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Who am I teaching?

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Introduction

In this assignment, the aim is to critically analyse and reflect on a critical incident (CI) that was observed in the professional bridging experience. A CI can be defined as the “interpretation of the significance of an event” (Tripp, 2012, p.8). It can also be seen as a production of personal information that has been observed by an individual with the outcome to understand and control classroom environments (Mohammed, 2016). The importance of adopting Tripp’s Critical Incidents Methodology (Tripp, 2012) is to provide practitioners with knowledgeable findings to self-assess teaching practice and to allow practitioners to identify the effectiveness of one’s pedagogy and relevancy in return to enhance professional development and practice (Tripp, 2012, p.24). Additionally, Joshi (2018) states CIs enables practitioners to evaluate teaching practice, identifying practices that are not working effectively and those that have adopted good teaching practices. The assignment will begin with the discussion surrounding the important role of critical reflection for student-teachers and within the Initial Teacher Education. Complying with the BERA (2018) guidelines, the CI’s observation school and class context will be analysed along with a brief of the CI with strong links to Donaldson’s (2015) four purposes in the new Curriculum for Wales 2022. The literature review will be based upon the CI, discussing pupils well-being and how it is monitored, and the awareness raised by teachers through learning and how a growth mindset supports resilience and academic attainment. This will allow a reflection to take place, demonstrating an understanding of what could be factored into a student-teachers pedagogy to ensure pupils well-being is factored into learning and supported holistically.

The role of critical reflection

To provide effective teaching and learning, both of which are key components in education, successful pedagogy is paramount (Welsh Government, 2019). Under the professional standards for teaching and leadership, reflective practice lays beneath the pedagogical standards, providing students and practitioners with the opportunity to critically reflect on their practice in an honest manner whilst allowing others to collaborate and share their reflections upon how pedagogy can be enhanced (Welsh Government, no dateb). Additionally, Fook (2015) states the role of critical reflection allows professionals to adopt the skills to be transformative, implementing the fundamental change into practice, with the ability to improve on professional

development and practice (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2012). In agreement, Lee and Richings (2018) express the role of critical reflection supports student-teachers with the integration of theory and practice.

To support this, within the new curriculum for Wales, all student-teachers must meet the professional standards for teaching and leadership with the programme of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) partnership between the school and university, to gain a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (Welsh Government, 2021a). In comparison, within the last 4 years according to Furlong *et al.* (2021), now being 5, the curriculum has been structurally reformed. The encouragement for refinements stemmed from analysing the then current provision and ITE. The expectancy of students and teachers to just 'deliver' the curriculum without guidance would not be necessary, but to become 'active' professionals to identify effective pedagogy for pupils to be taught effectively. The five standards guide the underpinnings of student-teachers and professionals' development in the teaching profession, feeding the education system in Wales through transformation of skills and pedagogy (Welsh Government, 2020b). The purpose of these standards that student-teachers are held against and must follow, is to ensure that all trainees are meeting the same quality of standard in teaching, providing clarity of what is expected within provision (Department for Education, 2011).

Yale (2021) suggests professionals and student-teachers reflect upon their teaching to ensure pupils learning environment is experiential and empowers their sense of belonging. To do this, they must engage in reflective pedagogy, consider pupils feedback and dedicate time to evaluate their own teaching in practice (Welsh Government, 2019). Therefore, teachers in Wales must ensure they are reflective towards practice as it identifies what is working well within the setting and what is not working so well, to ensure all pupils have rich learning experiences that are all equipped to their individual learning attainments. This in return supports reflective pedagogy, developing from each experience. In addition, following the professional standards and reflecting upon practice supports student-teachers ability to understand how all pupils learn, the best ways to promote learning and teach them, and identify any obstacles that prevent the pupils from learning effectively (Cambridge Assessment International Education, no date).

Observation school and class context

Following the guidelines of BERA, it is considered to be the “norm for the conduct of research” to ensure the data of participants remains confidential and anonymous, therefore throughout this assignment, the school, pupils and staff involved will remain anonymous (BERA, 2018). The setting will be named as school ‘X’ throughout and the pupils and teachers will be identified in alphabetical format such as ‘Pupil A’ and ‘Teacher A’. The two-day observation took place in an English-medium Primary School in the observer’s local area. Due to the schools Estyn’s report (2013) being out of date, the Welsh Government (no date) share that within school ‘X’, there are approximately between 627 pupils that attend school ‘X’ between the ages of 3 and 11 with an increase of 13.4% of pupils have free school meals (FSM), 18 pupils have statements, 4 pupils with an individual development plan (IDP) and 32% of pupils have English as an additional language (EAL) (Estyn, 2013).

