

Critical Incident assignment

What is a critical incident?

Within the teaching profession critical incidents occur when an event occurs not just within the classroom setting but at breaktimes or at any time outside the classroom and is vividly remembered, (Brookfield, 1990). These incidents when looked at deeper, could have had a positive or negative experience on the pupil/s that it potentially may change their behaviour, views or life. Tripp (2011), describes 'The term critical incident comes from history where it refers to some event or situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person or an institution.' He then goes onto suggesting that critical incidents only happen when we reflect upon them and the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident (Tripp, 2011). When teachers look at a specific incident, deeper understanding as to what happened and why it happened will enable them to further understand whilst potentially collaborating with pupils and colleagues to establish what can be put in place to avoid or replicate a positive or negative experience (Joshi, 2018).

Teachers become aware of critical incidents when they analyse and understand the outcome of a specific event. This is essential to further develop their teaching and classroom health and well-being. Tripp (1993) states that Critical incidents exist 'to challenge an articulated set of beliefs that inform our professional judgement' This enables teachers to ask questions and change their beliefs and behaviours if something is not working effectively or on the other hand, increase the usage of a particular method if it works well and creates a positive effect.

Key terminology

Critical incident, professional development, professional judgement, analyse, health and well-being, Emotional Labour, Pandemic.

The role of critical reflection

When talking about critical reflection one of the most influential names in this field of work is John Dewey. Dewey suggested that reflective practice is not just a recall of a specific event that took place, but more about the deliberate and active process that a teacher undertakes to truly understand what impact an event had upon a student, class, colleague or themselves. Dewey (1993) states that 'Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads.' This suggests that Dewey has developed an idea about how the teacher can develop their understanding and professional development when an event occurs by reflecting and asking questions about how it progressed and what they can do in future to alter their actions to produce a different result. There are 3 key sections in Dewey's reflective thinking theory, these are, open mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness and all 3 are needed to create a real understanding and to analyse reflective practice in detail (Dewey, 1990).

There are many reflective practice models, these include but not limited to, ERA Cycle, Driscoll's What Matters, Kolb's Cycle and Gibb's Reflective Cycle. Kolb's cycle refers to four key elements, Concrete experience, Reflective experience, Abstract conceptualization and Active experiment. This cycle suggests you will always start with an experience, reflecting upon what happened and then starting to develop a new process in order to apply your new ideas to change the outcome that had previously occurred. However, Gibb's reflective cycle includes the element of feelings and well-being. Gibb's cycle contains six stages of reflection, this includes Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action Plan. This cycle differs to any other as it includes the feelings of the teacher, pupil/s at all stages of the event. This really shows us the importance of well-being within your reflective practice and not to neglect that key aspect.

The new reform in Wales which comes in 2022 looks at countries across the globe to determine what the key elements the curriculum should include. In order to suggest creating a new curriculum for Wales there must have been a process of reflection on the previous curriculum. Successful Futures (2015) states 'Between March and December 2014, members of the Review Team undertook to meet a very broad range of stakeholders, visiting around 60 schools, including Welsh- and English-medium nursery, primary and secondary schools, special schools, pupil referral units, a young offender's institution and work-based learning settings. We met not only with headteachers, managers and their staff but also with children and young people, and where possible their parents and carers.' This suggests by

key stakeholders and other professional practitioners analysed and recognised that the old curriculum was outdated and needed a refresh to include modern day skills and include key aspects such as health and well-being.

Reflective practice links to many of the titles within the professional standards these include Collaboration, Innovation and Leadership. Hitting these professional standards will enable you to critically analyse your teaching whilst trialling research-based models to further your professional development. The professional standards for teacher's (2017) state 'The standards clarify the professional characteristics that a teacher should be expected to maintain and to build on at their current career stage.' Teachers can actively collaborate with colleagues and other professionals to collectively come up with a solution to an event to increase the learners experience within the classroom. This is one of the key elements within the professional standards as it enables the teacher to consistently evaluate their teaching methods and critically analyse anything they deem to influence the learner or themselves. Social constructivism theory is a theory where educators can enhance their knowledge and understanding based off interactions with culture and society. This enables the educator to challenge their beliefs from a deeper understanding by building new knowledge on top of already existing knowledge. This can be done through critical incident analysis.

