, 1988). Bandura’s research highlighted that “parental modelling of hostility and aggression” was the key factor throughout his study and that there was stupendous “non permissiveness in punishment at home for aggression” (Bandura, 1988). As there was no consequence for a child's action at home this study suggest that children are allowed to test boundaries which results them not knowing right from wrong, to break the rules and not recognise acceptable behaviour additionally affecting their child development growing up into an adult. The study also revealed that children who witnessed adults displaying

aggressive behaviour were more inclined to mimic that behaviour when given the opportunity to interact with the doll (Bandura, 1988). This study highlighted the significance of observational and modelling learning in shaping behaviour and can suggest that students can mimic and copy other students' behaviour for attention and control of the class or teacher.

Building upon the literature above emotional and mental health can play a significant part in understanding a child's behaviour. It involves understanding their emotions, emotion regulation, emotion expression, being empathetic, developing better social skills and reducing their stress levels. Emotional literacy helps provide techniques and strategies for adults and children to manage these effectively which helps them minimise an outburst of challenging behaviour within any environment. Furthermore, it increases self-awareness and self-reflection for the individual allowing them to recognise and address the underlying causes which also helps professionals and educators provide useful tools and insights to support this behaviour fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. A national assembly for Wales report 'Mind Over Matter' (2018) states that "levels of stress and anxiety among pupils are rising" and that the "proportion of 15–16 year olds self-reporting anxiety or depression has doubled" resulting that "one in ten 5–16 year olds suffer a diagnosable mental health disorder" (National Assembly for Wales, 2018, p. 20). Following on from this at any one time "10-15 per cent of teenagers have symptoms of depression" (National Assembly for Wales, 2018, p. 22). The significance of this is that the step change needed in emotional and mental health support for children and young people in Wales is of high importance and that reducing the stigma around mental health issues and providing the right need of comprehensive support services in Wales is crucial. The Welsh government for Wales (2022) states that the new curriculum will have "more emphasis on equipping young people for life" and "build their ability to learn new skills" applying their knowledge on the subject creatively and positively adapting to the world around them. In summary this evidence indicates that challenging behaviour can arise due to limited support and lack of prompt services available.

Nevertheless, an American psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner “rejects” the notion of unobservable mental states such as feelings and thoughts as the primary determinant of behaviour, known as radical behaviourism (William O’Donohue and Kyle E. Ferguson, 2012, chapter 4). Alternatively, he highlights the importance of studying behaviour as a product of the environment and the consequences of that individuals’ actions. His work on behaviourism focuses on the idea that human behaviour was influenced by the consequences of previous actions and believed that the behaviour could be “understood” and “controlled” through the careful study of observable behaviours and their outcomes (William O’Donohue and Kyle E. Ferguson, 2012, chapter 4). This later developed the concept of operant conditioning involving the use of rewards and punishments to shape and control behaviour. This idea is implemented into modern day schools and colleges which have been created to maintain a safe and respectful learning environment via behaviour management plans. Skinners’ operant conditioning includes two reinforcements, positive and negative and two punishments, positive and negative. A positive reinforcement was rewarding a behaviour with a desirable action which schools encourage teachers to use, for example a tool called class charts which increases their positive behaviour score, to encourage students to display positive behaviour consistently. Skinners’ negative reinforcement however was to remove something aversive to strengthen a behaviour, for example if a child already has a warning point given on the board, depending on the school’s behavioural system, deducting that point would encourage that student to continue with their positive behaviour that they are currently presenting. The positive punishment Skinner created was to introduce something aversive to decrease behaviour, for example a child could gain a negative behaviour point on the tool class charts decreasing their behaviour score within the class. This would result them to wanting to stop their negative behaviour and listen and respect to the class teacher. The negative punishment removed something desirable to decrease negative behaviour, for example deducting a minute off their break time to stay behind in the classroom would result them not wanting to continue with their negative behaviour. Negative punishments are highly used within school environments and their behaviour plans as it helps to teach students the

