

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.

Introduction

Ashdown & Bernard suggest that (2011, p.398) "only 40% of children enter school with the socio-emotional skills needed to succeed."

This essay will attempt to assess a critical incident observed in a primary school. By looking in-depth at the reasoning to why the incident occurred, by reading relevant studies and literature. Thus, identifying the next teaching and learning steps, to understand how to deal with future issues regarding the critical incident. The critical incident that will be addressed is regarding a shy child contributing to group discussion. From the literature, we can identify different teaching methods to ensure the inclusion of extroverted and introverted students. Firstly, looking at the role of critical reflection, to give the reader an understanding of what issues the researcher was looking for and their importance. Secondly, an overview of the observation and school context, to give us a deeper understanding of the environment in which the incident occurred. Thirdly, comparing the incident to Donaldson's four purposes (Donaldson, 2016), allowing us to critically evaluate the incident. Furthermore, looking at the literature surrounding shy children and academic success and teaching methods that have been identified as helping shy children succeed academically. Moreover, a reflection on the steps the researcher would take if an incident like this was to occur again. Finally, an overview of the topics discussed, to find an answer to our question regarding the next teaching and learning steps for a teacher, based on a critical evaluation of the critical incident provided. The importance of identifying and finding effective teaching methods for shy children is shown in the figure provided by Ashdown & Bernard (2011). Good social skills are imperative to the academic success of a child. If 40% of children enter school without the social skills needed, it is our role as teachers to identify these issues and incorporate suitable activities to support and develop these children's social skills in the form of scaffolding, to ensure no child gets left behind.

The Role of Critical Reflection

Firstly, looking at the role of critical reflection and how this can assist teachers to be able to reflect on their teaching practice. The introduction of the new Welsh Curriculum has created great change to schools in Wales. The curriculum has moved from a teacher focussed to a student-focused approach. Instead of following an intense curriculum, the teacher will be able to have more flexibility in what they teach, to be able to suit it more to the individual (Curriculum for Wales, 2020). The previous Curriculum for Wales (2008) has been highly criticised as not being able to provide for all learning needs. Whereas the new curriculum will accommodate more to all needs by being based on the individual. However, the new Curriculum for Wales (2020) has also been criticised by many academics, as it will be even more demanding to a teacher's already extensive workload (Power, Newton & Taylor, 2020).

The new Curriculum for Wales (2020) is influenced by the idea of critical thinking. Tripp (1994) suggests the idea of critical thinking is used to raise professional standards, by teachers reflecting on their work, with the use of professional journals, to create a continuous assessment of their practice throughout their careers. With the use of the professional standards (2021) in Wales, teachers can reflect on their practice by comparing it to a set of standards.

Lister and Crisp (2007), describe Tripp's critical incident as reflecting in stages. Firstly, you observe the event. Secondly, you analyse your initial thoughts on that event and note any issues. Lastly, you think about what you've learned from this event, and how can you develop and improve it for future practice. Lister and Crisp (2007) note that this can be used in any aspect of your life, whether you are a student using it to improve your knowledge and understanding, or as an adult to improve your work.

Critical incidents are of at most importance to teachers, as it allows them to improve their methods of teaching daily, not continuously following the same teaching methods that could prove to be outdated or no longer applicable. Especially in the case of newly qualified teachers or trainee teachers. It allows them to find their method of teaching and to realise the importance of continuously analysing their methods in an ever-changing world, to suit their pupils' individual needs. Thus, the new Curriculum for Wales (2020), allows teachers to use critical reflection to identify the needs of their pupils and to form their lessons from this. Instead of following an in-depth curriculum which may not benefit all, with an overload of knowledge that they will not retain.

Observation

This critical incident has been done in line with the Bera (2018) guidelines, to ensure the name and area of the school, pupils and teachers remain anonymous. The name of the school will be hidden from all literature. This is to ensure the research is ethically sound and to make sure the anonymity of all those involved is upheld throughout.

