

A CRITICAL EVALUATION AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF NEXT TEACHING AND LEARNING STEPS FOCUSING ON A CASE STUDY OF AN INDIVIDUAL LEARNER BASED ON AN OBSERVED CRITICAL INCIDENT

INTRODUCTION

What is a critical Incident?

From an ordinary viewpoint, a critical incident may be viewed as a fatal occurrence by the sound of the word itself, but critical incident from the context of this research takes a completely different approach as it relates to schools and classrooms. Critical incident is unique in that it is mostly an individual observation of a teacher about a pupil.

It is used to observe, in the tiniest details, pupils/learners and their behaviours in order to research and document different forms of behaviour in young people/pupils for the purpose of finding ways to improve such behaviours if they are negative, and to encourage such behaviours if they are positive. Clearly, critical incident can either be negative or positive.

According to (Brookfield, 1990, p. 84), a critical incident is an event which is not planned or anticipated, and which happens in the classroom during a lesson or outside the classroom or in the course of a teacher's profession, but which stands out. These incidents are normally created by the learners.

Also, (Richards and Farrell, 2010) suggested a similar definition of critical incident as an event which was not planned or anticipated and which takes place in a classroom during a lesson, and which serves to create an insight towards some aspects of both teaching and learning (p. 13). They went further to say that critical incident can be connected to the documentation and the scrutiny of incidents in teaching in order to learn from the incidents and improve teaching practice. These incidents mandate teachers to consider and ponder over the long-term issues they may come across. The process of keeping critical incident records and reflecting on them

gives opportunity to teachers to learn more about their teaching, their pupils and themselves (ibid, p. 114)

OBSERVATION

The observation was carried out in a year 8, intermediate class of about 28 pupils. One Teaching assistant was present in the class but permanently attached to a pupil with recognised ALN. The school is a mixed public secondary school for ages between 11 to 19 years of age, coded green and has a population of about 1100 pupils, of which about 116 pupils are in the sixth form.

Free school meals are available for about 12.5% of the pupils. about 7.8% of the pupils are from different ethnicity and the remaining pupils are white British.

Pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) or ALN are just below a third of the school population, and the school has special facility for Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) pupils. Estyn 2017

The observed pupil was not paying attention as the lesson progressed, and while some other pupils were engaged in the lesson, asking and answering questions, the observed pupil was busy distracting nearby pupils and did not seem to be interested in the lesson. At some point, the observed pupil was seated almost backing the board and being disruptive but in a quiet manner.

This may be seen as a critical incident by taking many things into consideration, such as possible issues that the pupil may be going through, some of which may be connected to issues at home or family, health and wellbeing, the environment outside the school etc.

METHODOLOGY

A field research also known as observation research is a unique type of research process that offers researchers the privilege of obtaining live information rather than relying on experimental information. The researcher observes the actual behaviour first-hand as a

continuous situation with more accurate and authentic information which otherwise could be missed (Cooper and Schindler 2001: 374)

Observation research methods can be classed into different types and each type with its advantages and disadvantages.

For the purpose of this research, two main types are considered: participant and non-participant observational research methods which houses all the other types of observational research.

Participant observation implies that the researcher is part of a group of people carrying out specific research. The individual researcher may be known to both the group and the area where the research is taking place, and the researcher relates with the community hosting the event (or the person that is being observed if it is an individual.)

Non-participant observation implies that the observer could be part of a group of researchers but anonymous to the group or the class or the individual that is being observed. The researcher does not take part in the research or event. The researcher appears dormant but visible to everyone.

Overt non-participant observation can be biased through the observer effect where people change or seek to improve or manipulate an aspect of their behaviour just because they are aware that they are being observed, however, this form of observation is the method most at risk due to the Hawthorne Effect.

Covert non-participant observation refers to observing research subjects without them knowing that they are being observed at all.

This refers to the presence of a researcher in an event without the knowledge of the subject or the individual that is being observed.

The non-participant observation method was adopted in the Bridging exercise due to the nature of the event and due to the time scale. The researcher observed critical incidents in four different subject areas in order to gather behavioural information to reflect on.