consequences of their actions and helps them understand the repercussions that action could cause. This intends to help students understand acceptable behaviour from non-acceptable behaviour and the consequences they could face in the real world outside of school. A school's behaviour management plan or policy contains a variety of strategies and techniques that help create a structured and supportive environment that encourages individuals to learn, exhibit and promote appropriate behaviour while reducing or preventing the inappropriate behaviour. Like Skinner's operant conditioning the key components used within a school's behaviour plan or policy are positive reinforcement and praise for positive behaviour, clear expectations or boundaries set by the class teacher and if broken the student will result with having a set of consequences. Lastly consistency and communication between teacher and students is key as it helps to develop a stronger relationship and understanding of one another. Skinner's evidence of operant conditioning research involved using controlled environments and devices such as the "Skinner box" (B. F. Skinner 1930) to study how animals learned and modified their behaviours based on the consequences of their actions.

To summarize the relevance of this literature to my thoughts on challenging behaviour and the critical incident I observed it has helped and developed my own personal understanding of the signs to look out for while in a classroom environment and the possible reasons behind why children respond or behaviour either negatively or positively. This literature can provide valuable knowledge and insights that can help guide my future practice forming my own identification of my next teaching and learning steps. These steps include understanding and recognising challenging behaviour, understanding causes and triggers, interventions to best support the student within a classroom and lastly the collection of data and progress monitoring of students.

Case Study

Outlined in the appendices of this assignment the critical incident observed occurred on the first day of the observation experience on placement in a KS4 year 10 performing arts class. The number of students present when the incident occurred was around 14 pupils with one class teacher. Putting this incident into context, the pupils were standing in two rows which contained 7 chairs in each row facing a piano and white board which were situated at the front of the classroom. The teacher instructed the students to sit down while explaining the purpose of the lesson and what song the students were going to practice before handing out their sheet music ready to sing. It was clear the students already knew the song 'One Short Day' from Wicked the musical as they were each humming their tune or harmony individually as a warmup before taking their seats ready to sit down and start the activity. The students already highly engaged and enthusiastic about their learning and song that the lack of focus and excitement distracted them off task. The teacher instructed for silent to regain focus back into the classroom before starting the singing task and it was in this moment the incident was observed.

I noticed one student (Child A) swinging back and forth in his chair containing an abundance of energy and fidgeting with their sheet music. Already aware of the classroom rules of hands up when wanting to speak and no shouting or calling out over the teacher in the classroom Child A continuously chose to interrupt and speak over the teacher distracting the class while the teacher was trying to implement new areas of learning around the song. In observing this incident throughout the remainder of the lesson it was apparent to me that Child A was a strong-willed and a dominant character within the class and that their fellow classmates were influenced by their comedic and outgoing character. Later discussing my observation further with the teacher, it was made aware to me that Child A had recently relocated to the local area resulting his change of school and that on the school system the concern had been noted that Child A would be monitored as they are settling into a new school environment.

Under the discipline for learning policy (Bishop Vaughan Catholic School, 2023) within the school their aim for their students is to “help young people to take responsibility for their own behaviour” and to “support students where necessary to change their behaviour by making good choices”. As a Catholic ethos school, they strive to “reflect the Gospel values of truth, tolerance, justice, respect and forgiveness as modelled by Jesus Christ” and the school's approach is to “build positive relationships between all members of the school community” based on respect and trust (Bishop Vaughan Catholic School, 2023). The school encourages and “nurtures a culture of self-discipline in which pupils take responsibility for their actions and relationships with others based on making good choices” (Bishop Vaughan Catholic School, 2023). This is attained through a “system of high expectations, rewards and structured sanctions which are actively taught and reinforced at the start of each academic year” (Bishop Vaughan Catholic School, 2023). As a catholic school “every child is a unique individual, made in God’s image” and “each child should be treated with the utmost dignity and respect”. This is highlighted for those displaying the most challenging behaviour, as these are often the pupils who are in the most need of our understanding and support as seen in the observed incident.