The critical incident took place in an English medium school in Wales. The incident was recorded in a year 3/4 class, where the children were between the ages of 7-9. The school in question has approximately 216 students, including 44 part-time nursery students. The school has 6 single age classes and 2 mixed-age classes. There are 44% of children in the school entitled to free school meals (Estyn, 2019). This figure is relatively high in comparison to the Welsh office of national statistics, where it was recorded on average in Wales there are 25.2% of children known to be entitled to free school meals (Gov, 2021). 21% of children were identified as having an additional learning need (Estyn, 2019). In comparison to the Welsh office of national statistics, which recorded 19.5% of children with an additional learning need. Therefore, it is only slightly higher than the recorded average for Wales. Most of the children who attend this school are from a first language English speaking home. No children were identified in speaking Welsh at home as a first language (Estyn, 2019).

Critical Incident Linked to Donaldson's Four Purposes

The critical incident recorded (see appendix 1), took place in a year 3/4 class in the morning and was the first task the children undertook that day. The session was concerning reading, the children were placed in groups based on their reading ability. The incident occurred in one of the lower ability reading groups, with around 5 children. The incident took place on the reading mat, while the teacher read the children a story and prompted questions and answers based on the story. The child in question was seemingly disengaged with the story, by not sitting in the required manner and continuously fidgeting. When the teacher would ask questions on the story, other children would respond out loud to the group. While child X would whisper the answers. The teacher recognised the child's attempt to join in with the group discussion, yet understood the child was not comfortable in speaking loud enough for the others in the group to hear. The teacher responded to the answer with positive praise. Which saw the child beam from their contribution being positively recognised by the teacher.

This incident can be linked to the four purposes in the welsh curriculum, predominately 'ambitious and capable learners' (Donaldson, 2016). Child X even though seemingly uninterested was willing and wanting to learn, but lacked the confidence to do so in front of their peers. How the teacher responded to the incident would link to encouraging the child to be a 'healthy, confident individuals' (Donaldson, 2016). By showing the child that their opinion mattered and that their engagement in the lessons would be positively rewarded. However, reflecting on this incident, more would need to be done in each lesson, to try to help the child's social skills develop so they can contribute vocally. As it has been shown the child was aware of what was required and knew the answers. Yet did not have the confidence, a scaffolding approach may prove in this instance to be beneficial to develop the child's confidence as will be discussed in the next section.

Literature Review

In this section, we will attempt to define what is meant by the term 'shy children'. Also critically evaluating the link between shy children and academic success. Thus, discussing the literature surrounding different teaching methods, that can help shy children develop their social skills and in turn creating a more inclusive environment for all children. By comparing the literature to a constructivism theory approach and evaluating a variety of study-based research, we can begin to establish effective methods to ensure shy children thrive academically and socially in primary school.

Firstly, looking at defining shy children and how it affects a child's academic success. For example, Zhang's (2015) research on children with social anxiety and loneliness in grades 4-6 in a rural primary school in China, shows that shyness and social anxiety progressively gets worse as the child gets older and can majorly affect their academic performance. Zhang's (2015) use of questionnaires with teachers showed that shyness amongst children was not gender-specific, however, boys were less likely to admit any difficulty compared to girls. Thus, poor peer relationships due to self-esteem issues could significantly influence a child's academic ability, due to the child being more concerned with how they are perceived by other children, as opposed to focusing on the knowledge taught by the teacher.

Similarly, Kalutskaya et al's (2014) study described shyness as a child being self-conscious, which could stem from poor relationships with their peers, by feeling excluded and thus, influencing their academic ability, showing that peer relations and the child's interactions in the classroom are linked to their wellbeing. This study observed shy children's involvement in group work and based the child's academic ability on their vocal contribution regarding their

work. This study was conducted in a Kindergarten school in America focusing on the role of teachers interacting with shy children. The research showed that most of the teachers involved, were more likely to involve themselves in social issues involving a shy child, however, a child's lack of verbal involvement would influence their decision regarding the child's academic abilities. Hence, little interaction between a child and the teacher could result in the teacher's perception of the child as one of lower academic ability, yet in written assessments, the quieter children performed better than those children who are more extroverted, yet the limited interactions between a shy child and the teacher, could allow the child to believe their academic performance is lower as the focus of the teacher may be more towards the more disruptive children. Surprisingly, even though both studies were done in different countries the results are seemingly similar. Despite the fact, both studies neglect to inform the reader of different views of shyness by different cultures.

