

*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.*

Over the course of this module, I had the opportunity to visit a local primary school and observe some of their lessons. During my visit, I had the opportunity to visit many different year group classes, in which my role was to observe and analyse critical incidents. But what is a critical incident? According to David Tripp, the founder of the critical incident's theory, 'Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event' (Tripp, 2011: 8). During my time in the school, I critically analysed some key incidents that happened during lesson time and additionally, during break time. In this essay, my case study will be focusing on one critical incident regarding a pupil with undiagnosed additional learning needs. During this essay, I will thoroughly explore the incident in relation to additional learning needs and inclusivity within the classroom.

During this assignment, I will ensure to adhere to the University's BERA ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2018: np). To protect the confidentiality of the school and the pupil, I will not name the school and will refer to the pupil as 'Pupil 1' to protect their anonymity.

### **The role of the critical reflection:**

Firstly, I would like to discuss the role of critical reflection within teaching practice. When a teacher educates their class, they should constantly be reflecting on their practice. Reflecting on their practice additionally means to reflect on their student's response to their work and adapt their work accordingly. According to Paula Zwozdiak-Myers, analysis requires 'professional judgement both to reflect and act upon these analyses and evaluations to improve pupil learning and the quality of your teaching' (Myers-Zwozdiak, 2012: 3). It is one thing to reflect but one must also act upon that reflection to adapt and improve the quality of education that the pupils receive.

Within critical reflection, there are many theories to support reflection technique. One of the theories that explores reflective practice is Dewey's five phases of reflective thought. Thomas Farrell summarises Dewey's five phases by stating:

Teachers look at their experiences, review and examine these in light of what evidence they can collect from their practice, and then plan what action they want to take as a result.

(Ferrell, 2012: 10).

This expresses how observation and reflection of your work, leads to adaptation of your practice with the intention of improvement. Within critical reflection, there are many more theorists including Schön's reflection in action and reflection on action, Kolb's experimental learning theory and finally, Myer's nine dimensions of reflective practice (Myers-Zwozdiak, 2012: 5). During my essay, I will refer to some of these reflective theories to explore how critical reflection supported me in investigating my critical incident.

Without critical reflection, there would be no such thing as a critical incident. Within a classroom or school, many incidents will take place throughout the day. What makes these incidents a critical incident, is if you decide to critically reflect on it. According to Tripp, 'these incidents appear to be 'typical' rather than 'critical' at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis' (Tripp, 2012: 25). This is where the role of critical reflection takes place as it is down to the educator's interpretation to decide whether an incident should be critically analysed. This portrays how anything can be a critical incident if it is critically analysed.

### **Observation and my Critical incident:**

The observation element of my research took place in many different classrooms in a Primary school context. For this essay, I am going to focus on the classroom where my chosen critical incident took place. The classroom was a Year 5, key stage two class. I observed this class for an hour. During this lesson, the class were revising the different characters from a story they had been reading. The story was *Branwen*, a Welsh mabanogi story. The task within this lesson was to use adjectives to describe the characters in the story.

When the teacher described the task, I noticed Pupil 1 sat on a desk on their own, near the front of the class. I noticed the pupil was not paying attention to the instructions and was playing on their iPad. After the teacher had finished explaining, the teacher approached Pupil 1 and asked them to participate in the task. I saw the pupil desperately shake their head. The pupil was adamant that they did not want to take part. I then noticed that the pupil was making a poster on their iPad. I noticed that the poster was about cats. When the teacher had a quiet moment, I asked what the pupil was doing on the iPad. The teacher stated that the

pupil has not got an interested in the *Branwen* story. The teacher continued to explain how the pupil is obsessed with cats so decided to adapt the task for Pupil 1 give a similar task but integrated cats into it. The pupil's task was to use adjectives to describe cats, rather than using adjectives to describe characters from story *Branwen*. The pupil used an iPad to complete this task and created a creative poster, while the other pupils had pen and paper. This was interesting to see because this fell into one of Donaldson's four purposes by using digital technologies creatively to communicate, find and analyse information, under the ambitions and capable learner's purpose. To contradict this, the pupil did not set themselves high standards or seek and enjoy challenge which is also under the ambitions and capable learners' purpose, because the pupil was only willing to stay within their own comfort zone and would only do tasks associated with her obsession with cats (Curriculum of Wales, 2022: np). It was clear that the teacher could either argue with the child and therefore the child would not complete anything at all, or the teacher could let the child do what they wanted to, but with some sort of skill being developed. Therefore, the teacher created an inclusive classroom where every pupil could develop their language skills in some form. This links to the healthy and confident individuals' purpose who face and overcome challenges. The teacher and the pupil overcame a challenge by simply adapting a task so that it was more suitable for the pupil (Curriculum of Wales, 2022: np).