During the observation period, the observer was placed in the reception area, consisting of three classrooms, each made up of approximately 20 pupils. [REDACTED] (no date) has a strong partnership, promoting a holistic “together we thrive” approach. However, according to the school’s latest Estyn report, school ‘X’ has not had an inspection since 2013. Estyn (2013) described the settings learning and teaching standard as “good”, with the findings of pupils setting a high standard of positive behaviour, pupils had an effective wide range of skills, understanding and knowledge and made good progress academically in their oracy skills.

Critical incident linked to Donaldson's four purposes

The CI (see Appendix 1) took place in the second out of the three reception classes, during the meet and greet routine, in the morning as the pupils were arriving to school.

Following the BERA (2018) guidelines, pupil A arrived at school very quiet, looking down at the floor and disarrayed. As with each pupil, the teacher A greets pupil A with a 'Bore da' but they do not respond and requests if a member of staff could encourage pupil A to wash their hands and face. Pupil A then proceeds to change their morning routine from how the teacher has previously modelled, by going to express how they feel on the monster check-in board first, placing their picture on 'dw i'n drist' (I am sad).

Pupil A sits on the carpet away from their peers, whilst the movement 'dot song' plays. They just participate through small movements. The teacher's assistant (TA) records how each pupil's emotion from the data on the feelings board. The teacher did not disrupt other pupils from participating – but was happy that pupil A was participating. During activity times, the teacher addresses pupil A's feelings during their 'squiggle while you wiggle' activity.

Once activity time came to an end, pupil A noticeably expressed how their feelings had changed, moving their picture to 'dw i'n hapus' (I am happy) on the check-in board.

The Welsh Government (2022) identifies there are four purposes that are at the heart of learning and every school's unique curriculum design. Additionally, they are recognised as "the shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person" (Welsh Government, 2021b). Therefore, this implies that each school has the power to construct as a team and implement their own specific curriculum which abides by the national approach and the four purposes to ensure consistency and security in learning for all pupils (Welsh Government, 2020a). This implies it strengthens the teaching and learning.

Through the observation that has been carried out and that is used throughout this assignment, it has been evident that the CI has highlighted one of the four purposes within the new curriculum for Wales 2022, with the purpose of the pupil to become a healthy, confident individual (Welsh Government, 2022). Although the observation had been documented as a whole, the CI will be focused on the pupil arriving to school

expressing they were sad to then being able to express how their emotions had changed once the sociable and interactive activities had finished. Donaldson (2015) states to thrive towards this purpose, the pupil should continue to “build their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy” (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30). Through the lens of the CI, pupil A aspires to the purpose of becoming confident to express their emotions and resilience through awareness of their feelings and how they can change with a growth mindset, supported by socialising within a movement activity. The CI demonstrates (see Appendix 1) how pupil A found it challenging to socialise upon arrival and to be resilient during an experience that appeared mentally strenuous for them.

Additionally, pupils are supported to “face and overcome challenge” (Welsh Government, 2022). The CI highlights how pupil A faces the challenges of their emotions and overcomes the challenges through the “confidence to participate in performance”, powering through with a growth mindset to be able to regulate their emotions and show awareness that they can change by demonstrating the results on the monster feelings check-in (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30). Pupil A’s class demonstrates effective use of encouraging the four purposes for the pupil in particular, due to showing effective use of expressing and regulating emotions through classroom strategies.

Literature review

The question of pupils' mental health and well-being within education is of significance – observing pupils through the incident implementing an understanding of emotional intelligence (EI) with strategies and socialising through physical activities, inspired additional research whether encouraging awareness of emotions and socialisation promotes well-being and growth mindset activating learning attainment and participation.

