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

Word Count - 3898

Introduction

The following essay is a reflection on a critical incident that was observed within a primary school setting. To ensure the critical reflection is appropriate, the essay will be constructed using Tripp's (2012) critical incidents in teaching methodology. The essay will first begin to explore the meaning of critical incident, before moving on to explore the critical incident that occurred. A literature review will be included, to discuss all relevant literature linked to the critical incident that was observed. Teaching and learning methods will also be explored within the essay, to highlight the key methods used within education to address the critical incident that occurred during the observation. Following on with a discussion and recommendations section that will include a reflection on what has been identified within the literature review, therefore allowing me to develop my pedological practices and theory.

Joshi (2018) portrays critical incidents as an incident that can be a 'turning point' for teachers. Tripp (2012) believes that teachers need more than good techniques and routines to be a 'good' teacher, it is the ability to judge their professional judgement by reflecting. Derakhshan & Mazari (2022) believe that examining critical incidents will reduce the chances of them reoccurring, influencing the way they teach. Joshi (2018) describes a critical incident as personal to each and unplanned, with the idea that a critical incident is not something that happens regularly or something that happens as part of a usual routine, in or outside the classroom. Tripp (2012) believes there are two steps in the creation of a critical incident, the first step is the incident being observed and the second step is the description of the critical incident, thinking about what happened and why (Joshi, 2018). After these steps, the critical incident is then created by understanding the incident with an open mind, welcoming different contexts, and values you might not usually consider (Tripp, 2012).

Despite there being many benefits of the critical incident technique, a recent study highlights the challenges many teachers face when using this technique to reflect on their professional practice. The study conducted by Derakhshan & Nazari (2022) suggested a rise in novice teachers' emotions, in comparison to experienced teachers, suggesting experienced teachers can handle their emotions based on their acquired knowledge. This suggests a negative effect on novice teachers, as they are said to feel anger and fear, which in turn affects their self-confidence to teach (Derakhshan & Mazari 2022). With the idea that teachers who are at the start of their careers, are only interested in their survival in the classroom, and themselves (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012). Cornish & Jenkins (2012) believe that teachers learn to become reflective practitioners, throughout their developmental process of becoming a teacher.

The idea is that when practitioners are confident and comfortable in their classroom environment, they can then use their time more efficiently, to improve their practice.

Case Study

Closely following the BERA guidelines for educational research, the following incident will operate within an ethic of respect for all individuals involved and it will be inclusive of different methods and perspectives relating to the critical incident observed (BERA, 2018). Individuals who are involved in the incident will be treated reasonably and free from prejudice, including rights and differences on the aspect of the individual. The case study will ensure to not oppose no risk or harm to the individuals mentioned as all individuals mentioned will be under strict confidentiality, ensuring no names are mentioned (BERA, 2018).

The critical incident happened at a school within the City and County of Swansea. The school is an English medium school with 435 pupils ranging from ages 3 to 11 (Swansea Council, 2023). The recent Estyn report highlighted the importance of working as a team with staff and outside organisations to be able to identify children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) and ensure they have the support they need to make progress (Estyn, 2023). Welsh Government (2022) describe ALN as a learning difficulty that requires additional learning provision, meaning they will need further support to learn. The pupil the case study is going to explore has a visual impairment and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). NHS (2022) accepts that children with autism may find it difficult to communicate and understand.

The classroom consisted of one male teacher and one female learning support assistant (LSA). It was a Year 4 class, with mixed ability learners, learners with English as a second language, and hands up as a way of responding. The learners were conditioned as a way of improving classroom management, when the teacher started to play the guitar, the learners were conditioned to understand this meant they had to stop talking and listen. The learners were separated into five working groups of ability, four of the tables were together, meaning that the pupils were facing each other and one of the group tables was in a line at the front. The tables were divided into higher ability, lower ability, gender, and English as a second language. The learner that is going to be discussed (Learner A) was sat at the front table which was structured as a line. Child A has a visual impairment and has an assistive technology camera, that

mirrors what is on the interactive whiteboard, on the iPad set up in front of Learner A. Bala et al (2023) and Sefotho & Ferreira (2020) emphasise the important role that technology has in the development of learners who are visually impaired to overall, improve their quality on all aspects of their life. Transforming schools to adapt to the requirements of visually impaired learners (Ajuwon et al., 2016).

