Assignment 6007

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 aim to identify and critically evaluate a critical incidence observed while observing a wide range of lessons in a secondary school in Wales. A critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgment we make, and the basis of that judgment is a significance we attach to the meaning of the incident (Tripp 1993), for example the way a teacher approaches teaching a lesson, the way a pupils react to the teaching. A common misconception when it comes to critical incidents is that it must be a pupil being complete adverse to doing any work or being uncooperative and exhibiting unwelcomed behaviours. For this assignment I intend to focus on how the teacher engages the pupils, allows the pupils to express their knowledge and how the teacher assess their learning of the pupils. The critical incident I will be delving into can be found in the appendix of this assignment, there you will find three critical incidents that I observed while in the field and my initial thoughts and findings on these incidents. Number two of the recorded critical incidence is the sole focus of my research and literature review.

The role of critical reflection

The role of this critical reflection is to first observer lessons in a secondary school, to gather information on how teachers teach in a secondary school and within these lessons find incidence that can be deemed as a critical incident in accordance with Tripp's methodology. A critical reflection is key to my development as a teacher, it will allow me to first observe experienced teachers practice their art of teaching, second observe how pupils respond to their practice, third observe how teachers practise in other subjects, and finally what can I use in my own practise that I observed the other teachers doing. With this, the engagement with literature around the critical incident I have chosen to give a solid basis for the teaching practice I observed, and potentially shed some light on why the teacher approached the topic in that way, what are the benefits and negatives of teaching it this way. Once I have engaged with an extensive list of literature in and around this critical incident, it will allow me to make an informed decision on how to include teaching strategies and practises demonstrated in this critical incident and in the literature surrounding this critical incident. Furthermore, a critical reflection is here to understand a teacher's practice informing and develop my future practice, to help me improve how I teach and develop my skills as a reflective practitioner. Always looking at ways to improve my practise, implementing the ideas demonstrated in this critical incident and learning how to reflect on my own teaching, as there is always room for improvement especially at this early stage in my career. The importance of this critical reflection is vital in line with the education reforms in Wales. With the move to AoLE's (Areas of Learning and Experience) the 4 purposes Ambitious, capable learners, Enterprising, creative contributors ethical, Informed citizens of Wales and the world healthy, confident

individuals. (Welsh Government 2020) This move presents a new and more collaborative approach to teaching in the 21st century in Wales. It is seeing teachers as professionals and how we now need to constantly reflect on our practice, to see what area we can improve on, to get the best possible result from the pupils in our care. Furthermore, the links between different areas of learning allows the pupils to constantly build on what they already know and allows them to make steady progress every day and empower pupils to become the best version of themselves. Along with teachers raising their bar for teaching standards by being a reflective practitioner.

OBSERVATION School & Class Context

In accordance with the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research, I will only disclose some details of the school but will omit the name of the school and only give the bare bones of the schools set up and demographic of pupils. Furthermore, I will be as objective as possible, only focusing on the teaching practice itself and discussing what strategies they use and approach this as a researcher.

The secondary school I was placed into observe classes was an English medium school in South Wales. A school for pupils from 11 to 18, around 1,600 pupils attend the school from mostly white British background with two percent of pupils speaking English as a second language and very few speak Welsh at home. The national average for free school meals in Wales is 16.4%, in this school is substantially lower that the average at 4%. Around 8% of pupils have additional learning needs, 12% lower than the national average and 1% of pupils have an additional learning needs statement. (Estyn 2019)

The critical incident was observed in a Year 7 English lesson with 25/30 pupils in the classroom, set in rows with two pupils per tables. Minimal displays on the wall with a big floor to ceiling window to the left of the pupils, with a few key words on the walls to use in description tasks unrelated to the task of the lesson. The Lesson was at 8:55am and ran to 9:55 on a Monday morning, and break time proceeded this lesson. Pupils were visibly tiered and were yawning quite a lot.

