Assignment Title: 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.

Word count-3602

Introduction

This assignment will critically analyse and evaluate a critical incident involving a learner in a classroom setting. According to Tripp (1993, p.24), a critical incident refers to a turning point or a change in a situation that allows educators to look at the situation and make judgments to enable them to reflect on their practice. By using Tripp's methodology, the observed critical incident can be reflected on the observed critical incident, and recommendations can be made to inform future teaching practices. Tripp (1993, p.12) believes that reflection is an essential component of professionalism to inform future practice, which can help us to be better educators. Tripp (1993, p.24-25) describes critical incidents in the classroom as events that may not be obvious or dramatic but instead provide insight into what is happening. These incidents may initially seem typical but are considered critical after analysis, allowing us to look deeper into the situation.

The critical incident, as presented in the appendix, will explore the theories related to the critical incident and, through reflection, will form a foundation as to how this will inform future teaching practice. This is in line with the Welsh Government's (No date) guidance on leading professional learning which practitioners are entitled to Professional development opportunities that allow practitioners to reflect and learn through a combination of approaches encouraging enquiry and collaboration.

Literature review

The term "transition" describes the moving of a child from one educational setting to another. There are several transitions within schools where there is a progression between schools as children get older, for example, the transition between primary school to comprehensive school and the transition between comprehensive to college or higher education. Another transition could also occur when a child moves from one setting to another due to other factors, such as moving home, additional learning needs, or for personal reasons. These transitions mean the child at the centre of the transition may need to adapt to their new environment,

different routines, and teaching styles to make new friends, all of which can affect the learner's overall well-being. The Listening Partnership (2023) describes Bridge's transition model as a process where the first part is the ending of a situation, which leads to coming to terms with it and having to deal with the associated feelings. Cherry (2021) supports this and notes Piaget's theory of cognitive development and assimilation and accommodation adaptation processes. Children process new information and adapt to their new environment by adopting new schemas to help them adjust to the changing environment.

School transition plays a significant part in a child's journey through education. The vertical transition process is an important milestone for a young person.

According to Freud (2020), transitioning between schools is a crucial step in a child's academic journey and must be treated with utmost care and attention to the child's needs. Poor handling of the transition can lead to negative consequences, such as a decline in academic performance and well-being. Learners may experience feelings of not belonging, have difficulties adjusting to changes, struggle to make friends, and become disruptive. Therefore, it is essential to manage the transition process carefully to ensure a smooth and positive experience for the child.

Fabian and Dunlop (2007) proposed Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which suggests that environmental factors significantly influence a person's development. According to the theory, a child's ecological system can interact with other systems in their life, creating an impact. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure a smooth transition between schools to minimise any adverse effects on the child's learning.

Drew (2023) argues that Bronfenbrenner's "terms and categories are sometimes vague".

As students move from one school to the next, it is crucial that they engage with their peers to establish a supportive and constructive atmosphere for learning. Collaborating with fellow students fosters the development of teamwork skills, promotes effective communication, and

facilitates the sharing of ideas for enhanced learning. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory suggests that a child's potential can be measured by the gap between their current abilities and those of a more knowledgeable other (MKO), highlighting the value of learning from experienced individuals. (Pound, 2005, p.40)

According to Vygotsky's theory, children within the zone of proximal development can achieve tasks with the necessary support from peers. This support can provide them with the ability to accomplish the task and develop their skills further. (Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development & Scaffolding Theory In Psychology, no date).

Chaiklin (2003, quoted in Vygotsky Learning Conference, 2023) criticised Vygotsky's theory on the Zone of Proximal Development, stating it’s unclear and does not take into consideration individual differences and capability level and may need an approach more specific to their needs. Some students may struggle with social situations, preferring to observe others rather than play, which can result in either happiness or unhappiness at school. (Peer & Reed, 2021, p. 358)

Piaget's theories of cognitive development intersect with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development by highlighting the importance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). According to Piaget's theory of constructivism, individuals and their environment play a crucial role in learning, and the role of peers is of utmost importance. Palinscar (1988 quoted in Velez et al., 2011, p.41) states that "As peers interact with each other, they challenge established norms, effectively creating a state of learner disequilibrium”. The work of Piaget (1985, cited in Velez et al., 2011, p.41) then goes on to emphasise that it is through the learner's disequilibrium that then forces the learner to challenge themselves and step out of their comfort zone to work with others which will then eventually allow the learner to reach a cognitive equilibrium. (De Lisi et al.,1999, p.41).