Conversely, Dwech's (2012) literature provides us with an alternative way of thinking, by seeing shyness as a characteristic that can be developed instead of hindering a child's academic success. Dwech (2012) discusses how characteristics are not set in stone and a child needs to be made aware of this in the form of resilience. Defining resilience as when there are good outcomes to instances that appear negative or threatening, a child can then build upon these (Dwech, 2012). However, it is in the role of the teacher which can influence this as it is a skill that needs to be taught. More teaching on these areas and how children are different could lead to less exclusion and bullying.

To exemplify Dwech's (2012) viewpoint, Soleberg et al (2020), views shyness as an additional learning need, where more knowledge is needed for teachers to understand how they can assist these pupils. During their study of teachers in Norway, in the form of semi-structured interviews, provided us with alternative opinions of where shyness would come from and how to identify it. The research showed that shyness could be harder to identify in pupils in comparison to other additional learning needs such as dyslexia. As the child may only be shy in the classroom context and extroverted when it came to playing with their peers. The research discussed the importance of the use of pedagogical principles to build a strong relationship with all children in the class, to be able to identify early on if there are any issues. Thus, the teachers could begin to work on these issues with the child from an early age, so they do not hinder the child's academic and social ability in the future. In comparison with Dwech's (2015) research, Soleberg et al (2020), provide a more up to date analysis of shy children, yet both share similar viewpoints on the role of teachers in managing the issues surrounding shy children.

Overall, these studies have allowed us to evaluate the link between shy children and academic ability. Shyness does not hinder a child's ability to be academically successful. The child's limited interactions in the classroom environment could mean the child is listening more intently, than their other peers who are more willing to contribute vocally, yet their vocal contribution may not always be on the topic the teacher is trying to teach. It is key to note that the aforementioned studies are primarily based on the viewpoint of teachers concerning the mental wellbeing of their students. More research is needed on the viewpoint of the children and how they feel about classroom discussions, how their mental health is affected and what alternative teaching methods would better suit them to thrive academically.

Secondly, looking at the literature surrounding different methods of teaching to ensure the academic and social success of shy children. The teaching style used is of most importance for the pupil's mental health and their future development. As Wright (2005) suggests, a more authoritative style of leadership in the classroom could lead to resentment from the pupils. Viewing the classroom as a hierarchal system, whereby the teacher must be in control always can lead to no personal relationship with the teacher due to fear. How can we then expect the child to be able to trust the teacher with their concerns and worries. To help a child address their issues regarding shyness and mental health issues a child needs a teacher who is supportive, understanding and encouraging. The role of the teacher should be to help a child manage their behaviour whether they are introverted or extroverted, not to control their behaviour (Wright, 2005). Cowley (2003) suggests that a teacher must be a role model for the children. For instance, the use of positive expectations, affirmations and the regular use of children's names, will influence the way children speak to one another, and create more of an individual relationship between teacher and student. In terms of helping shy children develop their social skills, Cowley (2003) suggests, scaffolding in small steps to improve their confidence and not trying to force them to do tasks such as reading aloud, if it causes them great distress, instead, doing this incrementally.

However, this idea of scaffolding in terms of a child's social skills would be different for each individual. With a teacher's already extensive workload, will they have enough time to identify all the social needs of each child and devise targets for this. Alternatively, Nyborg et al (2020), looks at scaffolding in a different light, by the use of adaptive pedagogies in everyday situations regarding a shy child's oral engagements. Nyborg et al's (2020) study showed that reducing the frequency a child was asked questions, and monitoring the depth of answer required, positively influenced the fluency of the shy child's answers. The positive feedback the child then received increased their confidence when answering questions. Nyborg et al's (2020) study also noted the importance of group work in small steps, first in pairs and then gradually increasing the number of pupils in the group. They also noted the pupils assigned to

work with the shy child would notably affect the success of this method. Placing the shy child, with a child of the same sex proved successful. The role of the teacher was also important in this method as they were able to monitor the child's involvement and prompt further questions. This method would also benefit a child's social skills as it requires them to converse with their peers, and as the task was focussed more on conversational skills instead of content, the children were not overloaded with knowledge to make the task overwhelming.