Urie Bronbrenner (1974) recognises through his ecological, holistic systems theory that children's health and well-being can be impacted by a multitude of factors displaying the affects through the early years with the interaction from personal experiences that they encounter with other individuals, relationships and the environment (Rose, Gilbert and Richards, 2016). Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny (2017) explains Bronfenbrenner's theory (1974) as an insight to a child's development and well-being through the five systematic layers – the microsystem which includes pupils' close surroundings such as school and teachers. Additionally, Jones (2022) stated he believed children's well-being was influenced by the individuals' interactions within their environment. Furthermore, Musgrave (2017) demonstrates the layer is known to be the most impactful system to well-being and progression, due to the powerful impact and interaction that takes place within this layer. During this section, the focus will be aimed at the microsystem and the interaction and relationships between the pupils and teachers, promoting well-being.

Similarly, teachers being an important educator, facilitating children's well-being in the early years, Omid, Haghani and Adibi (2016) suggests teachers that teach and promote EI within their learning, assists children's interpersonal communication to succeed, enhancing their well-being and everyday academic achievement. They go on to say, the awareness of EI will support pupils' well-being to remain positive, increasing one's concentration and the learning attainment. Therefore, this suggests EI should be factored into pupils learning to ensure the learning environment can be a more positive emotional experience and opportunities can be provided for social interaction.

However, although Bronfenbrenner (1974) has brought the importance of the child's development to light through his discussion surrounding the role of interaction with

schools and teachers play in influencing a child's well-being, within in the Microsystem, Rosa and Tudge (2013) suggest that EI is not so simple and that is the purpose of EI being factored into learning is highly significant.

The National Institute for Health and Care [NICE] divides well-being as three separate branches – *emotional, psychological and social* – which all are equally as important with factors that should be considered in education. Factors such as being confident, happy with positive relationships with peers should be addressed to be able to manage emotions and become resilient (NICE, 2012). Practitioners in educational settings are the most involved professionals in a child's life meaning that they are more equipped to identify changes in behaviour that may indicate an emotional difficulty (Weare, 2015). Through this, pupils communicating about feelings is stated as the control to express personal feelings and the ability to pay attention and acknowledge other feelings around them (Keys, Jacobs and Celotta, 1990). Therefore, Howard, Burton and Levermore (2020) supports teachers providing strategies for pupils to build on their resilience ought to be a whole school approach, educating and the encouragement of emotional health and wellbeing becoming immersed into the core of the educational provision. Similarly, adopting this, a school's approach to provide well-being check-ins to monitor and promote emotional regulation and intelligence allows data to be gathered to understand the pupils needs, measuring how the data changes over time and to provide and identify interventions (Anna Freud, 2022).

In connection to the CI, Bronfenbrenner's theory of the microsystem (1974) supports the need to ensure the most involved professional in a child's life, the teacher teaches and promotes EI in their learning. This implies it will encourage pupils to be aware of different feelings they may encounter and how to deal with them, emotionally. This is demonstrated through the CI (see Appendix 1) where the pupil makes use of the feelings check-in and has been able to regulate their emotions through sociable activities and a growth mindset and identify that they have changed over time, building on emotional growth.

Carol Dweck studies the motivation between individuals, focusing on two key mindsets that individuals navigate through life with, *growth and fixed* (Aubrey and Riley, 2022). The concept of growth mindset links to Appendix 1 where pupil A recognises their

“intelligence can, by effort and perseverance, be developed” and how this affects the success of learning (Aubrey and Riley, 2022, p.360). In addition to this, pupils will be able to positively develop and react to their mistakes, learning and building from negative comments and experiences, facilitating emotional growth and intelligence (Yeager and Dweck, 2020). Similarly, Armstrong (2019) delivers Dweck’s views of growth mindset as the ability to view emotional setbacks as positive opportunities to build and respond on new skills rather than the view of hiding away from experiencing negative feelings, to avoid disappointment. Hildrew (2018) supports Dweck’s growth mindset theory, describing individuals with the ability to identify areas of development in their qualities and attainments, formed through experience, application, practice and effort. This implies pupils should show openness to their emotions and how to apply their feelings in situations with the awareness and understanding that their feelings can change and shall not be permanent. Appendix 1 demonstrates that the pupil shows clear understanding of growth mindset. Therefore, the effectiveness of learning is often contingent on the child’s growth mindset (Greenhalgh, 1994).