After a thorough examination of the literature that delves into the intricate dynamics of peer involvement during the transition process, as well as the underlying theories that underscore

the significance of schools facilitating a seamless transition for students, it is fitting to delve into the critical incident where the transition phase plays a pivotal role in the learner's educational journey and how peer involvement supports this. There are numerous factors to consider when introducing a new student to a learning environment. The adjustment period can be quite daunting and nerve-wracking for the learner. To mitigate this, peer support is a widely used tactic in schools to assist children in transitioning from one educational setting to another. Learners are frequently encouraged to partake in activities that aid in their assimilation to their new surroundings. According to (Pound, 2005, p.74), it is by engaging through play that children can make sense of their emotions, concepts, and relationships and connect one experience to the next.

In his independent review of the Curriculum for Wales (Donaldson, 2015 p.69) also supports this view that collaborating with peers and practitioners can be highly beneficial in improving the metacognitive skills of learners. When students discuss their thinking processes with others, compare them, and refine their learning abilities accordingly, they become active participants in the learning process. This approach allows children and young people to develop an understanding of how to learn and create the best conditions for effective learning. One of the four fundamental goals outlined in the new Curriculum for Wales is to create "ambitious, capable learners". Mayo (2023) presents that there is a shared vision for young people in Wales, where learners develop resilience and perseverance to overcome obstacles through flexibility and strength. Creating emotionally safe environments is an expectation for enabling learning within the new Curriculum for Wales (2023), which explains the importance of the role of enabling adults in creating emotionally safe environments to help learners express and regulate their feelings and behaviours in positive ways is the responsibility of the adult responsible for enabling such learning. This individual provides consistent care and models compassion and kindness, setting the expectation for learning. They also help learners cope with uncertainty and change, preparing them to manage transitions and changes in daily routines.

Ethical considerations

When conducting research or making observations on a critical incident, it is of utmost importance to take all necessary steps to ensure that confidentiality is maintained and that the privacy of both the school and its learners is safeguarded. In accordance with the guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) for Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, it is crucial that individuals are treated with fairness, sensitivity, and dignity and without any form of prejudice. Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that the right to privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of both the school and individuals involved should be respected. This means that any information collected or communicated should be kept strictly confidential, and any personal information must not be disclosed. It is also crucial to ensure that any identifying information is removed or anonymised to protect the privacy of the school and its learners. By upholding these ethical guidelines, researchers and observers can conduct their work in a manner that is respectful, safe, and ethical. Ultimately, this will help to ensure that the research and observations conducted are of high quality, accurate, and valuable to the educational community (BERA, 2018)

Classroom context

The observation I participated in for this assignment took place at the University's immersive learning space. (Immersive Learning Space, 2023) The room was specifically designed to create an immersive learning experience for students. The lesson that we observed was pre-recorded and tailored to the requirements of the assignment.

The observed lesson was a morning session before break time at the end of the summer term for a Year 4 class in an English medium school located in the Swansea local authority. The class consisted of 24 students, who were organised into ability groups and working within progression step 3. The students had varying abilities, and the class included a child who used English as an additional language (EAL), a visually impaired child, and a student who had

recently transferred from another school just a month prior to the observation. It was also noted that there was a teaching assistant present working with a small group of children at the front of the class.

During the observation, we had the opportunity to observe the students' behaviour, engagement, and participation in the lesson. We were able to see how the teacher interacted with each student and how the students interacted with each other during the lesson. Overall, the observation provided a detailed and comprehensive insight into the learning environment of the Year 4 class.

Explanation of the Critical Incident

Through an immersive observation experience, I was able to identify significant incidents that can guide our future practices through reflection. In this assignment, I have selected one such incident (detailed in Appendix A) that took place in mid-July during the initial lesson of the day. It's important to note that the critical incident involved a learner who had only recently joined the school a month before the observation.