The studies mentioned are supporting the constructivism theory. The work of Vygotsky (1978) stresses the importance that learning and development are separate things, but they build on each other to strengthen learning. Vygotsky (1978) discussed how an improvement and understanding in one area, can improve understanding in all areas. This is reiterated in the findings of the studies shown as the use of scaffolding in the classroom, can improve the student's retention and understanding of knowledge, whilst coinciding with the improvement of social skills. The work of Piaget as discussed by Asendorpf (1990), supports this by noting the importance of peer relationships in a child's development. However, suggests that a child's limited social interaction in the early years is not an issue, as social withdrawal is more prominent from the age of 7 up to the start of puberty (Asendorpf, 1990). On the contrary, as Vygotsky (1978) discusses skills are built upon, the earlier years are still of importance socially, as if social skills can be developed from when the child starts school, they are then able to build on them. In turn, attempting to limit the distress a shy child may have as they get older, by learning these essential skills when they are younger.

To conclude, the link between a shy child and academic success is based on the individual. A shy child may be an attentive listener to group discussions and understand the knowledge without verbal clarification. A child should not be disregarded academically if they do not feel comfortable expressing themselves vocally, as they may excel in other areas where more extroverted children may not. Therefore, shy children cannot be associated with low academic success as a rule as the research suggests, it is based on the individual. Teaching methods relating to shy children in terms of scaffolding, and the relationship between a child and the teacher, is of most importance to the development of their social skills. Shy children should always have the opportunity to understand and undertake tasks that will in turn help them develop socially. It is not an additional learning need that will hold them back in adulthood, it can be built and worked on as suggested by the theory.

Reflection / Evaluation & Next Steps

The use of critical reflection in teaching practice is key to improving. The process of self-reflection allows us to be open to change, question our own beliefs and be an active participant in our growth (Larrivee, 2000). Almusharrauf (2020) suggests, that the role of peer observation and reflection is key to our development and we as students should take responsibility for our growth. This task of finding a critical incident and reflecting on it, allowed me to research further meaning and gain more of an understanding. Allowing me to understand the role of critical reflection and how it will affect my teaching practice.

My critical incident has allowed me to research and learn more about shy children. Understanding why they are shy and looking at tried and tested methods to help them develop their social skills. How the teacher in my incident dealt with the situation, allowed me to reflect on the kind of teacher that I want to be. The teacher was collaborative and inclusive, ensuring that the shy child was heard, even though they lacked the confidence to speak out loud. Instances like this, where a teacher includes a shy child, will, in turn, help them develop more confidence in themselves, as if the role model in their life actively wants to hear their opinions, they will begin to realise the importance of their own opinions.

As previously discussed in the literature review, the use of scaffolding is key to developing a child's social skills. Critically analysing my incident allowed me to see first-hand that small steps in helping a child's social skills is effective and is a skill I will take with me when continuing to reflect and develop on my practice. The critical evaluation of my incident has allowed me to further recognise the importance of a pupil's voice. If we want shy children to improve socially, all the students in the class must be taught the importance of their words and views. As discussed by Lewis and Alyson (2016), if children are more actively involved in decision making in the classroom, it will make them feel more involved and confident in decisions that affect their lives. In turn, pupil voice will lead a child to make more logical decisions in the future.

Reflecting on my incident and assessing the literature, my next steps in my teaching would be to include shy children in extroverted activities in small steps. For instance, asking a shy child to answer a question that does not need much depth. Then giving them positive feedback and continue to do this, not excessively but build upon it over time so the child can begin to feel more confident in their abilities. Also in terms of group work, starting with small steps for instance pair work. Pairing the shy child, with a child of the same gender and similar ability. This could then lead to more group work with more children over time as the shy child gains confidence.

Witnessing and evaluating this critical incident has made me realise that as a teacher I need to be adaptable in my teaching methods. A child's mental health could be different every day and we need to be able to change the way we teach our lessons if needed, to accommodate this. By showing a child that we learn by participation and building on knowledge, we can begin to establish ways of helping a child's confidence (Edwards, 2005). I believe with the new Curriculum for Wales (2020) being student-focused, this will help us as teachers identify issues with self-esteem and confidence and build our lessons around this, to ensure children learn more effectively.

