

Shannon Cox

Student number: 1703980

Module: ECAD6007-C: Who am I teaching?

A critical evaluation and the learning steps focusing on a
case study of an individual learner or a group of
learners, based on an observed critical incident.

Introduction

This assignment will involve critically analysing the teaching and learning steps within the classroom, based on an observed critical incident (CI), using Tripp's (1993) critical incident methodology. Two observations were conducted, one through an immersive video and another in a classroom setting, both observations had their positives and negatives, however, when weighing which observation would hold more merit for the researcher, it was decided that the second observation from the reception/year 1 class was the most beneficial to the teaching methodology. Both observations can be found in the appendices.

The CI methodology comes from the history that causes a person to evaluate a significant event, to successfully initiate a CI, one needs to try and verify a hypothesis while also identifying something new. This does not mean that there are numerous CIs waiting to be observed. A CI is simply an event that one looks at critically and facilitates the ability to critically analyse a particular event (Tripp, 1993; Tripp, 2012 p. 8). Tripp (1993) claims that an event leading up to a successful CI happens rarely in a teacher's career, however, Mohammed (2016) claims it is a situation where one stops and thinks about what is happening, why it is happening and how it can be encouraged or discouraged. The method is for one's own self-criticism. It is an advantageous self-reflection tool in that it provides a thorough examination of one's own practice. It is not always a dramatic event, for example, a child throwing a chair across the room (Mohammed, 2016). Furthermore, the critical incident methodology was originally developed to understand specific professions, however, it was adapted to pinpoint areas of success or failure of an event and/or practice to fit the specific needs of the individual (Philpot et al, 2021; Butterfield et al, 2005).

The aims of this assignment are to start the initial stages of self-reflection practice and looking into how specific events can influence the classroom experience. Research the different learning theories and how they could be implemented in practice. And to find different teaching and learning strategies and how they can be put into practice within the researcher's own classroom.

To accomplish the aims of this assignment, the CI methodology was implemented within a reception/year 1 class over the course of the day. This essay will follow the guidelines of the Equality Act 2018, personalised data, such as race, gender, location

will be anonymised (Gov.uk, 2018). Due to confidentiality, the school will not be named, gender of the child will be anonymised, and anything that could cross confidentiality guidelines, will be anonymised. The school where the CI took place is an English medium primary school, with 162 pupils enrolled in the school, the Estyn investigation came out with no children with English as an additional language (EAL) (Estyn, 2023).

For context, the CI took place in a reception/year 1 class, where Child A was seen screaming, throwing items from the different enhanced areas, and walking in and out of the classroom. When other children tried to follow Child A's lead, they were immediately told to return to the carpet.

Case study

This case study involves a child within a reception and year 1 class; the child in question will be referred to as Child A. The critical incident unfolded throughout a school day in an English medium primary school with a total of 162 pupils on roll. There is no record on the percentage of children with English as an additional language (EAL) (Estyn, 2023): this information is relevant due to the CI involving a child with EAL.

Child A is a refugee who has some trauma related behavioural issues.

Child A come to Wales within the last two years, they speak very minimal English and Welsh, for example, they can answer simple questions with yes, no, yma, cinio, and make some simple requests such as "Teacher, help me?" indicating that they require support. Throughout the day, several events occurred which developed into the CI.

The first event occurred at the start of the day. The usual procedure is that the children start their morning on the school yard before being called in for registration at 9:15am. However, Child A did not arrive until the class had already entered the classroom for registration. Child A would not sit on the carpet with the other children, but lay on the floor, playing with the Lego, which was actively accepted by both the classroom teacher and the teaching assistant (TA) in the classroom. Child A refused to answer when their name was called on the register, only answering when the register had finished being called: no comment or reprimand was made by the teacher.

Children with EAL require a positive role model to learn the language, this is done through modelling the correct language that the children can then practice (The Bell Foundation, 2023a). Throughout the observation a positive role model was not seen for Child A, this does not mean that Child A lacks role models within the school, during that specific day, Child A was often ignored. Children with EAL, require additional support

within the educational setting, as a teacher, it is vital to ensure that the language is modelled correctly. They need instructions to be given slowly and actions need to be demonstrated, furthermore, it is important to find a baseline of what the children know and then build upon their knowledge (Gov.uk, n.d).