To provide some context, during the lesson on inferences, the teacher had the children seated in their ability groups. While introducing the lesson, the teacher interacted with the students and selected children to share their examples of inferences. Child A, seated with two other children across from him, actively participated in the lesson and eagerly raised his hand for every question the teacher posed. However, the other two children were not as engaged and spent their time interacting with each other. Towards the end of the lesson, the teacher instructed the students to work together to create sentences using their inferences. Unfortunately, Child A was not included in their discussions and ended up working alone.

The teacher used a strategy to grab the attention of the class by clapping. The children responded by clapping back. The teacher then explained that he would be passing around a

shoe as a visual aid for the children to make inferences. A high-heeled shoe was placed in the middle of Child A's table for the children to discuss their inferences with the person sitting next to them. One of the children on the table took the shoe, smelled it, and discussed it with the child next to him, completely ignoring Child A. Child A waited patiently for the shoe to be returned to the middle of the table to have his turn to explore it.

During the session, Child A raised his hand to get the teacher's attention. The teacher approached him and sat down next to him. Child A proceeded to share his inferences with the teacher, and they had a brief discussion. Afterwards, the teacher left, and Child A continued to work independently on the task.

As the incident under observation was a pre-recorded lesson, there was no opportunity to present the findings to the class teacher and engage in a discussion regarding the observed incident.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the critical incident, it was deemed appropriate to look deeper into it and its relevance and connection to the Curriculum for Wales. The Curriculum for Wales (2020) places significant emphasis on nurturing children's development across four core purposes, with a focus on helping learners become healthy, confident individuals who possess strong emotional fortitude and resilience. These priorities are further reinforced by Freud (2020), who underscores the critical role resilience-building plays in equipping young people to navigate life's unpredictable challenges and thrive in the face of adversity.

On reviewing the literature, it is evident that peer support plays a pivotal role during the transition process. Transitioning is a major event in a young person's life, and the importance of a smooth transition cannot be overstated. According to West Sussex County Council (2023), the ability to manage transitions effectively is crucial to the development and emotional well-

being of a child or young person. It will significantly affect their ability to handle change both in the short and long run.

Teaching and Learning Methods

Upon recognising the crucial event, I used Tripp's (1993) critical incident methodology to pause, comprehend, and interpret the critical incident, eventually forming informed professional judgements based on my discoveries (Tripp, 1993, p.8).

During the observation (refer to the appendix), it was evident that Child A lacked communication and collaboration skills with his peers. To support the learner, I considered implementing certain strategies to support Child A. To reflect on my teaching approach, I used Gibbs' model of reflection (1988, in Oxford University Press 2013, pp.49-50) to de-brief the incident, which involves six key elements: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. In support of this, The Welsh Government (2022) emphasises that schools must reflect on their understanding of pedagogy as a tool for growth and development.

During the transition process, the literature highlights the importance of peer involvement. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasises the role of peers in cognitive development, including making friends, using peers as a source of support for learning, and building meaningful relationships (Pound, 2005, p.40). These peer interactions can provide opportunities for problem-solving, collaboration, and shared experiences, which can enhance the overall quality of the transition experience.

Based on my observations, it was clear that Child A was disengaged from the other children at the table. Throughout the activity, Child A did not initiate any interactions or engage in any conversations with his peers. This lack of engagement was particularly concerning when Child A waited for a shoe to be returned to the middle of the table, as it appeared that he may have

been anxious about asking his peers for the shoe. Furthermore, when the children were asked to discuss their inferences with each other, Child A did not participate in the discussion and instead raised his hand to have the teacher share his thoughts. Overall, it seems that Child A may be experiencing social anxiety or struggling with communication and social skills, which may require further attention and support.

The strategy used by the teacher to encourage partner talk is derived from the Curriculum for Wales (2020), which emphasises the importance of collaborative learning and teaching, encouraging children to work together, share ideas and combine their knowledge.

As I reflected on the critical incident that I observed, I felt that Child A would have greatly benefitted from having a peer seated next to him. I believe that having someone to collaborate and interact with would have helped him feel more engaged and included in the classroom. From my observation, it was clear that the children seated opposite Child A already had a strong bond and an established friendship, which might have made it difficult for him to participate fully in the classroom activities. Considering that Child A had only been attending the school for a month prior to the observation, it is possible that he had not yet formed many friendships, which could have contributed to him feeling unable to collaborate and interact with his peers. This is supported by Mayo Clinic Staff (No date), who maintain that friendships are key contributors to improving health and well-being, supporting good and bad times, giving children a sense of belonging, and helping them cope with major changes in their lives.

