

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

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Introduction

The current study aims to analyse critically an incident observed in a classroom through research. As Tripp (2012) implies, a critical incident is an interpretation of an event, to which significance is given by the critical evaluator. Concerning the incident observed for this essay, it took place in an English medium secondary school based in Swansea. The school has an age range of 11 to 18 years old and a total capacity of 1479 pupils. The event came to pass in a year 9 class of around 20 students, the subject being English. It was the second class of an autumn day, so pupils were not too tired; though it was Monday, when it can sometimes be challenging for them to resume classes. The learners were sitting down facing the teacher, while they were located in small rows of 2 to 3 students.

In general terms, pupils joined the class speaking to each other. So, when the teacher wanted to start the class, there was quite a lot of noise in the classroom, which caused the teacher to struggle a bit to get them quiet. Once the teacher had started the class, they asked the students to read a text out loud by taking turns. While many students focused in the reading, some others were disengaged, disconnected, bored and absent-minded, and they would be drawing in the palm of their hand, tapping at the table with a pen, speaking to each other and distracting other students. One of them even made a fool of themselves, and the rest of the class laughed at them.

Later on, the teacher was asking questions to pupils in front of the rest of the class, to make sure they were following the teaching. While Student (X) was answering the teacher, Student (A) interrupted them in an inappropriate way. The teacher reprimanded Student (A), but Student (A) did not want to acknowledge their own mistake, professing to being right in their own eyes in a teasing way.

This last incident produced by Student (A)'s intervention is the one that will be critically analysed in a research-informed way throughout this essay. To do so, the area aimed to explore is classroom behaviour management.

Literature review

The critical incident analysed in this study accentuates the importance of being well prepared to manage behaviour in the classroom. The following literature review aims to study this mentioned topic, as a key point that will strengthen classroom management.

Haydn elaborated a 10-point scale in managing behaviour in the classroom, where 1 indicates no control over the class, and 10 depicts very good behaviour management, in which teaching is an enjoyable experience (Classroom Management, 2008). If his figurative scale is to be considered as a starting point, what could be defined as level 10, that is to say, as the best achievement of behaviour management in the classroom? As it can be assumed, there can be as many opinions as teachers. However, as Schleicher believes, without date, each of us would be 'just another person with an opinion' (quoted by Wilby, 2013, cited by Powell in Robinson, 2021). Therefore, research is very important when analysing a critical incident.

Burke considers that there is 'a potential balance to be struck between the targets of discipline which aims to control "behaviour", and discipline which aims to promote study' (2007, cited in Maguire, Ball & Braun, 2010). This relationship between behaviour management and classroom management is worth it to be considered, as it can be key to understand why good behaviour management usually helps teaching to be effective. According to a study on teacher's classroom management, with the participation of six-hundred teachers, most of the teachers who feel quite confident regarding classroom management, still lose 30% of the class time with misbehaviour (Lopes, Silva, Oliveira, Sass & Martin, 2017).

Within this context, Williams thinks that good behaviour management in the classroom 'means the majority of your students for the majority of the time are on task and all learning, and do move from A to B in your lesson' (Real Life Productions, 2005). As well, Haydn describes the above mentioned level 10 as not depending on silence, nor on children being terrified of the teacher, nor on the teacher not hearing a pin drop; but on the teacher being able to get pupils quiet when they want to get them quiet. If this premise is accomplished, he considers a classroom with quite a lot of noise and children doing all sorts of things, as level 10 (Classroom Management, 2008). Likewise, a NQT's point of view considers teaching enjoyable when pupils do not talk while the teacher is talking (Haydn, 2007).

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Once this basis of the definition of good achievement of behaviour management in the classroom is agreed, a further question is: How can teachers manage to reach such standards? This is a very large area to explore, which encompasses diverse areas to consider, for which research, as always, helps us to estimate what matters.

According to research done in Manchester, student teachers and NQT's value a sense of humour, presence, and powerful and effective voice; while, interestingly, more experienced teachers said it was more about good lesson planning, being consistent and firm, and perseverance (Classroom Management, 2008).

In connection to the things that the less experienced teachers said, Robertson (1981) focuses on things such as the outward body posture of the teacher, as a sign of authority or submission; these points of view should not be completely disregarded, as they have some sense if they are considered as additives to what the most experienced teachers said, rather than being considered as primary strategies.

