

A critical evaluation and the identification of net 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

This essay will be critically evaluating a critical incident in which was observed during two days at a primary school. It will involve the researcher to use their critical thinking and critical evaluation skills, which involves to identify the strengths and weaknesses and to challenge any assumptions made by other researchers. It also involves having to weigh up arguments for and against the evidence found for the critical incident. It is important when critically analysing information to understand that there are different view points, and to explore these and justify them in the essay, using links to relevant theories. The critical incident involves creating a case study, which is where scenarios are observed or a study about a person or group. The researcher will discuss the chosen critical incident within the essay, with links to the four purposes of the new curriculum. It will include the identification of teaching and learning steps that will be carried out during the professional teaching experience and further on into the future. The idea of critical incidents is based on David Tripp's interpretation. According to Tripp (2012) critical incidents occur continuously and that they are not a critical or a negative incident, however, they are made critical through analysis and evaluation. This means that the researcher would look into a critical incident and analyse it by looking at research and theories that underpin these type of incidents and critically reflect on the ideas that arise. This method of critical incidents allows practitioners to gain knowledge and understanding of these incidents and link them to practice and theory in order to develop their professional practice.

The role of critical reflection

The new curriculum for Wales by Graham Donaldson has had an impact on the role of teachers in Wales. The new curriculum provides teachers with more flexibility to be able to make their own decisions as to what the children will learn, however, it does not give complete authority to them (Donaldson, 2015). There are many documents in which teachers need to use to guide their teaching, which include the four purposes, the six areas

of learning, the Digital Competency Framework (DCF), the Literacy and Numeracy Framework (LNF) and the progression steps for each Area of Learning Experience (AoLE) (Donaldson, 2015). It allows teachers to be creative in their lesson planning and to meet the needs of every child within their classroom, whereas before the new curriculum, teachers had to teach each subjects within blocks and therefore would have not been as cross-curricular as the new curriculum will be. This means that as part of the teaching profession, critical reflection will need to be used in order to assess, understand and weigh up what works for each child and how the teacher can make this a positive change.

There are many different definitions of what critical reflection and critical thinking mean. The researcher has found that some authors have the same views, however, some have very different views, some also believe that there is no end to what these concepts involve. One aspect in which was found states that critical thinking does not only involve analytic work, but it also involves reflection, including self-reflection (Katz, 2018). This is important as it ensures that the practitioner is reflecting on themselves in order to help with their experience and build on their knowledge and understanding. Being in a teaching profession, this is an aspect in which may happen naturally, as the teacher would have to assess their lessons, looking at what went well and what could have been improved, and also how them themselves could make a difference next time.

According to Cottrell (2017), there are many benefits to critical reflection, some of which include having time to build on self-development, to ensure effective learning for the pupils and to support own professional practice (Cottrell, 2017). This links in well with Katz's (2018) and Smith's (2011) idea as they both include the aspect of reflecting and building on own self development and to ensure effective learning for the pupils. According to the Department of Education (2011), teachers are professionals who keep their knowledge and skills up to date and who are able to critically reflect on themselves. This shows that being critically reflective in the teaching profession is an important aspect to include and to use every day. Brookfield, 1987 and Mezirow, 1994 also agree with this, stating that own professional development can be built upon through critical reflection (Brookfield, 1987 & Mezirow, 1994 cited in Smith, 2011). This is essential when being in the teaching profession, as building on own self development and professional practice ensures that the teacher is equipped with the skills and knowledge in order to support the children's learning and development.

Observation – School and class context

As part of this assignment, observations were carried out over a two day period at a primary school under the Powys local authority. It is a small primary school, which opened back in 2012, and has a total of 228 pupils, which consists of ten classes, and three special teaching rooms for children who have Additional Learning Needs (ALN) (Estyn, 2016). When the report of the school was published by Estyn in 2016, 35% of the pupils who attended the school were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), this is above the average number in Wales of 20% of pupils receiving FSM (Estyn, 2016). According to Estyn (2016), the school has approximately 37% of pupils with ALN; this is above the Wales average of 25%. As part of this study, it is important to note and recognise the importance of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy of the participants (BERA, 2018). The researcher will ensure that participants are treated with respect and to be treated fairly within the study. It will also be ensured that the name of any participants or the school involved in the study is kept confidential and anonymous throughout (BERA, 2018). This is to ensure that their privacy is respected at all times. The researcher is also aware of data protection during the study. All information and data collected will be kept secure and confidential and will not lead to a breach of information, and only share the information with the school if asked to see any data collected (BERA, 2018).

