

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

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Introduction

The following assignment will consist of a critical evaluation of an observed incident within a classroom setting, using Tripp's (1993) critical incident methodology. Throughout, I will discuss my critical incident and how it is underpinned by literature and theoretical understanding. The purpose of this was to explore and discover the significance of reflective practice through a genuine, classroom based incident, resulting in the development of new ideas and skills to use in future practice. Tripp's particular methodology regarding critical incidents is based on the belief that they are occurring constantly during the school day and the significance of such events are determined by the interpretation and analysis of the observer (Tripp, 2011). Tripp suggests that although these incidents may seem to be rather insignificant at first, critical analysis and reflection can lead to these events becoming endless sources for reasoning, developing understanding and expanding knowledge. Following this, when studying critical incidents, Larrivee (2000) stated "The more teachers explore, the more they discover". Critical incident analysis is a crucial aspect of teaching, informing future practice and informing appropriate action in similar situations to those previously analysed. However, past studies have shown that critical incident analysis hasn't always been positive and has had the potential to expose vulnerabilities, rather than reducing anxieties (Vachon et al., 2011). Yet, This could be due to incorrect practice and improper reflection. Throughout this essay I will aspire to discover the effects of critical incident analysis on a personal level through analysing a particular incident which allows me to dive deeper into the classroom setting in particular and conclude whether it has led to progression and development of knowledge. Furthermore, I will aim to discover whether the analysis of such events has led to greater understanding and through a diagnostic approach be able to recognise, understand and explain the justifications of professional practice through the utilisation of academic theory and profession specific knowledge (Tripp, 2011).

The incident I observed took place in a Primary School in Swansea at 9.30AM within a mixed ability class. The particular incident I observed was that of the teacher rewarding the students' good behaviour. The teacher did this through extrinsic rewards such as 'Dojos' and also a 'Class vs teacher' tally chart where the students got scores on the chart for answering questions correctly and good behaviour. The positive reinforcement delivered by the teacher is associated with the work of behaviourist psychologist B.F Skinner in 1958. The following sections will look further into theoretical concepts associated with reflective practice, and how this relates to the teaching profession. A review of the literature will then aim to outline some key areas to better

understand the relevance of the incident in question, before outlining my own reflection to indicate next steps for future practice.

Literature Review

Positive reinforcement is a tool that has been used by teachers in education for many years. It involves the giving of rewards to encourage observable, positive behaviour changes in students. In my observed critical incident, the teacher used different techniques to use positive reinforcement in an attempt to create a positive behaviour change. The Method of positive reinforcement to recreate a particular behaviour was developed from a behaviourist ideology from B.F. Skinner (1958) that if an individual is given a reward following a task, the likelihood of the desired behaviour recurring in the future will be increased. Skinner showed how positive reinforcement worked by placing a hungry rat in his Skinner box. The box contained a lever on the side and as the rat moved about the box it would accidentally knock the lever. Immediately it did so a food pellet would drop into a container next to the lever. The rats quickly learned to go straight to the lever after a few times of being put in the box. The consequence of receiving food if they pressed the lever ensured that they would repeat the action continuously. This is where the behaviourist view that reward following a behaviour increases the likelihood of that behaviour being repeated. Therefore, the inquiry focuses on whether current research on positive reinforcement in the classroom supports Skinner's original conclusions.

The teacher used 'Class Dojo' as a reward system. It is a popular online platform that teachers, parents, and students can use for active communication and classroom behaviour management. Many teachers use behavioral management charts in their classrooms to manage student behaviours. A study by Victoria Choi (2019) studied teachers' use of the class dojo in comparison with standard behavioural management charts. The inquiry focuses on whether current research on positive reinforcement in the classroom supports Skinner's original conclusions, and whether Class Dojo creates similar results in positive behaviour change. Choi cited Krach (2016) who compared how teachers collect and keep track of students' behavioural information on paper and with the Class Dojo app by analysing different types of behavioural management charts. The study included the following conclusions: Firstly, the majority of behavioural management charts (BMCs), failed to adhere to the four positive behavioural intervention support (PBIS) standards which are data, equity, systems and practices. Secondly, Class Dojo out of all the systems, came closest to satisfying the necessary requirements needed for behavioural management charts as it notes both positive and negative behaviours, unlike paper and pencil BMCs. Lastly, Class Dojo offers "17 times the number of data points compared to the school-approved method, four times the number compared to teacher-made methods, and

18 times the number compared to multiple methods combined by a single teacher" (Krach, 2016, p. 7), resulting in a superior data-management system that generates a lot more data than other BMCs.