When Pupil 1 finished their poster about cats on their iPad, I noticed that they started playing *Minecraft* instead. While the teacher was talking to the class, the pupil was wandering around the room, distracting other pupils by showing them their *Minecraft* buildings, and not paying attention. However, whenever the teacher asked the class a question regarding the story, this pupil was eager to shout out the answer. The teacher said, 'Yes, I know you know the answer, you just don't want to do the work' (Classroom teacher, 2022: np). The pupil then proceeded to explain that they find the *Branwen* story scary. This moment helped me to conclude that it wasn't the fact that the pupil didn't understand the work, it was the fact that they simply had no interest in the story. This made me wonder whether the task could have been adapted in a way to make the *Branwen* story more inclusive and interesting for the pupil, rather than disregarding the story all together. This is something that I will explore further in my literature review below.

Finally, at the end of the lesson, the pupil approached me for a chat. The pupil showed me two books that they had handmade and written. The books were about cats, and they were

called *The Moon Kitten* and *The Moon Kitten 2 and my new friend*. From this, the pupil's obsession with cats became more evident. In addition to this, it was clear that the pupil is extremely creative and has a great imagination. This links to the enterprising and creative contributors' purpose which explores how children can connect and apply their knowledge and skills to create ideas and products (Curriculum of Wales, 2022: np). The pupil engaged in this purpose by applying their knowledge about cats into two story books that the pupil had written themselves. As much as Pupil 1's creativity linked to this purpose, it did not for fill the requirement of the lesson as she refused to engage in the story of the term.

At the end of the lesson, due to the pupils' obsession with cats and behaviour in refusing to participate in the task regarding *Branwen*, I asked the teacher whether the pupil had any additional learning needs. The teacher explained that the pupil is undiagnosed but it's clear that additional needs are apparent. From this, in my literature review, I would like to explore inclusivity within the classroom, with reference to additional learning needs.

### **Literature review:**

Focusing on inclusivity within education, every child has the right to receive a valuable education. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) states that 'Children and young people aged 18 and under, have the right to be safe, to play, to have an education, to be healthy and be happy' (UNCRC, 2022: np). To ensure that every child has access to these rights, it is essential that an inclusive environment is created within schools. As part of my research, I have identified several texts regarding inclusivity within education. Many of these texts refer to additional learning needs within the classroom and explores how inclusivity can help develop their learning and involvement within lessons and beyond.

From researching this topic, a key piece of literature that I have found is *Teaching and supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities in primary schools*, by Jonathan Glazzard and Annette Netherwood *et al*. This book explores a variety of perspectives on inclusive education, some of which include the sociological perspective, philosophical perspective, and the political perspective. The book also investigates the medical model and the social model of disability. Firstly, I would like to discuss the sociological perspective in relation to additional learning needs, which explores how inclusion 'moves away from notions of 'learning difficulties', to notions of 'rights'' (Glazzard and Netherwood *et al*, 2019: 33). This definition inspires me to reflect on Pupil 1's access to education within the lesson I observed.

The pupil's lack of interest in the class topic and the pupil's obsession with cats, meant that the pupil did not get to develop their skills to a challenging level. The pupil stayed within their comfort zone to an extent I felt educational development may have been minimal. This leads to the philosophical perspective which questions: Are there limits to inclusion? (Glazzard and Netherwood *et al*, 2019 35). In the lesson I observed, Pupil 1 was included in the lesson to some degree as they developed similar language skills by using adjectives to describe cats, rather than of characters from the story. However, if the pupil continuously refuses to engage in the topic and will only engage with topics regarding cats, does this put a limit to their inclusion? It is important to note that I only observed an hour within this class, so I am not aware of what strategies the teacher had previously implemented. It would have been interesting to see what alternative strategies may have helped encourage an interest in the story to help challenge the pupil more academically. Would Pupil 1 have shown an interest in the topic if the task perhaps included pictures or if the task was on the iPad rather than paper for example. It would be useful to see whether these techniques would help engage Pupil 1 further, therefore leading to a more inclusive approach. However, if the pupil proceeds to refuse to engage in the story, perhaps the approach the teacher used was the most inclusive way to ensure Pupil 1 was developing some sort of skill, like their peers.