Critical Incident linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes

From observing in two classrooms within the school, the chosen critical incident occurred within the year 5-6 class. This incident happened within the classroom setting, in the afternoon session, after the pupil's lunch break. During this time the children engaged in a reading session, where each child had their own book and were to read quietly. However, child B was not engaging with this session and was being very disruptive to other pupils within the classroom. The child was told repeatedly to read quietly or sit in silence in order to show respect to the other children, however, the child carried on to be disruptive. Looking at the four purposes, there is a link here to the ethical, informed citizens section, as it states that children should understand the impact their actions have on others when making their choices and also to respect others needs and rights within society (Donaldson, 2015). In this incident, the child is not showing their peers respect as they are distracting them from their reading and is not thinking of how his actions may have an impact on their peers.

The teacher decided to give out stickers to those who were engaged and reading quietly. The children would then put these stickers on the 'Sparkling Students' reward display which was placed behind the door in the classroom. This aspect can be linked to the ambitious,

capable learners section of the four purposes, it states that children should set high standards for themselves and to seek opportunities to challenges and to enjoy. By the children engaging with the reading session, they were rewarded, therefore it may have a positive impact on their standards to always do their best and to reach their potential (Donaldson, 2015). The teacher had decided that child B was not going to receive a sticker due to his disruptive behaviour. Although the child saw others receiving this positive reward, this did not seem to bother the child as they carried on with their disruptive behaviour in the session. The teacher tried to ignore his behaviour in order to not give him the attention he was looking for. What the other pupils within the classroom shows during this session was that they were able to give off their energy to that their peers will benefit (Donaldson, 2015), as when the children were reading quietly, despite being distracted, others then saw that rewards were being given out so then they saw that they would also receive this award if they were to do the same and reading their book quietly. This has a positive impact on others within the classroom and shows that peer support is beneficial within the classroom setting. However, this approach did not work for child B and was very disengaged throughout the whole session. This critical incident was chosen as the researcher found it interesting that the positive reward did not seem to make the child think of his behaviour and that he did not want to receive this positive reward, and why this may be.

Literature Review

In this section of the essay, there will be a critical reflection on the research found surrounding the chosen critical incident. From carrying out research, the researcher found that there are many sources which focus on these topics in the school context. Some of which agree with the use of rewards within the classroom and that it can have a positive impact on the pupils, and others who found that the over use of rewards or sanctions can have a negative impact on the pupils. The researcher will look at these views critically, linking to the critical incident.

Rewards are used within the school setting, from the early years in the foundation phase up to secondary school, but have different strategies and ways of displaying these rewards for each year group. Rewards are seen as a form of positive reinforcement, as children are praised for their good work or behaviour within the classroom setting (Sumiati, Septiani, Widodo & Caturiasari, 2019). It is also believed that positive reinforcement can be used to help build children's enthusiasm to learn and develop (Sumiati et al, 2019). A theorist named Skinner believed that positive reinforcement was a more beneficial way to help with behaviour than using negative reinforcement, as he thought it would result in the desired

behaviour from the pupils (Aubrey & Riley, 2019). Some children enjoy having rewards for their behaviour as they see it as though they are doing well and that they are succeeding in their learning. However, this approach may not be suitable for every child. According to Payne (2015), the use of rewards and sanctions within the classroom may sometimes not be consistent. This may result in the children expecting a reward but not receiving one which may make them think why did they not receive it if one of their peers had had a reward for a similar reason, or as for sanctions, a child may repeatedly be disruptive but may not always receive a sanction for their behaviour which may make them believe that it is ok to show this behaviour within the classroom setting. It is important that rewards and sanctions are used appropriately and consistently in order for the children to know what behaviour is expected of them and how they are able to receive rewards. Ellis and Tod (2015), agree with the fact that rewards and sanctions should be used consistently and sparingly. Payne (2015) and Ellis and Tod (2015) both agree that rewards are usually used for good work and that sanctions are usually used for misbehaviour within the classroom. This means that they believe that children should be given rewards for their good work as well as their good behaviour, and the same with sanctions, that they should be used for poor work and misbehaviour. This supports the idea of rewards and sanctions being consistent as the children will understand what is expected of them in order to receive the rewards, and also what would happen if they were not following the classroom rules.

