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The learner: Who am I teaching?

INTRODUCTION

Undertaking research-informed teaching is imperative for the professional development of educationists. To achieve this, self-reflection and in-depth analysis of own methods of teaching are indispensable for teachers. Teachers' reflection often begins with bewilderment when they encounter certain incidents which happen in and out of the classroom. These incidents stimulate them to analyze the situation in a way that they could learn to deal with it in a better manner next time (Schön, 1983).

Critical Incident analysis is an effective way of self-reflection in the context of teacher education. A critical incident is an event that is unpredictable and unforeseen in the classroom which triggers educators to reconsider their methodologies of teaching (Richards and Farrell, 2005, p. 113). An incident becomes critical when the teacher perceives the underlying issue by interpreting the significance of that event (Tripp, 2011). It may not be necessarily an incident that is dramatic or dangerous in a classroom, but it becomes critical by the way the teacher analyses the situation and makes meaningful judgments about it. As an educator, it is necessary to constantly detect critical incidents in the classroom and undertake detailed research to improve teaching and learning methodologies.

The assignment will focus on a particular critical incident that I contemplated inside a classroom in my bridging days. The incident will be critically evaluated and reflected using Gibbs' reflective model. Furthermore, it will also discover the significance of the incident using four purposes of the curriculum of Wales and its impacts on students. The learning outcomes of the research will be used for personal and professional development in the future.

THE ROLE OF CRITICAL REFLECTION

Before discussing the critical incident, it is important to focus on the role of critical reflection in the area of teaching and learning. Self-reflection and reflective practice are important in the journey of teacher education. John Dewey (1933, quoted in Farrell, 2012, p. 9) in the 20th century stated that the aim of education is to aid people to gain knowledge so that they can think and act intelligently rather than spontaneously. The essence of reflection allows educators to cease, observe and rethink where they are in terms of teaching methodologies and then navigate where they want to move professionally in the future (Farrell, 2012, p. 7).

Some people misinterpret reflection as an evaluation of the situations which seem interesting to them; however, Dewey (1933, quoted in Farrell, 2012, p. 9) stated that reflected inquiry is constant and cautious contemplation of knowledge or any belief in the

light of the grounds which supports the belief and further inference would lead to reflective thought. Kolb in 1975 proposed a reflective model that emphasizes the importance of learning through experience. Kolb stated that practitioner reflects when they encounter a certain experience, gain an understanding of the concepts behind the experience, and then implement the understanding gained in a new scenario (Kolb and Fry, 1975). Schon (1983, quoted in Farrell, 2012, p. 12) has proposed a new term called reflection-in-action in which the teachers consider the experience and beliefs and connect it to the theories.

In 1988, Gibbs proposed a model of reflection which comprises six different stages in reflecting practice. It consists of a description of events, feelings, and reactions involved, an evaluation of the positive and negative impacts of an action, analysis of actions through research, conclusions, and future action plans (Gibbs, 1988). In 1998, Brookfield stated that reflective practitioners persistently research the assumptions in practice using four lenses: their own reflection, learners' perspective, colleagues' perspective, and theories or literature related to it (Brookfield, 1998, p. 197). In 1993, Tripp has emphasized the importance of the role of critical reflection. He suggested a three-step approach for reflecting after an incident.: analyze why the incident happened, identify the dilemma and research it, analysis of personal theory, and then apply it in the future (Tripp, 1993).

The professional standards of Wales also emphasize the importance of educators' professional learning through research. They suggested that a teacher should actively participate in research while making decisions in the classroom. Also, they encourage teachers to contribute to journals, books, and articles (Welsh Government, 2019). Overall, teachers make a lot of decisions in classrooms and it is vital that the decisions should be informed. It is important that educators continually reflect on their own practice through wider research.

