

**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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ECAD6007: Who am I teaching?

Introduction

The word 'critical' or even 'incident' may initially provoke negative thoughts, potentially a disaster event. This is however not always the case. This critical evaluation looks to acknowledge a particular event which had previously occurred in a classroom setting, an event that appeared to play a significant part in the routine of the classroom. A critical incident was therefore described by Tripp (1993, p.8), as an 'interpretation of the significance of an event'. Therefore, these events referred to as critical incidents, can either play a positive or a negative part, depending on the way in which they are analyzed. These incidents are extremely important in evolving and adapting pedagogy. They allow us to consider possible implications of the pedagogical approaches currently being implemented, and allows us to dive deeper in to why these incidents occur. These can be of huge asset to any educator when setting out to improve their own practice. This evaluation will discuss one particular critical incident and how this associates with the 4 purposes of the Welsh curriculum, discussed in the Donaldson Review (Welsh Gov, 2015) This literature will also elaborate on potential next steps for future practice. Within this literature, there will be a focus on two main areas in terms of how they were represented within the chosen critical incident. These areas are; differentiation/Inclusion and behavioral management. This discussion will also acknowledge a plethora of literature by credited authors in assisting the evaluation.

The role of critical reflection

The world of pedagogy is a forever changing and a forever adapting area with new research, new opinions and new legislations playing a huge part in these changes. Reflection in a broad sense can be of vast importance to any individual or group. Reflection can help to review procedures and routines, it can help to investigate potential issues, but most significantly, aid the proposition of improving what is already being practiced. Shelley (2019), highlights the importance of being able to examine your own thinking as this in turn, allows for greater understanding and sense of ownership. Hathazi and Serban (2021) also discuss the extremely high importance of constructive feedback and reflection strategies when training professionals. Gulyamovna and Abidjanovna (2021) state that reflection allows for a person to comprehend their own mental activity, consequently, unless an educator is able to understand their own thoughts and feelings, how is a child supposedly able to understand them? Furthermore, emphasizing the sheer importance of reflection.

The new curriculum for Wales is set out to support schools in creating their own curriculum. In order for them to assist children in the four purposes (Welsh Gov, 2021). This new direction in Welsh education would have stemmed through a reflection and as assessment of the previous curriculum and the pedagogical practices in place. There are different reflective models in which each individual may choose to adopt when assessing and evaluating practice. Gibbs (1998), created a model whereby the individual must describe what happened in a particular event, what feelings then occurred, what could then be evaluated, and thus analyzed, and consequently resulting in a conclusion and an action plan. The Kolb (1984) model focuses on an experience, followed by a reflective observation, a conclusion and finally experimenting with what has been learned. Schon (1987) applies a more simplistic approach, with two options; reflection that takes part in action, and reflection after the event. These reflective models may split into alternative segments however they all arrive at the same conclusion, this being the necessity of implementing what has been learned into future practice. Reflection is inevitably critical, however without then creating a subsequent action plan, the value of reflection its self is severely degraded.

When looking to reflect and evaluate, it is vital that there are set goals and standards in which to form a comparison with. The new professional standards introduced by the Welsh Government provide these targets. These are a set of standards in which all teachers in Wales must meet (Welsh Gov, 2019). It is highly encouraged that schools use these standards as a way of reflecting on practice and to assist in professional learning (Ibid, 2019). Considering the challenges that come with implementing a new curriculum in practice, these standards provide clear expectations of what the Welsh government wish to see in Welsh classrooms and offer professionals the material to reflect on their own practice in order to collaboratively support the success of the new curriculum.

Observation- School and class context

In order for this critical evaluation to be possible. It was imperative that I spent some time within a classroom setting in order to be able to pick out the critical incidents. I was able to spend two school days within a year 5/6 classroom situated within a large mainstream school in the

Neath/Port talbot area in south Wales. This particular school contains both primary and secondary phases and in 2018, had approximately 1,512 pupils, with 286 of these at primary age. Over 30% of these pupils are eligible for free school meals with two thirds of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas in the country. The national average for eligibility for free school meals in 2018 was 16.4% for secondary schools and 18% for primary, consequently lower than the percentage given for this particular school (Estyn, 2019). The percentage of pupils with additional learning needs was approximately 26%, this again being a higher figure than the 2018 national average of 22.9%. 9.2% of pupils also had statements of special educational needs, this being considerably larger than the 2018 national average of 2.2% (Ibid, 2019). The classroom I was situated in involved 8 girls and 25 boys, split between 8 year 6's and 25 year 5's. The group was of very mixed ability; however, they were not initially grouped ability wise due to the academic year starting fairly recently before. There were 3 children diagnosed with ASD and one of these individuals was involved in the particular critical incident discussed in this literature.