Advantages and disadvantages of participant and non-participant observation methods

Advantages Participant observation:

- It is quicker and easier to implement
- Data collected can be stored and shared

- Less risky
- Easier to get into groups
- Saves time
- Researchers can discuss what the project is about and give reasons

Disadvantages of participant observation

- Requires a level of expertise i.e could need lots of practice - data collection
- Information gathered may not be accurate ('Hawthorne effect')
- Can be expensive
- Information can be biased
- Requires so much time consumption
- Not easy to conclude from data

Advantages of Non-participant observation

- More natural behaviour is achieved
- Could be achieved in a short amount of time
- It's a continuous process
- Information gathered is not biased

Disadvantages of Non-participant observation

- It involves so much time and effort
- Getting into group is difficult

FOUR PURPOSES

The four purposes describe ways through which learners will engage in education, progress through all stages of education from age 3years old to 16years old and be able to apply all they have learnt to better themselves, Wales and the world at large. It proposes to combine pupil's competence with subject-based contents.

The four purposes suggest that all children and young adults should be:

- Ambitious, capable learners who are ready to learn throughout their lives.
- Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.
- Healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

- Enterprising, creative contributors who are ready to play a full part in life and work.

Special provision is also made available for those with SEN/ALN and those with disabilities.

In other to achieve these purposes, both local and national education authorities must team up and prioritise all teaching and knowledge acquisition in Wales.

Hence, the six areas listed below are to be considered for knowledge acquisition and experience:

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-being
- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology

In relation to the pupil that was observed in this research, one could argue that the learner may not be aware of the four purposes of education that applies to them or their right to education (right to learn) if these purposes and rights are not defined or interpreted or explained to the learner. However, in a class with mixed abilities and different levels of differentiation to be executed, a learner such as the observed learner can be easily missed.

Learner not showing interest in learning in this one class out of the four classes observed may be down to lack of confidence in themselves in this subject. Supposedly, this is where it becomes crucial for a teacher.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical incident is centred around the behaviour of learners and teachers in the class and around the school, in other words, the behaviour of pupils is the focus of critical incident. One cannot help but to ask the question as to why learners behave the way they do when the behaviour is challenging. To answer this, many factors are considered, such as:

- Class management

- Well-being of learners
- Mental Health
- Wait time/Questioning techniques
- SEN/ALN
- Social Constructivism
- Inclusion and many more

The understanding of critical incidents helps teachers to improve their teaching practice by identifying what works and what does not work during their professional career. This helps teachers in dealing with queries and finding solutions on how learners can receive the best form of teaching.

Richards and Farrell (2010), outlines some of the benefits of how critical incident helps teachers to develop themselves in their professional career:

- Record keeping: The records of critical incidents that teachers keep of their classes can help other teachers when used as a reference for teaching improvement.
- Self-awareness: Critical incident makes teachers become more cautious about what they are teaching and will make them want to scrutinise every aspect of their teaching.
- Idea development: When teachers start understanding critical incidents in their classes, they start developing more ideas and ways to help learners, and they share these ideas among other teachers and for further research purposes
- Teamwork: Critical incident can unite teachers to work as team in order to improve teaching.

In reflection of the critical incident observation during bridging, the following three elements will be considered: Classroom management, ALN and Well-being

Classroom management

Disruptive behaviours cannot be completely eradicated from the class, but good classroom management helps to reduce such behaviours by a large margin. A teacher must adopt a classroom management that works for them the most.

Some basic classroom management strategies are:

- Expectations are clearly explained.
- Model ideal behaviour.
- Constant scanning of the class.
- Allow the pupils to help create guidelines.

- Offer reward/praise
- Maintain eye contact
- Use of names to catch them off guard
- Encourage creativity
- Motivate self-esteem
- Varied tone of voice - friendly but firm. etc

ALN – Additional Learning Needs formally known as SEN

ALN is used to describe children and or young adults who have learning difficulties. It includes children with physical or sensory needs who finds it hard to learn like children of the same age bracket, children with SEN and young adults of up to 25 years of age with LDD (Learning Difficulties and Disability.)

Apart from children with physical impairment, there are children with other types of ALN which are not visible. For example, children with Dyslexia, ADHD, ADD to mention but few, these may be a challenge for a teachers to be able to recognise the symptoms in the class, but once discovered, there are provisions in schools where teaching assistants (TA) are assigned to support the children, in areas such as School work (taking notes), helping the children socialise (making friends), helping hem express themselves etc.