OBSERVATION SCHOOL AND CLASS CONTEXT

According to the ethical guidelines published by BERA, the school where the observation took place and the pupils' details should not be disclosed in any type of research (BERA 2018, p. 21). Therefore, all the details of the students and the school will be anonymous throughout the essay.

The school where the critical incident happened is a mixed-gender, English-medium, Community Comprehensive school based in Llanelli in the Carmarthenshire local authority. The school consists of pupils aged between 11 and 16 from Grades 7 to 11. There are around 483 students in the school (ESTYN, 2022). There are 24.2% of students who have identified as having additional learning needs which is slightly higher than the Welsh national average of 21.7%. The percentage of students having English as an additional language is 3.3%. 18.3% of students are eligible for free school meals over the last three consecutive academic years which is almost the same as the Welsh national average of 18.7% (ESTYN,2022).

Every year group, the students are grouped into five sections according to their literacy score. This was a part of the policies the school has implemented to improve pupils' literacy after realizing that the pupils' literacy level has been affected by the pandemic. As per the

Estyn report, the school atmosphere is calm and friendly. The school actively seeks help from various outside agencies to give support to students and parents. Various enrichment activities have been implemented to enhance the learning experiences of every pupil in the school. Even though the curriculum and its implementation are solid points for the school, the feedback and assessment need improvement. (ESTYN, 2022).

CRITICAL INCIDENT LINK ONTO DONALDSON FOUR PURPOSE

The critical incident for the essay happened in one of the Year seven Mathematics lessons. This happened in the second lesson which was after a short first break of 15 minutes. The class comprised around 26 students which were grouped according to numeracy scores. The teacher divided the whole class into two different teams to perform a group activity. Students were enthusiastic and excited to perform in a team competition. The activity consists of various questions with varying difficulties. One student from each team was selected randomly to come forward and compete. A question would be displayed each round and they must show a green card if they want the answer. Whoever shows the card first would get the opportunity to answer first. Each correct answer would help the team to get scores. Scores of questions would also vary depending on the difficulty of the question. The rule of the game is that the selected team member had to do the task individually and couldn't take help from other teammates. Students were very excited to compete.

In the third round, one of the boys, boy X from Team A broke the rule by helping his teammate to win the round. Seeing this, students from Team B were upset and a few students said, "we will do the same next round". The teacher noticed this behavior and as a result, she immediately deducted a score from TEAM A and emphasize to everyone the importance of doing this in a proper way, so they get benefited from this. After the scores got reduced, the pupils in TEAM A discussed that they had to behave well to win the game. The whole class irrespective of the team behaved well throughout the lesson. The researcher noticed that the pupils were taking responsibility to make sure that their team members behave well throughout the game to win the competition. At the end of the lesson, the teacher praised the kids for their good behavior and especially praised boy X for his good manner throughout and said, "You have behaved really well throughout, and keep it up".

The new curriculum of Wales focuses mainly on four purposes for every individual's development. Donaldson (Donaldson, 2015, p. 29 - 30) suggests four purposes: ambitious and capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethical and informed citizens, and healthy and confident individuals. The observed critical incident can be linked to ethical, informed citizens. One of the points which come under ethical, informed citizens is to understand and examine the consequences of their actions before making any choice or acting upon it (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30). Even though it was not completely implemented in the mentioned incident, but could have been implemented if the teacher could have taken an effort to speak to student A after the incident. Since the group activity involved everyone, they were enjoying solving problems. With this context, the incident can also be linked to the purpose of developing ambitious, capable learners. This can also be connected with developing healthy and confident individuals as the group activity had given chances to

everyone to build their confidence to come in front of the classroom to participate in activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classroom management is a principal factor for effective teaching and learning. The critical incident observed is an instance of behavior management using operant conditioning, more specifically negative punishment. The essay will mainly focus on analyzing the impact of negative punishment on behavior management in classrooms. It will also discuss the efficacy of peer pressure on children's behavior when doing group work.