During times of transition, such as starting a new school, it has been suggested that buddy systems and peer support systems can be beneficial for children. According to Freud (2020), buddy support systems can provide new arrivals with peer support. However, it is important to manage these systems carefully, as there is a concern that children may feel pressured to join peer groups, which could potentially create an unhealthy dynamic in the peer support

relationship. Understanding Voices (2020) notes that it is vital to ensure that each individual involved in the buddy system or peer support system is comfortable and willing to participate in order to establish a positive and supportive environment.

Discussion

After reviewing the findings, I have come to the understanding that transitioning into a new classroom can be a daunting experience for a child. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to ensure that every child feels welcome and comfortable in my classroom. To achieve this, I would implement several strategies, such as encouraging collaboration among students, conducting regular well-being check-ins, and creating a support system where students can help one another.

One of the most effective strategies that I would use is a buddy system where each new student is paired with a classmate who can guide them through the initial transition period. This would help the new student to feel included and supported and also promote a positive relationship between themselves and fellow learners.

Additionally, in line with the Curriculum for Wales (2020), which promotes an integrated approach to teaching and learning, I would encourage peer interaction wherever possible to ensure that students feel comfortable around one another. This would be achieved through various activities such as group work, classroom discussions, and games that promote teamwork and collaboration, enabling students to establish relationships, build connections across their learning and connect their experiences and skills.

Overall, it is essential to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for every child, especially during the transition phase. The (Welsh Government, 2021, p.5) supports this by emphasising the importance of a supportive environment where children can learn and emotionally develop.

By implementing these strategies, I believe that I can help new students feel comfortable in my classroom and ensure that they have a positive and enjoyable learning experience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it can be inferred that incorporating the aforementioned strategies would be highly advantageous in facilitating children's transition process. This inference is supported by studies that have demonstrated the positive impact of buddy systems and peer support groups. According to a study conducted by Coleman, Sykes and Groom (2017, p.6) concludes that peer support can have a positive impact on the mental health of young people. The research found that children who received peer support reported improved emotional well-being, including increased happiness, self-esteem, and confidence. By implementing these strategies, learners will receive the necessary support and motivation to feel empowered to navigate their unfamiliar environments and effectively cope with the challenges that come with adapting to new situations. This approach will not only give learners a sense of confidence but also provide them with the tools and skills needed to integrate into their new surroundings successfully. Ultimately, this will facilitate a smoother transition and promote a more positive and enriching experience for all involved.

As an educational practitioner, gaining a deep understanding of a critical incident and the theories that connect reflective practice to these incidents is crucial. This knowledge will allow me to gain better insights into the dynamics of the classroom and help me make informed professional decisions through one of the models of reflection. This is vital for my professional growth because the early identification of critical incidents and subsequent reflection will enable me to align my methods with the Welsh Government’s (2019) five professional teaching standards, where the insights gained through reflection can be applied to enhance effective pedagogy and refine teaching.

After conducting a thorough critical incident analysis, it was found that there are various approaches to managing transitions for learners, as indicated by the existing literature. However, one common thread that emerged was the importance of peer involvement in facilitating smooth transitions. In light of this, it was concluded that a buddy system and peer support network be implemented in classroom settings, as this has been shown to be an effective way to manage transitions and provide learners with the necessary support. By implementing such strategies, it is hoped that students will feel more supported and encouraged during periods of change, leading to more positive outcomes in the long run.

Reference list

BERA (2018*). Ethical Guidelines For Educational Research, fourth edition (2018)*. Available at: Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition (2018) | BERA (Accessed 30 October 2023)

Cherry, K. (2021) *Adaptation in Piaget's Theory of Development.* Available at: https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-adaptation-2794815 (Accessed:14 October 2023)

Coleman, N., Sykes, W. and Groom, C. (2017). Peer Support and Children and Young People's Mental Health Research Review. Available at: Children_and_young_people_s_mental_health_peer_support.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk) (Accessed 01 November 2023).

