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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 ability to reflect on ourselves as practitioners and use it for further progression is crucial for all teachers so that we can understand ourselves and our teaching methods. The following essay will investigate an observed incident in a classroom setting, using Tripp's (1993) critical incident methodology to critically evaluate the incident. Critical incidents in the classroom may present themselves as mundane, everyday occurrences such as a child putting their hand up, asking a question, or a teacher correcting inappropriate behaviour. However, it's why and how these incidents occur that matters. Incidents happen all the time, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look and reflect on a situation. 'A critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event' (Tripp, 2011 p.8)

'Good teachers use good techniques and routines, but techniques and routines alone do not produce good teaching' (Tripp, 2011). This quote suggests that teachers need to do more than just teach to become the best practitioners. Tripp (2011) says that it is the mix of 'experience, flexibility, informed opinion and constant self-monitoring' that is fundamental to the production of good teaching. The importance of reflective practice was first introduced by Dewey (1993) He identified three attributes that are integral to being a reflective practitioner. These are open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. In my own teaching practice, I will develop and foster these attributes. Following Dewey, literature has continued to grow around the role of critical reflection. Models have been created that can aid teachers in becoming critically reflective, including Gibbs (1988), Schon (1983) and Brookfield

(1995,2017). Later, I will be referencing Brookfield's model of reflection to aid my critical reflections on my developing teaching and learning.

This observation experience and assignment are crucially important for myself to start engaging with the significance of reflective practice so I can develop my own professional practice and judgments in my future practice. The observation stage required assessing the classroom for potential critical incidents before deciding on one to analyse further, as evidenced in the appendices section.

Through this essay, I will delve deeper and look 'under the hood' of the chosen incident and consider theoretical concepts associated with reflective practice and how this relates to the teaching profession to discover why I consider it to be a critical incident. I will give context to the school I have been observing, making sure I am aligning with the BERA guidelines. I will review other literature to better understand why this critical incident has come about and use these discoveries to question my own teaching and learning and how I will use reflection to aid my future practice.

School context

During my role as the observer, it is incredibly important that the following sections of this assignment align with the BERA Guidelines regarding the treatment of the participants that have been observed. Meaning that the following sections will ensure that the collated data will be anonymous and confidential (BERA 2018). This data includes the name of the school, staff, and learners.

The allocated observation time took place in an English-medium secondary school based in the Bridgend BCBC. The present roll is 1120 mixed-gendered pupils, including approximately 200 in the Sixth Form. There is a high percentage of learners living in the

most deprived areas in Wales. A total of 26.5 % of pupils are entitled to free school meals which is above the Welsh national average. It is also important to note that the school has 82.5% of students in the school on the additional learning needs (ALN) list. These statistics have been found on the school's website and Estyn report. It is important to include these statistics as pedagogical choices that teachers make could be informed from this demographic information.

The aim of the school is to instil learning and maximise opportunities for learners. The new curriculum for Wales is fully embedded in their way of teaching and focuses on the four purposes, adopting a holistic approach to supporting not only the learners' academic needs but social and emotional development. They believe that removing barriers to learning is a fundamental responsibility of the school. The Key Stage 3 learners are in mixed-ability classes for all Art lessons. The incident recorded during the period of observation occurred within a year 8 class.

Case study:

The critical incident I observed took place on Tuesday, October 17, 2023 in the last lesson of the school day at around 2:00 p.m. The teacher began to introduce the lesson of continuous line drawings and started modelling on the board. Most learners were actively engaged, whereas some seemed passive. One of the learners' behaviours I became quickly interested in. For the purpose of this essay I will be calling them Child X. Child X had entered the class in a heightened, energetic state. Through the introduction, Child X was fidgeting, playing with pencils on the desk, and not looking at the teacher while they spoke. As the teacher was introducing the lesson, they asked who would like to hand out the resources and Child X's hand instantly shot up. The teacher chose Child X and another student and announced to the class that 'Child X and Child Y have the important job of handing out your books today'.