Critical incident linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes

The critical incident that I have chosen for this assignment is one that I observed in an English lesson where the teacher was reading a book that was the book for that the year seven class was working through. I chose this as my critical incident was because of the way the teacher read through the chapter in the book. They read in a way that was engaging, active with characterisation and the teacher constantly asked questions of the pupils about the book. With this constant barrage of questioning the teacher was able to assess the learning of the pupils and they went. A mixture of questioning techniques was used. For example, the teacher read about a certain character in the book and immediately asked "so what do we already know about this character?" then would look for hands up or cold call pupils to answer the question. Once a pupil had answered the question the teacher would then pose a follow-up question "how does this affect the character?" "What do think will happen next? With this the teacher assessed the learning of the pupils, while making sure they understood the text and we actively listening to the story. This is a great example of repetition and retrieval practice the teacher is constantly ask for the pupils to recall information of the characters time and time again. With this repetition the teacher is committing more of

this information to long term memory, thus enhancing the pupils understanding of the text. Remembering depended on “frequency and recency” (J.B Watson)

A more prominent school of thought on show here is constructivism and cognitive load theory. Jean Piaget a Swiss psychologist, Lev Vygotsky a Soviet psychologist were one of the original constructivist theories and Dylan Wiliam a Welsh professor in education the cognitive load theorist. Frequency and recency are most prominent here as the teacher is constantly bringing back the information they have just learnt and bring it back time and time again, whilst constructing the knowledge using a constructivist approach building on the knowledge already attained by the pupils in previous lessons.

Donaldson's Four Purposes came about from his document *Successful Futures,* published in 2014, which looked at the Education system Wales and in the document are a series of recommendations for the Welsh Government to improve education in Wales. One of the recommendations was around the purposes of educating young people and what we want them to become at the end of their schooling and out of this came the Four Purposes. The Four Purposes Donaldson set out and has since be scrutinised and now adopted by the Welsh government with them soon becoming part of most school's approach to education in Wales. The Four Purposes are as follows; Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives, Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work, Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world and Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society (Welsh Government 2020). Though the school this critical incident comes from had yet to adopt the new curriculum and plan to adopt the new curriculum in September 2023, the teacher is getting the pupils to be Ambitious, capable learners as the pupils active in the learning and they are capable as they are

showing that they know exactly what the story is about and are able to infer or work out what is going to happen next in the story.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I aim to cover a broad range of sources and materials that will allow me to understand and comprehend the positives and negatives of the two areas of methodology I identified earlier that the teacher in my critical incident. The first being constructivism, then repetition and retrieval practice.

Constructivism is a methodology and theory based on the work of Jean Piaget a Swiss psychologist, Lev Vygotsky a Soviet psychologist, and John Dewey to name but a few. Constructivism is where humans construct their own knowledge by using their own knowledge as a basis and build upon that knowledge by constructing ways to solve a problem. Giambattista Vico an Italian philosopher is attributed as being the first constructivists (Tobias, Duffy p.3) one of Vico's basic ideas was that epistemic agents can know nothing but the cognitive structures they themselves have put together . . . 'to know' means *to know how to make*" (Von Glasersfeld 1989, p.123) the theory does what it says on the tin. You gain an initial understanding of something and can construct your own learning on top of that. For example, learning how to read music as a pianist, then being able to transfer that knowledge of reading music being able to construct knowledge of how to play other instruments as you already have that foundation knowledge to build on and to teach yourself that new instrument. However, you will need scaffolding given to you by players of that new instrument to help you achieve the new knowledge. This is how the teacher has approached this task of the

book reading, they ask the questions allowing them time to infer then nudging them along when needed.

With relation to the critical incident, the teacher is allowing the pupils to construct their own knowledge on the book and use their previous experience with stories and how the characters have acted earlier in the book. Often coming up with the correct outcomes or close enough that the teacher can clarify reading on in the book. Constructivism enables us to consider students' abilities to create new knowledge when the are outside of instruction. (Schwartz, D.L., Lindgren, R. and Lewis, S. p.35) The teacher is allowing the students to construct their own their understanding of the book by giving them question such as "what do you think this means? What do you think is going to happen?" though still in some form of instruction by means of the questioning, they still are trying to use their knowledge of this story and of stories read previously to infer their own answers and meaning to the question. In this school setting constructivism is used as a pedagogical label for sense-making activities including discovery, inquiry, exploration, and hands-on learning (Duffy& Jonassen, 1992) (Schwartz, D.L., Lindgren, R. and Lewis, S. p.34) the discovery part is negated in this critical incident however the pupils are definitely able to inquire and explore on their own as they are being, though with a bit of scaffolding, they are working parts of the story and inquire through the questions asked by the teacher.