The incident occurred shortly after the class teacher chose different children to read out the lesson objectives for the main part of the lesson 'To make inferences'. This lesson followed the Language, Literature and Communications Area of Learning and Experience of the new curriculum for Wales 2022 which is a critical element of the learner's communication, supporting learners to develop and gain knowledge and skills in the medium of Welsh and English (Welsh Government, 2021). Following this, the classroom teacher placed one item on each of the group tables, for them to be able to make their inferences about the given object, a shoe. Each group had a different type of shoe placed on their table, and the table at the front where Learner A sits was given a Wellington boot. Learner A decided to pass the Wellington boot to the more able (MA) pupil sitting next to them (Learner C) but shortly decided they wanted it back after stating they had it for a long time, but Learner C did not want to give it back. This resulted in another pupil sitting on the opposite side of the table (Learner B) forcefully removing the Wellington boot from the hands of Learner C and passing it back to Learner A. A result of these actions left Learner C name-calling Learner B. A couple of minutes after the group had been given their item, learner A was asked to finish his sentence as an educator had arrived to carry out an intervention with them. As the classroom teacher notified the learners of this change, they were informed that the Wellington boot was going to be passed down the line. Just as this happens, Learner A asks for the boot back, the teacher hands the boot back to the learner without hesitation and the learner keeps the boot until leaving the classroom. During this time, the LSA had left the classroom, and the classroom teacher sat on the lower ability table. After asking Learner A for the boot twice Learner B went to see the classroom teacher about the situation after Learner A responded with 'I have not had it for long'. Shortly after, Learner A was asked if they were ready to leave the classroom for the intervention, got up off their chair and placed the Wellington boot on the table as instructed by the LSA, then left the classroom.

Literature Review

The following section of the essay will explore relevant areas from the critical incident, relating each area to relevant literature. The review will start by exploring assistive technology in primary schools and how

learner A is supported by this. Following on to funding in schools and interventions. This section will conclude by introducing peer relationships and motor skills, following on to explore the context of this area in reflection on the critical incident being explored.

A study conducted by Bollini et al (2023) on the role of vision in the development of spatial coordinates believes there is a genuine connection that the role of vision in the spatial development of individuals. The study indicates that in order to gain the most accurate and reliable information about a spatial property, vision is needed. Therefore, in relation to the observed critical incident, learner A would have been negatively impacted as they were unable to view the object in a way that would support their development. Sefotho & Ferreira (2020) emphasise the difficulties that many learners with a visual impairment could experience in the classroom. As a way of combatting this, learner A has access to learning support equipment that enhances their learning. Khan & Khusro (2020) state that assistive technology provides individuals who have a visual impairment with the ability to 'access information and promote safety' overall improving their involvement within society. The Welsh Government (2019) believe that the teachers within the classroom are to scaffold the use of technology to ensure it is used as a tool to utilize learning but support independence by encouraging learners' use of technology.

However, the Welsh Parliament (2021) focus on school funding being an issue within education. Highlighting that due to a lack of funding, schools are concerned that they will be unable to effectively teach the new curriculum for Wales and meet the needs of pupils, whilst forever improving the school's standards (Welsh Parliament, 2021). Fortunately, a document entitled The Department of Education (2022) highlights the large amount of funding that is now being given to schools to allow staff members to enrol on relevant training programmes that will assist staff on how to correctly use assistive technology. Thus, would have a positive impact on learner A as their education would be delivered by educators who would have enrolled on such courses, enchaining their learning, and ensuring the use of assistive technology is safe and effective.

In relation to this, reflecting on the critical incident observed, learner A is taken out of the classroom for an intervention. NASUWT (2019) and Goldberg et al (2018) describe interventions as an activity that are 'different or additional to' a learner's usual routine in school, improving the holistic development of young people. The intention is that interventions are used as a way to support learners to be able to progress and achieve (Burroughs-Lange & Douetil 2006 cited in NASUWT 2019 p.4). Schools that receive interventions are typically those with attainment levels that are below average (Department for

Education 2017). Goldberg et al (2018) explore the idea of individual and whole-school interventions. Whole school interventions aim to integrate skills developed into interactions made with educators, pupils, and family members (Jones and Bouffard 2012 and Meyer et al 2015 cited in Goldberg et al 2018). In conclusion, Goldberg et al (2018) believe that interventions have no connection to academic achievement. Despite Macnamara & Burgoyne (2022) argument that if a learner is engaged in an intervention, their academic achievement can be massively improved. Linking back to the previous point made about the lack of funding in schools, interventions are a cost-effective way to achieve attainment (Department for Education, 2017). Forman et al (2008) consider the idea that if interventions are implemented carelessly, then positive outcomes are less expected.