On the other hand, Krach (2016) argued in the conclusion of the study that when class dojo is used as a form of punishment for students, it can be seen as a 'shaming approach' to discipline rather than a previously established method. This suggests that the Dojo system can be regarded as a lazy method for teachers to control a class. Due consideration needs to be given to this perspective due to 'Class Dojo' being a new piece of technology for behaviour management. However, MacLean-Blevins (2013) conducted research on how Class Dojo influences student behaviour when it is only used to praise students and removing the negative, disciplinary side. For the study, MacLean-Blevins (2013) utilised the app to monitor the good habits she wanted to promote for three weeks. She also gathered information on the students' reactions to Class Dojo, observed behavioural patterns, and examined pre- and post-Class Dojo behaviour checklists. The study found that many students reacted favourably to Class Dojo and that tracking reinforced positive behaviours on the platform led to an increase in positive self-regulatory behaviours while decreasing negative disruptive behaviours (MacLean-Blevins, 2013). This suggests that utilising Class Dojo to congratulate students for exhibiting positive, self-monitoring behaviours was successful. This conclusion is in line with Krach's (2016) findings, and that of Skinner's initial positive reinforcement theory (1958).

Furthermore, a study by Garcia (2015) discovered the importance and the dramatic positive effect that Class Dojo had on her pupils. Garcia observed a critical incident in her classroom where one child would simply refuse to carry out tasks and would not follow rules established in the classroom. Garcia stated "I was stressing so much trying to get him to stay on task that I was losing my focus with the rest of my class." This was until she discovered Class Dojo. She suggested that the app encouraged the children to improve their behaviour through gaining points and that the app became the form of a 'token economy' system within the classroom. The visual stimulus and instant positive feedback leads the children to instantly be drawn in, in an attempt to accumulate more points. Garcia suggests that the students constantly want more points therefore they will apply themselves in order with the teachers expectations in order to achieve this. She stated "After I started using the Class Dojo app, I noticed an immediate change in the behaviour of my class, including my challenging student." This study relates to all prior studies mentioned, suggesting that positive reinforcement in the classroom relates to positive behaviour management change and management

Lastly, this study by Saeger (2017) focuses on the effect on class dojo on students with Additional learning needs. The positive effects of the website are clear, showing great effectiveness in reinforcing positive behaviour, however it is unclear whether this applies to all students with different learning needs. Three students in the class studied were diagnosed with

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and one with oppositional defiance disorder. The study achieved all of its goals outlined which were that of an increase in positive behaviour and a decrease in negative behaviour for all students involved. However, Saeger outlined some key limitations of using Class Dojo. Technical issues can be a problem for example if the school has wifi issues and the internet is not working, class dojo cannot be accessed. When a reward system such as this has been in place for an extended period of time and the students have become accustomed to this, a sudden change can be very unsettling for students with ALN (Martinelli, 2023). This change in delivery can be upsetting and could lead to a negative effect in the positive changes to behaviour that have been made.

Case Study

The case study I observed took place in a Primary School in Swansea at 9.30AM within a mixed ability class . The particular incident I observed was that of the teacher rewarding the students' good behaviour. The teacher did this through an extrinsic reward scheme using 'Class Dojo'. My observation looked at the effect that Class Dojo was having on the class and how the teacher was using it. I observed the teacher giving the children a Dojo point for continuous good behaviour such as putting their hand up to answer a question and not shouting out. One example of this being used by the teacher is when he stated "I am going to give you a dojo point there just for participating." This would encourage the students to get involved with class activities and to pay attention in order to gain more points. The students became excited whenever a dojo was awarded to them. This also led to the children becoming increasingly more likely to repeat said behaviour that led to the dojo being awarded. Furthermore, if the children got a question right, the class would be awarded a dojo. But on the contrary, if the teacher got a question right or the children got one wrong then he would award himself a Dojo. This created a challenge for the class to attempt to 'beat' the teacher by the end of the day. If the class successfully got more dojo points than the teacher then they would be given rewards for example an extra couple minutes at play time.