Observation/Context

Whilst undertaking any research the university and the individual must comply to BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. Within these guidelines it states "The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research. Researchers should recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy and should accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity." Within this section, I will refer to the school as 'School X' to ensure confidentiality whilst always adhering to the BERA guidelines. Within school X there are 130 pupils and there are six female full-time teachers. 18% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, this comes in at below the national average. A low number of pupils come from a ethnic minority background whilst no pupils come from a welsh 1st language home. Within school X there was several children who had additional learning needs (19%), this percentage was above the national average for Wales, however, only a few of these pupils are statemented.

Within the Estyn report for school X it states the wellbeing of children is at a good level. This is in line with the school's overall attendance record of 94% and in the higher 50% when

compared to other local schools. This may suggest that the school regards well-being as important for pupil attainment whilst punctuality is good and there have been no exclusions over the past 5 years.

Critical Incident

Whilst observing for critical incidents at school X, I found one incident that stuck with me especially given the current times. At the start of everyday, the class pupil's line-up outside of the classroom door. When the pupils are ready and the teacher checks everyone is okay, the teacher welcomes everyone into the classroom. On entry, each pupil picks up a pencil and places it on the 'Mood wall'. The mood wall is where pupils can place a pencil in a pot that is stapled to the wall with an emotion attached. The class had a range of emotions to choose from, these were, Excited, Happy, Sad, Anxious, Angry or Upset. This was all done under no command from the teacher which suggests it has been reinforced within the class potentially from previous years. The task happens before the first lesson and does not happen at any other point throughout the day. By visual observation, most pupils seem happy to come to school, however, on closer inspection when the pupils place pencils in their chosen mood pot, this does not seem to be the case for a small handful of pupils. The teacher then asks every pupil how they were when taking the register to potentially bolster the importance of how they are feeling in terms of the teacher-learner relationship. This could lead to increased trust within the classroom as all pupils feel valued and cared for by the classroom teacher. With this in mind, barriers can be broken down and pupils can open up about their health and well-being in which the teacher can reflect and put in place additional help and support for pupils that may need it.

This links directly to one of the AOLE's and the 4 purposes. Health and well-being is an important part of the school curriculum especially now the pandemic has had a lasting effect upon many people. Health and well-being is essential within a child's foundations as it puts in place a structure to create life-long healthy, confident individuals who are resilient, empathetic and motivated to develop their decision-making and be ready to learn throughout their time in school and further life (Welsh Government, 2020). However, the mood wall could potentially be giving false accounts of actual pupil emotion. When pupils place their pencils in the emotion pots, there could be a lot of copying wherever their friends go. This could cloud the teacher's judgement of the pupil's health and well-being which could have a direct link to a lack of confidence, collaboration and other contributing factors in order to achieve the healthy-confident individuals core purpose.