Overall, I learned a lot from observing different teachers and different classrooms. It allowed me to see different styles of teaching and allow me to begin to establish my style of teaching. In writing my 3 critical incidents, I can see that none of the children were the same, each incident was different. This allows me to realise that each child needs to be seen as an individual and that this needs to be considered when planning my lessons. With the use of critically reflecting after my lessons by myself and with my mentor, I will be able to see which methods work and which don't. I can then go on to improve my lessons to ensure all children are engaged and involved.

Conclusion

To conclude, this essay has shown how critically evaluating and reflecting on our teaching and incidents in the classroom will improve our teaching practices. By noting our successes and failures, we can be reflective in ensuring we are upholding the professional teaching standards (2020) and adapting our methods where needed. The literature review provided us with more of an understanding of shy children relating to academic success and how shyness does not define their academic ability. Also showed us different teaching methods of helping shy children improve their social skills with scaffolding and in small increments. To uphold the four purposes (Donaldson, 2016) we need to be reflective in our work, to establish areas that need more of a focus. The new Curriculum for Wales (2020) will allow for more flexibility in our lessons which will allow us to be more reflective, to establish what works and what does not and develop our practice.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

OBSERVATION / FIELD NOTES

Record 1

Date and time, year group: 22nd September, Year 3/4
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context • Morning, the first task of the day • On the matt in the reading corner • Reading session • Different ability groups were monitored by different members of staff • An incident occurred in the lowest ability reading group, while the teacher was reading a story to the group.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) • The child would not sit in the required manner on the matt • The child was continuously fidgeting and playing with the bookcase • Seemingly uninterested in the story • When the teacher asked questions on the story others would answer out loud, pupil X would whisper the answer • When pupil X answers were praised by the teacher, even though not said out loud, pupil X beamed from the praise
Areas of possible exploration: what do you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? • Mental Health and well-being. • Collaboration • Confidence and social anxiety, self-esteem • Pedagogy- influenced learning • Innovation • Bright child- possibly held back by shyness • Inclusion- teacher ensured all students in the group were heard
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) • Group of 5 pupils • Quiet environment, other children were reading • Minimal distractions • Clear direction- to listen to the story • Early morning- the child could’ve been tired.

Appendix 2

Record 2

Date and time, year group: 23rd September, morning, year 5/6 class
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context During a maths lesson- children listen to explanations from the teacher
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) - The child was shouting out answers - The teacher firstly responded with “dwyllo lan” (hands up) - Behaviours continued throughout the day “Pupil X is speaking, I only want to hear their voice” - The child was engaged with the lesson but couldn’t follow correct behaviour – fidgeting and disruptive. - Calm behaviour from the teacher.
Areas of possible exploration: what do you think could be “under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? - Used welsh in instructions to pupil X - Leadership- showing children the behaviour they wanted by responding to the child with hands up and only wanting to hear one child speaking. - Potential behavioural difficulties - Look into theory on undiagnosed additional learning needs - Different ways to teach to ensure all are engaged- physical and talking. - Assertive discipline
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) - Calm and quiet environment - The teacher showed an example question on the interactive board - The incident occurred in the morning during the first task - Directions were made explicit – to listen to explanations to be able to understand the work and do the task that follows - Children were all in assigned seats facing the teacher and interactive board.

Appendix 3**Record 3**

Date and time, year group: 22nd September, morning, year 3/4
Where and When: Context of the observation – subject/AOLE, general classroom context • Maths lesson based on numbers in the 1000s • Sat in groups based on ability • Teacher explaining and showing methods of counting and in groups of 10.
What happened: a detailed description of the critical incident(the more detail the better to refer to in your later work) • The child was asked to write on individual whiteboards the numbers stated by the teacher • When asked to complete the answer and show the teacher, child X wrote down the wrong answer • The child was told to ask a friend for help • The child asked a friend sitting next to them • The child explained how to do the task, child X then got the answer right
Areas of possible exploration: what do you think could be” under the hood” in these incidents? What avenues of research could you consider? • Collaboration- asking peers for help • Own initiative- Ambitious capable learners • Teacher showing children that if they don’t understand, there are other methods of finding out answers. • Children with different abilities help each other – effective teaching.
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) • Calm and quiet environment, children listening to instructions and explanations. • Directions made explicitly • Early morning second lesson of the day, before morning break.