Another aspect in which Payne (2015) believes is that sanctions may not always have the expected effect on a child. For example, if a child receives a sanction for their misbehaviour, it may lead to the child being quiet and disengaging with their learning and not have the motivation to complete their work (Payne, 2015). By receiving a sanction for their misbehaviour, it may result in the child's confidence being knocked down and that they have no motivation to learn. However, it may also have the opposite effect, where the child may continue to misbehave and disrupt the classroom and that they do not feel as though they are having an effect on their peers, which can be linked back to the four purposes of the curriculum which was discussed in a previous section, where children should be able to understand the impact of their actions (Donaldson, 2015). This links back to the point of using sanctions consistently and fairly in order to manage the class behaviour. It is also suggested that the use of stickers or stamps for children are an effective way to show positive reinforcement, however, Payne (2015) believes that these methods have been shown that they do not have the effect to encourage children to work harder. This could result in the child becoming very disengaged and disruptive within the classroom.

A point in which Kennedy and Jolivet, (2008) state is that some teachers may send the child, who is being disruptive, out of the classroom to have time to themselves and think about their behaviour and the actions they chose, and that this approach is carried out by over 70% of teachers (Kennedy & Jolivet, 2008). Although this source is from 2008, it is interesting to see how many teachers used this approach, and what effects it had on the children who may have been consistently disruptive in their school years. It is believed that this resulted in the children not being provided with the education they needed in order for them to succeed within the outside of the school environment (Kennedy & Jolivet, 2008). This may have had a very negative impact on the children as they were not provided with the same education as their peers due to their misbehaviour. Ellis and Tod (2015) state that it is not the child that is the problem, but it is the behaviour they show. They believe that teachers should believe in the children in that they are able to change their behaviour (Ellis & Tod, 2015). This shows that it is important to build positive relationships with the children in order to gain their trust and for them to feel comfortable and safe within the school environment, this may then have a positive impact on their learning and development (Payne, 2015).

A point in which the researcher came across often during the research was that “motivation is something that can provide a stimulus and enthusiasm for an individual while they do the learning process” (Sumiati et al, 2019). Two sources were found to agree with this, believing that if a child has no motivation to learn then they are unable to follow the learning pattern as other children may do (Sumiati et al, 2019). The other source states that it is the teachers who should provide motivation for the children by building positive relationships with them and by being a good teacher (Payne, 2015). It is important for children to have the motivation to learn and develop their knowledge and skills, however, Sumiati et al (2019) suggests that if children do not have any motivation at all then the child will not succeed in their learning, which may not be the case for some children (Sumiati et al, 2019). For example, some children may lack some motivation in subject areas in which they do not enjoy, but may have a high level of motivation for subject areas in which they enjoy and feel passionate about which would result in them succeeding in their learning but in different areas to another child in their class. As Pinto (2015, p.9) suggests that “no one approach will work for all students”, which suggests that all children are different and that every child will need a different level of support and motivation in order for them to reach their potential. Linking back to positive reinforcement for children, behaviour policies in which have been published by the Labour Government state that rewards are more beneficial and effective in helping to motivate children, than using punishment or negative reinforcement (Ellis & Tod, 2015). This suggests and agrees with Payne (2015) where the motivation should be

provided by the class teacher in order to provide positive reinforcement resulting in the children developing their learning, understanding and knowledge.

