

ECAD6007 –  
Who am I teaching?

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## Introduction

In this assignment, I will critically analyse and reflect on a critical incident that I observed in my professional bridging experience in school 'X'. Tripp discusses that critical incidents are "produced by the way we look at a situation and how we interpretate the significance of the event" (Tripp, 2012, p.8). For example, a critical incident could be a student constantly arriving late to school. Critical incidents have two main uses; in education teachers use critical incident to help develop an understanding and control of their practice and they can also use them for classroom research by helping a teacher to understand the class that they will be teaching (Tripp, 2012). Critical incidents are important because it helps teachers know more about how they teach. (Joshi, 2018) states critical incidents are important because it allows teachers to develop professionally, identify practices which aren't working so well and serves as a form that allows teachers to reflect and gives a sense of professional awareness.

Throughout the essay, I will critically evaluate different avenues beginning with the role of the critical reflection and its importance for developing teaching and linking to the five professional standards for teaching in Wales. Following this, I will be providing information about the observation setting, ensuring the compliance of BERA. Which will lead onto the next section of the critical incident being discussed, and how it links to at least one of the four purposes for the new curriculum of Wales. Next, will be the literature review, literature and key theories will be linked to the incident. Following this, will be the reflection and evaluation, using a reflective model to identify next steps. Finally, I will conclude and summarise the essay and the links to the professional standards for teaching and leadership.

## The role of critical reflection

Fook, (2015) states when used specifically to improve professional practice, is reflective practice that focuses on the power dimensions of assumptive thinking, therefore on how practice might change in order to bring about change in the social situations in which professionals work. This year in Wales the Welsh government have implemented out into schools the new curriculum for Wales, Welsh Government have carried out reflective practice on the old Welsh curriculum in order for them to bring a change to create a more effective

curriculum for the professionals and learners. The new curriculum will prepare young people to develop higher literacy and numeracy, to be able to become more digitally and bilingually competent and to be confident capable citizens of Wales and the world (Welsh Government, no date). Myer's (2012) stated that reflective practice is a disposition to enquiry incorporating the process throughout the teaching profession to help structure or restructure actions, knowledge and theories that inform teaching for the purpose of professional development.

Within the new curriculum, all student teachers must meet all five professional standards for teaching and leadership within the programme ITE "To become a school teacher in Wales, you need to gain Qualified Teacher Status, this means completing a programme of Initial Teacher Education" (Welsh Government, 2021). In Wales, there are five new professional standards for teaching and leadership that drives everyone working with learners and supports professional growth that all student teachers must meet before qualifying. The five standards will help underpin the development of the teaching profession as it leads the transformation of our education system in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019). Reflective practice is an element that lays under the professional standard of pedagogy for professional potential and aspiration as it allows teachers to adjust and respond based on previous experiences. In terms of reflection teachers can carry out multiple opportunities such as "engage in reflective teaching, they are dedicating time to evaluate their own teaching practice, examine their curricular choices, consider student feedback, and make sure students continue to improve and feel a belonging in the classroom" (Yale, 2021). Teachers in Wales must be reflective, reflection on teaching as a profession allows us to identify what works best for the children so the lessons can tailor to suit their needs. Being reflective allows you to be able to help yourself improve and develop from your experience.

Critical reflective practice is important as a student teacher as it allows us opportunities to reflect critically about our practice and ideas while being open to others' reflections on how practice can be improved or developed (Welsh Government, 2022). This is important as a student teacher because if we keep doing the same thing and achieving the same outcome, we won't grow any further. As a student teacher reflective practice and being open minded can deepen pedagogy and allow an insight into the best practices for a classroom setting.