Literature Review

Health and well-being have a direct impact upon pupil achievement. However, until recent times, it has taken a backseat in terms of school life. Educationalists and sisters Rachel and Margaret McMillan (1919) were pioneers in nursery education. However, whilst working with children in a nursery and childcare setting, they recognised the importance of early childhood education on health and wellbeing and therefore moved onto publishing books on how children develop both emotionally and socially and are still recognised as pioneers within their field (Open, 2020). The year 1936 was a pioneering year for child's psychology. Jean Piaget developed his theory that a child's intelligence changes with age. Within Piaget's theory he suggests there are 4 stages to cognitive development these are, sensorimotor (Birth – 2 years old), preoperational (Ages 2-7), concrete (Ages 7-11) and the formal operational stage (Ages 12+) (Cherry, 2020). Psychologists such as Baron, Duckworth and Quinn have produced several studies relating to children's academic growth links significantly to emotion and well-being. Baron (1982) states 'Emotion and personality influence the quality of one's thinking and how much a child learns in school.' This suggests that teachers need to create a holistic approach to pupil's classroom experience which should extend further than the academic knowledge but also include wider skills to enhance their personal development. The convention on the rights of the child, article 29 states 'The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential' (Unicef, 1989). Outside of the classroom pupils face several potential factors that could drive down their well-being, these include friendships, homelife, stresses of homework and many more. Maslow's hierarchy depicts what children need to develop in order to reach the higher more complex needs. Physiological, safety, belonging and love, and esteem needs are to be touched upon before children can realise and experience self-actualisation. However, this is not to mention that some children may find that their personal pyramid of needs is different to that of Maslow's. His theory can be flexible in a way where children will have individual and external differences which will shape the way they put forth their most valued need (Maslow, 1987). This will have a significant impact upon pupil achievement within classroom experiences and pupil achievement. Many pupils especially in the current time (pandemic) will have even more of a challenge to develop skills in order to achieve and develop skills needed to touch upon the self-actualisation need. As pupils will not have been able to exercise in the outdoors, socially interact with other pupils in a face-to-face environment, resource availability and many more. These issues put pressure on pupil's mental health and well-being and make their way into schools and ultimately effect progression and learning in the classroom. Rodgers (1959), challenges Maslow's theory and suggests that for a child to grow it must have an environment that shows them genuineness,

acceptance and empathy to reach their highest potential. He moves onto state that healthy personalities along with relationships will not develop as they should or breakdown completely. This puts emphasis upon the environment the pupils are surrounded by in order to reach their highest potential not just in school but in wider society and to be lifelong learners. This has an important role within schools as it is then possible to meet the 4 purposes of the Welsh curriculum that will enable pupils to be Ethical, Healthy, Ambitious and Creative contributors who will then develop into well-rounded individuals (Curriculum for Wales, 2021).

In teaching, there are a lot of mixed emotions emitted daily. These could vary and change in an instant and put pupils and teachers under stress if not managed and dealt with. Incidents that happen daily could be an argument between two class pupils, or a deeper connection to an English story being told, however, they will all have a personal understanding. Pupils and teachers alike need to manage these emotions to fully invest themselves within their learning and teaching experiences in order to make progress. If these emotions are not managed, then they could manifest into stresses and barriers that could potentially stop pupil development within the classroom. Emotional Labour was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild in 1983. Hochschild (1983), described emotional labour as 'Inducing or suppressing feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.' Emotional labour can affect how we approach different situations in school and in the real world. Burr (2003) states 'Our constructions of the world are bound up with power relations because they have implications for what is permissible for different people to do, and for how they may treat others.' Social interaction could be the catalyst to social constructionism and therefore place importance upon language and how that connects many interpersonal skills including emotional intelligence, self-awareness, staying positive, problem-solving skills and many more. Teachers must therefore manage their own feelings before they can start to manage others (Previte, 2021). For teachers to have a good grasp at tackling pupils emotional labour and well-being, Winograd's (2003) study suggests 'To love and show enthusiasm towards pupils, be passionate about your subject, avoid displaying emotions like anger, joy and sadness and to have a sense of humour.' This will produce a positive environment for your work and translate to the pupils in the classroom and around the school. When teachers are made aware of emotional labour it can have a positive impact on pupils and highlights the importance of providing and developing a nurturing and supportive environment to enhance pupil experience.