Well-being of children

This is recognised as the quality of life that is made available for the children and young adult. It consists of understanding and attending to the needs of a child, youth and caregiver. It covers the social, behavioural and cognitive aspects of a child and is expected to cover every part of the welfare services for a child.

When children have are well taking care of, like every other person, they are instinctively anxious and are ready to explore life and grow in attitude, skills and knowledge at the slightest chance they have, in other words, Children develop well when their needs are met such as emotional, physical and spiritual needs.

The government understands the importance of good start in life as this contributes to the well-being of the learner. As the result, learners are encouraged to get involved in outdoor activity. Research finds that involvement in any outdoor activity has positive contribution to the

learner's mental well-being (Future Generations, 2017). Generally, learner's well-being depends on their motivation, ability and being physically active on their daily basis.

Another point, learners encouraged to have a good understanding of the influence of their choices on the economy, environment and the people surrounding them. In Wales particularly, the government aim to challenge learners at all levels of the education stages to see how they can provide to the lives of others. This has been embedded across all learning environment sectors within the wide range of topics.

REFLECTION / EVALUATION & NEXT STEPS

According to (Richards and Farrell, 2010, p. 120), when teachers document and create reports of critical incidents, they normally do this by thinking back and reflecting on the critical incident and try to answer questions such as: what made the incident important; what occurred just before the event; what occurred immediately after the event; the teachers reaction when the event happened; the teachers understanding or analysis of the event; what the teacher thinks about their teaching as related to the event; what the teacher may want to do differently to improve the situation or avoid re-occurrence.

Teachers can reflect on their critical incidents in different ways and through analysis, they need to look thoroughly in order to understand the critical incident specifically.

Tripp (1993) indicated that there are two stages through which a teacher can understand critical incident:

- Stage 1: The description phase. A particular observation has occurred and is recorded by the teacher. It's called the 'what' stage
- Stage 2: the explanation stage. The teacher explains the issue and its effect as they understand it. It's called the 'why' stage

The two stages above means that an incident first occurs, then the incident is described before it is categorised as a critical incident or not. The following steps are recommended by (Thiel, 99)

- Self-observation: Teachers need to have knowledge of all the relevant happenings in their class for them to be able to recognise and identify critical incident in the class in order to document such event in any way they choose, like in teaching journal, notebook, Videotape or audiotape.
- Describing what happened: The next step is to write a detailed description of the critical incident describing what happened in the class with all the relevant information that qualifies it to be a critical incident.
- Self-awareness: The teacher is then allowed to explain the way the actual incident happened. The teacher is expected to consider the scenario from every possible direction to establish how the incident came about.
- Self-evaluation: The final step is for the teacher to look back at the whole incident in order to establish how the incident has affected their present way of teaching and to determine what they can do differently to improve the situation.

CONCLUSION

For critical incident to be the successful carried out, different areas should be considered should be considered, such as, the community or the school that is involved in the event or research, the type of incident that requires investigating, etc, bearing in mind that not all incident are critical. An incident is considered critical when the situation is observed, and a reason is given. It also depends on the observer or researcher or the teacher as people consider incident in different ways. hence, a critical incident as defined previously, is an event which just occurs unexpected and unplanned in a classroom as the lesson is in progress. A teacher can document a critical incident event in order to have a proof of how their teaching pattern has improved after the event. Reflection is a key attribute to becoming a better teacher.

In conclusion, the researcher cannot help but give the following quote:

Education is a life-long process for all of us, provided we make the most of the opportunities. But, of course, we have to want to do so. We can just as easily reject such opportunities and even celebrate our lack of education. Whether we choose to be life-long learners will depend, in part, on our early school experiences. ... If our schooling has given us a positive view of our potential and stimulated our curiosity, imagination and capacity for sustained learning, our scope as life-long learners will be boundless. (Mortimore 2014: 11)

Mortimore, P. (2004) Education Under Siege. Policy Press

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Mortimore, P. (2004) *Education Under Siege*. Policy Press.