### Observation school & class context

I am following the BERA guidelines which believes in 'the confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' therefore the school, staff and pupils observed will remain anonymous throughout (BERA, 2018). School 'X' is a happy, hard-working school based in a well-ordered community which allows children to strive to establish a love of learning in a safe, happy, stimulating environment. School 'X' vision states "we believe that everyone should learn to care for and respect themselves and others and become healthy and confident" (■■■■■, 2022). Diversity is valued and celebrated, there curriculum reflects and responds to their learners and the community. School 'X' is made up of 627 pupils, (13.4%) of pupils are eligible for free school meals, (32%) of pupils have English as an additional language, (18) pupils with a statement, (4) pupils with an IDP and (+6) pupils on school action (Welsh Government, 2021). During my observation experience I was based in a year 3 classroom which had 28 pupils in attendance. School 'X' last had an Estyn inspection in 2013 due to covid, the school are due an inspection at any time. In 2013 the Estyn report standard for the school was 'Good', they report that pupils make good progress with their oracy skills, enter the school with a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Something I agree with on the 2013 report is "most pupils are polite and courteous. Their behaviour in and around the school is of a high standard" (Estyn (2013) ■■■■■ school report). This is something that I noticed throughout my visit, the behaviour of the school and year 3 class was at a high standard which led me to think staff carry out effective teaching practice which links to one of the professional standards.

### The critical incident

During my two-day observation period at school 'X' I witnessed multiple critical incidents. A critical incident I witnessed was on day two at 8:50am, pupil 'A' came to the classroom door with parent/carer very upset and distressed, I witnessed no message passed on from home to the teacher at the classroom door verbally. Teacher told pupil 'A' "well done for coming in, go to your seat and sit down please". From this incident I did not see the teacher or teaching assistant approach pupil 'A' to ask if they are okay or ask what was wrong. As the morning routine went on it became apparent that the class didn't carry out a daily 'check in' which they did not do the day before either on my observation. Throughout working in past schools

this is something I had not seen before, a daily check in is carried out in all classrooms I have been in previously. Throughout my observation I took a notice to the displays around the classroom and noticed the children's name attached to a feeling board on a door at the back of the classroom but had not seen the children participate in doing the check in board.

"In its recent review of school education in Wales, the OECD found that Wales lacked a convincing overall set of aims and purposes and recommended that the Welsh Government should develop a shared vision of the Welsh Learner" (Donaldson, 2015). After highlighting what was lacking in the old curriculum, the new Welsh curriculum is pushing its new set of aims and purposes they want teachers to implement into school. "The school curriculum should be designed to help all children and young people to develop in relation to clear and agreed purposes. The purposes should be constructed so they can directly influence decisions about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment" (Donaldson, 2015).

Donaldson has created 'the four purposes' which the Welsh Government states as the shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person in Wales (Welsh Government, 2021). The four purposes should be the starting point for all teachers and learning in Wales. Donaldson states on the evidence and analysis of the review, the four purposes should be elaborated in terms of their key characteristics which should demonstrate the purpose through practice and should be developed through the curriculum (Donaldson, 2015). The four purposes are; ambitious, capable learners, enterprising creative contributors, ethical informed citizens and healthy confident individuals.

From the critical incident I observed I feel it links to the healthy confident individuals because within this purpose is the importance of well-being and mental health which links to pupil 'A' arriving at school upset and distressed. "A continuing theme in the evidence was the importance of well-being, and in particular mental health. Schools need to care both for children and young people's physical and emotional needs" (Donaldson, 2015). Teachers and support staff have the responsibility to ensure the well-being and safety of all pupils, if a pupil attends school upset and distressed, they are accountable to support the child. Pupil 'A' coming into school upset and distressed showing they need support from staff links to the

strand “healthy, confident individuals are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy (Donaldson, 2015).

### Literature review

The critical incident as seen in [Appendix 2] identifies the well-being of pupils, there is literature that links to the incident to support the understanding of emotional intelligence in primary schools. Rose, Gilbert & Richards (2015) explained Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory and how it acknowledges many factors interplay which affect children’s development and the personal encounters a child has with the environment and with other humans, along with the relationships that subsequently may develop. His theory looks at a child’s development by using four ‘layers’ of different environments (Berk,2000) explains the microsystem layer which encompasses relationships and interactions a child has with their immediate surroundings this layer includes school life. It is important for the teaching profession to know about each breakdown of each layer and for schools and teachers to provide stability and long-term relationships with all pupils.