Promoting health and wellbeing along with mindfulness and relaxation in primary school can have a definite positive impact on classroom learning (Hayes et al, 2019). This suggests by

incorporating mindfulness in the class can boost various elements of pupil welfare including mental clarity, emotional intelligence and the ability to relate to others. Chiesa et al, (2014) states 'Mental health interventions incorporating mindfulness elements have proven effective in treating and preventing various psychological and physical difficulties.' Socio-emotional development during the pandemic has hit an all-time high with the number of pupils needing additional support (Idoiaga, 2020). Now that lessons are back in school, there is still a percentage of children who feel that the coronavirus is still very much at large, and rightly so. The virus undoubtedly has had an impact upon children's mental health as Idoiaga, (2020) states 'children expressed their fear, concern, sadness, nervousness, and fright when they were asked about coronavirus.' Teachers should therefore acknowledge that children may act differently to how they were before the pandemic and could put in place reinforcements to create a sense of safety along with to provide opportunities for growth, support friendships and to talk about the virus to correct any inaccurate information. This should support pupils to readjust, recover and to move forwards within lessons (Freud, A. 2020).

Reflection/Evaluation & Next steps

Reflection is a key aspect in teaching and all teachers should use it to enhance and progress their pupil experience and maybe change their beliefs about a particular incident. Using Gibbs (1988) model of reflective practice, he splits it into 5 stages, Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Conclusions and Action. This enables teachers to dive deeper into the incident that took place and dissect each section to make improvements if necessary. If teachers reflect upon their lessons or incidents, they can look at the classroom experience in a different way and then research how best to deal with something that has happened. By doing this it could make them aware of new theories to discover or enhance their professional development where they can come back to something they have read if they feel it could be beneficial. Stepping back and taking in different approaches or views other than oneself, can inspire teachers to better support our pupils holistic learning experience. Gibb's model includes the element of feelings which can help teachers understand how themselves or the pupil/s felt during, after or whilst the incident took place. By using Gibbs model, I will be able to reflect accordingly and use it to enhance the classroom experience for my pupils, recognising and acting upon is a way for personal growth and to challenge any assumptions of everyday practice. This will enable me to tailor the learning for pupils which could enhance their school achievement, enhancing school experience will therefore increase their health and wellbeing (Gov, 2014). Ultimately, reflecting on your practice will have multiple effects upon your pupils, these include compassion, confidence, happiness

and a healthy emotional outlook on life along with many more (Mental Health America, 1997). There are many theories other than Gibb's reflective cycle. Teachers do not have to use the same one throughout their teaching career, they can explore different concepts that best suit individuals or whole groups. By understanding theories and having the knowledge you can then start to unpick and use different parts and link them in with one another. By using more than one theory and combining elements means you can improve on the wide range of student strengths and along with pupils learning from each other in order to improve upon their weaknesses (Waage & Haugalokken, 2013). During the current pandemic teachers had to display a different type of strategy as we all moved to online learning. As this happened teachers had new critical incidents to deal with as it is not the typical face-to-face environment they have taught in over their careers. However, teachers then had to think of innovative ways to help and support students from online. This meant that teaching pupils from home was still accessible whilst maintaining the highest quality of education.

Conclusion

Critical incidents are a vital way for teachers to analyse and evaluate to further develop their professional development. Acting upon critical incidents can have a positive effect upon groups or individuals in the classroom which can therefore increase mental health and well-being. Health and well-being in the classroom changes from 1 minute to the next, this can mean the teacher has to try to think of ways to develop and help their children when needed. Creating a positive atmosphere and a positive mindset for pupils will mean that they will have the opportunity to fulfil their potential throughout their learning. Especially nowadays where covid has had a great impact upon many aspects of pupil's lives including, mental, social, financial and physical concerns then pupils will feel overwhelmed as they have begun attending school again. Physical literacy has taken a hit also, as children have not had the experience over the past year to take part in physical activity as sports venues and clubs have closed. Effects will include, motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding which may affect them participating in health and well-being lessons as they may possess barriers which ultimately lead to impacting achievement, learning and experience. Overall Looking at critical incidents gives me the confidence to tackle the issue when going into a professional setting and having the skills and knowledge to appropriately minimizing the impact upon pupil learning and experience.