A final aspect in which the researcher found to be an effective link to the critical incident was a strategy called tactical ignoring. This strategy was founded by Rogers (2012), who described this approach as a way of managing behaviour without having confrontation from the pupils, and a way of not directly addressing the incident (Ellis & Tod, 2015). This kind of approach is usually used if a child is off task but the teacher feels confident that this approach will help them to get back to focus on the task, and it is also important in this approach that it is used alongside providing the child praise after the incident. For example, to link this to the chosen critical incident where the child was being disruptive, the teacher had decided to ignore the child's behaviour and provide rewards to the other children who were reading quietly. However, due to the child still not engaging with the reading session, this approach of tactical ignoring may not have been the most effective way to manage their behaviour as the teacher was unable to provide any praise to the child as he did not change his behaviour. However, if this approach was to work with this child, Rogers (2012, p.19) suggests that "tactical ignoring is a significant feature of the teacher's overall 'discipline'" and that it will help both the teacher and the child to be "relaxedly vigilant and positive" (Rogers, 2012, p.19). Although this seems like a very positive approach, as with any other approaches, not all will work with every child, as stated previously that "no one approach will work for all students" (Pinto, 2015, p.9), meaning that every child is different and all have different backgrounds and that every child will display different behaviour due to their surroundings and upbringing, which links in with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, where everything around the child, including family, school and their environment around them has an impact on them, whether it will be positive or negative (Aubrey & Riley, 2019).

Reflection / Evaluation & Next Steps

In order to help me to reflect on my critical incident, I have decided to use Gibbs' Reflective Cycle as I believe that it will help me to cover all aspects in order to reflect appropriately. This model will allow me to learn from my experience by looking at what went well and what could have been improved or changed. I believe that by using a model to reflect, it allows me to look and think about the different aspects and it will help me to look back at in the future in order to develop my experience, knowledge and understanding in my professional practice. Gibbs' reflective cycle has six steps, I will be using these steps as my sub headings in order to set out my reflection structure.

Description:

The first step is description, in this section I will be providing a brief description of my observation linking with what I have found within my literature review. As discussed previously, I carried out two days observation in a primary school, where I observed three main critical incidents which I have put in the appendices section of my essay, and then chose the one which I wanted to look into in more detail, and the one I was most interested in.

Feelings:

In this section I will be talking about my feelings throughout the process of the observation and completing my essay. Before starting my observations for this essay, I felt nervous going in to the school but very excited to get to know the staff and the children that I would be working with. It gave me the opportunity to get to know the school and to familiarise myself ready for the placement. I also found it beneficial that for the observations I was placed within the classrooms in which I would be teaching in for my first placement, it gave me the opportunity to see the structure of the day and how the teachers carried out their lessons.

Evaluation:

In the evaluation step I will be looking at what I felt went well, what I felt that did not go well, and what I felt could be improved during my experience. I felt that the observations had gone very well and that I gained a depth of information for my essay and prepared me for the placement. I felt that the time I had to carry out the observations, literature review and to write the essay were very limited as we had many other activities which needed to be completed around the same time. This is something I would also improve, if I was to carry out this task again, is to manage my time more effectively and possibly complete the essay before starting the first week of placement.

Analysis:

For this step, I will be looking deeper in to why things went well or did not go well, focusing on the reason why. As stated in the evaluation section of this cycle, some things I would change for next time would be time management, ensuring that my research is completed and analysed in advance, before starting to write my essay to ensure that I have all the information needed to complete my assignment to a high standard. I believe that the observations had gone well as I was made to feel comfortable within the school and was able to interact with the children and get to know them a little before starting my placement. As part of the essay, I found that there were many sources regarding the topics which was

relevant to my literature review, and I found it hard to be able to include all the information I gathered in to a short essay. Next time I would ensure that I give myself plenty of time in advance to complete the research and be able to analyse the information better so that I would be able to include all relevant aspects.

Conclusion:

In the conclusion section, I will be summarising my learning. I have learnt during this process that there are always reasons behind children's behaviour and that not one approach will benefit every child as each individual child is different and they have different needs. It has provided me with the knowledge and understanding of children's behaviour and also information on positive and negative reinforcements within the classroom setting. It is important to build positive relationships with the children in order for them to trust you and to feel comfortable within their school. It has taught me that sometimes some incidents can be challenging and that it may take time to resolve and take time to find the approach which best helps that child.