The children both did exactly what they were told and then returned to their seats. Child X gave the teacher their full attention when they explained the next task.

The part of the observation that I identified as critical was the teacher allowing the child to hand out the resources. I found it particularly interesting that they chose Child X over other learners who had sat patiently, listening to all of their previous instructions. I was particularly surprised that after this bestowed responsibility, Child X became alert and engaged in the lesson. As a result, this made me want to delve deeper and look into the literature regarding this type of behaviour management and how this incident could link to other learning theories.

Literature review

To better understand why and how my observed critical incident might have taken place, I will be exploring existing literature and learning theories that I have identified as a link to the observed critical incident of resource distribution in the classroom. The areas I have chosen to research in more depth are proactive strategies relating to behaviour management, operant conditioning, and self-determination theory.

Resource distribution, or better known as classroom jobs, is something that has been instilled in classrooms for decades. Penderi & Rekalidou (2016). For most, these jobs could be viewed as a way for the teacher to quickly start the lesson in a time-effective way. However, classroom jobs are also a means of increasing students' feelings of responsibility in a classroom community (Kimberly Rombach 2001).

When children are encouraged to participate in establishing classroom rules and partake in resource distribution, they may better understand their importance and become responsible in the classroom, resulting in self-regulation (Feinfield et al. 1999). Even though this evidence is based on key stage 1 children, It is argued that the role of school is to prepare children to become responsible and caring adults (Elias et al. 1997) which should continue through all years of school. This is linked to ethically informed citizens in the new Welsh

curriculum. The continuation of giving children responsibility within the classroom is apparent in secondary schools and is what I have based my critical incident reflection upon, as it is important to reflect on why these routines are important in the classroom.

Behaviour management in teaching refers to the way teachers and schools can create and maintain “appropriate behaviours of students” in their classrooms (Kratochwill, DeRoos and Blair, 2010). Behaviour management is a core part of teaching roles to maintain order. There are many different pedagogical strategies within behaviour management. Due to the critical incident I observed, I am particularly interested in exploring proactive strategies for behaviour management.

Proactive strategies are deliberate, planned, and anticipatory actions taken to prevent potential inappropriate behaviour or issues before they occur. Proactive strategies were first introduced by Covey (1989). Being proactive involves identifying potential challenges and taking preventative measures that require planning, preparation, and positive action to achieve desired outcomes. This is an alternative to reactive strategies that react to problems after they arise. Using more positive proactive strategies for school discipline has been demonstrated by many education professionals such as Horner & Sugai (2015) and Jolivette, Alter, Scott, Josephs, & Swoszowski (2013).

Assigning responsibilities within the classroom could be a proactive behaviour management technique. When learners have specific tasks, they are engaged, accountable, and are less likely to be disruptive. It encourages a sense of responsibility and ownership, contributing to a positive classroom environment.

By providing the student with a task or responsibility, the teacher is offering a constructive way for the child to challenge their energy. This proactive approach aims to engage the student, maintain focus, and prevent any possible disruptive behaviour. It addresses issues before they escalate, promoting a positive and inclusive classroom environment. Using

Tripps (1993) framework in this scenario, the teacher notices the students heightened state and fidgeting. The teacher then proactively assigns a task to the student over others in an attempt to prevent restlessness and give the child a sense of accomplishment.

The use of proactive strategies for discipline has been supported by many. Maini (2011) found without the use of reactive strategies student problem behaviour was efficiently and effectively managed in the classroom. Results revealed increases in 'student on-task non-disruptive' behaviour when teachers decreased the use of reactive responses. The findings from this study are highly applicable; the teacher training programme used was 'relatively brief and inexpensive' and showed significant positive change in a 'large, ethnically diverse school with high levels of socioeconomic disadvantage'. Meaning that schools with similar contexts could benefit from implementing proactive teaching strategies.