But, focusing on the best research-informed strategies, concerning good lesson planning, Gilbert, a Chief Inspector, argued that there would be 'less troubling classrooms if teachers had interesting lessons' (Classroom Management, 2008). Haydn (2007) shares this opinion by stressing that sometimes pupils misbehaviour has to do with a bad quality learning experience provided in the lesson. He also underlines the importance for teachers to be expert in the engagement agenda, including previously writing aims and objectives for the lesson, which makes pupils think that the lesson is 'something worthwhile and relevant and interesting' (Classroom Management, 2008). Wearing also sees the importance of identifying the purpose of the lesson, as something crucial to motivate the learners (Robinson, 2021). Smith and Laslett (1993) believe planning to get pupils focusing on study from the very beginning of the lesson, by means of an easy starter activity, to be very important. Interestingly, Haydn recommends to plan a low value activity to be combined with the high value activities, alleging that some pupils can get bored if it is always too demanding, while they would be kept engaged with the mentioned low value activity instead of getting lost (Classroom Management, 2008).

After the previous preparation is set in good planning, teachers have to 'engage with more than the 'how to' guides if they are to effectively manage students' behaviour' (Robinson, 2021); and then

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comes the importance to step forward by being consistent in the daily real life classroom. First of all, Haydn leads teachers to discourage pupils from messing around (Classroom Management, 2008). To do so, Ellera recommends to establish early on as teachers what is acceptable in their classes, 'what is unacceptable and indeed what the consequences may be'. He also recommends to start tough and ease off, rather than 'to try and start soft and then toughen up' (Brook Lapping Productions, 2006). So, once pupils know what to expect from the teacher, thinks Wearing, they can align their own behaviour to the teacher's lessons (Robinson, 2021). This relationship with students is built with consistency; since the figure of a teacher that lies, by not accomplishing what they said they would do, is quickly underestimated. Haydn emphasises that 'reputation does get round about whether you follow the things upon or not' (Classroom Management, 2008), as pupils get to know the teacher's truthfulness when they say they will punish the students if they do a certain thing again. Buck also says that if teachers do not do what they say they will, 'immediately respect is gone' (Brook Lapping Productions, 2006). Contrary to such inconsistency, Wearing considers consistency as 'key to building trust and becoming a reliable figure in the eyes of a student' (Robinson, 2021), while Haydn reinforces this view, when he explains that teachers he knew, who were very good at managing behaviour in the classroom, 'had a quiet, calm, firm style', with no shouting or getting angry; their secret was just doing what they said they were going to do, as reputation goes around when being a person of their word (Classroom Management, 2008).

Though these pieces of advice are very helpful, 'managing classrooms is not always easy; it is not always a matter of applying 'what works'. Life in schools is complex and it can be tricky to manage 'behaviour for learning' (Maguire, Ball & Braun, 2010). Sometimes teachers can be quite good at managing behaviour, by following the aforesaid pieces of advice, while there can still be some disruptions in the classroom by reason of the teacher's behaviour and the consequent secondary behaviour it produces in the students. Concerning the secondary behaviour, it is explained by Rogers (2000) as the argument that arises with some pupils when being reprimanded by the teacher. Sometimes it can be avoided by the teacher's proper behaviour, while other times it just happens. For that very reason, Rogers advises to keep the focus on the primary behaviour rather than the secondary behaviour. That is to say, when a teacher rebukes students and some of them reply trying to discredit their being right when correcting them in such area, if the teacher gets carried away by their dispute, they can end up being involved in a long argument; instead, giving a simple direction or a simple rule reminder could solve the situation. Rogers also advises to 'tactically ignore the nonverbal secondary behaviour' (if there is a nonverbal reaction), 'avoid argument (especially in a

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public forum)' and 'refocus [or redirect] the secondary behaviour'.