Curriculum for Wales (2020). *Developing A Vision For Curriculum Design*. Available at: Developing a vision for curriculum design - Hwb (gov.wales) (Accessed 30 October 2023)

Curriculum for Wales (2020). *Introduction To Curriculum For Wales Guidance.* Available at: Introduction - Hwb (gov.wales) (Accessed 31 October 2023)

Curriculum for Wales (2020). *Introduction To Curriculum For Wales Guidance.* Available at: Introduction - Hwb (gov.wales) (Accessed 01 November 2023)

Curriculum for Wales (2023). *Enabling Learning.* Available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/ (Accessed 29 October 2023)

Drew, C. (2023) *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Pros & Cons*). Available at: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Pros & Cons) (helpfulprofessor.com) (Accessed: 21 October 2023)

Dunlop, A-W and Fabian, H. (2007) *Outcomes of good practice in transition processes for children entering primary school*: working paper 42 The Hague. Available at: https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/22677929/AlineDunlop1.pdf (Accessed:15 October 2023)

Freud, A. (2020) *Transitions*. Available at: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/school-based-risk-factors/transitions/ (Accessed:15 October 2023)

Freud, A. (2020) *Transitions*. Available at: https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/risks-and-protective-factors/school-based-risk-factors/transitions/ (Accessed: 31 October 2023)

Freud, A. (2020) *What Is Resilience?.* Available at: What is resilience? : Mentally Healthy Schools (Accessed 30 October 2023)

Gibbs, G. (2013) *Learning by doing: A Guide To Teaching And Learning Methods*. Oxford Brookes University. Available at: learning-by-doing-graham-gibbs.pdf (wordpress.com) (Accessed 31 October 2023).

Immersive Learning Space (2023). (Accessed 26 September 2023)

Jonathan J. Velez et al. (2011). '*Cultivating Change Through Peer Teaching'. Journal of Agricultural Education*. 52(1), pp.40-49. Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ955665.pdf (Accessed 28 October 2023).

Mayo Clinic Staff (No Date). *The Benefits Of Good Friends*. Available at: Friendships: Enrich your life and improve your health - Mayo Clinic (Accessed 31 October 2023).

Mayo, J. (2023). *Curriculum for Wales: "Ambitious, Capable Learners" Resources & Activities*. Available at: https://www.twinkl.co.uk/blog/curriculum-for-wales-ambitious-capable-learners#:~:text=In%20the%20process%20of%20studying%20as%20part%20of,ideas%20and%20concepts%20they%20learn%20about%20More%20items (Accessed 29 October 2023)

Peer, L and Reid, G. (2021) *Special Educational Needs*. London: Sage Publications Limited.

Pound, L. (2005) How children Learn. London: Step Forward Publishing Limited.

The Listening Partnership (2023*) About the process of transition- And how to handle it well*. Available at: https://www.listeningpartnership.com/insight/about-the-process-of-transition-and-how-to-handle-it-well/ (Accessed:15 October 2023)

Tripp, D. (1993) *Critical Incidents In Teaching*. Oxon: Routledge.

Understanding Voices (2020). *Benefits And Drawbacks Of Peer Support*. Available at: Benefits and drawbacks of peer support - Understanding Voices (Accessed 31 October 2023).

Vygotsky Learning Conference (2023) 'Criticisms Of The Vygotskian Approach'. Available at: https://vygotskyetec512.weebly.com/criticisms-of-the-vygotsky-approach.html (Accessed: 22 October 2023).

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development & Scaffolding Theory In Psychology (no date) *Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development & Scaffolding Theory In Psychology*. Available at: https://www.simplypsychology.org/zone-of-proximal-development.html (Accessed: 22 October 2023).

Welsh Government (2019*). Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership*. Available at: professional-standards-for-teaching-and-leadership-interactive-pdf-for-pc.pdf (gov.wales) (Accessed 01 November 2023)

Welsh Government (2021*). Framework On Embedding A Whole School Approach To Emotional And Mental Well-Being*. Cardiff

Welsh Government (2022*). Pedagogy – Hwb*. Available at: Pedagogy - Hwb (gov.wales) (Accessed 31 October 2023).

Welsh Government (No date*). National Learning Entitlement*. Available at: National professional learning entitlement - Hwb (gov.wales) (Accessed 01 November 2023).

West Sussex County Council (2023). *Key Principles For Transitions*. Tools for schools. Available at: Key principles for transitions | Tools for schools (local-offer.org) (Accessed 30 October 2023)