Although a limitation of the study was that the sample was made up of volunteers. It is possible that teachers who already agree with proactive strategies volunteered. Meaning that the findings are not applicable to the general population. However, it is significant to note that teachers within the discussed studies demonstrated low rates of punitive discipline strategies; It could be suggested that this allowed the development of a warm teacher-student relationship. Hamre & Pianta (2005) would argue that teacher-student interactions can serve as a protective factor for children at risk for school failure, and this could have been the correlating factor rather than using proactive strategies alone.

The idea of having a strong rapport with learners is also supported by Madden and Senior (2018) who say that building a rapport with the child is the most effective proactive strategy. In their findings 39% of teachers agreed proactive strategies are the most effective and that 'Acknowledging the child's feelings' was important in response to behaviour.

I ponder the question of whether the teacher made a pedagogical choice to use a proactive strategy in the observation I analysed. Without looking under the hood of this incident, it

could be insinuated that the teacher assigned roles to help with the smaller and more tedious tasks in the classroom. However using Tripps (1993) framework, It is possible that giving Child X the responsibility of handing out resources even though Child X was showing signs of being disruptive was a preventative proactive behaviour management technique to prevent disruptive class behaviour.

Another learning theory that could explain the critical incident observed is behaviourism. From a behaviourist point of view, learners require some reward or reinforcement for learning. This idea is called operant conditioning (Skinner 1958) it is thought that the consequences of a behaviour determine if that behaviour will reoccur. Within operant conditioning is the Reinforcement Theory, also coined by Skinner (1958), It is one of the oldest theories of motivation and describes behaviour and how we act. The basis is that reinforced behaviours become strengthened, whilst punished behaviours are weakened. Positive reinforcement is when a good or desired behaviour occurs and is treated positively with praise. Within the classroom, it could be said that positive reinforcement plays a pivotal role in encouraging good behaviour.

When a child is entrusted with a responsibility, such as being a classroom helper, the reinforcement theory suggests that the role gives them a sense of pride when they've completed it due to the teacher's praise.

In the observed critical incident, it could be the praise after the responsibility has been completed that motivates the good behaviour of Child X to focus on the subsequent task. The affirmation of praise after the job serves as positive reinforcement and may increase positive behaviours such as attention and listening.

Consistent evidence of the effectiveness of positive reinforcement within the classroom has been demonstrated. Jack, Shores, Denny, Gunter, DeBriere, and DePaepe (1996) found that positive reinforcement strategies in the classroom significantly improved students on task

behaviour and academic performance. Similarly, Cameron and Pierce (1994) found that verbal praise and rewards led to pro-social behaviour among school children. Positive reinforcement can also significantly decrease disruptive behaviours among students in the classroom Maag (2001). However, it is emphasised that it is the consistency of positive reinforcement that is important.

These studies collectively provide strong empirical evidence that positive reinforcement techniques in the classroom are important strategies to promote desirable behaviours. However, positive reinforcement can be very individualistic. Reinforcement is personal and the same reinforcement may work for one person and not the other. Morin (2017) says that it is important for teachers to observe students to see what they like and gravitate towards during their own free time. A teacher can then more accurately determine which reward will motivate which student. Morin (2017) backs up their statement with findings that show when each student gets a specified type of positive reinforcement, the reward is more effective in getting a child to repeat the good behaviour.

This highlights the importance of consistency and the individual differences among learners. Giving learners more choice and boosting their self-esteem could be a way to motivate them to behave in the classroom. The combination of praise and classroom jobs could have been identified by the teacher as a specified type of positive reinforcement for the child to reinforce desirable behaviour.

The final learning theory that could link to the observed critical incident is Self-Determination Theory (Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan 1985), which emphasises the importance of autonomy, social interactions, and a sense of purpose in enhancing motivation and engagement. The self-determination theory (SDT) proposes that people are moved by external factors (extrinsic motivation) such as reward systems, grades, and feedback. Yet, contradicting operant conditioning theories, it states that just as frequently, people are motivated from within (intrinsic motivation) by interests, curiosity, care, or abiding values.