There is a large volume of studies and research regarding how rewards and punishments could regulate the behavior of pupils in the classroom. The approach comes under the Behaviorist learning approach. John B Watson and B.F. Skinner are the major contributors to these approaches. Watson stated that humans show responses in accordance with certain stimuli (Zhou and Brown, 2015, p. 6). Skinner has expanded Watson's theory and stated as humans are more likely to redo things that give favorable responses whereas they tend to eliminate the behaviors if they are unfavorable (Shaffer, 2000).

Skinner proposed a new way of conditioning called operant conditioning. Using operant conditioning, the desired behavior can be conditioned while the undesired behaviors can be suppressed (Zhou and Brown, 2015, p. 7). Reinforcement and punishment are the two major processes of operant conditioning. Reinforcement is used to increase or encourage the behavior whereas punishment is used to suppress the undesirable behavior (Schunk, 2012, p. 90-94). To reinforce a certain behavior, something can be added as a catalyst which is called positive reinforcement while taking away something to encourage a behavior is termed negative reinforcement. Similarly, in positive punishment, something is added to suppress the undesirable behavior whereas, in negative punishment, something is removed to control the undesirable behavior (Zhou and Brown, 2015, p. 8).

The teacher involved in the critical incident used the strategy of negative punishment to control undesirable behavior, that is she reduced a point to suppress the behavior of the child who broke the rule. The observation of the critical incident noticed a considerable difference in the overall dynamics of the classroom, the students were seen well behaved after the incident. It has been noted through various studies that punishment is very effective in suppressing unpleasant behaviors quickly (Zhou and Brown, 2015, p. 8). It is important to analyze why someone would stop the behavior when punishment is given. The efficacy of the punishment depends on different factors such as the environment where it happens, the relationship between the pupil and the teacher, the pupil's individual personality, and the social environment (Overskied, 2018 p. 2-4). For a negative punishment to be successful, the stimulant which is removed should be something that is valuable to the pupil (Poling et.al, 2002, p.190). The pupil involved here was thrown into a situation where the reduced point was valuable for him and his team to win the game. Thus, the points which were acted as positive reinforcers for the team were removed which made them uncomfortable, thus suppressed the behavior. The implementation of negative punishment can be through different methods according to different settings such as timeouts and

response costs. The procedure teacher used here is response cost involving fines. This is basically a loss of points, money, tokens, or any valuable stimulus that they already possess (Poling et al., 2002, p. 192). This incident is also an example of response cost implemented for a group of pupils such that the behavior of one member of the group resulted in losing points or tokens for the entire group. In this procedure, due to peer pressure from the group members on other team members would make everyone remain well-behaved (Poling et al., 2002, p. 193). The advantage of response cost is that it allows teachers to act immediately after the response, which is not always the case for timeouts. Timeouts often depend on the availability of rooms, environment, or staff monitoring the students.

Even though the usage of punishment is unavoidable in classrooms, there is a lot of research that questions the effectiveness of punishment in a long run. According to behaviorism theory, pupils respond instantly without reflecting on their behavior or the circumstances (Boghossian, 2006, p. 716). In general, the behaviorist approaches completely ignore the internal psychological process of students (Zhou and Brown, 2015, p. 10). Since the response from punishment is instant and not involved any thinking process, there is a high chance that it can be repeated in another instance or environment. Pupils respond in a particular way because of the fear or threat of punishment due to punishment. But if the fear factor is removed, the punished response may be repeated (Schunk, 2012, p. 94). Since they are doing it without knowing the purpose, they might lack the individual responsibility of behaving well in the future. B.F. Skinner stated his view of the adverse effects of punishment in 1953, that punishment does not provide long-lasting results and could sometimes provide negative reactions such as anger, attempts to counter react, and escaping from the situation (Poling et al., 2002, p. 194). A recent study in classrooms in the United States has noted that the students who were motivated using fear and punishment stopped behaving in absence of a teacher (Ilegbusi, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, the punishment should be implemented with careful consideration. Teachers could also use some alternatives after the punishment to avoid its adverse effects of it (Schunk, 2012, p. 95). The teacher in the mentioned incident used a combination of praise and punishment. Thus, she tried to suppress any adverse effects that could be emerged as a result of the incident and build mutual respect between them.