Constructivism is closely linked and built upon by the Cognitive load theorists such as Dylan Wiliam a Welsh professor of education. Dylan believes Cognitive load theory is vital to teacher but first what is it?

Cognitive Load Theory posit that there are three types of cognitive load: intrinsic, extraneous, and germane. Intrinsic load is that which is inherent to solving the problem and cannot be altered. Extraneous load is generated by the manner in

which the instructional information or problem is presented. When unnecessary information is provided, or the information is provided in an unnecessarily complex manner, the cognitive load generated is said to be extraneous. Germane load is that focussed expressly towards the acquisition of knowledge such as analysis or critical thinking. (Bentley, B. and Sieben, R.)

The teacher is enabling the pupils to utilise all three of cognitive load. Intrinsic load by allowing them to solve a problem, i.e., a question about the book with only a correct answer. Extraneous load by presenting their questions to the pupils in a variety of different way from straight lased questions, for example “who is this character related to?” to more intricate question such “so what do you think this will lead to?” and finally Germane load allowing the pupils to analyse what the teacher has read, and enabling them to think critically about the book, with an Extraneous load placed on the pupil to help them along with Germane load.

Retrieval practice in this critical incident is key to success of the pupil’s engagement in the learning of the topic and ability to answer the question posed by the teacher. By using this practice, I saw the pupil’s knowledge of the book and that in speaking to the teacher after the lesson that they do this to make sure that the information regarding the book is in the long-term memory. So, when they come to the end of term test, they can answer the question and construct answers based on the txt they have been reading. Retrieval practice involves reconstructing something you’ve learned in the past from memory and thinking about it right now (Weinstein, Y., Sumeracki, M. and Caviglioli, O. 2019 p.118) a concept most of us use daily. With this constant request from the teacher to continually retrieve information pertaining to the book and enabling them to commit the information to more long-term memory.

Retrieval practice gives students feedback on what they know and do not know and gives teachers feedback too. (Weinstein, Y., Sumeracki, M. and Caviglioli, O, 2019 p.120) Pupils in this English lesson are using retrieval practice, by the teacher asking these questions in that manner that they are is asking of the pupils. The teacher is giving them a chance to retrieve the information they already know, infer further from the follow up questions and allows to make mental note of how the pupils are doing, so the teacher can guide the learning in future to fill any gaps in knowledge about the book. However, retrieval practice is just memorising facts and bringing them to the fore. Weinstein, Y., Sumeracki, M. and Caviglioli, O. would disagree with this statement. Retrieval practice also helps the students use the information more flexibly in the future, applying what they know in new situations. (2019) This can be argued that retrieval practice is a form of constructivism as it is getting the learner to use what they already know to inform and apply the knowledge to different scenarios. In lieu of the critical incident itself the pupils are taking their knowledge from previous lesson on the book and retrieving it to use to build an answer for the teacher and further inferring what they think will happen next in the book from other books they have read.

A link between these three theories; constructivism, cognitive load theory which is an extension of constructivism and retrieval practice is that of being able to be flexible with information and allowing the pupils to make their own connections to come to their own conclusions. These three combined make up the reasoning behind this part of the lesson. Teaching in this way allows the pupils to understand a lot more as they are able to put their knowledge in context and make sense of it in their own way as they have constructed understanding themselves. These techniques pair with that of repetition (see diagram 1) shows how the more you repeat the exercise and keep it

consistent when repeating pupils are more likely to commit the information to long term memory and have a greater knowledge base for them to build their answer in future, allowing theories such as constructivism to flourish.