Intrinsic motivation has been considered the desired type of motivation for study (Deci and Ryan 1985). In comparison to extrinsic motivation, it has been associated with better performance, deep learning and positive well-being (Utman 1997).

The theory of intrinsic motivation is dependent on the fulfilment of the three basic psychological needs described by SDT. These are the needs for autonomy (ownership over behaviour) , competence (to have experienced or completed a task well) and relatedness (feel connected to others). By giving students responsibilities, teachers provide them with opportunities for active participation, decision-making, and contribution to the classroom community that meet the three needs for fulfilling intrinsic motivation.

A large body of empirical evidence based on SDT suggests that teachers' support of learners' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness increases motivation for learning, increases academic performance and well-being. Kusrkar, Croiset, and Ten Cate (2011) state that autonomy-supportive teaching is important to ensure learners feel autonomous and competent in their learning and also supported (relatedness) by their teachers. Similarly, in a South Korean public school, learners were more intrinsically motivated when they experienced feelings of autonomy and competence (Jang, Kim and Reeve 2012)

Concurrently with these findings, Standage et al. (2006) showed that students who had more perceived autonomy support had higher autonomous self-regulation (including intrinsic motivation), which in turn was associated with greater effort and persistence in a physical education class. These findings suggest that if the teacher has given the child the opportunity to be autonomous, they will be more persistent in their learning. However, this finding is exclusive to physical education; the implications may not be transferable to other areas of learning, such as expressive arts, where the observed critical incident took place. Despite this difference in the area of learning, Fischer, Malycha and Schafmann (2019) found a significantly strong relationship between intrinsic motivation and creative performance which suggests

that intrinsic motivation can be implemented to improve motivation and appropriate classroom behaviour in subjects other than physical education.

In addition, competence feelings have been found to be effective for those with ADHD.

Morsink et al (2017) discovered that, from a range of motivational factors, ADHD adolescents preferred feeling competent and achieving a sense of togetherness. This aligns with the three fulfillments of intrinsic motivation. This evidence is particularly applicable, other studies have used the general population, whereas this study has actively chosen an ALN sample. As of 2020/2021, the school that the observed critical incident took place in has 82.5% of students on the ALN list. Meaning that making learners have opportunities to be autonomous, competent, and related in their lessons is very important.

Though, it is important to address the significant emphasis on intrinsic motivation in this theory. Some argue that in real-world scenarios, extrinsic motivators such as grades, rewards, or praise can play a crucial role, especially in educational settings. This is supported by Lepper, Greene and Nisbett (1973), who discovered that if there were clear means of achieving extrinsic goals in an activity the intrinsic interest decreased. Therefore, dismissing the influence of extrinsic motivators as well as intrinsic motivators might provide an incomplete picture of motivation to behave in the classroom.

Reflecting on the observed critical incident in terms of this learning theory, it could be that by involving the disruptive child in classroom tasks, the teacher is promoting the child's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to foster a more internally motivated approach to behaviour. Giving the child an important responsibility makes them have ownership over that task, and when it is completed to the desired standard, they feel competent and related to not just the teacher but the whole class. As this theory primarily focuses on individual psychological needs and motivations, we need to be aware of the impact of broader environmental factors such as socioeconomic status, school resources, and teacher quality.

Nonetheless, this fulfilment of intrinsic motivation could have made Child X motivated to engage, listen to the rest of the lesson, and behave appropriately.