The second event took place within the first two hours of the day. Child A refused to participate in the phonics session that was taking place, they wandered around the classroom, playing with different objects and distracting the class. Another child, Child B decided to try and join Child A and was immediately told to re-join the other children on the carpet, however, Child A was allowed to continue with their behaviour. Whether this difference in response by the teacher was due to the language barrier between Child A and the rest of the class is unknown. Children develop language through the interaction with individuals around them, such as, parents, siblings, and teachers. While it is easier to acquire language as a baby, children pick up language as easy as walking (Linguistic Society of America, 2023). Child A continued to display a range of non-compliant behaviours throughout the day. While it was clear that they did not want to participate in classroom activities, other behaviours were shown throughout this time. During break time, Child A was seemingly an engaged, happy child, however, once it was time to re-enter the classroom, Child A instantly ran to the other side of the yard and refused to go into class, and it took the TA ten minutes to have Child A enter the classroom. Throughout the observation, Child A would often have to be physically removed from situations, one event being that Child A continually displayed physical reactions to being upset, such as hitting and biting the teachers. When trying to deescalate the situation peacefully did not work, Child A had to be removed from the environment for the safety of themselves and the others within the class.

Children learn through observation and to learn the correct behaviour, they need to see the correct behaviour, linking with the social cognitive theory (Ross, 2007, p. 50-56).

The final event took place towards the end of the day, when Child A was preparing to go home. During this time, each child was asked to gather their bags and coats from the cloak room and then return to the carpet. However, while Child A was in the cloak room, two other pupils (Child C and D) were also present. Child C regularly aggravated Child A daily, and on this occasion, they pushed Child A and encouraged Child D to participate. Child A became aggressive and extremely upset, which made it difficult for them to follow the teacher's instructions to get their belongings and return to the carpet. In order to calm Child A, it took a considerable amount of time, first by

sending Child C and D back into the classroom after a discussion on using kind hands and encouraging them to apologise. This gave Child A the chance to process their emotions by pacing up and down the corridor, which due to safeguarding procedures in the school was completely safe, as all doors needed a key fob to open them. This gave Child A freedom of movement where they were able to regulate their emotions, along with having a calming adult presence. Child A was then able to re-enter the classroom, where they sat in the home corner out of the way of the other children so that they could continue to peacefully end their day.

Literature review

The CI observed a child with EAL, the observation took place over a school day and identified a number of key areas that emerged for further study. These being: how do children with EAL learn? And how can children with EAL be supported. There will be some discussion of the theorists that support different areas of education, along with some discussion on guidance for refugees and how to support them in their education.

Learning is an integral part of human development; therefore, it is vital that children of all abilities have an education. However, learning is defined in different ways, one being that it involves a change of behaviour through an experience, which has significant advantages to cognitive development (Houwer et al, 2013). Meanwhile, learning has also been defined as the acquisition of knowledge or skill through instruction (Pritchard, 2018, p.1). According to the international education charity, World Vision (2023), there are three types of education. The first type they identify as formal education which often takes place within an educational setting for example, a classroom or academic building. This is where children learn their basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. Where formal education is available, it starts from an early age and lasts into adulthood and is usually completed through following a curriculum. Another type is informal education which happens outside of an academic context, and instead takes place through home life, visiting different places such as libraries, and using technology. This is not planned through a curriculum but happens naturally. Finally, the charity states there is a non-formal type, which takes aspects from both formal and informal learning, meaning that it follows a timetable, however, it does not have to be conducted within an educational establishment, it can instead take place through outside clubs and online courses (World Vision, 2023).

Moreover, language is a vital part of life, so much so that it is considered as a very distinctive part of being human. It could be said that some issues with communication comes from the frequent use of the media. As long ago as 1922, the Australian philosopher Wittgenstein theorised that images have meaning, and that language is the 'picture of reality' (Heshu and Nasrabadi, 2016). Similar to the picture theory, it is very common to see a picture exchange communication system (PECS) in place, usually it is in place for children with an additional learning need (ALN) such as autism. The system uses pictures that children put together to express themselves. However, many individuals feared that by introducing the system, that children would refuse to express themselves verbally, this fear held no real motive in the prevention of the system being put in place as there was no clear evidence that there was a negative impact on verbal communication (Bondy and Frost, 2011). Furthermore, while the PECS system has many advantages, like many other systems, there are also disadvantages to the system, PECS relies on having constant access to communication cards, however, there may be times when the cards are missing or inaccessible at a specific time, this will interrupt the communication exchange and depending on the level of English that the child has, will make it difficult if not impossible to communicate with the child. There is also the reliance that PECS requires, the development of oracy skills is diminishing, and the PECS may overrule verbal communication (Bondy, 2001). This is important due to children with EAL needing a way to communicate clearly, using visuals such as the picture exchange communication system is a way to clarify thoughts and feelings, also using them in collaborative activities provides an inclusive space for children with EAL, meaning that the curriculum is accessible to all (The Bell Foundation, 2023b).