Concerning teacher's behaviour, which some times reduces the secondary behaviour as previously discussed, Haydn highlights the importance of teachers being polite, approachable and relaxed, as opposed to being narky, aloof, hostile and mannered, if they want to be successful at managing behaviour (Classroom Management, 2008). According to Wubbels' team's research, behaviour of teachers who are successful in both classroom and behaviour management, include 'being 'friendly, helpful, and congenial'', a 'good listener', 'empathetic', 'not gloomy' and 'even tempered'. (Marzano, 2003, cited by Powell in Robinson, 2021). Likewise, the Bible emphasises the importance of having such self-control (Galatians 5:23), as the old proverb says: 'He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city' (Proverbs 16:32). According to a sample of 254 students, it was considered to be inappropriate behaviour on behalf of the teachers, 'unfair rules', 'not answering students' questions' and 'being sarcastic or publicly criticizing a student', amongst others (Marzano, 2003, cited by Powell in Robinson, 2021). Rogers (2000) insists on this last point mentioned, by illustrating that some teachers do not even realise how sometimes they are offensive in the way they address pupils, and even sarcastic in a confrontational way. The Bible, though when speaking about disciplining children it mainly refers a parent-child relationship rather than teacher-pupils, directs fathers not to provoke their children to wrath, but to raise them in admonition instead (Ephesians 6:4). This admonition, though, also leads pupils in the classroom to reflect, since, as Wearing exemplifies, 'sometimes students do not know why they behave as they do', when they are asked by the teacher: 'Why did you just do that?' and they sincerely reply: 'I don't know' (Robinson, 2021); this fact underlines the importance of making pupils come to their senses, and such moments are the best opportunities to teach them by means of reflection on how they should behave. In this sense, it could be assumed that discipline, in the punishing sense of the word, should always be accompanied by making pupils listen to reason. Thus, as with what Haydn's advise also aims towards, pupils know you are correcting them for their good, as you care for them (Classroom Management, 2008).

Case Study

Returning to the particular incident that is highlighted in this essay to be critically analysed, it has been previously explained what happened between Student (A), Student (X) and the teacher. The context in which the incident happened is worthy to be considered, as it could have affected the very incident. When pupils entered the classroom, Student (A), like the rest of the students, was speaking to others. The teacher had to make an effort to get Student (A) and the rest of them to be quiet. Later on, Student (A) was disengaged and tapping the table with a pen. This last fact could perhaps be related to Gilbert (Classroom Management, 2008) and Haydn's (2007) view in that disengagement could be linked to a poor or uninteresting lesson.

Coming back to the incident, while Student (X) was answering a question the teacher had asked them in front of the rest of the class, Student (A) interrupted them in an inappropriate way, by talking over them. Student (A) was reprimanded by the teacher, though, not willing to acknowledge their own mistake, Student (A) replied by contradicting the teacher's rebuke and trying to raise an argument. This reaction Student (A) made to the teacher's reprimand is what Rogers (2000) defines as secondary behaviour.

Then, the teacher gave a simple direction, by commanding Student (A) to stop talking over them, and ignored Student (A)'s attitude. Right after, the teacher gave the pupils another task and, whilst everyone was busy with the new task, approached Student (A) to speak with them one-to-one, and explained to them in a soft way how they had acted in an inappropriate way, by reminding them of the things in which they had been instructed concerning how to behave. As a matter of fact, Student (A) acknowledged their own mistake.

Teaching and Learning methods

Research provides helpful tips that perhaps could have prevented Student (A)'s negative attitude in the previously described incident. First of all, the weak beginning characterised by pupils—including Student (A)—speaking to each other, which was hardly solved by the teacher, could be improved by using Smith and Laslett's (1993) methodology of preparing an easy starter activity for the students, which would probably get them focused on study from the very beginning of the lesson. Likewise, Student (A)'s disengagement could have been possibly reduced by Haydn (Classroom Management, 2008) and Wearing's (Robinson, 2021) methods of elaborating an engagement and motivation agenda, by preparing a good lesson plan that would include the objectives and aims and purpose of the lesson, which would be communicated to pupils at the start of the lesson.

According to data, another strategy that could have helped the teacher in preventing Student (A)'s inappropriate behaviour, would have been using Elleray (Brook Lapping Productions, 2006), Wearing (Robinson, 2021) and Haydn's (Classroom Management, 2008) recommendations of letting pupils know at the beginning of the class what behaviour would be unacceptable in their classroom and what punishment would be applied to those acting so, with the view of discouraging them from misbehaving, as long as this early warning is accompanied by unfailing consistency, as considered essential by Buck (Brook Lapping Productions, 2006), Haydn (Classroom Management, 2008) and Wearing (Robinson, 2021).

Analysing, then, the incident of Student (A)'s secondary behaviour, according to Rogers (2000), the teacher acted in an advisable and wise way, as they did not get carried away by Student (A)'s argument, but, instead, kept the focus on the primary issue, by giving Student (A) a simple direction and strategically ignoring their attitude for the moment. Likewise, by approaching Student (A) to speak with them one-to-one after commending pupils another task, the teacher avoided an argument in the public forum. Furthermore, the polite, approachable, relaxed, even tempered and soft way the teacher spoke to Student (A), in concordance with Marzano's (2003, cited by Powell in Robinson, 2021) and Haydn's (Classroom Management, 2008) methodology, made them come to their senses and listen to reason, by means of reflection on how they should behave; and had the undeniable positive result of Student (A)'s acknowledgement of their own mistake.