This book also explores the social model of disability. The book states that 'disability is a loss or limitation of opportunities to participate on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers' (Glazzard and Netherwood *et al*, 2019: 38). Although undiagnosed, Pupil 1 was limited in their participation with their peers due to their social barriers. The pupil was sat on their own, wanted to be on their iPad, would only participate in work if it was related to cats, wandered around the room, and played *Minecraft*. These social barriers meant that although Pupil 1 participated in developing a similar skill to everyone else to a certain extent, the pupil did not get to participate on an equal level. Despite this, According to Brahm Norwich in their book *Addressing tensions and dilemmas in inclusive education: living with uncertainty*:

Inclusive teaching or pedagogy is taken to be about recognising, accommodating, and meeting the needs of all pupils/ learners, where the emphasis is on all. This recognition can be about individuality, that is, meeting individual needs

(Norwich, 2013: 74).

Despite the pupil not engaging at the same level as their peers, the pupil's individual needs were met, and Pupil 1 was involved in a way that suited their needs. This adaptation was an approach to ensure inclusivity for the pupil.

From my research, many scholars have different interpretations of what makes successful inclusive practice. An interesting strategy that I have discovered is explored by David Mitchell, a writer in inclusive education. He says that inclusive education must contain the following formula:

Inclusive Education = V + P + 5As + S + R + L

Vision, placement, adapted curriculum, adapted assessment, adapted teaching, acceptance, access, support, resources, leadership.

(Mitchell, 2014: 302).

From this, I can see that there are a variety of aspects that ensure inclusive education. In this essay, I would like to explore the 5As where many of which, focus on adaptation. Within my observation, the teacher adapted the task for Pupil 1 so that the pupil could practice developing the same skill as their peers. This adaptation ensured that the pupil could be included in a way that was suitable to their needs. One of the As' that this book explores is 'adapted curriculum'. It states that the curriculum should be 'flexible, relevant, and adjustable to the diverse characteristics and needs of learners' (Mitchell, 2014: 303). Fortunately, in Wales, the Welsh curriculum has a diverse range of progression steps in our range of areas of learning and experience. These progression steps range from one to five progression steps in multiple areas of learning. Although the progression steps are estimated for certain age groups, many pupils will be working on progression steps higher or lower than estimated (Curriculum for Wales, 2022: np). This allows inclusive education as there are different levels of learning for everyone. This was evident during my observation as Pupil 1 developed a similar skill to others but on a level that was suitable for them.

As previously stated, Pupil 1 did not have a diagnosis for an additional learning need but did need additional support. According to Glazzard and Netherwood, the medical model uses 'processes such as the examination to diagnose specific impairments... and is then prescribed a 'cure'' (Glazzard and Netherwood *et al*, 2019: 37). The medical model implies that a 'cure' is needed which further suggests that the person needs 'fixing'. Inclusivity should play a role within education and beyond, whether a diagnosis is in place or not. This is difficult within a school setting as without a diagnosis, the pupil may not receive the full support that they may

need. This is where the teacher's role comes into play to ensure inclusivity within their lessons. No person should need 'fixing' to fit into society or to receive an inclusive education.

This next piece of literature that I am going to address portrays how inclusive education benefits people with and without disabilities. Dorries and Haller state:

Inclusive education benefits disabled children in the short run with better learning and, in the long run, with more employment and post-secondary educational opportunities. The benefit of inclusive education for non-disabled children is the ability to understand and cope with a more diverse society and people who are different from themselves

(Dorries and Haller, 2010: 173).

This links well to the social model of disability which explores how it is not the person who is disabled, it's society that is disabling. Therefore, inclusive education within mainstream schools will lead to a more inclusive society due to increased understanding and empathy towards disability.

To conclude on my literature review regarding inclusive education with reference to additional learning needs, it is a very broad and complex topic due to the range of different definitions and perspectives. From my research, I have gathered that the main principle of inclusive education is the skill to adapt lessons to help ensure the capability to participate from every individual within the classroom, no matter what their ability.

### **Reflection/ Evaluation and next steps:**

In this section of my essay, I am going to reflection on the critical incident I observed and discuss potential next steps, with reference to some of the reflective models I have previously mentioned. According to Tripp, a critical incident begins with an observation, which someone then decides to critically analyse, which creates a critical incident. From the critical incident, you must then plan a response, implement your response, analyse the effects of your response, and then observe the incident all over again. This cycle continually repeats itself as a critical incident will never be fully resolved (Tripp, 2012: 32-33). This technique requires thorough reflection and the ability to respond to the incident from your reflection.