English as an additional language (EAL) is a term used when a child who has a language other than English as their first or main language (Cortazzi and Jin, 2007). Furthermore, there are high numbers of pupils with EAL due to an increase in the number of migrants to the UK, which can result in language barriers and subsequently barriers to learning (Scott, 2020). It has been reported that 25% pupils from the National Pupil Database are disadvantaged EAL pupils which is slightly higher than those who have English as a first language. It was also found that children with EAL require higher levels of support and are at a higher risk of underachievement (Scott, 2021). With the increase in EAL pupils, there is an increase in the need to address the problems that may arise due to the language barrier. Problems which were seen in the case study.

As of 2015, Wales had an average number of pupils with EAL, with around 7% of all pupils needs EAL support (Welsh Government, 2015 0 Furthermore, due to the

support the number of EAL pupils, Wales has a five-stage approach to measure and support pupils with EAL, with each stage having three sections, these being speaking and listening, reading, and writing. The initial stage, known as stage A, is when they are new to English, this stage involves repeating words and sentences as pupils have only a basic understanding and minimal literacy skills. Stage B involves the early acquisition of more English, they can understand more English within this stage, they can understand more, and they are able to copy familiar words and/or patterns. Next, stage C is reached when they are developing competence in the English language, they are more confident in their ability to speak, read and write. Stage D is the next step, when individuals with EAL are competent in the English language, they have a more complex vocabulary, are able to write with minimal grammatical errors and are confident with verbal input. Finally, stage E is reached when the children with EAL are fluent in speaking, reading and writing (Hwb, n.d). Child A, for example, was seen to have limited English skills and found communicating with staff and other children difficult, therefore, Child A was in stage A.

Furthermore, education for children who are refugees, is considered a human right under the United Nations conventions on the rights of the child, article 28 (UNICEF, 2018). While access to education is a human right, education for refugee children is often delayed due to three main factors, these being: lack of places within the schools, schools' reluctance to admit within the upper primary phase, and the lengthy application process, which comes with its own downfall when refugee parents are unable to complete the forms. Furthermore, education comes with difficulties for refugee children thriving in school, past experiences create a barrier to the education of these children (Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018).

While accessing education is difficult for children with EAL, some children from a refugee background, like Child A, suffer from behavioural and mental health issues (World Health Organisation, 2021). Child A was seen to have severe behavioural issues which also affected his relationships with other pupils. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory is focused on how learning is affected by different factors. The theory looked at how behaviour can be affected by observation, for example, if bad behaviour is observed, a child may imitate that behaviour. Furthermore, the Bandura (1986) also mentioned that individuals are leaders in their learning, they can take the initiative to change their behaviour and self-regulate themselves (Minnesota State University, n.d).

Teaching and learning methods.

Teaching and learning methods are different for each teacher, these methods come in different forms. The two most common methods are: teacher-centred, this is when a teacher or educator provides direct instruction. Then there is the student-centred approach, where teachers or educators are more of a side character in the classroom, with pupils taking a more active role in their education (Lathan, 2023).

In addition to teacher-centred teaching being about direct instruction, the method also involves there being a single leader within the classroom which would be the teacher, they hold all responsibility with pupils having a limited role within the setting. Furthermore, in 1975, Willower observed that educators have a range of feelings in regard to how children learn. This ranges from custodial or teacher-centred to humanistic or student-centred (Garrett, 2008).

As well as teacher-centred and student-centred, there is also an alternative way of looking at teaching methods. Teacher-led and student-led, each has their own benefits and limitation. Student-led is believed to motivate pupils while leaving teacher-led behind is believed to impede learning (Promethean, 2020).

When teaching and learning methods are being implemented, there are several factors that need to be considered, such as subject, year group, abilities of all children, and the academic ambitions. Because teaching and learning methods are the key factors in the education of pupils, it is necessary to adapt and improve the methods regularly (Kapur, 2020).

Furthermore, learning styles or methods are the process pupils use to absorb knowledge. These methods can be condensed into seven categories: Physical, logical, social, solitary, visual, aural, and verbal (Gandhi and Mukherji, 2023). While these styles are widely accepted, they are now seen as myths within the educational community. The styles can be highly subjective and do not take learning materials and subjects into account (Firth, n.d.).