The critical incident and its link to Donaldson's Four Purposes

The new curriculum for Wales sets out to address the four purposes of education in Wales. These four purposes include ethically informed citizens, confident and healthy learners, ambitious and capable learners and enterprising and creative contributors. These four purposes are the concrete foundations for the new curriculum for Wales and are described as representing the ambitions that all schools should design their curriculum towards (Welsh Gov, 2021). While observing within the classroom, I was looking for any relationship between any noticeable critical incidents and their association to these four purposes.

The critical incident which I selected for further consideration involved a particular child with Autism (ASD) (Appendix A). This child became quite distressed after being provided with a task set within a math's lesson. The child in turn began to be quite rude to his peers and the classroom teacher. Consequently, to avoid any further disruption to the classroom and to provide this particular child with some space to them self, the teacher pointed to the classroom door. By doing so, the child knew it was best to remove them self from the classroom, which they then proceeded to do so. After approximately 45 minutes, the child returned to the classroom having successfully completed all the work they initially refused to complete. The child was praised highly by the teacher however the child appeared to react negatively towards this and proceeded to lie down

on the classroom floor. In an attempt to distract the child, the teacher provided the individual with a role. In this particular case, the role involved taking stationary items back to where they came from. This appeared to provide the child with a sense of responsibility and a growth in confidence. Furthermore, a discussion was then able to take place between the teacher and the child, a discussion which allowed for immensely valuable reflection time, on matters of behaviour and the work completed.

When relating this incident to the four purposes of the Welsh curriculum, it was evident that there was a solid understanding between the teacher and the child in terms of their human rights. The child was provided with an alternative method of completing their work, exercising their right to their own personal space. In close correlation to this, the teacher understood the needs and the diversity within the classroom and was able to adjust their pedagogy accordingly. Both of these examples are acknowledged under the ethical, informed citizens element of the four purposes (Ibid, 2021). There was also strong evidence of healthy, confident individuals within the classroom and this particular incident. The child appeared to fill with confidence after discussing their achievements with the teacher. Not only this but the child displayed great levels of resilience when overcoming a challenge which initially appeared too difficult. These are massively important traits that are highly recognized within the four purposes and were undoubtedly influenced by the teacher within the classroom.

Literature Review

The two focal points identified within this critical incident and thus selected for further consideration are; differentiation/Inclusion, and behavioral management. These were two exceedingly noticeable elements within the classroom and were therefore chosen for further research. Differentiation has been described as a way of allowing all children to benefit from the education they are in (Denessen, 2017). Differentiation allows for the necessary support to be provided for those who may require it. The new Welsh curriculum sets out to promote a fair and equitable environment within classrooms by taking into consideration the Additional Learning needs bill and by applying differentiation into their new set of professional standards (Welsh Gov, 2019). Denessen (2017, p. 4) recognizes that differentiation can be a way of reducing the 'risk of inequalities in education' however also goes on to conflict this statement, noting that differentiation can also 'increase inequality'. For instance, if a class is set into ability groupings, studies have

revealed that this leans towards the children developing in different directions, with the highest ability groups developing the most (Naomi, 2010). This is most likely down to the effect the similar ability peers within the group have on each other. Vehkakoski (2012) also described strategies relating to ability groups as an uncompromising method and other literature has argued that setting groups into similar interests and characteristics may in fact be more beneficial (Lindsay *et al*, 2014). This being that children can learn a great deal from likeminded individuals and forming strong connections. This correlates very strongly with the findings of Chung *et al* (2018) where it was revealed that strong relationships and friendships had a significant positive effect on the performance of a group. Consequently, highlighting that simply grouping children in terms of their ability, with no certainty that strong relationships may be formed, may not be the most effective approach. Despite this, there has been positive recognition in terms of the success of ability groupings whereby Deunk *et al* (2015) state that greater instruction provided as support for the lower ability groups, can result in a more cohesive development. Deunk *et al* (2018) do however identify that ability grouping is simply not enough to assure differentiation and thus differentiation must be considered in a broader context. In order to create a more equitable classroom environment, the needs of each individual and the way in which they process and deliver information must be paramount. It is vital that as educators, we understand which method of pedagogy is appropriate for which child and to know when to adapt the learning processes to the needs and characteristics of an individual (Isidori *et al*, 2018). This quality is represented with vital importance under the innovation element of the teaching standards (Welsh Gov, 2020).