As children grow throughout their learning, they adapt more emotions and feelings about themselves and their life. “Given such changes it could be argued that such an all-pervading whole school approach to mental health and well-being is vital, as children and young people will be learning how to recognise and manage the ebb and flow of emotions” (Howard, Burton & Levermore, 2019. Pp.28). School is a huge part of a child’s day; Bronfenbrenner put school life in the closest layer to a child, it is important that teaching staff are supportive of a child’s emotional intelligence because they have a significant part in their development. Howard, Burton & Levermore, (2019) stated that helping teach children how to improve their resilience and promote of emotional health and well-being being embedded into the school curriculum should be a part of a every school approach and settings. This is something that the Welsh Government have implemented into the new Welsh curriculum, so all schools should have this approach to all children’s emotional well-being in Wales. This may seem problematic due to the difficulties faced O’Reilly et al., (2018) mentions a lack of funding for well-being, trained willing staff, and the need for clarity and consistency in what mental health is and means. However, if there were solutions for the difficulties schools faced in the long-term it could be more beneficial for the child but also the teacher. (Howard, Burton & Levermore, 2019. Pp.3)

“Promoting and supporting the emotional well-being of the whole school is noted as very important given educational staff have high rates of work-related stress”

In support of the critical incident, Howard, Burton & Levermore, (2019) produced a theory that primary schools should all have a ‘whole school approach’ to children’s mental health and emotional well-being. Bronfenbrenner theory corresponds to that theory as Aubrey and Riley (2018) stressed that it is seen to be extremely important to the classroom, and showing the vitality home and school have on each other when they are working together to achieve the best interests of the child MacBlain (2014). The first transition of the day when the child goes from home to school settings is a huge transition which marks a change in role of the child coming from someone within their family to a participant in more of a formal setting which involves being about strangers sometimes. It is important that the first transition for the child is a positive one because the handover from home to school can set the tone for how the child will engage with peers, staff and learning and also affect future transitions Howard, Burton & Levermore, (2019). The critical incident supports this viewpoint, it could be argued that the critical incident showed a negative handover and throughout the day showed the pupil disengaged which supports the theory of the importance of a positive handover from home to school.

Although Bronfenbrenner has created theories which are still spoken about in the teaching profession, theorists critique his theory including himself. Christensen (2010) observed that Bronfenbrenner stressed his concerns of the negative impact from the environment and didn’t take into account the resilience of the individual with dealing with the hardships that life encounters. “This is further supported by MacBlain (2014), who suggests that Bronfenbrenner failed to pay sufficient attention to the individual psychological needs of the child” (Aubrey and Riley 2018. pp.157). Doherty and Hughes (2009) expand on the same idea, they suggested that Bronfenbrenner takes into little account different ecologies that a child is likely to encounter with especially in an increasingly globalised society, and more attention should be paid to the interactions of different people within a child’s development who have an impact on the individual’s life.

Bronfenbrenner theory emphasise the importance on the child, family and the environment they are living in, however looking at more recent theories and theorists critiquing his previous theory it is easy to see how work can become outmoded. Aubrey and Riley (2018) stated that when Bronfenbrenner produced the 'Ecology of Human Development' theory, he could never have known the rapid changes which have since happened in society, especially the huge influence technology now has on children. However, this theory to this day is still helping professionals to understand the ecology of human development and should not be underrated.