Tao *et al.* (2022) carried out a study to identify whether a growth mindset has an influence on pupils’ mental health. Although, it becomes evident to the reader that the study is aimed at college students, primary pupils first have to experience opportunities similar, before they reach the teenage stage (Mainstone-Cotton, 2019). The study revealed pupils with a growth mindset scored considerably lower on mental health ‘difficulties’ than pupils who appear in the fixed mindset. The researchers’ findings showed pupils with a growth mindset are more able to control and deal with their emotions, with the ability to learn from those, lessening the risk of increased well-being difficulties as opposed to those who have fixed mindsets (Tao *et al.*, 2022).

Therefore, pupils who encounter and embrace challenges provides ease in future obstacles that they experience, enhancing the process of development in well-being (MA Education, 2015). This implies that overcoming obstacles emotionally is often driven by extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, driving the force and motivation to require a specific outcome (Thomson, 2014). Referring to Appendix 1, pupil A shows with motivation (socialising and movement), they were able to overcome their obstacle (emotions) to gain the outcome of being happy. Tsompanaki (2019) supports this by referring to creative movement activities as interventions which create positive

environments. These provide pupils with opportunities to overcome negative emotions and form positive relationships through socialisation.

Dweck's theory suggests that having a growth mindset associates with better well-being which ultimately promotes enhanced academic achievement for children (Claro, Paunesku and Dweck, 2016). However, not all pupils automatically are inclined to think this way towards their emotions and experiences (Aubrey and Riley, 2022; Tao *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, Boylan, Barblett and Knaus (2018) clarify the integration of the mindset theory supports pupils in aspiring academic achievement, facilitating the autonomy for learning. This promotes pupils to develop effective learning habits for their well-being. Therefore, practitioners must apply theory to practice, educating and promoting that it is possible for pupils to change their way of thinking, being adaptive with their thoughts and feelings (Seaton, 2017).

Although not all pupils have a growth mindset, researchers say that it can be taught and factored into learning, shifting their mindset from 'fixed' (Hochanadel and Finamore, 2015). For example, Appendix 1 demonstrates the pupil could have been in a fixed mindset, continuing to feel sad and isolate from other peers, instead they had the ability to identify that they were sad and seek challenge in participating to overcome the emotion. This built on the pupil's growth mindset allowing them to take the risk and see if the activity and their mindset could shift their emotion. Conversely, regardless of multiple evidence which suggests a growth mindset can support the progress of pupils' academic achievement, Aubrey and Riley (2022) suggested that the outcomes of pupils having a growth mindset and the advantages have been extremely overstated. Theodore (2020) implies that the evidence to support Dweck's beliefs is indefinite, failing to gather studies which fully support the relationship between a growth mindset and the progression of emotional and educational attainment. Additionally, they further state that mindset interventions for example, movement activities and emotional check-ins (see Appendix 1) have been known to be most effective when used with pupils of lower attainments and poorer backgrounds.

Reflection/evaluation and next steps

When considering the role of critical reflection within teaching practice, there are many models of reflective practice in terms of learning styles that could be discussed. Kolb (1984) developed a learning style inventory which operates on two levels, focusing on the individuals internal cognitive process and how they learn from new experiences (Bergsteiner, Avery and Neumann, 2010). Cornwell and Manfredo (1994) state Kolb believed effective learning has taken place when individuals progress through the four stages of his cycle however, the learning must only occur when the learner can accomplish all four stages (*concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation*). Throughout my study, I have adopted Kolb's (1984) learning style. I had the experience of observing the classroom for two days to identify a CI for my assignment and to support my knowledge in teaching practice.

Additionally, I have continuously reflected upon my observations through carrying out research for this assignment, critically evaluating how emotional check-ins support pupils overall. Furthermore, supporting Kolb's (1984) abstract of conceptualisation, I have formed new ideas based upon my research and what I have observed and have an understanding and an idea of what I would incorporate into my teaching practice. Therefore, with the knowledge that I have gained through research and Kolb's theory (1984), as a reflective student-teacher, it is my duty to incorporate it into my teaching practice to identify whether the strategies support the pupils within my class, the theory behind it and my pedagogy.

The CI has been key to my research for the assignment but additionally, my understanding of teaching practice. Throughout the observational experience, I was able to observe the teacher and gain further knowledge and understanding of the classroom routine, classroom management and how to promote and support emotional well-being through promoting EI and growth mindset.