Most of the previous literature I have covered has been conducted in countries outside the UK. It is important to highlight that Wales has recently introduced a new curriculum that focuses on a more holistic way of teaching. As the critical incident occurred in a school located in Wales, it is important to see whether the incident was influenced by the four core purposes or the 12 pedagogical principles (Donaldson, 2015). Assigning responsibilities aligns strongly with the 12 pedagogical principles that underpin the new curriculum for Wales. Giving a child a class job, even as simple as handing out books promotes engagement, collaboration, personalisation and a positive classroom environment, contributing to a holistic and effective learning experience for the learner. While all the pedagogical principles are important, the principle of "Ownership" stands out as particularly relevant to the observed critical incident of giving a child responsibility in the classroom. When a child is given a responsibility, they develop a sense of ownership over their role in the classroom community. This ownership provides learners with a feeling of pride and accountability, making them more invested in their learning environment. As they see themselves as active participants in their education, they are more likely to engage in learning. The responsibility promotes self-motivation, autonomy, and a sense of belonging within the classroom, making it an effective pedagogical choice to make within the classroom.

Giving responsibility in the classroom links primarily to the ethically informed citizen's purpose. By involving learners in resource distribution and other classroom responsibilities, it promotes responsibility, accountability and ethical behaviour among students and allows them to develop an understanding of their role in the classroom, which will translate into an understanding of their role in the future as an ethically informed citizen living in Wales.

Teaching and learning methods

As I have previously mentioned, reflective practice is crucial in the teaching profession. To reflect on and evaluate the observed critical incident, I must identify my next steps, which will inform both my personal and professional development as a teacher. I will be using Brookfield's Four Lenses (2017) to aid my reflections, as this will allow me to consider a range of different perspectives and gain a holistic understanding of the observed critical incident.

Firstly, I looked at the critical incident using the first of Brookfield's lenses, the autobiographical (self). From my own perspective, as documented in my observation notes, I was intrigued by the observed critical incident. I found it surprising that the teacher chose Child X to carry out the responsibility of handing books out over children who had sat patiently and quietly since entering the classroom. I have acknowledged that this feeling of surprise has been shaped by my past encounters with the effectiveness of giving responsibilities to disruptive students. In the past, I have seen teachers choose the children who have remained quiet and demonstrated desired classroom behaviour. I have always thought that this was a reward for their good behaviour, and they could have a chance to show others how they should behave. Although I found how the teacher approached the incident to be successful, you could see how this bestowed responsibility made Child X feel. They were so eager to engage in this activity and subsequently completed the task well and listened for the rest of the lesson. While it could be argued that the teacher should have addressed the heightened behaviour and inattention at the beginning of the lesson, I would argue that giving Child X time to adjust to the classroom and not encountering a possible negative remark straight away and instead providing an opportunity to feel good, maintaining their engagement, and creating a positive learning environment prevented any further disruptive behaviour. I believe that this observation will impact my own pedagogical choices in future professional practice. I feel that giving Child X a sense of competence (self-determination theory) made the child feel good and a sense of accomplishment. Making learners feel like this in the classroom is essential for their well being and motivation to learn.

The second of Brookfields reflective lenses is from the students point of view. As the children were nearing the end of the school day, I could sense that they were restless and not as attentive as at the start of the day. As the learners entered and were asked to sit, I could see Child X was in a heightened, energetic state. I can consider the viewpoint that the child did not mean to come across as loud or disruptive. Also, I don't know whether this is typical behaviour from Child X or not. The heightened behaviour and inattention through the introduction could have been usual behaviour, personality, ALN, or an atypical occurrence. When the teacher asked for volunteers to hand out books, Child X's hand went straight up, and they looked eager to have this responsibility. When the teacher called out their name, Child X responded positively, smiling and jumping out of their seat to hand out the books. I can consider the viewpoint that Child X felt a sense of belonging and self-worth. The way they chatted and smiled as they completed the task suggests this. The responsibility positively impacted their engagement and behaviour for the rest of the lesson. From the child's point of view, they may have liked the praise for completing the responsibility, which would align with Skinner's (1958) positive reinforcement theory, or they may have felt that they owed the teacher this good behaviour after letting them do something they were so eager to do.