EEF (2018 cited in NASUWT 2018) highlight the benefits of pupil tutoring in the classroom. Proposing the idea that they are an effective way to enhance achievement and progress, specifically for learners with lower attainment and learners with special education needs (SEN). This literature links with the critical incident that occurred, as learners A and B were discussing and observing the boot together until learner C dismissed this learning. This links to peer relationships and Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (SDT) of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Abtahi et al., 2017). This theory includes cognitive development and the role of social interaction to 'make meaning' (McLeod, 2023). Vygotsky believed that learning is an important and extensive form of development. However, Piaget disagreed and instead had the approach that a learner's development forms their learning, the idea that social learning is more important than development (McLeod, 2023). Despite their different beliefs, Vygotsky and Piaget do share some similarities within their theories, one being the belief that learners should engage in their learning and development. However, they do share different beliefs about how this should be completed. Piaget disagreed that this should be completed by social interaction and instead indicated it should be self-initiated instead (McLeod, 2023).

Linking to the critical incident that occurred, and learner A response to having to share the boot with other class members, Reimer et al (2015) and Houwen et al (2022) discussed that individuals who have a visual impairment will have difficulties in processing sensory information opposing the risks for sensory processing, a process on how a learners brain receives and processes the sensory input. Suggesting that visually impaired learners should receive more time with objects as they will take more time to process the object as they generally have slower and more prolonged motor learning and will use different strategies to compensate for the lack of vision (Reimer et al., 2015). Learner A was negatively impacted by this as Learner B kept interrupting Learner A's vital time to process the object. Houwen et al (2022)

state that humans use their senses to be aware of their surroundings to grant them the ability to connect with the world in a purposeful course. A visually impaired individual will use their touch and hearing to stay connected (Houwen et al, 2022). This idea suggests that learner A should have been given adequate time to process the boot to make inferences on it, as it would take longer for this learner to process the sensory information. The following section on teaching and learning methods will explore methods to explore and support this idea.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The following section of this essay will include appropriate teaching and learning methods in the context of the critical incident observed. The essay will be critical, ensuring both positives and challenges are explored. Highlighting methods of teaching and learning that will be effective for my practice, based on the literature that has been explored.

Following on from Khan & Khusro (2020) idea of the importance of assistive technology in the classroom for a visually impaired individual (learner A). Metatla et al (2019) highlight the importance of 'voice user interfaces' which can be described as the communication between an individual and a machine, enhancing an individual with a visual impairment's ability to complete everyday tasks. Voice user interfaces would be an effective way to reduce the amount of peer conflict within the classroom between learners B and C. This assistive technology could be used to set a timer that can be heard by learner A, making them aware that when the timer runs out it is time to pass the object on to the next person on their table. This teaching and learning method would build on peer relationships as the difficulty of sharing the object would be removed if learner A was aware of the change of turn. However, to ensure this is an inclusive method within my practice, this could be a whole classroom approach, making all students aware that when the time runs out, they are to pass the object to someone on their table who has not had a chance to make an inference on the object yet. Adapting this as a whole classroom approach will accommodate the needs of learner A without discrimination (Rasmkitadila et al, 2021). From my classroom experience, it has been observed first-hand the positive effect that timers have on a classroom environment, it makes the students more aware and engaged in the task they are completing within the time given. Despite the benefits of voice user inferences, many challenges are being observed within the classroom. Murad & Munteanu (2019) propose the idea that when a voice interaction is

implemented in the classroom, many users could be disappointed with the response they receive. Murad & Munteanu (2019) state that one challenge highlighted is the ability to recognise what is being asked of the device, without the ability to correct errors. They believe these challenges can make or break how an individual decides to interact with the device (Murad & Munteanu, 2019).