With that being said, the observation took place during a difficult time, due to this, the classroom was very student-led, this was seen by lack of instruction and lack of teaching presence. Discipline was very minimal, if at all, and there was a very little learning occurring. During my own teaching practices, I would adopt a mix of both teacher-led and student-led approaches, I would do this because it is important for children to have structure in the classroom. The environment within the classroom impacts how children learn (Bergsmann et al, 2013). Mixing both teacher and student-

led methods ensure that children learn both independently and through interaction (Department for Education, 2017).

Within the observation, Child A was left behind in the learning journey, they were not supported in the way that they needed, and their English development was not encouraged. As seen in the case study, children learn best through modelling behaviour (Ross, 2007, p. 50-56).

In my own practice, I would also encourage scaffolding. Specifically, in regard to children with EAL as they require extra support to learn the language (The Bell Foundation, 2023c). This would benefit myself and the children in the same situation as Child A, to encourage competence in the language. With this in mind, moving forward, it would benefit Child A to have a structured learning environment and have language modelled toward them.

Discussion.

Excellent teaching is the most important part of children's education, it impacts on their educational performance, and while it is very important, there is no one way to be an excellent teacher (Cambridge Assessment, 2021). That being said, excellent teaching is important in the progression of pupils. There are six components of excellent teaching, the first being pedagogy, when a teacher or educator understand the subject being taught and understands how their pupils learn best, they have a deeper impact on the pupils learning. Quality of instruction is the next component, this is achieved when teachers use successful questioning, modelling the answers and scaffolding the learning for their pupils. Then there is the classroom climate, constantly building upon and validating pupils' success. After classroom climate there is classroom management, this one is vital in the success of pupils, due to the need to maximise learning, it is important to have clear, yet understandable rules, and the classroom environment needs to be managed accordingly. Then there is the teacher's belief as the fifth component, while this only has minimal impact on pupil outcomes, it is important that teachers embrace specific beliefs or theories and then practice them in the classroom so that the children understand. Finally, there is professional behaviour, which focuses more on the interaction with colleagues and parents while also bringing the previous five components together (Coe et al, 2014).

When thinking of pedagogy and pedagogical choices, it is easy to misunderstand the overall picture of education. Effective pedagogy relates to a range of different views, such as, pupil voice: by actively seeking pupil voice and opinions and the acting upon

them, pupil participation increases. Achievable goals, short and long term, Scaffolding the pupils learning and being inclusive (Husbands and Pearce, 2012). While this is the case, others interpret pedagogy as how the curriculum is interpreted, and that the curriculum content can be moulded to shape the overall outcomes (University of Minnesota, 2023).

This CI observation has taught me how to approach an unknown situation, for example, prior to the CI I have only ever encountered one child with EAL, this was still a relatively new situation for myself, therefore, finding the best way to support Child A was one of my top priorities, during the observation, I created picture cards with simple illustrations such as: toilet, snack, and water. These cards helped me communicate with Child A and helped me build a relationship with them that they were otherwise lacking within the environment. Due to this, I believe that in the future, scaffolding will be a main priority for my teaching practice and making sure that all children have a voice, not just the ones who have the English language as their first language. I believe that giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of language ability, will support their learning and the environment within the classroom. I will also ensure that each child learns, differentiating the work is important, this can be done in many ways and will be a main pedagogical choice for me.

Conclusion and Recommendations.

It is clear from the research that the CI methodology is beneficial in its ability to analyse an event that makes one stop and think, there are benefits to the method, which can be seen throughout. The ability to reflect of teaching practices has been beneficial to future practice. In the build-up to the CI observation, there was confusion and the feeling of unsureness in the ability to conduct a successful critical incident, however, during and after the CI it is clear that the methodology provided an important area of development for schools in Wales.

Furthermore, the CI observation took place over the course of a school day, during the observation, it was seen that Child A was ignored and their learning was severely impacted, what was not seen was whether that was due to the inability to communicate well with them. However, this is not to say that language intervention should not be introduced, Child A would benefit immensely from language support, starting from the simple words and building to the more complicated words, providing them with a vocabulary bank before moving onto sentences.

With the CI observation taking place in a primary school, there was first hand experiences with how a classroom should and should not be experienced by children. This experience has also provided a thorough theoretical knowledge on the different theorists mentioned within this assignment, some new to knowledge and other building on prior knowledge.

Moreover, my professional practice has been informed and the ideology of future teaching has been influenced and given thorough knowledge on pedagogical practices. The professional standards are linked due to the pedagogical choice and research aspect of this CI, for example, understanding how behaviour management, conducted in a pure pedagogical way can impact the support and classroom environment.

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