The critical incident I observed is in line with the literature that was reviewed prior. It shows the positive effect that class dojo has on individuals and on the class as a whole. It leads to children behaving in line with the class rules in order to earn more dojo points. This also seems to be a catalyst to less negative behaviour as the students know that this could impact their dojo points. The token economy system mentioned by Garcia (2015) is shown in this observation and seems to be an effective tool in regards to positive behaviour management and change. Furthermore, it links back to original literature by B.F Skinner (1958) on the effects of positive reinforcement. If you reward positive behaviour it increases the likelihood of said behaviour to happen again. In this particular observation, it is clear that the use of Class Dojo as a form of positive

reinforcement has become a very effective method in behaviour management. The students are excited and eager to perform well in class and earn rewards from that. The children are engaged and want to participate in the lecture in order to be rewarded. This seems to have created a happy work environment in the classroom which in turn would lead to more focus on work and therefore a better outcome in school in terms of grades and progression. Very few negatives of the class dojo seem to have arisen from the observation. One could be that one or two of the children in this particular observation had their hands up for elongated periods of time and did not get chosen. This led to them becoming disinterested in the task. This is no fault of the teacher as there are many students in the class and it would be impossible to accustom to each of them at the same time, yet this does shine a slim negative light on the use of Class Dojo. However, as a whole the observation provided a very positive example of class dojo being used in the classroom with children being more engaged with the tasks and eager to learn, while behaving appropriately within the rules of the class simultaneously..

Teaching and Learning Methods

The highlighted teaching method I observed in my critical incident was that of positive praise and reinforcement. Positive praise in education can link to several pedagogical principles and theories of learning. One example of this is praise's link to constructivism. Constructivism is a learning theory that emphasises the active role of learners in building their own understanding. Rather than passively receiving information, learners reflect on their experiences, create mental representations, and incorporate new knowledge into their schemas. Elliot et al (2000) states that constructivism is 'an approach to learning that holds that people actively construct or make their own knowledge and that reality is determined by the experiences of the learner'. The principle of constructivism therefore links to positive praise through several means. Firstly, it promotes collaboration. When positive praise is used to highlight effective communication, teamwork and contributions in the classroom setting then these behaviours are more likely to be reinforced. Secondly, the promotion of active learning in the classroom setting. When students are praised for thoughtful contributions to the task or generating contributions to the learning, they will be motivated to continue in this vein in the future. Lastly, a further way in which positive praise and reinforcement links to constructivism is through the importance of self-led learning. Cognitivist John Dewey (1933) valued real-life contexts and problems as an educational experience. He believed that "if students only passively perceive a problem and do not experience its consequences in a meaningful, emotional, and reflective way, they are unlikely to adapt and revise their habits or construct new habits, or will only do so superficially" (Dewey, J. 1933) If students engage with the task and show initiative, positive praise following these actions can lead to students taking control of their learning, linking to cognitivist principles. Overall, linking positive praise and reinforcement to constructivism creates an engaging, active learning process

for the students who would be motivated to achieve and do well, this is why I would adopt these principles in the classroom. On the other hand, the cognitivist approach to education does have its pitfalls such as a tendency to oversimplify complicated human behaviours and a difficulty in providing an explanation for emotional and inconsistent behaviour. Furthermore, it might not adequately take into consideration how social and cultural influences affect cognition. When this is applied to the classroom, it could mean some students do not adapt well to this form of teaching, especially those with additional learning needs (Schwartz, 1978). This could suggest more research is needed into these areas to understand potential drawbacks and how to resolve them. Yet, Class Dojo in my critical incident is a clear use of positive praise and reinforcement shown to be working very successfully, while linking to cognitivist principles of education and learning.

Furthermore, a learning method that falls hand in hand with positive reinforcement as briefly mentioned prior, is that of active learning. When these two elements are working together in an educational setting they can become a force that creates a happy, engaging, motivated work environment. Bonwell and Eison (1991) state that active learning is “a method of learning in which students are actively or experientially involved in the learning process and where there are different levels of active learning, depending on student involvement.” This method of learning is greatly supported by positive praise. It supports involvement and engagement for example. When students are praised for answering questions and getting involved with the class discussion, it encourages them to repeat this behaviour. The praise awarded in this particular observation is the receipt of a dojo point after a contribution to the class, which leads to increased contribution from the person awarded the dojo, but also from those who witnessed the point being given. Moreover, the immediate positive praise that students receive from showing they are engaged with the class and answering questions, the clearer it becomes for students to understand what they need to do in order to achieve. If students have to wait a week for a piece of feedback from a teacher, there is potential for the student to have forgotten what they did to earn that praise in the first place. Class dojo offers that immediate feedback circle keeping students motivated and engaged. Lastly, positive praise can be a huge confidence booster for students. Some students may feel discouraged after getting a question wrong in class and not want to engage again. Positive praise in this regard can be used to keep these students on task to boost their mentality suggesting that it is part of the learning process. Dwyer (2010) states that “Offering praise for students' work and efforts can alter this mindset so that students can begin to view their own intelligence as something that can be developed. This mindset of developing intelligence will increase students' ability to ‘bounce back’ in the face of academic setbacks and other difficulties.” The use of class Dojo encourages students to try again after making a mistake or after a set back as they are aware of the praise that they will receive for showing their learning process, but also trying again after getting something wrong the first time. Although active learning does have some disadvantages such as its time consuming nature and also the potential

to go off track from curriculum, it is an area I think is crucial for an engaging, motivated learning environment.