Further literature that supports the incident which links to child development in school and the effects on school's curriculum. Bruner's (1996) work 'The Culture of Education' involved the function of schools and school curriculum, the importance of a positive relationship between learners and teachers in the process of building knowledge together. "1960, The Process of Education, he set out his ideas regarding cognitive development and how children represent concepts, which in turn led him to consider the importance of culture and the environment in their learning" (Aubrey and Riley 2018. Pp.118). Bruner (1966) and (1971) explained his thoughts about how teachers help children construct their model of learning, he proposed that there were three different ways that children transform their experiences into learning and long-term knowledge: through action, symbols and imagery.

Aubrey and Riley (2018) stated Jean Piaget is well known for his theory of child development, which included stages of development that children pass through when developing their skills, he believed the stages were sequential and each stage must be achieved before the next stage could commence. Piaget theories showed his fascination with understanding how children think and learn, from this he focused his work on three different areas: how children acquire knowledge, how they think differently from adults and how cognitive development can be put into stages (Jarvis and Chandler, 2001). This theory links to the incident because in the teaching profession it is important to understand that each pupil develops at different times and build their knowledge from their own life experiences. Piaget suggested that the human mind accommodates structures which allows the child to make sense of the world, namely schemas and operations (Jarvis and Chandler, 2001).

In the teaching process it is important that teachers are supporting pupils, Aubrey and Riley (2018) stated that one of Bruner's deep-seated notions were that teachers should always reflect on how they engage with their pupils, that teachers should be intersubjective and not objectivist. Positive interactions and experiences between the teacher and pupils will support the child's development and allow them to have a good relationship with the teacher. "Bruner's earlier work with pedagogy highlighted the need for the teacher to act as a motivator and a catalyst for learning" (Aubrey and Riley 2018. Pp.125). The Welsh Government have a similar approach to this as the new Welsh curriculum has pedagogy as a professional standard in Wales that all teachers must meet. Bruner's idea of discovery learning linked with a pedagogical practice called 'scaffolding' which involves the pupil being helped by an adult or another child Aubrey and Riley (2018). Alternatively, Olson (2007) argued that some of Bruner's theory on scaffolding involved working with children on a one-to-one basis which made it easier for him to highlight the needs and comprehension of individuals. Unlike a teacher who has to cope with a whole class and check for understanding from pupils to make adjustments for the pupils it's needed for.

Aubrey and Riley (2018) expressed that Piaget acknowledged every child as being unique, that had their own needs and learning which encourages a curriculum which allows teachers the flexibility to plan according to the needs of all children rather than a curriculum that states all children should be at the same place as each other. As a teacher it is important to understand each individual's needs and to create a plan that can be implemented to help that individual learn. "The most significant influence Piaget's work had on the curriculum is through acknowledgement that children have different intellectual capabilities at different stages of their development" (Aubrey and Riley 2018. Pp.49).

Bruner and Piaget theories were very passionate about school and school's curriculum even if they had different views of what the curriculum should include. "Unlike Piaget's sequential and predetermined stages of learning, such as the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete and formal operational stages, Bruner considered three modes whereby children develop their experiences into learning" (Aubrey and Riley 2018. Pp.121). Bruner saw child development as a continuous process where as Piaget saw it as stages of development, however Piaget's theories are reflected in Bruner's work, especially with regard to his

assertion that children are active participants in their learning Aubrey and Riley (2018). Both theorists have had a huge impact on the teaching profession and their theories are still looked at today even though some theorists would say they are outmoded.

### Reflection / Evaluation and next steps

Reflecting on the critical incident [Appendix 2] I explored different avenues in the literature review that correspond with the incident. "Research indicates that children who are mentally healthy tend to be happier, show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than less mentally healthy peers" (Hyson 2004; Kostelnik et al. 2015).

Since the incident I have reflected and evaluated a lot about how I can support my future pupil's emotional well-being while being a teacher. For future next steps I would like to be a teacher that spends time getting to know the pupils on a deeper level and establish trusting relationships, I will try to do this by expressing warmth, positive emotions and respect. Children benefit socially, emotionally, and academically when teachers intentionally create close, trusting relationships (Palermo et al. 2007). I feel it is important to build a positive relationship with pupils after discovering the importance that the first transition from home to school should be a positive one for pupils because it sets the tone for the day and how they engage throughout the day.