In terms of reviewing differentiation in a broader context, there must be a multi-perspectivist approach in order to gain a true reflection. When doing so, it has been recognized that there was only a very minimal number of corresponding viewpoints between teachers and students in terms of the way in which differentiation and inclusion was being implemented within schools (Lindner *et al*, 2019; Schwab, Sharma and Hoffmann, 2019). Furthermore, it is imperative that there is cohesion and understanding between the way in which differentiation is implemented within classrooms. Everyone, especially the pupils must understand their right to inclusion and the ways in which they can access support. In addition to this, it is vital that schools are supplied with the necessary resources and required staff training in order to allow for inclusion (Dixon *et al*, 2014). This argument then in turn promotes the use of special schools. This route can offer this extra support for ALN pupils in greater quantity with a higher amount of ALN specific trained staff and a greater number of resources. In a survey collected by the NASUWT teachers' union, nearly two thirds of the 1,615 participant teachers/support staff stated that support for pupils had reduced

within the previous 5 years. Not only this but more than two thirds testified that they rarely receive the required support in order to fully support their learners with ALN (NASUWT, 2017). Evidently these issues require further investigation in order to help support schools in implementing inclusion and differentiation within their classrooms.

Behavioral management in its most broad sense, is the attempt to maintain a productive and orderly classroom (Armstrong, 2018). Behavioral management covers all varieties of behaviour, from violence to much more discreet persistent misbehavior. The Elton report (DFES, 1989) stated that solid group management should be considered the most critical part in attaining high standards of behaviour. However, since 1989 there has been huge developments within educational psychology and of course it must be acknowledged that there are several other factors within the school that must be considered. For example, whole school approaches, training, consistency, and ways in which behaviour can be monitored (Ofsted, 2005). Behavioral management in the classroom can come in a variety of formats. Some examples may be, presented in the format of written rules, reinforcement, and response or punishment, all in which set out to 'increase desirable behaviour' (Hart, 2010 p. 356). Accommodating behavioral requirements of those who may need that extra support, whilst cementing their inclusion within the classroom can be a very challenging concept (Armstrong, 2018).

Differentiation and inclusion must be at the forefront of the behavioral management approach in which is being implemented. All individuals may respond differently to alternative methods of behavioral management. For example, as educators, we initially believe that praise and positive reinforcement comes with massive rewards in behaviour, however it has been recognized that those with ASD do not necessarily respond well to praise (Livingston, 2018). This could be down to the social and emotional difficulties which come with ASD. Individuals with ASD struggle with communication and specifically social interactions, this could be the explanation for why individuals with ASD may wish to avoid praise, or even feedback of any kind (Ibid, 2018). Consequently, an alternative approach may be required. In correlation to this, Brummelman and Dweck (2020) also discuss how praise can sometimes result in unintended outcomes. The authors go on to elaborate on how praise can create a sense of concern within the children, a feeling of expectation whereby they must continuously meet the standard of work in which deserved this praise. This impact can extend as far as resulting in lack of motivation, lack of self esteem and incidents of challenge avoidance and cheating. This consequently may result in

higher levels of praise and encouragement from surrounding professionals, thus creating a vicious circle.

Despite this, there is inevitable importance in regularly praising children within the classroom. Praise can enhance motivation and perseverance when implemented correctly. In support of the research found by Brummelman and Dweck (2020), Corpus and Good (2020), discuss that in order for praise to result in its intended outcome, there must be 4 factors considered. The praise must be delivered in a way that implies that the success achieved is controllable, for example; the effort or the chosen strategy used by the individual. Consequently, the acknowledgement of external control must be minimized, thus encouraging a sense of autonomy. The praise must be specific and transparent about the quality of the individuals work and must result in a sense of competence and confidence. When all these factors are considered, there is a much greater probability that the praise provided will result in a more positive development.