In any circumstance, positive reinforcement serves as an instrument for teachers to encourage and celebrate students' correct behaviours, attitudes, and achievements that line up with the pedagogical principles and the curriculum. When applied correctly, positive reinforcement can aid students internalise the values and concepts associated with these principles, making learning more engaging and effective. In this critical incident, it is clear class dojo is being used as a form of positive praise in order to reinforce the students motivation and excitement to learn and improve.

Discussion

On the 22nd September I observed a critical incident in a classroom showing a teacher giving out dojo points to students as a form of positive praise. This incident stood out to me as it was clear it was an effective method of creating an engaging, motivated and positive classroom environment. The question arose however, is there literature to back this observation up? When looking back at the literature regarding positive reinforcement as a method of encouraging individuals to repeat a particular action, the findings from my observation linked strongly back to the work of B.F Skinner (1958) on positive reinforcement in that the praise given by the teacher led to repeated positive behaviour. Furthermore, I looked into more specific research into that of class dojo and its effectiveness. Studies by Choi (2019), Krach (2016), Garcia (2015) and Saeger (2017) showed the positive effects of Class dojo when used in a classroom setting. They showed how the positive and immediate feedback of giving a dojo point kept the students engaged and motivated to learn more. Moreover, Saeger's (2017) study looked into the effect of class dojo on students with additional learning needs. The conclusions of the study were the same with a high improvement of involvement and engagement while also creating a positive classroom environment for all children involved. My observation did not recognise any negatives of using class dojo apart from when a student did not get picked who had their hand up they became slightly disinterested and disengaged. There are negatives to this form of positive praise in the classroom as outlined by Saeger, who suggested that if technical issues arose then the software would simply not be usable. This could create a dramatic change for students and cause them to go off track. Also, Students with additional learning needs may find this sharp change in structure distressing. There are risks to using the software, however the majority of literature and my observation suggest that it is a very positive tool to reinforce correct behaviour in the classroom, creating and moulding active learners who want to please and improve.

In addition to these points of reflection, my observation and literature review have concluded that positive reinforcement in the classroom, and more specifically in this instance the use of

Class dojo, link to the 12 pedagogical principles (HWB, 2023) and to the curriculum. It links to “challenges all learners by encouraging them to recognise the importance of sustained effort in meeting expectations that are high but achievable for them” due to the encouragement given by the praise to motivate the students to learn and improve. Furthermore, I believe a crucial link that the class dojo has to the pedagogy is through encouraging collaboration. The feedback loop posed by the use of the software encourages and boosts the student teacher relationship through collaborative means. The praise given by the teacher provides the student with feedback to let them know when they are acting/behaving correctly or on track with what they need to be achieving. Lastly, my observation of class dojo shows a link to another pedagogical principle, this being “encourages learners to take increasing responsibility for their own learning”. Class Dojo encourages students to be active learners through encouragement into participation. This leads to them becoming more responsible for their own development, improvement and learning. My observation made it clear that positive reinforcement in the classroom in the form of classdojo is a useful method for creating a positive environment with students who strive for the best they can be.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Through the observational experience, an incident was recorded and utilised for the further critical reflection using Tripp’s (2011) methodology. This incident was that of Class dojo being used as a form of positive reinforcement in the classroom. Following analysis and reflection of this incident, class dojo is a positive, engaging and fun way for teachers to be able to praise the students in their class for being active learners and behaving in the correct manner. This method of praise leads to students becoming motivated and eager to learn more and impress, while not being afraid to make mistakes. The concept of positive reinforcement and positive praise in general and in the classroom was examined through various pieces of academic literature. The majority of which supported that positive reinforcement and in this case class dojo is an effective method of creating a positive, engaging learning environment for students and for the teacher. In addition to this, the use of Class dojo as a form of positive reinforcement falls in line with the current curriculum for Wales and covers crucial pedagogical principles for learning. The reflection following the analysis has shown how effective positive praise can be and how positively it can impact learners. Overall, following this reflection of the critical incident that was observed, Class Dojo is an effective method for teachers to implement positive reinforcement in their classrooms, creating a positive, engaging atmosphere filled with motivated, bold students eager to learn and improve.

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