Previously in other schools I have witnessed and been a part of a daily check in, this is certainly something I want to include in my next steps of being a teacher. It is a short activity that allows pupils to use a display in the classroom and put themselves in the emotion they are feeling, which is then discussed with the teacher. This activity helps children to understand what they are feeling, and promotes their own well-being which links to one of the four purposes of 'Healthy, Confident Individuals'. As a teacher it allows you to be more aware of what is going on with each individual and provide strategies to support pupils through challenging times. For vulnerable pupils it may suit them better offering a 1-to-1 individual check in with a trusted adult to offer further support.

As a primary school teacher, it is important to teach social and emotional skills intentionally to pupils. Kostelnik et al. (2015) stated that teachers and caregivers play a vital role within helping pupils to develop social and emotional skills. Within next steps I want to gain more knowledge on how I can support pupils with developing these skills, I understand I can support pupils social and emotional health by using suitable books. "Reading and discussing children's books is an excellent way to invite children to identify the characters' emotions and relate the characters' experiences to their own (Roberts & Crawford 2008). Introducing a social or emotional skill can be difficult for pupils for understand, by choosing to read related books to the class will help pupils connect the characters and situations to their own experiences.

Kolb's reflective practice model (1984) gives an insight of how we can use reflective practice in the classroom. "Kolb's reflective mode is referred to as "experiential learning". The basis for this model is our own experience, which is then reviewed, analysed and evaluated systematically in stages" (Kolb, 1984). In Kolb's reflective model, the learning cycle highlights reflective observation to analyse and draw conclusions from an experience. The aim is to take this learning into new experience, completing the cycle. The experiential learning cycle is the most widely recognised and used concept in Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb 2015; Kolb and Kolb 2017). Kolb's model engages learners in the learning process for them to be able to experience it for themselves, experiencing events such as; trips, role play or lab experiments gives learners that experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2018). After experiencing the learning Kolb's model moves onto reflection observation which involves analysing the experience and actions.

The use of reflection models is important to help structure reflections. Kolb's approach to reflective practice will inform myself on my own professional and personal development by allowing myself to learn from experiences, it allows myself to process what happened during the experience and reflecting on it will benefit my future opportunities by applying previous knowledge to experiences and constructing new knowledge, and apply specific strategies to new experiences.

## Conclusion

Throughout the essay I have critically evaluated research that corresponds with the critical incident seen in [Appendix 2], this is what the aim was for the essay after learning the importance of being a reflective practitioner. Reflecting on incidents are important for teachers to develop professionally. I have carried out research about different key theories supporting emotional intelligence and child development in the literature. The literature outlined the importance of children having positive well-being support in order to help them with their development through life. To conclude, I feel emotional well-being and mental health is affecting more young people now than ever before and with this comes more pressure on the teaching profession. Being a reflective teaching practitioner will allow you to evolve with the changes of well-being and make you aware of new strategies in place to help you to support pupils.

Lastly, in the section 'Role of Critical Reflection' of the essay, I outlined the importance of the role of being a reflective practitioner in Wales because it is under 'Pedagogy' which is one of the professional standards for teaching and leadership. Welsh Government (2019) explained that student teachers must meet all five professional standards before qualifying. Pedagogy, leadership, innovation, professional learning and collaboration are the five professional standards which links to the fourth stage (active experimentation) of Kolb's reflective model and using the cycle of the model will better professional development. I feel throughout the research I have carried out of the critical incident; I am on my way to being a reflective practitioner and refining my teaching to gain the best outcome for myself and provide pupils with the best teaching service. This essay allowed myself to reflect on professional practice which will benefit my development of becoming a teaching and provide tools I will need for future teaching.

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