The third lens involves colleagues' opinions and experiences. To gain the perspective of the class teacher, I had a brief conversation with her at the end of the lesson. I asked her whether she chooses who hands out the books and other class jobs with purpose or randomly. The teacher explained that they change their decisions based on which class they have, adding that they know some children really benefit from having a responsibility to achieve. This reveals that the teacher knows when to personalise these responsibilities depending on how they impact learners. It links to the work discussed earlier by Madden and Senior (2018): that good rapport is important and that knowing your students is essential for behaviour management.

The final lens I will reflect on is the theoretical lens. After considering the previous literature, it is evident that some theories have more similarities to my observed critical incident than others. This incident has similarities to proactive strategies in behaviour management. Being proactive involves identifying potential challenges and taking preventative measures to prevent any disruptive behaviour. As the teacher outlined, they give responsibility to learners both purposefully and randomly. If there was no pedagogical decision and reflection on the impact on identified learners, the teacher may have adopted the William (2011) randomiser technique to select learners to hand out the books so that everyone has the opportunity to receive the benefits of autonomy for their motivation, as suggested by self-determination theory. However, the choice to pick Child X even though they were being disruptive and inattentive implied that the teacher put in place a proactive strategy to re-engage the learner and maintain a harmonious, positive learning environment.

For my own teaching and learning, this observation experience is highly beneficial. I will adopt this strategy into my own practice and explore the impacts on the learners. It will be interesting to see if the pedagogical choice of supporting learners to take responsibility for their learning can be implemented to create a positive learning environment.

Conclusion.

The assignment brief required engagement with the concept of reflective practice. Through this assignment, I have critically reflected on my chosen observed critical incident and have been able to discuss it through different perspectives and literature. The incident was observed and recorded, and further analysis using Tripp's (1993) methodology was used to discover what made it critical. Through my assignment, I was able to 'look under the hood' and understand decisions made by teachers; even seemingly unconscious decisions can hold pedagogical choices and strategies to impact learners. Moving forward in my own practice, my reflection on the critical incident will inform my future decisions, especially in behaviour management. As mentioned, my next steps will be to explore proactive strategies

further and aim to adopt strategies that will instil a sense of responsibility in the learners I teach, coinciding with the 12 pedagogical principles and the four core purposes (Donaldson, 2015). The continuation to reflect and develop throughout my teaching profession is clear within the reformed curriculum policy in Wales and the Teaching Standards (Welsh Government, 2018). Using the professional standards for teaching and leadership for guidance will allow the delivery of teaching that is underpinned by pedagogy and the ability to reflect.

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Appendix.

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 17/10/23

Y18

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

• Lesson 5 (last lesson of the day) 1:50 - 2:50

* Art lesson - continuous line drawings. Teacher introduced lesson, modelled and gave learners task to draw objects in front of them.

• Around 28 learners

• Mixed gender and mixed ability

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

* Teacher introducing lesson on continuous line drawings, powerpoint and then a demo on the board of which to do.

* Child - entered class in heightened energetic state. During demo did not look at teacher but sat fidgeting and playing with pencil.

* Others sat quietly.

Teacher "I need some helpers to hand out the books for everyone" - child x hand shot up and teacher gave them the job along with another learner (child y)

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

What avenues of research could you consider?

* Why did the teacher pick child over others who were sat quietly?

↳ maybe a proactive strategy (had this happened before) or 1st time?

* Operant conditioning? Reinforcing good behaviour

* Sense of responsibility - motivates behaviour.

* Did task direct energy / more about to allow focus.

↳ does teacher know this motivated child?

Gave out books and returned to seat x looked at teacher x listened for rest of introduction

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)

* After lunch / last lesson of day.

↳ Has food / drink affected

* Tiredness / lack of attention.

* Big class - what are peer relationships like?

* Instructions were made clear by teacher and importance of job emphasised.