APPENDICES



OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date:	2/10/2019	0830 - 0930
Lesson details:	GEOGRAPHY CLASS Y9G.	
Classroom culture (Are the students focused on learning?)	CLASS OF 28 PUPILS. INTERMEDIATE. ROUND TABLE SEATING PATTERN.	
Objectives (Is there a clear purpose to the lesson? How do the lesson activities promote that purpose?)	IDENTIFYING VOLCANIC FAULT LINES.	
Direction (Are the students clear about what they are doing and how to do it well?)	CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS FROM TEACHER TO LEARNER.	
Access and challenge (Are all students able to engage in the lesson? Are all students challenged?)	LEARNERS ASKING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERING WHEN ASKED	
Assessment How does the teacher assess student understanding before, during and after the lesson? How is this used in their teaching?	HEADS DOWN, HANDS UP IF A STUDENT SCORED ALL ETC.	
Specifics / Critical Incidents Are there particular telling moments and examples which it would be helpful to discuss?	- NO EYE CONTACT WITH PUPILS DUE TO SEATING ARRANGEMENT. - SOME PUPILS BACKING THE BOARD. - A STUDENT WAS ABOUT 25 MINS LATE, UNABLE TO SETTLE DOWN.	



OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date:	2/10/2019.	0930 - 1030
Lesson details:	799 - TOP SET.	
RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE		
Classroom culture (Are the students focused on learning?) ABOUT 30 PUPILS. SEATING ARRANGEMENT - FACING THE BOARD.		
Objectives (Is there a clear purpose to the lesson? How do the lesson activities promote that purpose?) CLEARLY WRITTEN ON THE BOARD. - JEWISH CULTURE VS HINDI.		
Direction (Are the students clear about what they are doing and how to do it well?) CONTINUATION FROM PREVIOUS CLASS.		
Access and challenge (Are all students able to engage in the lesson? Are all students challenged?) MOST OF THE STUDENT SEEM TO ENJOY THE LESSON.		
Assessment How does the teacher assess student understanding before, during and after the lesson? How is this used in their teaching? TEACHER ASKS QUESTION AND PUPILS RAISE THEIR HANDS TO ANSWER.		
Specifics / Critical Incidents Are there particular telling moments and examples which it would be helpful to discuss? - A LEARNER NOT PAYING ATTENTION AND QUIETLY DISRUPTING ANOTHER PUPIL - ANOTHER LEARNER DISRUPTING CLASS - STUDENT WAS REPRIMANDED - TOLD TO STAY BEHIND DURING BREAK.		



OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date:	2/10/2019	1055 - 1155
Lesson details:	HISTORY.	Y9.
	INTERMEDIATE	
Classroom culture (Are the students focused on learning?)	COMPLETE CLASS MANAGEMENT. STUDENT SEATED FACING THE BOARD.	
Objectives (Is there a clear purpose to the lesson? How do the lesson activities promote that purpose?)	CLEARLY DISPLAYED ON THE BOARD - THE SPREAD OF DISEASE IN THE MID 17TH CENTURY.	
Direction (Are the students clear about what they are doing and how to do it well?)	VERY CLEAR AND ATTENTIVE.	
Access and challenge (Are all students able to engage in the lesson? Are all students challenged?)	ALL STUDENT PARTICIPATED VERY WELL.	
Assessment How does the teacher assess student understanding before, during and after the lesson? How is this used in their teaching?	TRAFFIC LIGHT PATTERN G	
Specifics / Critical Incidents Are there particular telling moments and examples which it would be helpful to discuss?	STUDENT WELL BEHAVED.	



OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

(Questions adapted from Fletcher Wood (2016))

Date:	2/10/2019.	11:55 - 12:55
Lesson details:	ENGLISH CLASS 79. TOP SET.	
Classroom culture (Are the students focused on learning?)	SEATED FACING THE BOARD.	
Objectives (Is there a clear purpose to the lesson? How do the lesson activities promote that purpose?)	CLEARLY DISPLAYED ON THE BOARD.	
Direction (Are the students clear about what they are doing and how to do it well?)	THE CLASS HAD AN ASSESSMENT	
Access and challenge (Are all students able to engage in the lesson? Are all students challenged?)	MOST OF THE STUDENTS WERE CARRYING OUT THEIR WORK.	
Assessment How does the teacher assess student understanding before, during and after the lesson? How is this used in their teaching?	THE CLASS SUBMITTED THEIR WORK AT THE END OF THE LESSON.	
Specifics / Critical Incidents Are there particular telling moments and examples which it would be helpful to discuss?	A LEARNER COMPLETELY UNSURE WHAT TO DO. - DOES NOT SEEM INTERESTED	