By engaging the observed incident through reflective practice, it is important as a practitioner to have a greater knowledge of understanding of the incident linked to the reformed ‘Curriculum for Wales 2022’. The recently executed curriculum reaffirms the “fundamental purposes of education” to support the development of resilient and versatile individuals (Donaldson, 2015, p. 5). This is by generating individuals with key qualities enabling them to meet the challenges and pressure changes in the future, the wider world and Wales today. The curriculum is delivered and driven through the four purpose which are a shared aspiration and vision for children and young people that together specify what education should be providing to endeavour success across Wales (Welsh Government, 2022). The observed incident can be linked to the four purposes through “ethical, informed citizens” as Child A had relocated and moved to the local area adapting to their new surroundings and

“healthy, confident individuals” as they are building their emotional and mental well-being by developing confidence and participation in performance (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30).

Teaching and learning methods

Reflective practice has been embraced and developed in the field of education through theoretical ideas for many years. The works of these ideas are from theorists such as Dewey (1933), Schon (1983), Kolb (1984) and Gibbs (1988). After incorporating Dewey’s idea of reflective thinking which encourages learners to reflect on their experiences, it helped me to examine my observation and interpretation of the incident further. This expanded my understanding of why Child A would react and respond the way they were doing. Developing my knowledge on this incident made me explore how relocation can affect and impact mental health and behaviour patterns of a child and what coping strategies to look out for. A teaching and learning method I could include in my professional practice would be promoting self-care by encouraging mindfulness in my classroom and relaxation activity. Dewey noted that often some individuals “exist in apprehension of what the future may bring and are divided within us” (Dewey, p. 51). Mindfulness can eliminate or reduce any stress and anxiety within the classroom before focusing and starting our learning intention for that lesson. Another method I could inhabit would be to build a supportive classroom environment fostering a nonjudgemental and safe classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, ideas and feelings. To encourage this, I would be consistent in my approach and use positive and inclusive language to promote respect and acceptance among students as well as listen and look out for any negative behaviour patterns within a student's behaviour. Students would become further “deregulated and agitated when the teacher is impatient, irritated, angry or raging in relation to a pupil” (National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Ultimately, I would regularly monitor progress with the student checking in to assess their well-being and progress as well as adjusting support strategies needed based on that student’s unique development and tailor my approach

based on the student's circumstances. Additionally, working in collaboration with school counsellors to support students suffering with mental health challenges and share observations with the school's support staff for possible interventions. Involving parents and guardians to maintain an open communication would also be a beneficial approach to ensure they are aware of any concerns to provide comprehensive support for the student. "Professional activity consists in instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory and technique" (Schon, p. 21).

Even though Gibbs (1988) reflective cycle framework replicates the work of Dewey (1933) his model of reflection splits into a few stages. Starting with describing the incident as I did via my observation it follows individuals' feelings and responses to an incident to gain a stronger understanding of a child's triggers and emotional control either before, during or after the incident. The evaluation and analyse process happens later before drawing upon possible conclusions to resolve the issue. As a practitioner this method would benefit my reflective practice to create a plan of action if the incident wasn't resolved and continued in future practice. As the incident observed focuses on challenging behaviour a teaching and learning method, I could utilize is the re-enactment approach. Reenacting an incident that has taken place can be beneficial for the student in this incident as it can be seen from the teachers or "other person's point of view" (Welsh Assembly Government, p. 93). The ability to view an incident from an alternative perspective is an important component in "developing self-awareness" (Welsh Assembly Government p. 93) and once a student can take accountability for their role in an interaction, it increases the chances of a change in behaviour and future practice. By using this strategy, it enhances critical thinking, assessment for learning and a deeper understanding of the student's actions. It also entails an active learning process which benefits acting skills while being in a drama lesson, problem solving skills that they can use in their daily lives and the application of knowledge where they can apply what they have learnt to real-life scenarios which bridges the gap between theory and practice. When a student can own their role in an interaction, it enhances their engagement for a change in behaviour to become more probable.