REFLECTION / EVALUATION & NEXT STEPS

To reflect and evaluate what has just been discussed in the literature review and before in previous sections, I feel that the teaching practice shown by the teacher was good. They were able to get the pupils to understand the vast majority of the content of the book, from characters names to their individual traits and how they will potentially affect the outcome of the story later on. An approach like this does take time to come to fruition and yield results of merit that pertain to good learning, in that the teacher has spent a few lessons before this reading the book and getting the pupils to feedback thoughts about characters to assess what they have gathered from each chapter. Once the teacher has enabled the pupils to get the knowledge required. They can now ask them questions that allow the pupil to construct their own answer from the knowledge, use retrieval practice techniques and the three parts to cognitive load theory: *intrinsic, extraneous, and germane*. (Bentley, B. and Sieben, R.) I feel that is a good example of pupils being able to access deep learning in this lesson as the pupils are enabled to explore in their own way, though with some guidance from the teacher which is needed from time to time to keep the pupils on track, however sometimes this did get in the way of the pupil's answers but I understand why the teacher did this as the pupil was going of topic and leading to a misconception about the book. Misconception was avoided by a tactful redirection of the answer from the pupil and allowed the pupil to construct their answer while avoiding the misconception they were heading for.

The role of this refection was to look at a seeming mundane incident in a classroom that most will believe to inconsequential and seeing from the theory side of the practice of teaching. Looking “under the hood” as it were at the inner workings of the lesson and potentially work out why the teacher did it in this way and how the pupils were affected by this approach to the lesson. In future reflections and observations, I need to look closer at how the pupils are reacting and receiving the information being given, and how this is affecting their learning and are the actually learning.

The experience of being back in the classroom again after so long and being able to observe a high standard of teaching, seeing some theories and practices that I have been introduced to in lectures in action. Seeing these theories and practices in context allowed for greater understanding of how I can use them in my own teaching practice and translate them to my AoLE of Expressive Arts, with my specialism under that being music. Retrieval practice being the main theory that makes most sense as there is a whole other language of terms and phrase that pupils need to understand so they are able to access the full breadth of music. So, by implementing retrieval practice will allow the pupils to engage fully with the subject. Also, constructivism building new skills from the old ones, pupils playing a simple piece of music then constructing new skills bases on the original’s ones enabling them to attain to a higher level and achieve that deep, long-term learning that we aspire to get from pupils.

In relation to the professional standards this critical reflection has enable to me to hit three of the standards: Leadership, Professional Learning, and Innovation. Leadership under the strand of taking responsibility for self, as I have taken it upon myself to research the techniques being used in this lesson and the theory behind it.

Professional Learning under the strand of Wider reading and research findings, as I have looked through a wider range of sources from books to journals to gain a greater understanding of these theories and they were being implemented in the lesson. Finally, Innovation under the strand Developing new techniques, as I have see what happens in an English lesson and workout was in which I could use similar techniques in my classroom when teaching music.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I observed a year seven English class in a secondary school, I observed the teacher reading the class book for that term and observed how the teacher was able to get answers from every pupil in the class, using theories such as: Constructivism, Cognitive load theory and Retrieval practice. Finding these theories allowed me to immerse myself around these theories and understand them in a review of literature while make connections between what the teacher was doing and the theories themselves. Furthermore, understanding the teaching in terms of Donaldson's Four Purposes.

The role of a reflective practitioner in Wales is to be always looking for ways to improve your craft. By observing other teachers teach and finding bits that they are doing in their lessons that might work in your or by looking inwardly and seeing what you can improve in your lessons. In order to become the best teacher, you can be. Pair this with the new professional standards for teaching and leadership and focusing to try and hit as many of those standards as possible will allow me to be the best I can be. To be constantly looking for improvements. There is always something you can improve on. Whether that is the structure of a lesson, layout of the

classroom, how you approach the pupils, how you differentiate for the pupils etc. Teaching is a profession, and I should treat it that way by constantly holding myself to the highest ideals and performance practice.

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