Another way in which behavioral management can display its self, is in the form of either positive or negative reinforcement. Skinner (1971) initially announced his theory of 'operant conditioning', a theory stating that individuals learn from consequences of previous behaviour. Therefore, if an individual is praised in some way, or punished because of their behaviour, this will consequently impact on their future behaviour. Whether this consequence is positive or negative reinforcement, can have significantly different effects on future behaviour. Positive reinforcement occurs when a favorable outcome becomes a consequence of behaviour (Ibid,1971). For example, if a learner receives a sticker for putting their hand up and contributing in class, this learner will feel intrinsic reward and this behaviour will be strengthened. Negative reinforcement on the other hand relates to an unfavorable consequence being eliminated due to certain behaviour (Ibid, 1971). Furthermore, both forms of reinforcement share the common goal of promoting good behaviour. In addition to this, there must also be attention given to differential reinforcement, whereby good behaviour being portrayed by a certain individual or group is reinforced in contrast to those displaying negative behaviour (Johns, 2015). This method of reinforcement avoids the potential negative impacts that may come with the use of punishment and by simply ignoring the negative behaviour, can in fact aid the promise of positive behaviour by focusing on good models of behaviour (Gongola & Daddario, 2010). It is however imperative that negative behaviour does not always get ignored. This being that in relation to the negative reinforcement element of operant condition, if this behaviour relates it self to no form of consequence, then there will be no motive for ending this pattern of behaviour.

Punishment In the general sense of removing children from class and suspensions are associated to be traditional forms of behavioral management (Garret, 2015). However, for the majority of schools, these methods are still being implemented into the behavioral management policies (Maag, 2012, Kelly and Pohl, 2018). When focusing specifically on the removal of a pupil from a classroom due to negative behaviour, it is important to note that there has then been no display or model of what would be considered more desirable behaviour. Consequently, this method could have very little impact on aiding the performance and behaviour of pupils due to its lack of positive instruction (Carter and Pool, 2012).

Reflection, Evaluation and Next Steps

By collecting the above literature and gaining a wider perspective of differentiation and behaviour management, it has allowed me to relate what had been previously found, to what I witnessed firsthand within the classroom. The particular child involved within my chosen critical incident as previously mentioned, was diagnosed with ASD. A topic which created a vast debate was the use of ability groupings within the classroom. Within this particular classroom, there was a much more flexible seating plan, allowing the children to sit where they felt most comfortable, consequently promoting social connections within the tables. This allows for children to feel comfortable within the classroom and provides them with opportunity to create meaningful experiences, thus being a pedagogical approach in which I wish to take with me into my professional career. Despite this, it is important to acknowledge that some individuals, especially those with a lack of potential social skills, may find this overwhelming. This appeared to be the case for the particular child within my observed incident.

The reviewed literature stated that the use of punishment lacks a positive model and instruction and can result in a much less than favorable outcome (Carter and Pool, 2012). Despite this, within my observed incident, exclusion from the classroom portrayed its self as an extremely effective and beneficial approach. In this particular case, it was evident that there was a very clear understanding between the teacher and this particular child. There had obviously been vast quantities of discussion between several different professionals, such as previous teachers and support staff, into the best possible behavioural management techniques for this individual. Furthermore, this approach was greatly deliberated and discussed and was therefore capable of

the desired outcomes in which occurred. By witnessing this incident, it has allowed me to appreciate the importance of collaborative pedagogy and this is something I will give massive consideration to in my future steps as a professional. This incident also highlights the status of innovation. If this particular child had continued to disrupt the classroom in the way in which they were initially doing, there could have been very little amounts of beneficial work completed by the child and their peers. By ways of innovation, the structure of the lesson for this child was completely altered. By providing this child with an alternative approach to the lesson, resulted in a much more beneficial outcome.

Within my future practice, I will pursue several different opinions and viewpoints for the children within my class. This could come from a variety of sources such as families, learning coordinators and educational psychologists, however most importantly, the feelings and opinions of the child. In close proximity to the approach within the new Welsh curriculum, I wish to create a child centered environment whereby each individual can express their feelings in a comfortable and welcoming environment. This particular child clearly felt more comfortable within an environment where they could feel secluded and within my next steps, I will acknowledge the needs of each individual and the alternative ways in which they may more greatly benefit from. However, I will also consider the potential drawbacks that can come from time outside of the classroom. A possible example of this would be the negative impact on social development. Consequently, it is vital that all individuals get the opportunity to create strong relationships.