In relation to Vygotsky's Social Development Theory identified within the literature review, the next teaching and learning method to be explored is the seating arrangements within the classroom. Vygotsky's SDT highlights the importance of students having interactions with an MKO to promote cognitive development (McLeod, 2023). This type of seating arrangement can be described as a heterogeneous classroom seating arrangement, the idea that students are sat in mixed-ability groups (Kim et al, 2020). Research shows that students' learning can be embellished through the layout of the classroom and the seating formation within a classroom, can increase motivation to develop further skills and knowledge. Hardiansyah & Rasia (2022) conducted a study that highlights the importance of motivation to drive towards achievement. Research has shown that heterogeneous grouping improves interdependence as students can share many diverse skills, which in turn allows students to recognize gaps within their knowledge (Kim et al, 2020). This interlinks towards Vygotsky's idea that children should not be grouped on the same ability but instead grouped on mixed ability with the goal that less able students can receive help from the more knowledgeable students using the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky describes the 'Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as the distance between the development made through problem-solving that a student makes, individually and with support from a more knowledgeable other (Bekiryazici, 2015). Research has shown that students in heterogeneous groups, reported higher levels of enjoyment and engagement within subjects and school, in comparison to the lower-ability groups. This study suggests that the reasoning for lower ability groups is usually students who have socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Boliver & Capsada – Munsech, 2021). Despite all the positive outcomes of heterogeneous groups, a research study highlights the barriers that some students will experience. Including the idea that MKOs are at risk of developing their skills and knowledge if they are grouped with students who are of lower ability (Kim et al, 2020). Proposing the idea that students should be organised into homogeneous groups, whereby they would be grouped with students who are at the same level as them. Research shows students' achievements were positive when

homogeneous grouping occurred (Kim et al, 2020).

Discussion and recommendations

On reflection of the critical incident that occurred, after researching literature relating to the incident, I have had many discussions on what teaching and learning methods I would include within my pedological practice and the reasons for why, based on the research conducted. The heart of all my pedagogical practice decisions will be based on pupil progression and inclusivity, ensuring all decisions are based on the best interests of pupils in my classroom.

Research highlighted the importance and effectiveness of heterogeneous grouping within a classroom setting (Boliver & Capsada – Munsech, 2021), in the hope that students have a positive experience with the classroom environment, to enhance continued development. Linking to the critical incident observed, learner A was at an advantage to this as they were seated next to an MKO. This encouraged conversation between the two pupils, which in turn was a positive experience for both learners to explore the object, promoting cognitive development.

Based upon the research, I have made myself aware of the different types of assistive technology and voice user inferences available to children with a visual impairment, and I will ensure I enrol on relevant courses to ensure I have the correct training needed to correctly model the use of equipment (The Welsh Government, 2021). The research conducted highlights the importance of extra time for children who are visually impaired to analyse an object, as the literature suggests prolonged motor learning in compensation for lack of vision (Reimer et al., 2015). Within my practice, I have highlighted two appropriate approaches to this incident based on the literature reviewed above.

Firstly, to introduce a voice user inference to ensure all learners get an equal opportunity to make observations of objects, again ensuring inclusion, I would involve the whole class in this approach. A noise timer would be a very useful way to conduct a sharing activity with a visually impaired student, as they would be able to hear the timer when it is complete, making them aware that their turn is over, and they are to pass the object onto the next student.

Another recommendation for this approach would be for learner A to have their object. As the object in question was a Wellington boot, there is a high possibility that the educator would have had two of these

Wellington boots, a pair. Providing learner, A with their object, with extra time to explore, would hopefully avoid the incident that occurs amongst learners, as there would have been an extra item for the group to explore. To ensure this approach was inclusive, it would be possible to give each group a 'pair' of shoes to make inferences on, instead of just one item per group. This approach would develop the learners holistically, as they could work in pairs, or with a MKO on their table, developing learners cognitively and socially.

Conclusion

The essay was conducted using the Tripps (2012) critical incident methodology, to ensure the information included was critically evaluated correctly. The literature review has made me aware of many strategies that can be implemented in the classroom, to create an engaging environment that will promote student achievement, that is an environment that children will want to be a part of. Both teaching and learning methods discussed above would be valid within my pedological practice as they are both very Important strategies to enhance development and engagement whilst ensuring inclusivity.

To conclude on the critical incident that was observed, many areas have been explored that in turn will promote inclusivity and create an efficient learning environment. During my own pedological practice, I will ensure I take leadership of my own learning and training, ensuring I enrol on any beneficial or relevant training courses, that will benefit me as a teacher to provide the students in my classroom with sufficient learning experiences. While linking to (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012) idea that teachers learn to become reflective practitioners, throughout their developmental process of becoming a teacher. The idea is that when I am confident and comfortable within a classroom environment, I can then use my time more efficiently, to improve their practice (Cornish & Jenkins, 2012). During my own pedagogical practices, I will ensure to take leadership of my classroom by gaining a positive classroom culture. As previously mentioned, I will ensure I create a diverse and inclusive environment where students are respected.

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