The experience has allowed me to adopt these skills and knowledge and adopt them into my teaching practice. However, since observing the CI (see Appendix 1) I have reflected and evaluated on how pupils' emotional well-being can be supported by myself as a student-teacher and in the future as a qualified teacher. As I continue my teaching practice, my future steps would be that I ensure I form positive and

trustworthy relationships with all pupils to understand and get to know them on a deeper level, so all the pupils feel comfortable in their learning environment. To achieve my future step, I will ensure I will model myself through a truthful role, expressing my emotions daily and showing respect and empathy towards others. Modelling this behaviour will support the pupils to adopt the same attitudes towards the emotional well-being of themselves and others (Mainhard *et al.*, 2017). Oxfordshire County Council (2017) states teachers modelling and promoting real and welcoming behaviour and emotions when the pupils arrive to school is important. From researching, I feel strongly about ensuring pupils have positive relationships with educators. This is because of the importance of the transition pupils have from home to school and how it impacts their day and learning. I observed this during my CI (see Appendix 1) where the teacher provided a warm welcome to the pupil and although the pupil arrived at school upset, the teacher still ensured to greet at the door. Therefore, I will ensure that each pupil feels welcomed and is greeted by myself each morning to support their well-being and ensure they feel safe.

As part of the CI, I identified strategies that were used within the setting to promote EI. The classroom used the 'emotional monster check-in' strategy as part of their daily morning routines upon arrival to school. I observed all pupils independently completing this activity and applying the activity to demonstrate how they were feeling. The staff members would then add the data to their check-in chart to monitor their pupils' well-being and how their emotions regulated and changed over time.

Through research I have found that teachers who incorporate and promote EI into their learning enhance the development of communication skills; describing how they feel which enhances their well-being and supports academic achievement; showing readiness to learn once they have been able to communicate how they feel and participate in sociable and physical activities and interventions. Research and observations have also enhanced my understanding of the awareness pupils have of emotions, how to regulate their feelings and how they can change overtime and that they are not a permanent emotion. However, this has been suggested through research that it is the teacher's responsibility to factor this into pupils learning to comprehend the changes, ultimately facilitating, and building upon their growth mindset. Therefore, without a doubt, this is a strategy that I will adopt and take forward in my teaching practice, incorporating into my next steps of becoming a teacher,

setting myself targets and goals to achieve to ensure I become an inclusive practitioner.

Conclusion

To conclude, Tripp's Methodology of Critical Incidents (2012) has been used and considered throughout this assignment. Additionally, it has been critically reflected through the lens of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle with the purpose and objective to support and develop professional development as a student-teacher. Adopting the skill to become a reflective practitioner enables the opportunity to continuously build on professional development. This in affect enables practitioners to adapt to new roles within education, following the continuous changes in the Curriculum for Wales (Furlong *et al.*, 2021). To support student-teachers in their first steps, the ITE supports the five professional standards in teaching and learning to be met (Welsh Government, 2021a). In return, the five professional standards then factor in the elements to reflect critically on teaching and practice, providing an effective learning experience for all pupils. Four of which actively outline Kolb's learning cycle (1984). Practitioners then develop further understanding using published literature to support experimentation and reflection enhancing professional development.

To complete this assignment, a CI was observed and filtered into an evaluative research study, developing the observers understanding of pupils' emotional well-being in settings, what strategies are used to support EI and how practitioners' factor and model growth mindset to pupils to support well-being, overcoming emotions and academic attainment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1974) was incorporated into the literature review, supporting the research of pupils' well-being through the microsystem layer, the layer which is highlighted as the most impactful system to a pupil's well-being and progression (Musgrave, 2017). Although, Bronfenbrenner's theory (1974) states this, it needs to be acted upon by teachers promoting and incorporating EI into their teaching, facilitating pupils' understanding and awareness of the different emotions and how to regulate emotions when they encounter negative experiences (Omid, Haghani and Adibi, 2016; Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Additionally, Dweck highlights the necessity of a growth mindset being taught and modelled to associate positive well-being and developing academic achievement (Claro, Paunesku and Dweck, 2016). Each theory implies the teacher is at the heart

of every pupil's understanding to well-being, this highlights through the reflection and next steps section where the student-teacher aims to facilitate the pupils' understanding in line with Kolb's learning cycle (1984) with guidance from Bronfenbrenner (1974) and Dweck.

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