One of the pieces of literature that I have explored is by Barbara Bassot, a senior lecturer in education. Bassot studies Schön's theory, 'knowing-in-action'. This is, as described by Schön, 'thinking on your feet' (Schön IN Bassot, 2016: 9). This is an action taken in the spur of the

moment, based off the incident taking place. In the moment that Pupil 1 decided not to participate in the story, the teachers 'knowing-in-action' was to adapt the task for Pupil 1 so that they still developed a language skill but based off a topic that interested them instead. As stated above, I am not aware of what strategies the teacher had previously implemented but if I was to experience this situation for the first time, I may have experimented with strategies relating to the story *Branwen*, before disregarding the story all together. On the other hand, the teacher knew Pupil 1 well enough to know that this may not have worked so the steps taken here may have been the most appropriate.

Focusing on my critical incident, one of the next steps that I would implement would be to continuously try out new strategies to maximise the learning potential of all students. This is phase six and phase seven of Myer's nine dimensions of reflective practice (Myers-Zwozdiak IN Brunel University, 2017-18: np). One of the strategies that I would implement into my next steps if I could develop this critical incident, would be to use images of the characters from *Branwen* to make the task more visual for Pupil 1. I would do this by either providing pictures of the characters to write adjectives around them or ask the pupil to draw their own interpretation of the characters. Due to the pupil's creativity, I saw from the books they had written and the poster the pupil had created, I feel a more visual and creative approach may motivate the pupil to have more interest in the story. Due to Tripp's recommendation of continuously trying new strategies, if this approach did not work, I would try a similar approach but let the pupil try it on the iPad. The pupil had a high interest in completing their work on the iPad so this may help the pupil have a greater interest in completing the task. According to Myers, 'teachers themselves must become 'flexible learners' and give serious consideration to the teaching strategies they use to differentiate the curriculum and make it accessible to all learners' (Myers-Zwozdiak, 2012: 110). I feel that the strategies that I have suggested above may be a successful technique in engaging Pupil 1 into the story due to its visual and creative approach. Additionally, due to the pupil being sat on their own, it would have been interesting to see to what extent group work and peer learning may have motivated the pupil to participate. If the pupil had the opportunity to work with others, it would have been interesting to see if they'd have participated. These are strategies that I would like to implement if I had the opportunity to study this critical incident further.

**Conclusion:**

To conclude on my research, I have explored the role of reflective practice within education. Additionally, I have studied inclusive practice within education with reference to additional learning needs. From my research and knowledge, inclusive practice is vital within education for every pupil to receive their right to education. Without inclusive practice, individuals would be excluded from their right to education and would not be on an equal level to everyone else.

Referring to my next steps and strategies, it is important to link this to the professional standards of teaching and leadership. I feel that my next steps and strategies link well to some of these standards. The first standard it links to is the 'four purposes for learners' where the 'student teacher demonstrates extensive knowledge and understanding of the needs of all learners in planning, preparation and teaching...' (UWTSD QTS, 2022: np). My next steps ensure knowledge and understanding of Pupil 1's needs and I would ensure to implement these needs into my planning, preparation, and teaching.

In addition, I would ensure to do a lot of research regarding Pupil 1's needs. This research would include reading a wide range of literature, seeking advice, observing real life circumstances, and putting my research into practice. This is one of the professional standards where the teacher 'demonstrates secure, confident understanding of theories and research about assessment, pedagogy, human development learning relevant to planning and day-to-day practice' (UWTSD QTS, 2022: np). I would ensure that I was aware of all the possible strategies to help be as inclusive as possible within the classroom and beyond.

Finally, I will ensure to always remain reflective. You can never be too reflective as there is always room for improvement. According to the Welsh Governments *Pedagogy for professional learning*, you must be reflective of your practice and use opportunities to 'reflect critically and candidly on current practice and being open to others' reflections on how practice can be improved or developed' (Welsh Government, 2022: np). It is important to always reflect on your own practice, as well as others to help improve your work. Additionally, you must be open to others' reflections of your work to gain others' perspectives on your teaching to improve.

Overall, inclusive education is a main topic of discussion within the current education system and from my research, inclusive practice is vital for every child's development, whether the child has or hasn't got an additional need themselves. Inclusivity is vitally important within

the education system because this knowledge is transferrable to wider contexts and the outside world.

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