It has been made clear to me through research and time within the classroom, that pedagogical approaches that may at first appear the most appropriate, are not necessarily the most suited approach. In terms of relating this to this particular critical incident, the learner was provided with a role or a responsibility, rather than being bombarded with praise and acknowledgement. By diving deeper into literature surrounding this topic, it is clear that for many individuals, this specific approach may be more beneficial. However, this research had also taught me the value of praise, when taking great consideration into how it is delivered. Within my practice, I will aim to make my praise specific, therefore making the reason for the praise transparent. I will also acknowledge that it was the acts of the individual or group, and not external factors that has resulted in the praise. This way the use of praise can help to motivate individuals rather than overwhelming them with pressure. As discussed previously with the use of literature, operant conditioning is a common technique used within schools. This was mirrored within this incident when the classroom teacher pointed to the door, rather than verbally giving instructions. This technique was

clearly understood by the learner and this simple action saved valuable time, protected against the potential of further disruptions and upset and prevented from piling an excessive amount of cognitive load on to the individual. This is a technique and a theory that I will give great consideration to in my next steps in pedagogy.

Conclusion

To summarize the findings that have been brought to light, through the use of prior literature and the analysis of a critical incident, it is evident that there is no one correct pedagogical approach. It has been made explicitly clear that only through great levels of communication, research and support, can a truly affect pedagogical approach be set in place. Creating a flourishing learning environment for all different abilities, beliefs and behaviours takes an immense amount of innovation and in doing so, requires massive volumes of understanding and empathy. It is transparent that individuals learn best in diverse ways and this must be acknowledged in great depth in order to help create an inclusive classroom environment. Equity must be at the forefront of any classroom approach in order to assure every individual is being provided with the opportunity to reach their highest potential. By implementing a reflective approach through the use of a critical incident, it abled me to recognize my next steps within my own pedagogical route. The experience allowed me to understand why certain approaches in the classroom are favored over others in particular situations. My time within the classroom highlighted the criticality of creating strong relationships with the learners and colleagues. By doing so, we are able to get the best support possible for the learners and thus resulting in a more equitable environment.

Appendix A- STEER observation and field notes.

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 22/09/21 year 5/6, 9:00am

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

- Initially in the classroom but also situated in the corridor
- First period, potentially anxious
- Noisy environment due to morning energy.
- Provided with individual maths tasks.

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

A child with ASD became distressed after being given a math's activity. The child then became disruptive and rude towards his peers and teacher. The teacher then pointed to the door and the child removed them self from the classroom. The individual then completed their work successfully outside of the classroom. But when praised when they returned, the learner proceeded to lie on the floor in upset. The teacher then provided the child with a task of taking some stationary back. This appeared to fill the child with confidence and thus resulted in a reflective discussion with the teacher.

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

What avenues of research could you consider?

- Can individuals learn more effectively outside of the class?
- Does this allow for inclusion and social growth
- How effective can removal from a classroom be?
- How does this child take demands?
- How does ASD affect the response to praise?
- How was innovation used to adapt the lesson?
- How was differentiation put in place?
- How can we support ASD pupils?
- Would ability groupings work?

Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit - the more you can refer to the better here)

It was a busy, noisy start to the morning therefore distractions were high.

Record 2

Date and time, year group: 23/09/21, Year 5/6, 2:00pm

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

- End of the day
- Children possibly tired
- Topic on castles
- Research lesson

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

A group of children were confused about a research task they were given on the topic of castles. They were initially told to work alone to find out differences between three different castles. These children asked the teacher how they would approach this, the teacher then realized there was confusion and adapted the lesson into a group task. The children then understood the task through a group format and then were able to transfer these skills over to an individual task at the end.

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

- How effective is group work?
- Is it best to stick to the lesson plan or innovate?

- The benefits of communication
- Ability groupings or friendship groups?

Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit – the more you can refer to the better here)

- The children could have been confused easier due to fatigue at the end of the day.
- The research format is a generally new one.

Record 3

Date and time, year group: 23/09/21, Year 5/6, 9:00am

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

- 1st lesson
- Maths

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

A child with behavioral issues was becoming restless after being given an instruction in math's. The teacher spotted this and rather than stating further demands, the teacher knew from previous experience that this child struggles with demand avoidance therefore chose to say nothing. The child sat there quietly without completing any work however the learner agreed to complete the work later that day.

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

- Is it best to ignore some behaviours?
- The importance of quiet and reflection time
- Demand avoidance and how to approach it?

Notes: any details you can note (is it a busy environment, is it after lunch, are there lots of distractions, are directions made explicit – the more you can refer to the better here)

- It was a morning lesson and fatigue could have been an issue for this learner.

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