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Appendix

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

Record 1

Date and time, year group: Year 6, Lesson 1 (9:00am – 10:35am)
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context General classroom vibe is calming, nobody seems to be overly excited or equally unhappy just by visual observation. Learning Objective – Can I understand that all children have rights, but they are not all met? Out of the 6 information boards in the class, half (3) were about mood/mindset. (1) Welsh, (1) Literacy and (1) Numeracy.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) 1st lesson of the day, all students lined up outside automatically. Teacher elbow bumps all students before they go in and asks how they feel. When students enter the classroom there is a 'How are you feeling today' wall, cups have been stapled to wall with each feeling, happy, sad, angry, sad, scared, excited and anxious. (Pupils know to automatically do this as soon as they walk in). No pencils in scared, 2 in sad, 2 in anxious, 2 in angry, 8 in excited and 14 in happy. When teacher does register pupils have opportunities to bring up concerns regarding their feelings about why they might be feeling unhappy or happy etc.. (Sort of like a check in)

Areas of possible exploration: What you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider?

Was very mindset focussed and all about feelings. Went straight into Children’s rights topic.

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)

No. distractions apart from children getting their pencil cases. Teacher gave no instruction to line-up at door. Also similarly gave no instruction to go to the mood wall or to get pencil cases out. Children put hands up for questions. Less than 1 pupil shouted out an answer without putting their hands up.

Children knew article numbers to go with the children’s rights.

Right to relax and play – article 31

Right to be the best you can be – article 29

Showed them a video about chocolate linked to human rights – Children watched, dead quiet, by observation they all looked focussed and on task. Inquisitive after video ended, lots of hands up for questions.

9:00 – Calming

9:10 – Calming

9:20 – Intrigued

9:20 – Intrigued

9:30 – Excited (Video)

9:40 – Intrigued

9:50 – Excited

10:00 – Calming

10:10 – Excited

10:20 – Excited

10:30 – Intrigued

10:35 – Excited (Video)

Record 2

Date and time, year group: Year 6. 1st Lesson (9:00am – 10:35am)

Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

Pupils are answering questions about the video on human rights and a typical day for an aged 11 boy in Ghana (Cocoa plantation farm).

Class seems quite inquisitive and asking questions.

What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)

Talking about Patrick in the human rights video aged 11, comparing him with a child in the class who's also 11. Suggested the pupil in the class goes home and does what other 11-year-olds do, play on ps4 etc.

When the teacher compared Patrick (in the video) to a pupil in the class she assumed the pupil is going to have a better day but did not ask the pupil what they did when they go home after school. Moved on.

Pupil did not respond to the question or statement.

Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be "under the hood" in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider?

Judgement and jumping to conclusions.

Not all children in schools have happy homes and may find school their only safe place.

Research suggests pupils normally sit in same sex groups. E.G boys sit together, girls sit together etc possible friendship groups.

Pupil hasn't said anything this lesson. (Something under pupil's hood?) – Could he have been one of the ones who put a pencil in the sad or anxious pot? What's next for the pupil when he goes home?

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)

Pupil sits by himself not his friends – on a table with 2 girls down other end of table.

Record 3

Date and time, year group: Across all KS2 years. 2:15 (Break)

Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context

On the playground, everyone has had a good day so far, no distractions or incidents in or outside of the classroom.

What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident (the more detail the better to refer to in your later work)

Teacher blows whistle once – This signals for everyone to immediately stop what they are doing. (Football stops, talking stops etc.)

Teacher only blows the whistle again when she sees everyone standing still and facing the front.

Teacher blows whistle the 2nd time to signal that pupils get into their year group formation (Stand around the circle on the floor)

On the signal of the year group teacher – Pupils make their way inside.

Areas of possible exploration: what you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider?

Potentially have been taught to do this from younger age moving throughout the year groups.

Within the ‘rules of the yard’ – Was it written by the pupils? Is that why they vigorously stick to the rules?

Neuroscience might offer an answer. A study published in *Nature Neuroscience* a few years back found that loud noises can trigger the release of noradrenaline in the brain — you know, the “fight or flight” hormone that makes you alert, vigilant, focused, and ready to form and retrieve memories.

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)

Breaktime, lots of distractions.

Game of football going on, group of pupils chatting and playing, another small group playing netball.

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