Covering the psychology schools of learning and Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory, a profound influence on how we understand children and their acquired knowledge and development intellect is found in Piaget's research of the stage Formal Operation. This focuses on children aged 11 to fully grown adults and characterizes between key cognitive abilities and developments allowing adults and adolescents to engage in hypothetical and deductive reasoning and abstract thinking by applying more advanced cognitive processes to a wider range of challenges and tasks. Linking to the incident I observed it would benefit my teaching and learning methods to be aware of this knowledge due to the evidence that teachers and students think, act, understand and react in differently. "Children construct an understanding of the world around them" (Saul Mcleod p.2 Piaget's theory, para. 5) before experiencing the "discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment" (Saul Mcleod p.2 Piaget's theory, para. 5). As adults and teachers our experiences of situations are at a higher level of understanding compared to adolescents and children due to the extra number of years we have on the planet in comparison. As a teacher I will constantly be mindful of this throughout my professional practice moving forward and in the future.

Discussion

From my research, I would apply mindfulness within my professional practice by playing a selection of calm music while the students enter the classroom which would encourage a relaxing and focused atmosphere supporting a safe and controlled environment. Alternatively, incorporating starter activities like colouring and drawing or physical exercises like mindfulness breathing and stretching can aid students to help calm their minds. When undertaking challenging behaviour relating to the observed incident, by employing the re-enactment approach I would role reserve with the student and model their behaviour as if I was them and the student was the teacher. By employing this the student should develop a greater understanding of how that situation made them feel and the

impact the situation had on the teacher's feelings. A self-regulation exercise can also be included to help manage impulsive reactions and emotions. From my research about teaching and learning methods the incident has informed me to include these pedagogical choices within my practice. The following choices include "encourage learners to take responsibility for their learning", "support social and emotional development and positive relationships", "sustained pupil effort to reach high but achievable targets and promote problem solving and critical thinking" (Welsh Government, 2022). By linking practice, it is crucial for refining skills, enhancing understanding and fostering the intellectual and cultural importance of literature.

Conclusion

This assignment required an engagement of reflective practice through an observed critical incident focusing on an individual learner which included the concept of challenging behaviour and wellbeing and mental health of children and young people. Using Tripps's (1993) methodology this incident was utilized and recorded for further critical evaluation on how teaching and learning methods can be impactful for my own professional practice and pedagogical choices moving forward reducing the chance of the incident reoccurring in future practice. Ensuring my methods are successful I would involve a combination of planning, assessment for learning and have continuous improvement to enhance my practice and the students learning. The critical incident methodology has allowed me to explore several theorists and theories which highlighted trauma responses within children, the social learning theory, concepts of emotional literacy, cognitive development followed by operant conditioning and the reformed curriculum for Wales policy to help me employ this in my professional practice. All this information throughout this assignment has developed my knowledge and insights to make better informed decisions and to refine my approach continuously to better support the development and learning of children and young people. The incident observed was contextualized through academic literature as part of analysis and evaluation which emphasised various arguments

around the concept of challenging behaviour and the significance of this role within policies of education. Through the stages of reflection, a plan for future teaching steps arose in response to the incident observed. It was concluded that behavioural strategies like re-enactment and mindfulness could be employed moving forward in future practices after considering the importance of challenging behaviour and mental health.

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Appendices

Date, time and year group: Monday 9th October 10:25 in a year 10 performing arts class.

When and Where: Second lesson in the drama department. The transition between taking the register and starting the first activity. Resources were being handed out by students.

What happened:

Student was swinging in their chair containing lots of energy. They were fidgety and was playing around with their sheet music. The teacher trying to explain the principles of the activity the student called out over the teacher for a comedic response from the rest of the class disregarding the classroom rule of hands up if a student wishes to speak.

Areas of possible exploration:

- The understanding of challenging behaviour and why the students act and respond in this way.
- The importance of mental health and wellbeing of students as part of their daily school routines.
- School policies of challenging behaviour and mental health awareness.

Notes:

A safe and supportive environment where students felt accepted and had a sense of belonging.