Discussion

The research-based analysis of this critical incident has informed my own pedagogical choices with many tips and a large amount of good advice, which are key for my own classroom in my first placement and moving forward:

First of all, I believe consistency is a fundamental principle to apply from the very beginning of my teaching experience, as it testifies of the truthfulness and honesty of the teacher and establishes the basis for a teacher-student relationship (Wearing, in Robinson, 2021), without which respect would be lost (Buck in Brook Lapping Productions, 2006) and learning experience would be reduced in quality, due to the fact that behaviour issues would take up a considerable time of the lesson (Lopes, Silva, Oliveira, Sass & Martin, 2017) and that would weaken pupils encouragement to learn.

For instance: If a teacher says to a student: 'If you do this again, you will be expelled from the class', and the student does it again; then the teacher says: 'Do you want to be expelled, or what? Do it again and you know what happens!'; the student does it a third time, and the teacher says: 'Continue like this and you will be expelled'; such a student, of course, will know for any future situation that when the teacher says they are in risk of being expelled from the class, the percentage of risk is very low, as that teacher hardly accomplishes their word.

Contrary to it, through being, as a teacher, a person of my word, students will be able to receive an example of professionalism and integrity, which are very important for the professional and adult life they are expecting to reach in the near future.

Secondly, I think being exemplar in behaviour as a teacher is also very important for my pedagogical influence on my placements, as dealing with pupils' behaviour can sometimes be very demanding (Maguire, Ball & Braun, 2010). For this reason, having self-control (Galatians 5:26) when being disrespected by pupils, and using the most strategic professionalism when dealing with student's secondary behaviour, by seeking the best moment to admonish them with a lot of tact (Ephesians 6:4), rather than feeding their misbehaviour by being involved in their argument (Rogers, 2000), will lead them to listen to reason and to value the fact that teachers care for them (Classroom Management, 2008)—as this critical incident has thoroughly proved the efficiency of this methodology, which was used by the teacher towards Student (A).

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Right before reading Rogers (2000) book, I had an interesting experience in my placement: I gave my first full lesson to a year 9 class, the topic being 'the instruments of the orchestra'. While the class was listening to one of the orchestral instruments, a student started tapping the ground with their feet. I went discretely towards them and politely asked them to stop making noise, as it was disrupting the listening. Then, the student replied disagreeing and started complaining about my reprimand. I was not sure what would work best in that situation, but, instead of getting carried away by their argument, I stopped the listening, reminded them that they should not disrupt the class, and resumed the listening, ignoring their nonverbal expressions of disagreement. To my surprise, it worked perfectly, as that student did not interrupt the class again nor tapped the ground again with their feet. Just a few days later, I found out in Rogers (2000) book, that this methodology is the one that is advised when facing pupils' secondary behaviour.

Last of all and very importantly as well, planning is aimed to be my routine of anticipation for every class from my placement onwards, as a very good and well-prepared lesson—including a 'do it now task' or starter—transmits, throughout the whole lesson, enthusiasm to pupils (Robinson, 2021) from the teacher rather than pessimism, which (enthusiasm) is key for students to be interested, motivated and encouraged as ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives—which is one of the four purposes of education in Wales.

Conclusions

This critical interpretation and evaluation focusing on a case study of an individual learner, based on an observed critical incident, has studied and developed, in a research-based way, methods to manage classroom behaviour, with the view of impacting positively nowadays in schools, according to the professional standards for teachers and to the four purposes of education in Wales.

The analysis has started by considering the context in which the incident took place, as a key point that could have affected behaviour and altered the very incident. By doing this, research has provided planning strategies to discourage misbehaviour, by means of inspiring, motivating, and raising aspirations of learners by communicating high expectations and a passion for learning, as well as applying motivational, coaching and skill development strategies to help learners progress and achieve.

When looking critically at the incident, the research has provided lots of strategies to deal with behaviour issues, as—amongst others—being consistent, being good behaved as a teacher, and responding to critical situations in the most skilful and professional way, so as to develop collaborative and respectful relationships with learners.

All in all, through this study I have critically reviewed and enriched my knowledge of educational research, pedagogy, and assessment, so as to develop evidence-informed practice, leaving a trace of this knowledge and methodologies to teenagers in Wales.

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