Another aspect that the essay focuses on is the influence of peers on the behavior of pupils. Peers are powerful influence of pupils in classroom. Piaget in 1934 observed that the relationship of children with their peers is democratic, so children eventually develop the ability to the thoughts and viewpoints of other people and build a foundation towards their social competency (Baruah and Boruah, 2016, p. 241). Therefore, peer influence could be used to build desirable behaviors in pupils (Carden Smith and Fowler, 1985, p. 213). The critical incident observed is an example of using positive peer pressure to reduce the undesired behavior. Positive peer pressure is the influence of peers on someone to perform something positive or to influence changing their behavior and attitude in a better way (Baruah and Boruah, 2016, p. 242). Several studies have suggested that the use of peers as a reinforce may work better than the use of teachers (Carden Smith and Fowler, 1985, p. 213). Peer assistance used in the education system is divided into two groups, firstly, peer who are trained to be tutors and secondly peer assistance through cooperative reinforcement

(Greenwood and Hops, 1981). The latter is observed in the critical incident. The procedure involves peers where the reinforcement depends on their behaviors. The teacher involved in the incident had put the strategy that the entire team loses point if any members of the group misbehave. Through this, teacher not only emphasized on individual responsibility of pupil to behave well, but also gave them an indirect additional responsibility that they must put positive peer pressure on other team members to behave well. Consequently, the responsibility of behavior of everyone in the classroom is evenly distributed between everyone. In 2011, Steinberg and his colleagues investigated how the brain of an adolescent works in effect with the influence of peers using MRI scans. They found out that the brain of adolescents showed greater activity when they get rewarded in front of peers than when they are alone (Baruah and Boruah, 2016, p. 242). This aspect can also be linked with the punishment as well. Receiving a punishment in presence of peers has more impact. So, this might have made the pupil involved in the incident to behave well throughout the lesson.

Several evidence suggested that the pupils get influenced by seeing the rewards and punishment their peers get. The change in the behavior of a person by seeing the consequences others receive is termed as vicarious processes. The vicarious process is classified into vicarious punishment or reinforcement depending on the scenario. Vicarious reinforcement is referred to the increase in behavior by witnessing the others receive rewards while vicarious punishment is referred to the suppression of behavior by seeing others receiving the consequences (Kazdin, 1981, p. 129). The critical incident observed had the involvement of vicarious punishment. Team B who had decided to cheat in the next round had stopped doing that by seeing the other team getting the penalty. Vicarious punishment is different from the punishment as the effect of behavior happened to observer (Malouff et al., 2009, p. 272).

Kazdin has written about the various studies about vicarious punishment earlier:

The initial study of vicarious punishment was reported by Gump and Kounin in 1958. In 1979, the effects of vicarious punishment were experimentally proved in a classroom by Wilson, Robertson, Herlong and Haynes. The time out procedure applied to one student had made considerable changes to other students in the class.

(Kazdin, 1981, p. 135-136)

However, there are certain drawbacks to the usage of vicarious punishment. In 1974, Hamner suggested that the punishment should not be implemented in the presence of others because the effect of it would be twice, once from the direct effect of the punishment and another would be the embarrassment it would make in front of peers (Schnake, 1986, p. 343). Several studies have demonstrated that it gives relatively short-term changes and the effects are not evident in every child (Kazdin, 1981, p. 136-137).

REFLECTION/EVALUATION & NEXT STEPS

As an emerging educator, it is important to reflect upon the critical incident and analyze it for a deeper understanding. Gibbs' model of reflection is used further for reflection to find

out the different perspectives involved in the incident and to think about how this can be implemented in my further teaching journey.