Action Plan:

The action plan is the final stage of Gibbs' reflective cycle. In this step I will be looking at what I could do differently next time, how would I build on my skills for the future and how I will ensure that these will happen. One aspect in which I would look at doing differently next time is within the year 5/6 classroom, due to them sitting at tables facing the front of the class, it was difficult to try and go around the classroom to interact with them, especially due to the COVID 19 pandemic. If I was to do this again, I would try to work my way through the classroom throughout the day in order to interact more with the pupils. As stated I would start my research earlier than I did this time around, and try to possibly look into more detail on a few aspects rather than trying to focus on more aspects in general.

Conclusion

In drawing to a close, it has been found that behaviour within the classroom is an aspect which can have a positive or negative effect on the pupils. From looking at the critical incident, it shows that the approach which was taken by the teacher did not seem to work for them. The approach of tactical ignoring by Rogers (2012), was used in this example of a critical incident, and as suggested it may not be the approach that works for every child. The child did not seem to care that they were not receiving a reward, this may be due to the fact that the reward board where the children put their star stickers on, was situated behind the classroom door. This may be why the child was not engaged, as he could not visually see

the board throughout the day. If the reward chart was within the classroom on a wall where the children could see it throughout the day then it may have made him realise that he would not be getting that reward like his peers were receiving. This has provided the opportunity to reflect on the incident and the literature which was found and analysed. It has helped the researcher to build on their professional learning as a student teacher, as it has developed their understanding and knowledge and also their skills of being a reflective practitioner, which will be continuously developed through the profession as a teacher and help professional growth (Welsh Government, 2018). Collaboration and leadership standards can also be linked in here as it has allowed the researcher to be able to collaborate with the staff at the school, as well as the children to attend the school, also it has provided the opportunity for the researcher to see other teachers using their leadership skills within the classroom, which will help support the researcher when starting the placement (Welsh Government, 2018).

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Appendices

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 22.09.2021 9:30am Year 5/6
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context Classroom Morning Session
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) Child A had finished the task quickly and was then rewarded by being given the choice to play educational maths games on the computer. The teacher had read over the work provided by child A and was happy for them to go on the computer. The task was one that had been started at the end of the previous day and was to be carried on into the next morning's session.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? • Was the child fully engaged with the task? • Did they finish the task quickly so that they could go on the computer? • Could they have completed the task to a higher standard if they had spent more time to complete the task? • Was the task challenging enough for the child? • Pavlov (positive/negative reinforcement)
Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here) Children just arrived at school Some noise distractions within the classroom Children sitting next to their friends Teaching discussing the task with individuals

Record 2

Date and time, year group: 22.09.2021 1:20pm Year 5/6
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context Classroom Afternoon Session
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) Child B was not engaging with the reading session after lunch and was being disruptive within the classroom setting where other children were reading quietly. The teacher decided to give out stickers for the children who were engaged with the session and to put them on the 'Sparkling Students' reward display behind the door in the classroom. The teacher had decided that child B was not to receive a sticker due to his behaviour in the session. This did not seem to bother child B as they carried on with their disruptive behaviour.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? • Why was the child disengaged? • Did the child not enjoy reading? • Teacher pointed out that the behaviour was good in the mornings but got worse in the afternoon • No Teaching Assistant due to COVID • Supply teacher in class instead of usual class teacher • Underlying issues (noted that there were some issues at Child B's home environment) = may be adding to the reason they were disruptive? • Why did the child not seem bothered about not receiving a sticker as a reward?
Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here) Session just after lunch break Child B distracting other pupils as they were not engaged with their reading Some children reading quietly and engaging well with the session Loud environment when children arrive back into the classroom

Record 3

Date and time, year group: 23.01.21 11:00am Reception
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context Outside / Playground Morning session before lunch
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) Girl A had hurt her knee while playing outside and was very upset. The teaching assistant in the class comforted her until she felt better. Girl A then sat on the carpet with her friend who helped make the child feel better. She then walked with her friend to the dinner hall ready for lunch.
Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be" under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? • Bronfenbrenners egological theory • Why did the child get very upset (she did not cut her knee) • Did the child have a good support network at home • Nature / Nurture • Does the child enjoy being comforted by the teaching assistant or class teacher • Do they get attention at home • Is the child quiet and shy • Being comforted may help benefit her wellbeing
Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here) Busy session outdoors Children enjoying playing with different equipment, e.g. bikes, sand outside Others enjoying being inside playing in the role play house or seeing the class bunny.