According to Gibbs' reflective model (Gibbs, 1988), there are six different steps to follow:

- Description of what happened.

- Description of your feelings and emotions before, after, and at the time of incidence.

- Evaluation of positive and negative aspects of the incident.

- The analysis attempts to why the incident is positive or negative considering different factors.

- Concluding on what are the learning from the analysis.

- What methods will we take forward in future teaching?

At the time of critical incident observation, I had a feeling that it was an effective way of behavior management in classrooms, but the feeling has slightly changed after thinking and analyzing about that incident. When thinking deeper into the problem, the concern was whether the student understood why he should not cheat or help others to win or did the behavior of student A stopped just because of the fear of the punishment. Furthermore, I need to understand if this method is applicable to every classroom and student.

The next stage was to evaluate the positive and negative aspects. The positive side is that the method of negative punishment was effective in suppressing unwanted behavior in the classroom. It was more effective as it became a vicarious punishment and that ensured everyone else was well-mannered throughout. Furthermore, the entire class was taking responsibility for ensuring good behavior to not lose any points. Moreover, the behavior has suppressed immediately. The negative side of this incident would probably be the feeling of the student, especially the punishment that happened in front of peers. Even though it worked as an effective behavior management strategy in the mentioned incident, there is also a probability of creating anger or aggression in students sometimes. This situation was well handled by the teacher as she appreciated him for his good behavior at the end of the lesson. This possibly could minimize the embarrassment created by the punishment, as he got the praise in front of other students. In addition to that, it is crucial that the student needs to understand why such behavior was not desirable when doing a team activity. The possibility of the behavior of student A could have been avoided if the instructions and the consequences of breaking the rules had been given initially. Also, a conversation with student X outside the classroom would be beneficial to make them understand their individual responsibility inside the classroom and aid to develop a positive relationship between the teacher and the student. To conclude, even though the use of negative punishment is effective in classroom management, it is essential to consider the scenario where it is applied. It is also important to consider the characteristics of the student before imposing punishment. It is necessary that the student should understand the importance of desired behavior in classrooms rather than suppressing it just because they receive a punishment.

In light of the critical incident observed and the research associated with it, I will take a few methods for my future teaching. I will make sure that I will have a conversation with a student after a punishment has been implemented. This will help me to build a positive relationship with the student and help them to understand the importance of behaving well in lessons. I would also like to use peers for behavior management in classrooms as this

method build responsibility in students and is very effective as per the research. Finally, I would give instructions clearly at the beginning of any group activity. This would further ensure that they know the rules before they take part in the activity.

CONCLUSION

Research and reflection are integral parts of teaching and learning for any emerging educator. The essay discussed the role of critical reflection in education. The professional standards of teaching and learning in Wales have specified the importance of making informed decisions in classrooms. It is important that the teachers in Wales take informed pedagogical decisions using relevant research (Welsh Government, 2019). The essay focused on the critical incident I witnessed and reflected upon the incident using various research in the specific area. The essay has identified that negative punishment and vicarious punishment are effective in classroom management in most scenarios. It has also been identified that the involvement of peers in classroom management increases the overall behavior of the class.

However, there are several studies that questioned the long-term effectiveness of negative punishment and the negative implication it can impose on pupils. The new curriculum of Wales focuses on transforming learners into ethical informed citizens who needs to understand and consider the consequences of actions while acting (Donaldson, 2015, p. 30). The significance of ethically informed citizens is observed in the critical incident. I believe that the research will significantly help to improve my classroom management strategies. I have discovered through the literature review that reinforcement strategies will have a longer impact than punishment. So, I will try to implement reinforcement strategies overall and implement punishment strategies when I need to stop the behavior immediately. After reviewing my literature review, I also discovered that it will be effective to use peers as a tool for managing overall behavior in classrooms.

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